



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

2023

# Lenten

REFLECTION GUIDE

INSPIRED BY LAUDATO SI'

“

*As the salt of the earth, we are called to bear witness to the covenant with God with joy and gratitude*

”

Pope Francis

# About this resources

In this Lenten Reflection Guide, we offer reflections, questions, prayers, and actions based on each week's Scripture readings in light of Catholic social teaching and Maryknoll mission experience. Use this guide individually or in small groups to reflect upon your life patterns, to pray more deeply, and to renew your spirit to face the realities of our world.

Cover image: Photo of Wadi Rum, Aqaba, Jordan desert picture by Juli Kosolapova on Unsplash

Quotes from Maryknoll Missioners are from the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns online Scripture Reflection series.

Ash Wednesday: Photo of wool weaving in the Sacred Valley, Peru by Pamela Huber on Unsplash. Photo of Sr. Dee Smith courtesy of Dee Smith, MM.

First Sunday of Lent: Photo of Sandwich Harbour Historic, Namibia desert by Ryan Cheng on Unsplash. Photo of Brother John Blazo from Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers YouTube video: <https://mogc.info/Lent2023-JBlazo>

Second Sunday of Lent: Photo of young girls walking beside their mother in Hyderabad, India. Image by IFPRI/Gert-Jan Stads, Creative Commons. Photo of Kathy Bond (left) teaching chair yoga at AFYA, Joao Pessoa, Brazil courtesy of Maryknoll Lay Missioners

Third Sunday of Lent: Photo of Haitian women carrying buckets on their heads by Bailey Torres on Unsplash. Photo of Dan Moriarty by Dan Moriarty.

Fourth Sunday of Lent: Photo of Christmas celebrations in South Sudan by Gabe Hurrish, Maryknoll Lay Missioner. Photo of Gabe Hurrish with Toposa boy courtesy of Gabe Hurrish

Fifth Sunday of Lent: Photo of sunset in Thailand by Nattipat Vesvarute on Unsplash. Photo of Sr. Genie Natividad assisting migrant children in clothing room at Casa Alitas Welcome Center courtesy of Sr. Genie Natividad.

Palm Sunday: Photo of palm fronds by Alex Perri on Unsplash. Maryknoll Fr. John Siyumbu with members of the Maryknoll Young Adults program in Chicago, June 12, 2022, photo courtesy of the Maryknoll Young Adults

## About us

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) represents Maryknoll missioners, 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 the integrity of creation that affect the countries and communities where Maryknoll missioners serve.

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# Ash Wednesday

*For gracious and merciful is God, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment.*  
PSALM 103:8

## Community Engagement

Ash Wednesday launches the Season of Lent, a season of reflection and preparation for Easter. While Catholics are known to joke about excess guilt and penance all year long, these next forty days offer us time for repentance, fasting, reflection, and ultimately celebration.

Today's gospel reading informs us how penance is to be carried out. Matthew tells us, "When you fast, do not look gloomy" and instead "anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting." It tells us also how we should pray: "when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret."

Beyond prayer and penance, it is also a mandate on how to live out worship in general. "Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them." And in what can only be understood as hyperbole, Jesus says, "do not let your left hand know what your right is doing."

If you go to church this Sunday, chances are you are not obeying this dictum to the letter. Celebrating the Mass might be difficult to do in your "inner room" and in secret. And yet, we recognize the truth of the Scriptures. The worship we owe our God is not one of public theatrics but of personal oblation. It is not the public act that is demanded, but sincere personal commitment. It is further echoed in the first reading of Joel: "Rend your hearts, not your garments."

How often do we see the expressions of public, insincere virtue? It can be particularly jarring to see people loudly invoke the mantle of Christianity to spearhead causes directly opposed to the life and

teachings of Christ. For every public invocation of faith and good works, it is worth considering: will the outward act deepen my relationship with Christ? If the act is not done for its own sake, its moral value might be vacuous.

Later in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus, brought before the Sanhedrin, is condemned to death by a dramatic public gesture: "Then the high priest tore his robes and said, 'He has blasphemed! What further need have we of witnesses?'" (Matt 26:65) Anyone reading the larger context of the story knows to be skeptical of the high priest's sincerity. His outrage symbolized by tearing his (probably very expensive) vestments is in part a misdirection from the fact that there are no other witnesses. What's more, all other witness testimony up until then has not been very convincing. The empty rhetoric and gesture condemn Jesus to death.

And so, the challenge for us all every day and particularly in the Season of Lent, is to let our outward gestures be no more than the sincere manifestation of inward conviction. "Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD, your God." ■

### Questions for Reflection

What are ways in which you pray to God?  
How do my prayer practices deepen my connection to God? To your community?

