



LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of Feb. 18 - Feb. 24

SUNDAY READINGS: *Genesis 9:8-15, 1 Peter 3:18-22, Mark 1:12-15*

ADULT REFLECTION

In the First Reading this week, we see how God wants to be in relationship with humanity. Rather than a contractual relationship (where goods or services are transacted), he wants something deeper: a covenant relationship, one that transcends mere justice and is rooted in love and generosity. The simple truth is that God loves us. God loves you. The abiding power and depth of God's love is akin to the love parents have for their children, only more perfect. Parents have a taste of God's love placed in their hearts!

In the Gospel passage, we find Jesus responding to the Holy Spirit's call to venture out into the desert. Preparing to take up his divine mission to proclaim this Good News of God's love and mercy, Jesus lives in the desert for 40 days, wrestling with some pretty scary stuff. This retreat is a time of stripping away all but the essentials. There in this seemingly lonely and barren place does he powerfully experience the intimate and transformative love of his Father.

Reflection Questions:

- *In a world where contracts are common, do you have relationships that are deeper than simply transactional? How are you called to live in such relationships?*
- *Are you afraid to quiet your life and look inward, for fear of what might be revealed? Are you willing to let God, whose love is unconditional, be with you in that deserted place?*

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

Does God love us only when we're good? What about when we're not? What is unconditional love? Where/when have you experienced this kind of love?

This Sunday's Gospel tells us that Jesus went into a desert to be alone with God. How or where do you spend time alone with God? What is it like? Is it easy to be honest with God? Why?

How can we, as a family and as individuals, quiet our lives more this Lent so that we can be more attentive to the whispers of God's love in our hearts?



PRAYER

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



FASTING

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



ALMSGIVING

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





LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of Feb. 25 - Mar. 2

SUNDAY READINGS: *Genesis 22:1-18, Romans 8:31-34, Mark 9:2-10*

ADULT REFLECTION

Our First Reading this week shares one of the most powerful moments in the Old Testament. God calls Abraham to take his beloved child, Isaac, to a high place and sacrifice him. Talk about putting Abraham to a test! Of course, God never wanted Isaac killed, and stopped Abraham. But he did want Abraham to be “all in” with God’s plan for his life. Fullness of blessing resulted.

The Gospel passage also takes us to a place of higher elevation, an indication of encounter with God. The Transfiguration, as we call it, reveals Jesus to his Apostles in dazzling white. God the Father speaks from a cloud, “This is my beloved son. Listen to him.” These powerful words are as much for us today as they were for the Apostles!

Both stories speak to the powerful bond between father and son. The sacrifice of Isaac is averted, but we know that Jesus will soon willingly sacrifice himself for all the world. Abraham and Jesus both reveal a degree of faithfulness to the will of the Father that is beyond heroic. It is only possible with the help of supernatural grace.

Reflection Questions:

- *Have you ever felt challenged beyond your understanding or ability to cope? How did you respond? Were blessings attached?*
- *What is at the core of God’s asking for your Lenten sacrifices?*
- *Would you like to surrender your hopes and expectations to God and have complete trust in his will? What holds you back?*

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

God gives Abraham a big test of faith. What was the test and did he pass it? Are we able to trust God even when difficult things happen? What helps us trust?

In the Bible, mountains are where people experience God in a powerful way. Why do you think this is? Individually and as a family, how do (or could) we have “mountain” experiences of God’s presence?

God the Father says of Jesus “This is my beloved son. Listen to him.” How can we “listen” to Jesus in our lives?



PRAYER

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



FASTING

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



ALMSGIVING

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





LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of Mar. 3 - Mar. 9

SUNDAY READINGS: *Exodus 20: 1-17, I Corinthians 1: 22-25, John 2: 13-25*

ADULT REFLECTION

The full version of this Sunday's First Reading, which names the Ten Commandments, begins with a consideration of the worship of idols. While belief in a Sun god or other nature form may be a thing of the past, human beings will always struggle with forms of idolatry. Anything (even neutral and good things) can lessen or all-together usurp God's rightful place in our lives. Lent is a time for examining our focal points, our guiding forces. Is God first?

