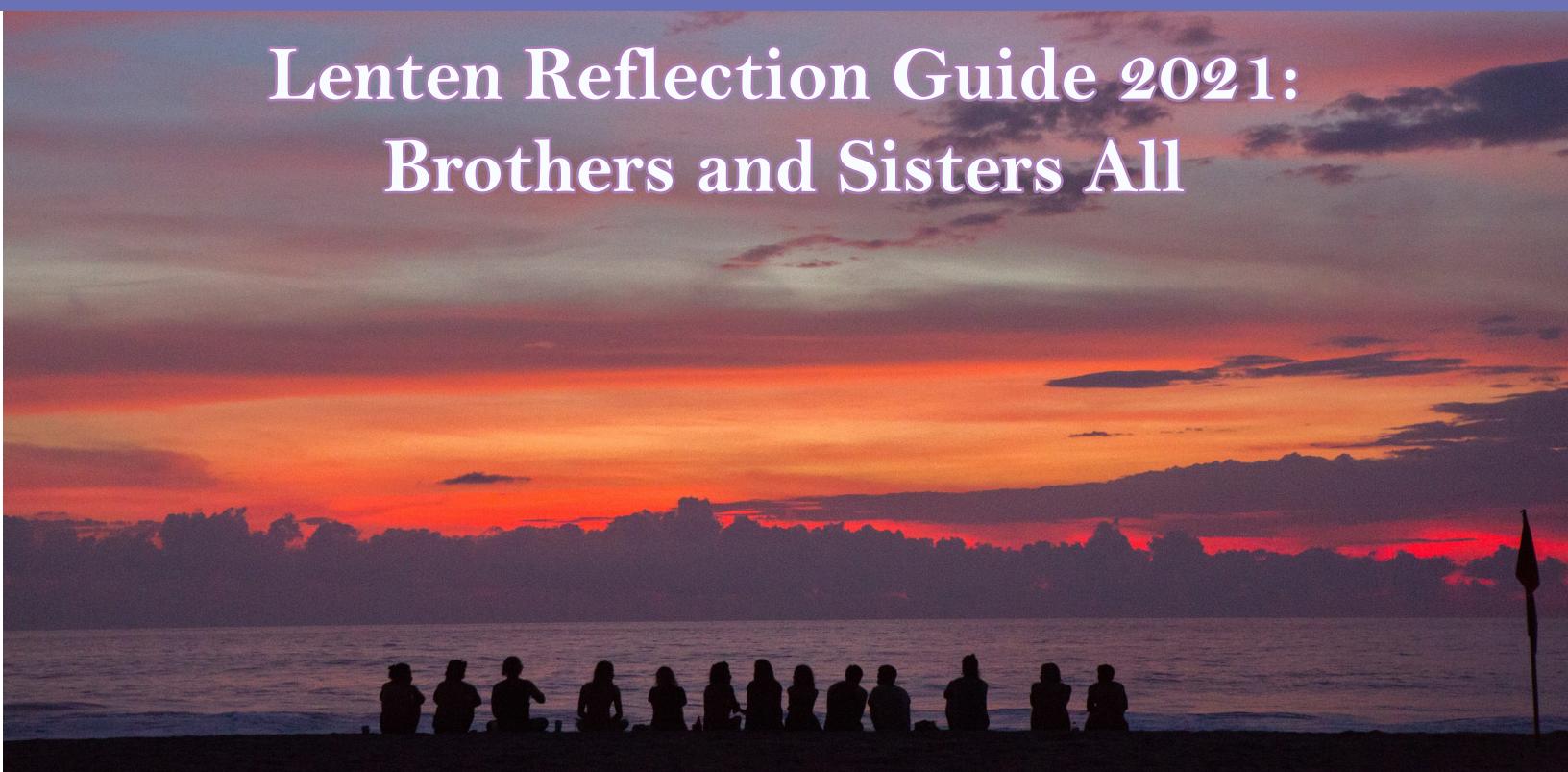




Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Lenten Reflection Guide 2021: Brothers and Sisters All



"Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all."

- Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*

About this resource

The Season of Lent is an opportunity to reflect on our lives, on how we are living our call to discipleship, and a time to seek repentance and renewal for the ways we have fallen short. This Lenten Reflection Guide is an opportunity for you to take up the invitation of Pope Francis to pray with and reflect on his new encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*. In *Fratelli Tutti* (“Brothers and Sisters All”), Pope Francis models a sort of Lenten-style of “examination” of the challenges and social sins facing our world. He calls us to personal reflection and repentance for the ways in which we fail to recognize our neighbors as “brothers and sisters” and contribute to the social and ecological crises facing our world today. Through the traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (here known as action), and through reflecting on the experiences of Maryknoll missionaries, we invite you to enter into the journey of Lent and dive deeper into the reflections of Pope Francis during this challenging time – or turning point – in history.

Quotations from Maryknoll missionaries courtesy of the Scripture reflection archives on our website. Quotes from Pope Francis are from *Fratelli Tutti*: <http://bit.ly/2Mfn3cl>

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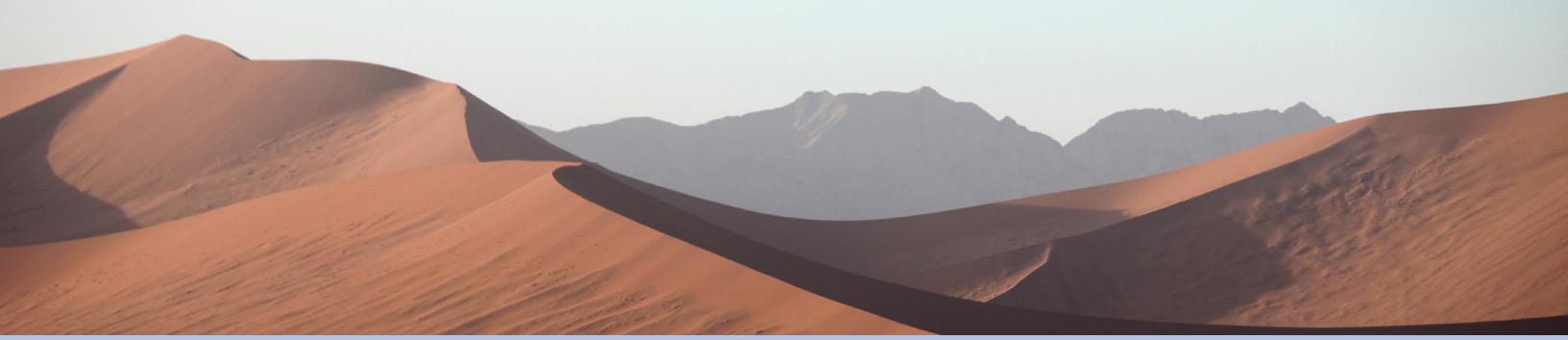
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About us

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) represents Maryknoll missionaries, who are Catholic men and women serving in impoverished communities around the world. The MOGC provides analysis and advocacy on issues of justice, peace, and integrity of creation that affect the countries and communities where Maryknoll missionaries serve.

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First Week of Lent: The Mission of Baptism

“The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days...”

Mark 1: 12

In this first week of Lent, we invite you to reflect on two stories of transformative encounters from the Gospels: the story of Jesus' baptism and the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The first story is at the heart of the readings for this first Sunday in Lent. The passage from Mark today recounts Jesus' journey into the desert which occurs directly after his encounter with John the Baptist at the Jordan River. The second reading from 1 Peter describes how the flood and Noah's ark prefigure the ritual of Christian baptism.

Cumulatively, the readings for this first Sunday of Lent describe the significance of Jesus' baptism and ours. As Christians, we imitate this encounter through our own baptism, through which we are incorporated into the mission of Christ to proclaim the good news of God's love to all people.

The second story on which we invite you to reflect is at the heart of Pope Francis' new encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti* (“*Brothers and Sisters All.*”) It is the Good Samaritan parable, about two people set at odds by social norms – a Jew and a Samaritan – who encounter one another through an act of profound mercy. In his encyclical, Pope Francis uses this parable to teach us how we can live out our universal call to be “brothers and sisters all.”

