



LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of February 22 - 28

SUNDAY READINGS: *Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Psalm 51; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11*

ADULT REFLECTION

In the first reading we hear a symbolic account of humanity's original sin. The second reading tells how Jesus, the reverse of Adam, brought life to all humanity by his faithfulness to the Father. The Gospel shows Jesus standing up to the devil's temptations in the desert, remaining faithful.

Sin is a dirty little word we don't necessarily like to hear. Over-emphasized in certain Christian circles, de-emphasized by the rest of the world; the fact remains that there is something in all of us that is broken. That the instinct toward "self" can become distorted, ferocious, even. That there is something—on our own—that we're missing.

Lent puts the reality of sin before us each year. Not to weigh us down, but to remind us that sin steals our freedom, and Jesus offers us freedom. By his cross and resurrection, he can heal what is broken in us. He wants to stand with us in the midst of temptation, modeling and sharing love strong enough to overcome selfishness. He wants to fill our emptiness with himself. Awareness of our own sin can become an opening to divine love.

Reflection Questions:

- *In what ways am I broken, empty, or bound?*
- *Have I thought about these "weak points" as openings to God?*
- *Have I allowed Jesus to be a real difference-maker in my day-to-day life?*

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

Lent always begins with the story of Jesus fasting and praying in the desert for 40 days, and afterwards being tempted by the devil. Why do you think the Church gives us this story now?

To be tempted means to feel like you want to do something you shouldn't. We all experience temptations throughout the day. Let's share some that we often face. What were the three temptations Jesus faced? How could we summarize them?

What was Jesus' response? It's interesting that he answered each with a truth he'd memorized from Scripture. They were truths he could hold on to even if he may have felt differently at the moment. What truths help us when tempted?



PRAYER

Be with us, Jesus, as we enter our 40-day journey this Lent. Help us become aware of our own weaknesses so we can experience the joy of leaning on you. Strengthen our hearts in your Word that we may help others on their journey, too. 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.



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LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of March 1-7

SUNDAY READINGS: *Genesis 12:1-4, Psalm 33, 2 Timothy 1:8-10, Matthew 17:1-9*

ADULT REFLECTION

Our First Reading at Mass has God calling Abram out into the unknown with only a promise of steadfast blessing. St. Paul encourages the young Timothy to endure hardship, holding fast to the promise of God's grace and call. And Jesus, with his closest friends, experience a foretaste of the glory which will come. . . after the cross.

Human life is so tenuous and uncertain. Just when we think we're on top of things, another challenge arises that changes the script. Has that ever happened to you? These challenges—whether arising from ordinary life (a broken-down car, a sick child, loss of employment) or from a personal calling from God (new skills to be mastered, hearts to move, funds to be raised)—can leave us feeling worn down or adrift. As people of faith, we have a lifeline: hope in the promises of God. A God who is steadfast, Good, and sees at once the expanse of history and beyond to eternity. A God that loves us.

Reflection Questions:

- *Read slowly through this Sunday's readings again. What promise of God stands out to you, like God is making that promise to you personally today?*
- *This Sunday's Responsorial Psalm has a beautiful line about trust. "Our soul waits for the Lord." What current situation has you waiting for the Lord?*

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

In this Sunday's readings, we can see a theme of hope. Hope means to trust in the goodness and power and wisdom of God. We believe that God is faithful to his promises and brings good out of every situation. How might this be different from our ordinary use of the word "hope"? (I hope it won't rain, I hope to do well on this test, etc.) How is it similar?

Go back over the readings. For what were the people in these readings hoping? What do you think helped them to hope? Hope is actually a supernatural gift from God received at Baptism. As a family, what are we hoping for? What helps us to hope?



PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we believe in you. We hope in you. We love you. We trust that you have good things in store for us this Lent. Thank you for the gift of supernatural hope. Increase it within us that we may share it with others this week and always. Amen.



FASTING

Trusting God sometimes means letting go of fears, plans, or misplaced "securities." What do you need to let go of this week so you can trust God more?