## Prayer

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Dedicated to Service

Pack nothing.

Bring only your determination to serve  
and your willingness to be free.

Only surrender to the need of the Time—  
To love justice and walk humbly with God.

Set out in the dark.

I will send fire to warm and encourage you.

I will be with you in the fire

And I will be with you in the cloud.

You will learn to eat new food

And find refuge in new places.

I will give you dreams in the desert

To guide you safely home to that place you  
have not yet seen.

The stories you tell one another by the fires in  
the dark

Will make you strong and wise.

You will get to where you are going

By remembering who you are.

Touch each other and keep telling stories.

- Sharon Raynor, *MKLM*  
*Maryknoll Book of Prayer*

## Fast

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Take a break from social media. Turn off your cell phone, tablet or computer. Use that time to care for your relationship with God, the earth, yourself, and others.

Social media can create false expectations, exaggerate misunderstandings, or fuel engative emotion. It is no substitute from in-person social interaction. Instead, seek out conversation with neighbors, especially those who are lonely.

## Action

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Gather friends and watch *The Letter*, a poignant YouTube Original documentary about Laudato Si', which tells the story of a journey to Rome of frontline leaders to discuss the encyclical with Pope Francis. See the movie for free here: <https://bit.ly/MOGCLetter>



I have been living and working in Guatemala now for over 29 years missioned and working with people with HIV and their families. These are a people who have been marginalized, judged, violated, murdered, isolated, and discriminated against in every area of their lives. Many Christian churches have refused to allow people with HIV or transgender people or gay people to worship in their temples. They are vilified, called sinners and 'deserving' of the virus through their unacceptable behavior (according to the 'righteous' of Guatemala.)

Throughout my time here I have witnessed the strength and conviction of my fellow colleagues in our hospice to promote the YES as YES and NO as NO that Jesus calls us to practice. Our YES to caring for people with HIV and our NO to discrimination, isolation and mistreatment by family members, communities and neighbors.

More than ever in these chaotic times we are challenged to speak out our truth and stand firm on the side of justice and equality for all in creation.

- Sr. Dee Smith  
Maryknoll Sisters





# First Sunday of Lent

*A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me.*

PSALM 51:10

## Ecological Spirituality

Jesus preceded his ministry with retreat, fortifying himself with forty days and nights of prayer and fasting. He completed his retreat with a trial—three tests of his resolve.

There is always value in centering yourself before you undertake your vocation: to discern your calling and reconnect with what you hold dear. In the case of Jesus's forty days, it was not a moment for pampering. On the contrary, his time was coupled with fasting, a most basic level of self-abnegation. Nonetheless the physical burden was of great spiritual value. Time for reflection coupled with discipline heightens our spiritual faculties and allows us to deal with the temptations ahead.

At the end of the forty days, Jesus is tempted with the prospect of food, if only he were to conjure it. The appeal is apparent to any human who has ever fasted. So, too, is the appeal of amassing earthly power in the third temptation.

Then, Satan tempts Jesus with the idea of throwing himself from the highest tower. To us, that hardly seems all that tempting. The temptation is clear to Jesus, though, who retorts that You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test. The response reveals the temptation. Why test God if there is not a shadow of a doubt? What better way to eliminate that doubt by compelling his intercession? Or, if there is no intercession on behalf of God, perhaps your death is no loss to you.

Surveying the pain and misery of the world, drastic economic inequality, ecological crisis, war and violence etc., we are presented with the same temptations of

Christ: convenience to the detriment of discipline, earthly ambition to the detriment of spiritual peace, and self-destruction – in Jesus's case a test of God's existence. In ours, we face doubt and even despair of the existence an all-powerful, all-good God presiding over a suffering world.

“Challenged with many complex issues today, we all struggle to believe in God's faithfulness through our unknown and unpredictable history,” says Maryknoll Sr. Teruko Ito in Japan.

“Today, let us individually and communally review our past, where we came from, and profess who our God is, in and beyond human history. And maybe we can shift our understanding of the word ‘God’ from noun to verb, which might expand our understanding of God. God is a process. God is holy-ing and is wholeness-ing. Oh God, you are the wholeness of life!” ■

### Questions for Reflection

What gives you hope when the state of the world gives you cause for concern?

What choices do you make daily that have an impact on the Earth? On lower-income communities?