The Good Samaritan parable is emblematic of the Christian baptismal mission: to reach across divisions to share the love of God through charity and justice. Pope Francis writes, “Jesus’ parable summons us to rediscover our vocation as citizens of our respective nations and of the entire world, builders of a new social bond...It speaks to us of an essential and often forgotten aspect of our common humanity: we were created for a fulfilment that can only be found in love. We cannot be indifferent to suffering... Instead, we should feel indignant, challenged to emerge

from our comfortable isolation and to be changed by our contact with human suffering (66-68).”

Pope Francis asks a challenging question in *Fratelli Tutti*: whom do we most resemble in the Good Samaritan story? Do we really resemble the Samaritan? Or do we act more like the passersby who do nothing, comfortable in our own spheres?

At the heart of the Christian life is mission, the call to leave one's place of comfort to share the gospel message. But, like Jesus, we need times “in the desert” to prepare for this mission and listen for the voice of God. We need to come to terms with our sins, personal failures that are obstacles to receiving and proclaiming the love of God.

Fr. Charlie Dittmeier of the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky and a member of the Maryknoll Lay Missioners, writes from Cambodia, “[Like Jesus,] we too are to be people of prayer. We too are to be formed and guided by the scriptures. We too are to take seriously our baptism. We too are to find a new way of being and a new way of offering God’s life and love in the places where we live.”

“If we take seriously our baptism as Jesus did,” Fr. Dittmeier goes on, “we can offer a new way of being in the world today. First, we must live that new way of being ourselves, changing ourselves to be the people God calls us to be, relating in ways that offer more life and love and integrity.”

Questions for Reflection:

How can you make this Lent a time of preparation to be like the Good Samaritan? Where are the spheres of comfort in your life and how can you step outside them in your Christian mission?

Pray

*Lectio Divina following Pope Francis' reflection on the Good Samaritan parable in *Fratelli Tutti*:*

Read or listen to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) three times through, paying careful attention to the words.

Each time, picture yourself as one of the characters, such as the injured man, the passerby, or the Samaritan.

What comes to mind in doing this?

How is God speaking to you through this parable?

How can this parable offer a new way of relating to your “neighbor?”

Maryknoll Missioner Experience



“[At the parish I attended on mission in Nairobi], many parishioners were not literate and lacked access to lectionaries, [so] the homilies were frequently acted out by members of the youth.

One Sunday, the youth set the stage for today’s Gospel – the Good Samaritan – by bringing a very elderly woman in the parish, known for her poverty and struggles, into the chapel and laying her down in front of the altar. [In one of the scenes, a] youth walked in – wearing my sweater and carrying my briefcase – and gingerly stepped over our parishioner saying, “I feel so terrible that you are lying there, and I really wish I could help, but I am late for a really important meeting at the UN on housing rights, I will try to pass by when I’m back.”

My heart sunk, my face flushed, and I knew I was trembling at my very core. I was the Levite who passed to the other side. While I don’t remember the rest of the play as I was mortified and hurt, what remains crystal clear in my mind is my walk back to the main parish after Mass. I was with our parish priest, who was equally chastened [by the reenactment],...[and] I asked him, “what are we going to do?” [He] stopped walking, looked at me and said, “Oh Christine, we are going to change – that is what we are both going to do.”

- [Christine Bodewes](#) (left in photo), Returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner, Kenya



Second Week of Lent: Embracing Transfiguration

“Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them...”

Mark 9: 2-3

In the readings for the second Sunday of Lent, we hear the challenging story of Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac, followed by the story of Jesus’ transfiguration before three disciples from Mark’s Gospel.

In one reading, Abraham is willing to give up his precious son, Isaac, to follow the will of God. In the other, Jesus, knowing his death is drawing near, brings his disciples up a mountain where they are given a glimpse of his heavenly glory.

These stories help us recall a most essential and difficult piece of Christian logic: that when we offer everything to God – all that we treasure, our whole selves – what we offer can be transfigured or resurrected, made more lasting and perfect than it was before.

On an individual level, Lent is a time of learning to “die” to the habits and patterns that keep us from God so that we can rise with Christ at Easter, renewed and strengthened.