ALMSGIVING

God often keeps his promises through the goodness of others. For whom specifically will we be instruments of hope this week?



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LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of March 8-14

SUNDAY READINGS: Exodus 17: 3-7, Psalm 95, Romans 5: 1-2, 5-8; John 4: 5-42

ADULT REFLECTION

In this week's First Reading we hear the story of God providing water for his thirsty people in the desert. Paul describes the Love of God himself— the Holy Spirit — as being “poured” into our hearts. And our Gospel, the Samaritan Woman at the Well, is jam-packed with food for thought and prayer.

We feel thirst because our bodies need water. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of a spiritual thirst. Our hearts, too, feel a need . . . though it can be harder to name or satisfy. Jesus helps the Samaritan woman get in touch with her own existential thirst, and then reveals himself as the living water that alone can quench it. Take some time to re-read this long and very rich Gospel. Pay attention to the give-and-take in the dialogue and the change gradually occurring within the woman because of her encounter with Jesus.

This was a woman who, culturally and religiously, was an unworthy outsider. And yet Jesus reveals himself to her personally with a clarity we don't often see in the Gospels. He seems to experience joy and satisfaction in refreshing her own deepest thirst.

Reflection Questions:

- *For what do you thirst? Jesus is available amidst our own daily tasks, at our own “well.” Have you met him there? Ask him for a drink. He wants to be your “living water” too.*

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

Our Sunday readings focus on the theme of “thirst.” Share a time that you were really thirsty. How did you feel when you finally got a drink? In our First Reading from the Old Testament, who was thirsty and why? What did God do about it?

In our Gospel, Jesus sits at a well during the hottest part of the day, and asks a woman with a bucket for a drink. He starts up a conversation with her that gets her realizing her heart is thirsty. How can our hearts “thirst” and for what?

What do you think Jesus means by, “whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” When we're Baptized we receive the Holy Spirit into our hearts. Is this related?



PRAYER

Jesus, encounter us in our daily routines this week. Give us the living water that is you. Pour your Spirit into our hearts to quench our deepest thirst. And inspire us to tell others about what you've done for us, that they, too, may come to believe in you. Amen.



FASTING

Consider trying to ration your family's water use (drinking, brushing teeth, washing) to one gallon jug per person for a day. Offer up your thirst as a prayer for those without access to clean water.



ALMSGIVING

In the story of the Woman at the Well, we hear that this woman went to fetch water alone in the afternoon because she wasn't accepted by the community - she was an outcast. Today there are still people living on the margins, is there a way you can help someone this week?



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LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of March 15-21

SUNDAY READINGS: *1 Samuel 16: 1, 6-7, 10-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5: 8-14; John 9:1-41*

ADULT REFLECTION

This week's readings have a theme of seeing and light. In the first reading, God chooses the unlikely candidate David, as king; because "not as man sees does God see." The second reading calls the first Christians at Ephesus to "live as children of light" and the Gospel tells of the healing of a blind man.

To this man born blind, Jesus reveals himself as the Light of the World, the Son of Man (a title affirming his humanity but also his identity as the Messiah. See Daniel 7.) Jesus' compassion and openness to this man is contrasted with his "you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains" statement to the Pharisees. But it makes sense. Jesus looks into the heart. Only the hearts disposed to see can benefit from the light Jesus shares with all. He's actually trying to cure the Pharisees' blindness too.

The Pharisees' hearts "have all the answers" and are disposed to judge others—including Jesus—from their narrow perspective. The blind man's heart is open, knowing he doesn't have all the answers, and is disposed to seek and believe.

Reflection Questions:

- How is God calling you to greater openness and belief?
- What are your blind spots that you need Jesus to reveal and heal?

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

Talk about what it would be like to be born blind. (You might even take turns together walking around blindfolded.) What do you think it means to be spiritually "blind" or to "see" spiritually — with our minds and hearts? Might we be spiritually blind in some ways?

In this week's Sunday Gospel, Jesus calls himself the Light of the World. How does Jesus help us see? How can he heal our spiritual blindness?