## Prayer

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All-powerful God, you are present in the  
whole universe  
and in the smallest of your creatures.  
You embrace with your tenderness all that  
exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,  
that we may protect life and beauty.  
Fill us with peace, that we may live  
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.  
O God of the poor,  
help us to rescue the abandoned and  
forgotten of this earth,  
so precious in your eyes.  
Bring healing to our lives,  
that we may protect the world and not prey  
on it,  
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and  
destruction.

Touch the hearts  
of those who look only for gain  
at the expense of the poor and the earth.  
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,  
to be filled with awe and contemplation,  
to recognize that we are profoundly united  
with every creature  
as we journey towards your infinite light.  
We thank you for being with us each day.  
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle  
for justice, love and peace.

*- A prayer for our earth, Laudato Si'*

## Fast

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Consider eating less meat and fewer dairy products.  
Meat and dairy products are a major driver of climate  
change due to carbon and methane emissions through  
their production and distribution chains, according  
to data from United Nations agencies.

## Action

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Join the “Encounter for Our Common Home”  
Campaign organized by the Catholic Climate  
Covenant. Get training and join efforts to urge  
government and Church leaders to support climate  
solutions from a place of faith and reason.

<https://mogc.info/EncounterCommonHome>



Brazil has one of the highest rates of anxiety  
in the world. We see this statistic play out  
in the people who come through our doors  
in the periphery of the coastal city of Joao  
Pessoa, in northeastern Brazil.

One day a man arrived with so much anxiety  
that he could not sit still for his session. Our  
holistic health therapist invited him to take  
off his shoes and go into the garden. After  
several minutes of pacing barefoot on the  
earth between the medicinal herb beds, he  
was able to calm himself down.

This story came to my mind as I reflected on  
the leper who returned to Jesus and fell to his  
feet. Besides showing his immense gratitude  
to Jesus in his gesture, the leper was, in my  
mind, grounding himself.

Grounding helps us to live more fully in the  
moment, anchoring our bodies, minds and  
emotions in the here and now. With this, we  
are free to live more fully with less energy  
(and anxiety) focused on dwelling on the  
past or worrying about the future.

- Kathy Bond

Maryknoll Lay Missioners





# Second Sunday of Lent

*All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you.*  
GENESIS 12:3

## Simple Lifestyles

The transfiguration in today's gospel reading is a revelation of Jesus's divinity and a privileged gift to the three apostles, Peter, James and John who witness it. Appearing beside Jesus are Moses, symbolizing the law, and Elijah, symbolizing the prophets.

Peter embarrasses himself when he asks Jesus if he and the apparitions of Moses and Elijah would want Peter to build a tent for each of them. His question reveals his misunderstanding and his innocence. It may have been a naive question, but it came from a place of sincerity.

All this is to make Peter's three denials of Christ later on more poignant. Peter, more than the other nine apostles, knew of Jesus's divinity. Peter had been the first among them to affirm it.

The transfiguration is also a shared secret since no one is to know of these events until Jesus is risen from the dead.

Today we, as Christians, have the benefit of the whole story. The teachings and ministry of Jesus are regarded simultaneously with the events of his death and resurrection. The tragedy is Peter denies Christ having seen the transfiguration. Our failure to live out the divine teachings is similarly tragic.

Maryknoll Fr. Joe Veneroso shares this story:

"I had the good fortune to study Scripture with Rabbi Asher Finkel. What made his lectures intriguing was that his specialty was the New Testament, specifically the teachings of Jesus. Rabbi Finkel offered insights into Jesus that most of us Gentiles could never imagine. One day he launched into an

impromptu explanation of the Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, saying that, to the Jewish mind, it made perfect sense for the Messiah to be born of a ritually spotless womb. On another occasion he spoke about the meaning of the Resurrection as if he accepted it as fact.

"One day, one of us had the courage to ask him: 'If you believe this, why aren't you a Christian?' He said, 'The real question is: are you a Christian?' Before we had time to object he explained: 'If you claim to be Christian, it means more than just saying "Jesus is Lord." It means you are willing to live by the gospel values set forth in the Sermon on the Mount.'

"Our life of prayer and good works comes in response to grace, not as its prerequisite. If we truly believe we are precious children of God and that God has forgiven us, then we naturally stop our foolish sinning because we no longer need such crutches and diversions. Sure, we might sin again, but instead of feeling discouraged, we should view these as reminders not to take pride in our own so-called holiness and stop begrudging people of other faith when they do better at living according to gospel values than we do."



### Questions for Reflection

Which gospel values in the Sermon on the Mount resonate with you? Which are most challenging?

## Prayer

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Oh, Great Spirit,  
whose voice I hear in the winds  
and whose breath gives life to all the world, hear  
me.

I am small and weak.

I need your strength and wisdom.