On a societal level, Pope Francis is calling us as a human family to “die” to patterns that reinforce a culture of death and indifference so that our world can be transfigured by love and solidarity.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, and throughout many of his recent papal writings, Pope Francis invites us to think beyond the broken economic and social paradigms that have led us to our modern crises – the pandemic, the environmental crises, economies of exclusion and consumerism, the refugee crisis, etc. He invites us to step back from our entrenched ways of thinking in order to imagine creative new ways of being in relationship with one another and the earth that reflect who we are as children of God.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis writes, “Once this health crisis passes, our worst response would be to plunge even more deeply into feverish consumerism and new forms of egotistic self-preservation... If only we might rediscover once for all that we need one another, and that in this way our human family can experience a rebirth... Unless we recover the shared passion to create a community of belonging and solidarity worthy of our time, our energy and our resources, the global illusion that misled us will collapse and leave many in the grip of anguish and emptiness (35).”

Fear often prevents us from taking the risk necessary to allow room for creativity and new ways of thinking. So does the feeling of helplessness, of despair. But today’s readings remind us of God’s desire to transform and transfigure us and all that we offer him.

Maryknoll Lay Missioner Peg Vamosy writes, “All of creation is waiting to see what we humans choose to do. Will we rush back to ‘normal’ patterns of consumerism, convenience, comfort, and indifference to anyone or anything but ourselves, or will we embark on a new path to restore the earth to right relationships, with God, with each other and with all of creation?

...[This] should be an opportunity and a time of hope, because we can transform this reality. We don’t have to return to the normal we left behind; we can choose a more fertile ground in which to plant the seeds for the harvest that God wills.”

Questions for Reflection:

In the hardship of this pandemic, have you experienced any growth or insights? Who do you hope to be during this pandemic and afterward?

Pray

When this is over,
may we never again
take for granted
A handshake with a stranger
Full shelves at the store
Conversations with neighbors
A crowded theatre
Friday night out
The taste of communion
A routine checkup
The school rush each morning
Coffee with a friend
The stadium roaring
Each deep breath
A boring Tuesday
Life itself.

When this ends,
may we find
that we have become
more like the people
we wanted to be
we were called to be
we hoped to be
and may we stay
that way—better
for each other
because of the worst.

- [Laura Kelly Fanucci](#)

Maryknoll Missioner Experience



"Wealth can shield us from memory of our reliance on God and one another. This is what seemed to have happened not just to the Israelites but also to many in the United States. We have forgotten that, rich though we may be, we are part of a global community, vulnerable to being struck down by the simplest form of life – a virus, just like anyone else. The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted many of the crevices, gaps, and breaches in our global community. It has also shown us the limitations of our ecclesial institutions and ministerial practices. When, in a time of deep crisis, we were unable to find ways of concretely sharing the "living bread" with those in need of spiritual sustenance, something is deeply amiss. Our churches are locked. Maybe what is happening in these times is Jesus knocking at the door from the inside asking to be let out."

– [Fr. David Schwinghamer, MM, Uganda](#)

Fast

Fast from one habit of convenience this week, whether it is driving when you could walk, getting takeout instead of eating the food in your home, using plastic bags instead of reusable ones, or texting when someone would appreciate a call.

Act

Explore the Pope's COVID-19 Commission at the Vatican, which studies the ways the world can progress in justice and sustainability after the pandemic. Based on the four priority topics of the commission (security, economics, ecology, health), find a person or organization to give your time, treasure, or talent to serve in some way this week: <http://bit.ly/31pLhp5>



Third Week of Lent: Loving God First

“Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money changers seated there. He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area...”

John 2: 13-15

For this third week of Lent, the Scripture readings center on the theme of God’s commandments and the sins of idolatry. In the first reading, the Israelites receive God’s ten commandments. In the Gospel from John, we hear the famous story of Jesus angrily removing the greedy merchants and money changers from the Temple.

St. Augustine famously called all sin “disordered love.” In the words of St. Augustine, God’s commandments teach us to “set our loves in order” so that our lives reflect what Jesus, echoing the prophets, named as the sum of the commandments: to love God above all things, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself.

Jesus’ actions in the Temple in today’s Gospel invite us to focus in on one “disordered love:” the love of money over the love of God and neighbor. We all have heard the commandment “thou shall not steal,” as well as Jesus’ sayings in the Sermon on the Mount, “One cannot serve [as Master] both God and Mammon,” and “Do not store up your treasures on earth...but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis discusses how the early Church developed an understanding of the social implications of Jesus’ teachings on material goods: “In the first Christian centuries, a number of thinkers developed a universal vision in their reflections on the common destination of created goods. This led them to realize that if one person lacks what is necessary to live with dignity, it is because another person is detaining it...In the words of Saint Gregory the Great, ‘When we provide the needy with their basic needs, we are giving them what belongs to them, not to us (119).’”

Returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner Erica Olsen recognized this foundational Catholic social teaching principle of the “universal destination of goods” at work among her community in El Salvador: “Leonardo, a subsistence farmer in Santo Domingo with a family of

10, made room for one more at his table one day when around midday he ran out to meet a traveling vendor passing by his home. He invited the vendor into his home for tortillas...Leonardo did not become anxious about what to serve his guest but ...recognized the dignity of the “other” and his equal right to the fruits of God’s creation. In doing so, he was invited into God’s presence.”

Looking at the world today, Pope Francis decries the excesses of our global system that allow for gross wealth for a few, excessive wealth for many in developed countries, and desperate and degrading poverty for many others. These imbalances have been intensified by the COVID-19 crisis.

Pope Francis writes in *Fratelli Tutti*, “Nowadays, a firm belief in the common destination of the earth’s goods requires that this principle also be applied to nations, their territories and their resources...[If] all people are my brothers and sisters, and if the world truly belongs to everyone, then it matters little whether my neighbor was born in my country or elsewhere. My own country also shares responsibility for his or her development, although it can fulfil that responsibility in a variety of ways.”

Beginning with our own self-examination, we can work together to change our economic choices and systems to reflect the equal dignity of all persons as created in God’s image.

Questions for Reflection:

How is God calling you to “set your loves in order?”
How has God called you to share your resources with your neighbors more generously?

Pray

Pray with this excerpt of an Examination of Conscience in light of the Beatitudes by Doris Donnelly, published by [Pax Christi USA](#).

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Do I fear being poor, in spirit or otherwise, and prefer to be rich in money, brains, or influence? Is my desire for poverty of spirit congruent with my lifestyle?

Do I use the word of God to rationalize my lifestyle, or am I willing to have God’s word criticize it?

Do I cling to my own ideas, opinions and judgments, sometimes to the point of idolatry? Do I contribute my time, talent and money to the poor of the world?

Do I make it my business to examine the causes of poverty in our world and work to eradicate unjust systems?

Maryknoll Missioner Experience



“As I read the Sermon [on the Mount], [the faces of South Sudanese refugees I work with] came flooding into my mind...

‘Blessed are you poor’ relying on scarce rations of food from the UN, wearing the same clothes day in and day out, unable to buy soap or salt or sugar to sweeten your morning tea... needing medicine or care of a doctor...for yours is the kingdom of God.

‘Blessed are you who hunger now,’ for more than one meal a day, for a chance to eat meat, drink milk, running water that won’t give you typhoid or worse, a blanket on a cold night, a mosquito net to ward off your next bout of malaria, for good news from relatives scattered far and wide,

‘Blessed are you who weep now’...over the loss of friends and family members, homes, farmland, a school to go to, work to improve your life just a little, just about everything you owned....

Later on in his sermon, Jesus gets around to address the rich people in the crowd by saying, ‘But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your compensation. Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep ... and full now and laughing.’

- [Fr. John Barth](#), MM, Uganda

Fast

Fast from buying “extras” this week and consciously set aside the resources saved for those in need.

Act

Many impoverished countries are crushed under the weight of previous debt owed to international financial institutions while trying to manage the new crisis of COVID-19. Urge President Biden to prioritize further debt relief for struggling nations during the COVID-19 crisis:<http://bit.ly/DebtRelief21MOGC>



Fourth Week of Lent: Living the Truth

“But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that their works may be clearly seen as done in God.”
- John 3: 21

In this week's Gospel, we hear perhaps the most famous passage from the New Testament: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him might not die but have eternal life.” A few lines later we hear, “[Whoever] lives the truth comes to the light, so that their works may be clearly seen as done in God.”

As Christians, we are called to proclaim the truth of God's love and mercy through our words and deeds. This time, Lent, is when we are invited to step back, remember our call, and ask ourselves whether we are “living the truth.”