PRAYER

Jesus, you are our Light! Thank you so much for the gift of seeing — physically and spiritually. Show us yourself this Lent. Strengthen our faith and open the eyes of our hearts to the needs and the goodness of others. Amen.



FASTING

Judging others' behavior is a natural part of figuring out the kind of person we want to be. It becomes unhealthy when we condemn what we can't know or use our comparisons to excuse or protect ourselves, or if we harden our hearts towards those we judge "less" or "wrong." Where are you prone to be judgmental of others in an unhealthy way? Give up such thoughts/comments this week.



ALMSGIVING

Bring light to someone in darkness this week. Read to an elder who can no longer see well, support an institute for the blind, call someone you know is struggling with spiritual darkness to listen and lend support, or send a relative an uplifting book with a note.



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LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of March 22-28

SUNDAY READINGS: *Ezekiel 37: 12-14, Psalm 130, Romans 8: 8-11, John 11: 1-45*

ADULT REFLECTION

This Sunday's readings center on the theme of resurrection as we near the end of Lent. Ezekiel prophesies that God will raise his people from their graves and put his own spirit in them. Paul reminds the Romans that the same spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in them and "will give life to your mortal bodies also," and in the Gospel, Jesus raises his friend Lazarus from the dead.

"Resurrection" may roll off our tongues but it should knock us over! Let yourself be rocked by these readings, especially the Gospel. A man dies and is buried. Four days later, Jesus does the impossible. He calls Lazarus from his grave. Back to life!

Here's another powerful detail. "And Jesus wept." Jesus—almighty God, capable of giving life back to Lazarus—was so moved at the pain of his friends, he cried. Where else do we see such power paired with such compassion? Unlike world leaders, God doesn't need to protect his power to keep it. His tender heart is accessible to all. His power flows from his life-giving love.

And so, the Father sends the Holy Spirit to us at Baptism. The same Spirit that powerfully raised Jesus from the dead. We have been invited to enter into the tender heart of God—to share in God's own life.

Reflection Questions:

- *Sharing in God's life doesn't make us gods or "pieces of God," nor shield us from experiencing our humanity — including our own death. So what does it mean to share in God's life? How does Jesus help you live life in abundance, fully?*

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

Have you heard of someone having a near-death-experience? Such people talk about it changing how they see their lives. Why do you think that is? Have you ever had an experience that changed your perspective on life in a lasting way?

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." Even saints die, so what is Jesus talking about? He could be talking about our souls going to heaven, or our bodies rejoining our souls one day. Hope of heaven is a game-changer. But could Jesus be talking about another difference he can make in life here and now — with all its ups and downs? "I am the life." "I came that they may have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). How is Jesus our life?



PRAYER

Jesus, there is so much sickness, sadness, and dying in our world. It can make us heavy-hearted. Call to us, like you did to Lazarus! Invite us to new life in you. Help us bring your compassion to others, that they, too, may believe in you. Amen.



FASTING

Set aside your normal TV show to watch an episode of *The Chosen* this week. Reflect on the difference Jesus makes in the lives of the people he touches.



ALMSGIVING

Reach out in love to someone near death (either close to death themselves, or someone who has recently lost a loved one) with a visit, a hot meal, a listening ear, or offering to pray together.



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LENT

Faith Conversations

Week of March 29-April 4

SUNDAY READINGS: *Matthew 21:1-11; Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22; Philippians 2:6-11; Matthew 26:14 - 27:66*

ADULT REFLECTION

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

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

Reflection Questions:

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

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

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

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

A part of Jesus' suffering was feeling left alone. How can we be present to each other this week—accompanying each other? What can we do as a family this Holy Week to walk closely with Jesus — accompanying him?



PRAYER

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



FASTING

Along with fasting on Good Friday, what routine can we fast from this Holy Week to make space for extra reflection, spiritual reading, and prayer? This can help to deepen our relationship with Jesus in this holiest of weeks.



ALMSGIVING

Pontius Pilate tried to remain uninvolved and make Jesus' plight someone else's responsibility. What is that one service that's been on your heart but that you've put off because you want to remain uninvolved and safe?



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