Let me walk in beauty and make my eyes  
ever behold the red and purple sunset.

Make my hands respect the things you have made  
and my ears sharp to hear your voice.

Make me wise so that I may understand  
the things you have taught my people.

Let me learn the lessons you have hidden  
in every leaf and rock.

I seek strength, not to be superior to my brother,  
but to fight my greatest enemy - myself.

Make me always ready to come to you  
with clean hands and straight eyes,  
so when life fades, as the fading sunset,  
my spirit will come to you  
without shame.

- Chief Yellow Lark, Lakota, 1887

## Fast

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Take a pause on buying non-essential items. Make space for the sacred and give the planet a rest.

Whether it is refraining from buying fast food, makeup, books, shoes, video games, etc., or perhaps buying nothing at all outside of the essentials, do what you can to liberate yourself from consumption. You may find you are able to get along with a lot less than you realized you were able.

## Action

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Perform an energy audit of your home yourself or with a professional to reduce your environmental impact at <https://mogc.info/EnergyAudit>

Discover ways of saving energy saving, including potentially upgrading to newer Energy Star appliances and/or retiring the old, energy draining ones.

Home energy consumption generates 20 percent of the greenhouse gasses released into the atmosphere by the United States. For older homes, you may not realize how some simple fixes make those carbon emissions completely needless.



It's so good to know that Jesus will be our ultimate judge after our lives, with all its ups and downs, are over. As a young Brother and after so much study in Maryknoll, I thought I knew all the answers. I often saw things in black and white and made my comments and decisions accordingly.

However, as I got older and learned the language and culture better, and built relationships with people, I realized the error of judging and realized that Jesus judges. It took a tremendous load off my mind.

I remember visiting the Nicaraguan village of Santa Maria in the mountains where I followed the lead of the people in the prayer service and was asked to visit a woman dying of cancer. While with her, I began the ritual for praying with the dying and along with some family members, I led them in prayer.

As I went through the prayers, I realized I was moving from saying the prayers to being in prayer with the woman and her family.

What a difference it made in me.

The prayers requested that Jesus show His mercy and love for this woman despite any sins she may have committed in her life. The sincerity of the people taught me to be with people and with God in prayer.

- Br. John Blazo

Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers





# Third Sunday of Lent

*The Israelites quarreled there and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord in our midst or not?"*  
EXODUS 17:7

## Cry of the Earth

Jesus loved surprises. His command to the Samaritan woman is certainly one of them. For one, we know who He is. As God, Jesus has the power to miraculously avoid any human entanglement at will; as a leader with a following, He can wait until more devoted servants return; and as a someone with a proven endurance, He has the capacity to do without water for some time. None of this is known to the Samaritan woman who encounters Jesus at the well.

The Samaritan woman has her own reasons to be surprised. She notices that Jesus is a devout Jew, and Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans. She is traveling to the well alone at midday, which biblical scholars have interpreted to suggest that this woman was ostracized even among Samaritans. And in her heart, she is painfully aware of her own defects, especially her current messy marital affairs. It is later revealed to the reader that she has not two, not three, but five husbands.

Jesus addresses the Samaritan woman because she is ostracized. His request for water pulls the woman into his orbit, a woman who is used to being excluded. It is the essence of the incarnation: God descending into flesh, adopting all of humanity's frailties and troubles, to participate and commune with us.

The first reading concerns God, through Moses, giving water to the Israelites in their exile. Moses strikes a rock from which flows water to quench the thirst of the people wandering in the desert. The narrow-minded grumblings of the Israelites who ask "Is the Lord in our midst or not?" are proved wrong. Water is found, and God literally joins the Israelites in

the person of Jesus.

Jesus gives living water. But as human, He also asks for earthly water. It is a further cruelty that he is given vinegar while thirsty on the cross.

Nearly twenty years ago, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns published these five principles on "Water and the Community of Life:" Water is its own reality, a dimension of planet Earth, ancient and life-giving. Water is the common heritage of all creation as it is an essential dimension of the journey of life. Water is an 'endangered species,' its purity, nurturing power, free-flow and availability for all, under attack. Water is both a sacred gift and a central symbol in all religious traditions. Water concerns are front and center across the globe as enlightened peoples awaken to this crisis.

Consider then the crime against God it is to pollute, withhold, or waste water.

In ten days' time from this third Sunday in the Season of Lent, the United Nations Water Conference will commence in New York City. Maryknoll missionaries will be there, to affirm the human right to water and protect the global supply from all "poisonings of the well." ■

### Questions for Reflection

How does your care for water and natural resources resonate with the five Maryknoll principles?