In the Gospel, Jesus' love for the Father spills out in righteous anger against the subtle idolatry that has crept into the Temple. Even this holy site meant for worshipping God has been capitalized by profiteering money-changers and others. Jesus, his humanity remarkably revealed, angrily overturns their tables and drives them all away. Elsewhere in Scripture, we are referred to as Temples of the Holy Spirit. What does Jesus see and feel upon entering our hearts?

Reflection Questions:

- *Money is an obvious object of idolatry for some people. There are countless other examples. What has been or is currently something that has more of your heart and attention than God?*
- *God became human in Jesus. What does that mean to you? What does his humanity reveal about your own?*

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

Our lives are full; some things are more important than others. How can we tell what is important in our lives? Are there things we actually treat with more importance than loving and being loved by God?

Anger is a strong feeling that can come upon us suddenly. Is anger wrong? When or how? What does Jesus' example in the Temple teach us about anger and what we do with it?

The Ten Commandments are God's guardrails for our happiness. How many of them can we, as a family, name without looking? What does it mean to "keep holy the Sabbath day"? How can we do this better?



PRAYER

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



FASTING

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



ALMSGIVING

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





LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of Mar. 10 - Mar. 16

SUNDAY READINGS: *2 Chronicles 36:14-23, Ephesians 2: 4-10, John 3: 14-21*

ADULT REFLECTION

God loves. First and foremost, Catholic faith is not about us but about God... and God loves. Us! Each of us! Loving is so proper to God that Scripture says God IS Love. He created us for love and invites us into this divine love, free to participate or to reject it. There are real consequences for choosing to live outside his love, not vindictive punishments, but rather natural results of a disrupted order. Outside his love, we end up hurting ourselves and others.

In this week's readings, we find God reaching out in love. God sends messengers to rescue the Israelites from their wicked ways. They laugh off the messengers, and end up defeated and exiled. The Gospel tells "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." We've all seen the consequences of choosing the darkness outside of God's light and love. Lent is a time to walk toward the light, to open to Love and reciprocate.

Reflection Questions:

- *We suffer consequences of a disrupted order, sometimes deservedly and sometimes not. Like the Israelites, have you experienced a time of exile in your life, alone and defeated? Did God send messengers? What brought your return to light and love?*
- *First and foremost, our Catholic faith is not about us but about God. Is this perceived in your own practice of faith?*
- *God loves... you... unconditionally. What does this make you feel? Does it offer you hope and gratitude? Are there dark areas in your life? Can you invite Jesus to bring his light in and let his unconditional love heal those parts of yourself?*

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

How would we define love? Are there different kinds of love? What kind of love do we have for each other in our family? What kind of love does God have for us? How do we know?

Are there actions we take that show acceptance of God's love? What about actions that say "no" to God's love? What kind of love do we have for God? How do we show it?

Why does Scripture describe Jesus as "light" for the world? How can we be light to the world?



PRAYER

Gracious God, we believe in your love for us. We thank and praise you for giving your only Son, Jesus, that we might have fullness of life: knowing your love and loving you in return. Help us share this love with others and so be light to the world. Amen.



FASTING

Choose one corner of darkness in your life to surrender to Christ's light this week: a grudge, a negative thought pattern, an un-healthy dependence, a fear, an exaggerated self-reliance, etc.



ALMSGIVING

There are exiles in our communities – refugees, the homeless, those misplaced from their families due to violence, etc. Seek out a local institution serving these people & contribute to their work in some way this week. Or at least, learn more about it as a family.





LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of Mar. 17 - Mar. 23

SUNDAY READINGS: *Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 5:7-9, John 12:20-33*

ADULT REFLECTION

As we near the end of Lent and approach Holy Week the Sunday readings reveal a greater sense of urgency, a sense that something big is about to happen. In the First Reading, the prophet Jeremiah says that a new covenant is coming. This covenant will be deeper than the first, when God was “master”. This law will not be on stone tablets. “I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Jesus proclaims in the Gospel “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” He then teaches that “unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.” This speaks to the sacrifice that Jesus is about to make by surrendering his life for us. It is also a powerful metaphor of God’s call for each of us to die to our own expectations, narrowness, and selfishness and invite God to transform our lives into something more beautiful, more meaningful, more fruitful.

Reflection Questions:

- *Have you opened your heart to God and allowed him to write upon it? What has God written there?*
- *What destructive or selfish aspects of your life do you stubbornly refuse to let go of? How can the example of Jesus giving his life on the Cross help you open to the possibility of fruitful surrender?*

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

The first part of the Bible, the Old Testament, tells the story of the developing relationship between God and the Israelite people. How would we describe the relationship God now offers all of humanity through his divine Son, Jesus?

What have we experienced of seed planting? What does Jesus mean when he says that a grain of wheat must die to produce much fruit? Can you think of a time where the “death” or “giving up” of one thing led to the “birth” or growth of another good – even better – thing?



PRAYER

Good Jesus, draw us to yourself this Lent and make us your people. Write your law of love on our very hearts. Please accept our ordinary acts of love, the “grains of wheat,” we offer you today. We trust you will transform them into something beautiful for us and for the world. Amen.



FASTING

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ALMSGIVING

“Die” to something this week that can directly give “life” to someone else. Intentionally link your fasting and almsgiving: bake frozen pizzas instead of ordering in or avoid superfluous spending – donate the savings, spend your weekend yard-work time working on the yard of someone who’s not able, give all the dessert you baked (the smell of which is filling the house) to a family that is struggling.





LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of Mar. 24 - Mar. 30

SUNDAY READINGS: *Before procession-Mark 11:1-10, Isaiah 50:4-7, Psalm 22, Philippians 2: 6-11, Mark 14:1-15:47*

ADULT REFLECTION

No set of Lectionary readings take us on as jarring a ride as on Palm Sunday. The opening passage read prior to the procession into church tells the story of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. He is given the homage and honor typically given to royalty. Of course, most of these people greeting Jesus did not understand his mission. He would not meet their political, temporal expectations.

The Gospel proclaims the full Passion story according to Mark. It tells of the extraordinary events of Holy Thursday and Good Friday that led up to the public execution of Jesus as a criminal against Judaism and the Roman Empire. The man hailed as king just a few days prior is now abandoned, reviled, tortured and killed. Jesus had every opportunity to escape his fate. But as terrible as his journey to the Cross was, he never wavered. He remained steadfast in his trust in the Father.

Reflection Questions:

- Does God need to change to fit our expectations? Or is it we who need to change our expectations to fit God's?
- How does it feel to know that in Jesus, God has gone before us... facing terror and suffering and death? Does it change how you approach loss and suffering and loneliness?
- Jesus spoke of taking up one's cross each day. He also spoke of taking up his yoke (an implement normally built for two) that is easy (or fits well). What are the small (but meaningful) ways I am invited to take up my cross, or his yoke, each day? How can these images help me make these loving sacrifices joyfully?

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

Why were people putting palm branches on the road as Jesus approached? What kind of king were they expecting? Is Jesus a king?

When we look at a crucifix (and perhaps hold and touch it), what does it tell us about God and God's love for us?

How can we, as a family, accompany Jesus closely this Holy Week?



PRAYER

Holy Spirit, inspire us to know how to accompany Jesus this Holy Week. Remind us of him often. Teach us how to joyfully take up our own little crosses each day. Create in us hearts that love like he loves. Amen.



FASTING

Give up thinking about yourself this week. Redirect your gaze to Jesus or those around you.



ALMSGIVING

Ask your pastor or parish leaders about opportunities to give hope and accompaniment to the imprisoned or the dying this week.