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis reminds us that, among many things, “living the truth” of Christ requires being committed to truth, honesty, and integrity as members of society, qualities that are less and less valued, especially in political discourse.

These qualities are what allow for true dialogue – the dialogue that allows for people encounter one another despite their differences and pursue the common good. Francis reflects on some of the barriers to dialogue in pursuit of truth today: “Dialogue is often confused with something quite different: the feverish exchange of opinions on social networks, frequently based on media information that is not always reliable...Indeed, the media's noisy potpourri of facts and opinions is often an obstacle to dialogue, since it lets everyone cling stubbornly to his or her own ideas, interests and choices, with the excuse that everyone else is wrong (200).”

He continues, “We need to learn how to unmask the various ways that the truth is manipulated, distorted and concealed in public and private discourse... We need constantly to ensure that present-day forms

of communication are in fact guiding us to generous encounter with others, to honest pursuit of the whole truth, to service, to closeness to the underprivileged and to the promotion of the common good (208).”

Similarly, Maryknoll Fr. John Barth reflects, “As a web connects us to others and their ideas, a web can also trap us if we are not careful. Here in Uganda, where I work with refugees from South Sudan, friends often ask me if a certain message, passed on to them through their smart phone, is really true. [Jesus] uses [his] parables to teach us that sometimes things are not what they appear. How do we know the truth from the fake truth? What is news and what is fake news? ...Do we have the wisdom and patience needed to avoid being duped?”

This past election season in the U.S. and the violent events leading up to the Inauguration have demonstrated for us the real consequences of failures at truth-telling and genuine dialogue. Maryknoll missionaries who have witnessed war, violent conflict, and healing and reconciliation processes around the world know the importance of beginning with the truth – without which it is difficult to move forward.

“Truth, in fact, is an inseparable companion of justice and mercy,” Pope Francis writes. “Truth should not lead to revenge, but rather to reconciliation and forgiveness (227).”

Questions for Reflection:

How can you demonstrate God's love and mercy through the ways you communicate, including social media?

Pray

A National Examination of Conscience

Do I make an effort to inform myself in a way that is open to truth wherever it may be found, or do I only read opinions and media with which I always agree?

Do I make an effort to find, understand, and read news sources that are objective and follow journalistic standards?

Do I regularly reduce complex issues to simplistic, partisan sound bites to avoid engaging honestly and vulnerably with people with whom I disagree?

Do I speak of my ideological opponents in a way that dehumanizes, stereotypes, or objectifies them? Do I speak scornfully or dismissively of those with whom I disagree rather than engaging with their ideas?

Do I allow feelings of rage, hatred, and bitterness toward those I see as political enemies grow in my heart?

Do I cultivate sin in my heart more than I cultivate virtue?

What are my highest priorities? Where do I direct most of my energies? Do I put living for God first in my life?

- Excerpted from “A National Examination of Conscience” by Sr. Theresa Aletheia Noble, FSP

Fast

Fast from social media and the rapid consumption of news for a period. Use that space to pray for the world more deeply or to read about an issue from a new angle.

Maryknoll Missioner Experience



“In my mission in Kenya, I and my fellow sisters worked in communities that have experienced conflict and trauma through political and ethnic violence. We created space for conversations to happen among community members, some perpetrators, some victims, all impacted by the conflict. Each person was invited to speak [during the peace circle gatherings,] to express their truth, their experience, while the others listened...

[I often recall] a particular young man that came to the conversations. He had been a victim; he saw his father murdered by the others. He had become a perpetrator, taking up the fight to avenge his father’s death. He later confessed he had come to the program to befriend his enemy, to draw closer and then kill one of them. But he found himself listening to what was being said. He heard his own words being reflected back to him. He heard the pain, the trauma, the fear of being destroyed. The words resonated among the group. In the quiet sharing of the group, he could let the vengeance go.”

- Sr. Teresa Hougnon (on right in photo), MM, Kenya

Act

From the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution at Columbia University, explore this list of U.S. organizations which foster dialogue among people of diverse religious, political, and experiential backgrounds. Consider attending or hosting a dialogue event through one of these organizations.
<http://bit.ly/3puTfHa>



Fifth Week of Lent: Transformation Through Solidarity

“[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.”