## Prayer

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God of the Ages

God of the Ages,  
Christ, the Alpha and the Omega of history,  
Holy Spirit, You who fill and connect all things,  
We know that in You a thousand years are a single  
day,  
And a single day is a thousand years.

Your today does not give way to tomorrow,  
Your now does not follow yesterday,  
You Live in the eternal present, where all things are  
one, and forgiven,  
And surrounded by mercy.

We who are caught in the flux of time,  
Seek to be where You are.  
We seek to be present to Your Eternal Presence –  
where all is one, forgiven, and surrounded by  
mercy.  
Amen

- Richard Rohr, OFM

## Fast

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Commit to one week of buying only local, in-season produce. Locally produced food grown during natural seasons is fresher and requires less energy to produce and transport.

## Action

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Ask Congress to meet the U.S. pledge to deliver \$11.4 billion a year to international climate finance. These funds will help vulnerable countries who have least contributed to the climate crisis to reduce emissions, transition to clean energy, and better prepare for the climate disasters to come.

<https://mogc.info/GCF>



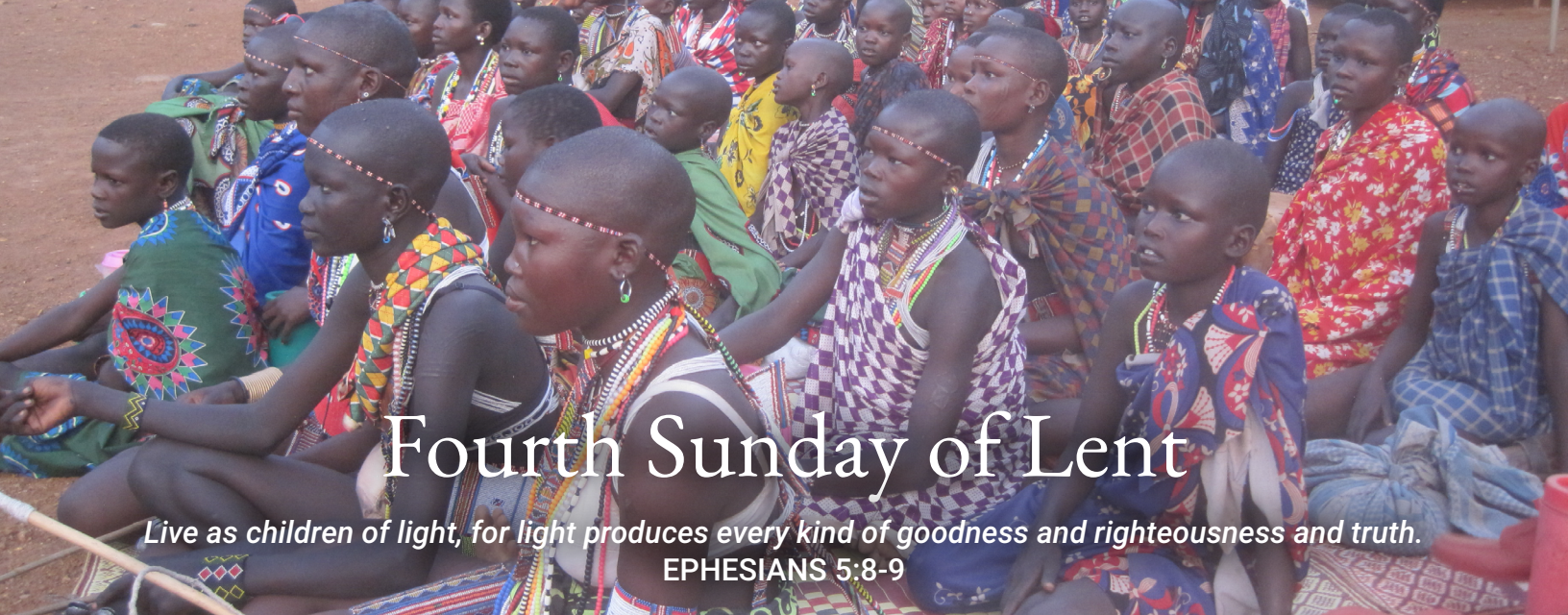
Being at Casa Alitas Welcome Center [in El Paso, Texas] with other volunteers has been a source of inspiration and strength for me. These volunteers come from all walks of life, from different faith traditions including Jewish, Muslims and Christians. There is a sense of cooperation and collaboration among us that naturally evolves when our common goal is the same: to respond as best we can to the basic human rights and needs of every individual coming our way. What, I wonder, draws them to this place? What gives them energy to be with the migrants who come in droves? What keeps them going when the going gets rough? We are drawn together for one purpose: to extend mercy and compassion. Regardless of faith tradition or ideology, we share in Jesus' conviction of service that must begin and end with the least ones, those on the margins: "For whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me" (Matthew 25:45).

In the end, I believe, we are motivated by a deep sense of fulfillment and gratitude when we respond to God's call to be with others.

Our foundress, Mother Mary Joseph as we fondly call her, said: "The missionary's portion is a special consciousness of God's thirst and hunger for the love of all. It was to satisfy this love that we came here."

- Sr. Genie Natividad  
Maryknoll Sisters





# Fourth Sunday of Lent

*Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.*  
EPHESIANS 5:8-9

## Children of Light

When Jesus heals the blind man on the sabbath, he ruffles many feathers among the Pharisees. Perhaps it ought to have. The act upsets the established order in all the most important ways. For one, Jesus dispels the idea that the blindness was caused by evil done either by the blind man or his parents. Nowadays, the very notion of inherited guilt is dismissed, along with the idea that bad things only happen to bad people.

Jesus healing blindness is also a metaphor for the way he brings light to the world, a metaphor he makes explicit in a way guaranteed to upset the Pharisees. He tells them “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind.” He tells them that due to their confidence, their sins remain. And to crown it all, he cures the blind man on the sabbath, violating the strict ‘no work’ rule.

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus has explained that “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath.” Here he goes even further. “We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

In Matthew 5:14, Jesus says “You are the light of the world.” Maryknoll lay missionary Judy Walter and her ministry at the Lake House of Prayer in Tanzania is one example of Maryknoll missionaries sharing God’s light in the world.

“Our ministry is to teach, counsel, and practice contemplative prayer together with all who come to pray here,” Judy said. “In the local Swahili language,

the word for contemplative prayer is “taamuli”, which means to shine the light, or to allow the light within to shine.”

“Besides our guests who come for retreat, those who come to practice ‘taamuli’ with us on a daily basis are our neighbors, the ‘anawim,’ Hebrew for the poor and lowly ones. These neighbors live on the margins and often struggle to feed, clothe, and educate their children. They come to spend an hour in silence, listening to God, finding an oasis of peace amid their struggles, coming home to themselves. It is these people, our neighbors, who in their faithfulness to prayer, in their need for God, are the very heart of our House of Prayer. They are our praying community. As we practice ‘taamuli’ together every day, we are allowing that inner light to shine even amid struggles and difficulties.”

Judy went on to say, “It is our deep belief here in this House of Prayer, that the power of this inner light will eventually overcome all the darkness, violence, and cruelty of the world. This is the apostolic dimension of ‘taamuli’ – it places us at the very heart of the spiritual balance of the universe.” ■

### Questions for Reflection

Who or what are sources of light in your life?

What are new ways you can live as a child of light?

## Prayer

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God of all creation,

How splendid and majestic is the world you created! It reveals your glory; it teaches us about you.

When you made us in your image, you gave us this command: care for the world and for all the creatures in it, for this is our common home.

Yet your holy creation cries out, for our home is “burdened and laid waste,” scorched and scarred. Come among us that we might remember our interdependence.

Let us see the face of your Son in those who suffer from the destruction of our common home. Help us to be stewards who honor you in the world you have made for the good of all creation and for future generations.

May your justice reign forever! Amen.

*- From the Querida Amazonia Study Guide  
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishop*

## Fast

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Consider ditching single use plastics. Plastics are made from fossil fuels and four percent of the world’s annual petroleum production is converted directly into making plastics. Another four percent gets burned as fuel in the process. Only approximately seven percent of plastics are recycled. Many municipalities in the United States have stopped recycling plastic bags because they are difficult to process and have little to no resale value. Plastic disposable bags clog our shorelines and suffocate birds and marine life.

Much of the nonbiodegradable waste ends up in the ocean, including into the Great Pacific Garbage Patch: a ‘debris convergence zone’ roughly three times the size of France.

## Action

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See what biodegradable materials can do by exploring paper and fabric alternatives. Reducing consumption is the most sustainable option, but at the end of a products life cycle, biodegradability allows for the complete elimination of waste. Learn more about composting to see the renewability of the materials in action.



If we don’t practice the Christian faith and charity, we cannot be among the chosen people in heaven. We need to constantly reflect.

Are we faithful followers of Jesus? Do we really practice charity based on our faith and hope in God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ?

How often do we fail to see and help the poor who are at our gates/doors/borders/ or in our communities? Do we only focus on our own life? What are we going to do with the Christian knowledge we have? Do we become blind to those in need and turn away or fail to “see” them as Jesus asks so many times in the Gospels? Can’t we do something?