- John 12: 24-25

In this week's Gospel, as we approach Palm Sunday, Jesus is increasingly clear about the demands of Christian discipleship. “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be.”

Throughout his teachings, Jesus makes it clear that we will find him among those who are rejected, suffering, unvalued or oppressed. If we are to follow him, we must go with him there.

Solidarity is the word the Church uses to describe what it means to follow Jesus into relationship with those who are suffering or downtrodden. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis explains, “Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community (116)”

He continues, explaining what the principle of solidarity means for social systems: “[Solidarity] means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labor rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money... Solidarity, understood in its most profound meaning, is a way of making history...”

Living out solidarity can be hard at the individual level, and perhaps even harder to realize as a society. It is made possible through God's grace and the encounters we have with those on the margins which teach us to recognize them as our brothers and sisters and undertake the hard work of learning to treat their burdens and joys as our own.

Once we have experienced these encounters, we learn that we cannot be wholly happy or satisfied while our brothers and sisters suffer. That is why we work for the Kingdom – so that all our joy might be complete. In the Gospel Jesus reminds us, “And when I am lifted up, I will draw everyone to myself.”

Sister Antoinette Gutzler, MM, President of the Maryknoll Sisters, reflects, “[Solidarity]...calls us to acknowledge our own suffering and then to shift our perspective into one that encompasses all the suffering peoples throughout the world. In a world where God is in charge – where Jesus Christ is King of the Universe, we realize that we are not alone – we are all connected. The recognition of that connection gives birth to empathy, compassion and a call to action for the life of the world.”

Pope Francis reminds us, “We achieve fulfilment when we break down walls and our hearts are filled with faces and names! The great goals of our dreams and plans may only be achieved in part... No single act of love for God will be lost, no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted. All of these encircle our world like a vital force (195).”

Questions for Reflection:

Where have you seen the power of solidarity or encounter? How do you feel the call of Jesus to draw near to someone in your midst who may be suffering or rejected?

Pray

O Creator, our world is large, and yet the global community is so fragile.

We glimpse the needs of our sisters and brothers, and those needs are great. We want to turn away, but you call us back.

We want simple solutions, but you want us to help solve the complex problems. Through your Church, you call us to listen, to learn, to reflect and to act.

Give us a deep sense of our place in this web of Creation.

Give us the wisdom of mind and generosity of heart to seek your will in the world today. Inspire us to respond to the call to live in solidarity with impoverished countries of the world, so that all children of God might live in dignity and peace.

Amen

- [Catholic Relief Services](#), Education for Justice staff

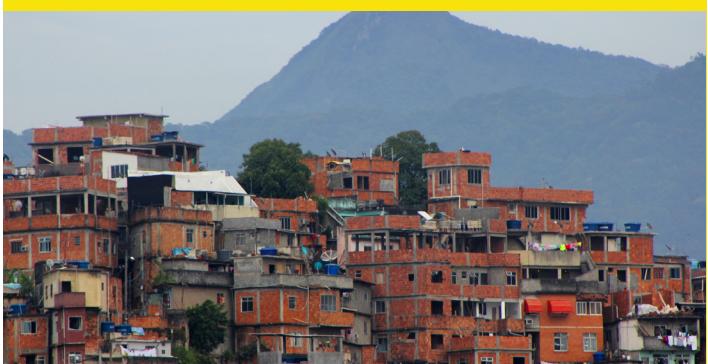
Fast

Fast from one habit of distraction this week, whether it is social media, watching TV, etc. Ask God how you might make more time in your life for encounters of solidarity.

Act

In solidarity with our brothers and sisters in impoverished countries without access to a COVID-19 vaccine, take action to urge our leaders to prioritize vaccine equity around the world: <https://bit.ly/2YBG8bj>

Maryknoll Missioner Experience



"When I was a Maryknoll lay missioner in Brazil, I lived in a neighborhood of migrants in the megacity of São Paulo...Being migrants ourselves, my friend Edina, who is from the northeast of Brazil, and I empathized with the women. We knew firsthand what it was like to be without family support as you raise your children and struggle to get by.

We decided to start a women's group to offer a place for these stressed and lonely women to rest and meet other women while learning a new skill....After about a year of meeting, our solidarity with each other was strong...Several women said they looked forward to meeting each week with their 'sisters.' We were there for each other when a husband left the home, or a child fell sick, or a family lost its shack to torrential rains...

Around this time, [one member, Ana], got mysteriously sick. She had no family, except her husband, in São Paulo. So our group accompanied her through her hospital stays and intense suffering...In an amazing act of compassion and love, Edina offered to donate one of her kidneys [to Ana]. She and Ana had already become very close from participating in the group and this act of kindness would solidify their bond forever... [in the end], Edina's offering to Ana saved Ana's life."

- [Angel Mortel](#), Returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner, Brazil



Sixth Week of Lent: The Power of Sacrificial Love

“Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself...becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Philippians 2: 6, 8

In this last week of Lent we reflect on the readings for the Passion, read on Palm Sunday, this time from the Gospel of Mark. We hear the stories of the Last Supper, of Jesus' agony and betrayal, and his crucifixion and burial. We are left waiting for the conclusion – the joy of the Resurrection.

Although these stories are familiar to us, this week we can step back and recall just how stunning and groundbreaking this foundational Christian narrative is: that Jesus – God incarnate – would allow himself to be betrayed, humiliated, and put to death. And that his rising from the dead would then allow all humanity access to eternal life, along with the renewal of all Creation.

Jesus' death is the ultimate act of nonviolence – the refusal to capitulate to the logic of violence and power, instead revealing the power of sacrificial love as the foundation of life in God.

Holy men and women throughout the ages have shown us what it looks like to live lives of nonviolent and sacrificial love, following Jesus' example.

Throughout his papacy and especially in *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis highlights the example of St. Francis of Assisi: “In the world [at the time of St. Francis], bristling with watchtowers and defensive walls, cities were a theatre of brutal wars between powerful families, even as poverty was spreading through the countryside. Yet there Francis was able to welcome true peace into his heart and free himself of the desire to wield power over others. He became one of the poor and sought to live in harmony with all (4).”

St. Francis shocked his society by his refusal of wealth and power in order to embrace the poverty and humility

of Christ. With God's grace, we, too, can be prophetic witnesses of a different way of living.

Pope Francis goes on to reflect on how the logic of violence, retribution, security, and power dominate our world today. Specifically, he points out the horror of ongoing wars and states that, given the technology and scope of modern warfare, “it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a ‘just war.’ Never again war!” (258)

Likewise, he states clearly his opposition to the use and very possession of nuclear weapons, writing that true peace cannot be dependent on mutual ability to annihilate one another. Finally, he reiterates that the use of the death penalty makes no sense in a world where it is possible to keep society safe without it.

This week, as we reflect on Jesus' passion and prepare to celebrate the Resurrection, let us pray that the spirit of humility, nonviolence, and perfect love which Jesus modeled may permeate our entire lives. May we help bring his reign of peace into the world.

Questions for Reflection:

How does the life of St. Francis of Assisi challenge you? In what ways can we welcome true peace into our hearts?

Pray

Peace Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

Fast

This week, and perhaps into the Easter season, commit to refraining from acting on feelings of anger toward those around you. If you are filled with anger or frustration, practice taking a walk, taking quiet time, or retreating into prayer. Let the anger subside and then decide how to respond.

Act

Urge the Biden administration to take steps further steps to reduce the United States' nuclear arms and work toward a nuclear-free world:
<http://bit.ly/2021NoNukes>

Maryknoll Missioner Experience



"On one occasion after a bombing in our area of Narus, South Sudan, Sister Madeline McHugh and I sat under the trees with about 12 women for prayer and debriefing. We used the Scripture for the coming Sunday from Luke's Gospel, chapter 6, where Jesus says we are to love our enemies. I asked the group how we would describe an enemy. Most of the women said that their enemy was the Khartoum fundamentalist Muslim government soldiers who were bombing them.

Then one woman said: 'I believe my enemy is someone who has wounded my heart, but whose wounds I do not know.' She went on to say: 'Maybe, if I can know the person's story better, especially to know the person's wounds, and the person can know my wounds, we would not be an enemy to each other.' The theology of the Sudanese women has deepened my faith, compassion, and forgiveness."

– [Sr. Theresa Baldini, MM, South Sudan](#)