Personally, I have come to understand through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit that all the people around me, rich and poor, are God’s children and I am called to serve. I am urged to be in mission in South Sudan, one of the poorest and most dysfunctional countries on Earth. I want to open my gate to the Lazarus-es of South Sudan. I want to recognize the suffering around me. I want to treat them with dignity and respect. It is through these souls we will all receive salvation.

- Gabe Hurrish  
Maryknoll Lay Missioners





# Fifth Sunday of Lent

*O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them.*  
EZEKIEL 37:12

## Cry of the Poor

The gospel readings for this Sunday are laden with matters of resurrection. Within Lent, it is a story that foreshadows what we will celebrate in two weeks. In two weeks, the resurrection will make it a joyful moment. All this makes the sadness of the readings starker.

Jesus says to his disciples that Lazarus is only sleeping. He delays his visit by two days fully anticipating the need for his miracle. He tells his disciples they will be lucky to witness it. But the moment Jesus meets with Mary and Martha, he weeps nonetheless.

To follow Jesus as a Maryknoll missionary can be similarly intense. Maryknoll Fr. James Kroeger wrote about the swell of emotions he felt when he saw a poor, young mother holding her baby while selling snacks outside of a train station in the Philippines:

“What will become of this little child?” I thought as I stared at the scene before me. ‘How many days before the baby will be sick, due to breathing this awful air and living in such conditions?’ I was sweating in the few seconds it took me to walk through the underpass, but the mother and baby would be there all day! O, poor baby, what future do you have? Loving mother, I admire your sacrifice to earn something for your newborn. May your sweet baby somehow be saved from sickness and premature death!”

Fr. Kroeger looks to Jesus for guidance and says, “Because Jesus is the compassion of God in person, he becomes totally approachable by those who suffer. In fact, the letter to the Hebrews advises: ‘Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.’ Such a profound awareness of the depth of the loving compassion of our God should radically transform us. It will also challenge us to reach out to the needy with Jesus’ compassion.”

“Christian mission has a multitude of faces,” Fr. Kroeger says, “building peace, promoting ecology, fostering justice, encouraging reconciliation, respecting human rights, caring for orphans and victims of war. However, at the heart of mission is always the compassion of God, personally experienced and then generously shared.”

“I have never forgotten my experience of the suffering of that young mother and her newborn,” Fr. Kroeger says. “We constantly seek to transform our heart-rending experiences into committed action and compassionate service of those who suffer in our peace-starved world.” ■

### Questions for Reflection

Where and when do you experience compassion most acutely?

What does that compassion call you to do?

## Prayer

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Today Jesus Wept  
Watching a mother die  
From the bullet of poverty  
That stole her right  
To give birth in safety

Surely

How could we yet again  
Let a mother die giving life  
As armies thrive taking life?

Today Jesus wept  
Listening to John confess  
The rape of five-year-old Joyce  
Not his first, but third count  
Violating grandma, teenager, child

Surely

How could we yet again  
Allow Impunity to blossom  
As we rip off bodies, souls, and spirits?

Today Jesus wept  
Watching the bomb explode  
Trees, insects, animals, human limbs  
All scattered away, turned to ashes  
Skies and waters choked with smoke

Surely

How could we yet again  
Divert resources to end malaria, TB, AIDS  
As we wreak nuclear havoc on planet Earth?

*- Jackie Ogega's reflection on "Jesus wept"  
Jn 11:35*

## Fast

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Consider ways to phase out fossil fuels from your life. Natural gas, oil, and coal are fossil fuels used daily to provide energy. They are non-renewable energy sources and produce greenhouse gas emissions.

Lower your thermostat a few degrees if your furnace uses carbon fuel. Find out how much of your electrical grid is powered by coal, natural gas, or oil. Plan your electrical consumption accordingly.

## Action

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Explore the resources compiled by the Maryknoll Affiliates group at <https://mogc.info/MA-LSAP>. The comprehensive resources include worksheets, visual slides, and guides on all the goals of the Laudato Si' encyclical. Tips on energy use, water use, and cooking are among the educational resources. They are worth exploring year-round.



Mercy and impunity are not the same thing, nor are nonviolence and passivity. Christ was never vengeful. He rejected punitive justice. But his mercy never sacrificed truth. Christian nonviolence seeks to interrupt and transform violence.

In South Africa, Rwanda, Chile, Cambodia, Guatemala, and in Native- and African American communities in the United States, survivors of historic, systemic violence are seeking their own paths toward wholeness and peace with their oppressors. Each community is different, and perhaps not all will achieve Christ's radical mercy. But only by allowing the truth to be told and by showing mercy first to the victims of violence will peace with justice be possible.

- Dan Moriarty

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns





# Palm Sunday

*I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard*  
ISAIAH 50:4-5

## Ecological Economics

In the otherwise serious season of fasting and spiritual preparation, Palm Sunday is a reprieve, a time of celebration. In less than a week's time, the crowd will turn on Jesus and He will be brutally executed. But in this brief moment, all is well, and Jesus is received into Jerusalem as the King he is.

Jesus knows what is about to happen—has known for some time. The reader, knowing what lies in wait, can only be astounded that Jesus, who also knows, can act so graciously. How can one eschew resentment knowing that “Hosanna to the Son of David” will turn to “Crucify him!”

In that context it seems less remarkable to us that he enters Jerusalem on an ass, a beast of burden. Jesus chooses the animal specifically and his arrival queues the red carpet treatment, but the red carpet is actually green palm fronds. There are many reasons the ass is chosen, the fulfillment of prophecy being only one.

Jesus, in taking on the weight of the world's sin, is assuming a heavy burden. The ass is a “workhorse” befitting Jesus who came to serve, not to be served. Donkeys are also known for being stubborn and independent creatures. And while other kings need horses and chariots to promote and signify their statuses, Jesus needs no extra embellishments to receive his due recognition. The fanfare is simple. There is genuine joy, but the observance is not wasteful. Jesus is not repelled by the crowd's joy and takes it in stride. His example demonstrates how celebration can be plain but compelling.

Lent is not associated with celebration. But on Palm Sunday, we are reminded a week before Easter

that there will be a triumph at the end of the long ordeal ahead. The celebration is inseparable from the sacrifice that must precede it.

Likewise, Maryknoll missionaries living with marginalized communities in more than 20 low-income countries tell us that these vulnerable nations are coming out of the covid pandemic and finding themselves in a dark moment, facing a triple crisis of debt, climate change, and nature loss. But Maryknoll Lay Missioner Peg Vamosy in El Salvador sees this moment as “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,” Peg says. Thinking of the parishioners she works with to promote sustainable agricultural practices and environmental awareness in rural El Salvador, Peg says, “We can choose a more fertile ground in which to plant the seeds for the harvest that God wills. Let us not close our minds to the poor and vulnerable, let us hear the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth and work together for our common home, where all have an equal chance at not only survival, but a dignified, meaningful, and fulfilling life.” ■

### Question for Reflection

How do you celebrate joyful moments/milestones?

In what ways can you work with others for our common home?

## Prayer

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Mary's Good-bye song  
Go forth in peace  
Don't fear the darkness  
Your life and ours  
Are one in the Lord.  
Though you don't know this road  
He walks before you  
And waits ahead with open arms  
To welcome you.  
So lift your eyes  
Set down your burden  
Make your step light  
And greet this day with joy.  
You carried the light  
And gave to all who met you  
And take the same light home.  
You live in our hearts  
As you live in the love of the Lord.  
Wherever you go  
You'll never be alone.  
  
His is the peace  
That passes understanding.  
His is the way  
That leads beyond the dark.  
Though we don't know the road  
He walks beside us now  
His cloak upon our shoulders  
To warm us through the night.  
So we leave the land  
We've come to love  
And follow his voice  
Under the crisp new stars.  
  
When we are weary  
And cannot face the morning  
He carries us safely  
Within his loving arms.  
Wherever we go now  
We're never alone.  
Wherever we go now  
We're only going home.

- Vicki Armour-Hileman MKLM

## Fast

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Consider walking, cycling, or using public transport to reduce your carbon footprint this week.

## Action

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Sign a petition to the G20 and IMF to protect the vulnerable and our planet, organized by Jubilee USA Network. Join this call to cancel debt and mobilize grants to support countries struggling to respond to the economic and health impacts of covid-19.

<https://mogc.info/Jubileepetition>



Cultures, just like persons, are imbued with a mystery that points to God, to the creator of all. Sure, this mystery is mediated through human ways, still, the humble disciple of Christ will choose to sit where she'll be invited into deeper truths – in God as God reveals Godself in a culture or in a person.

Mediated through the 'other' we are invited to experience the awesomeness of God; the presence of Jesus Christ through the 'blazing fire' manifested by South American *cariño* or other occurrences that may appear to be what Paul calls 'gloomy darkness'. The darkness of polarity that impedes the practice of humility. The darkness of divisiveness that brings contention and controversy to everything rather than allow for the creation of unity.

- Fr. John Siyumbi  
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers