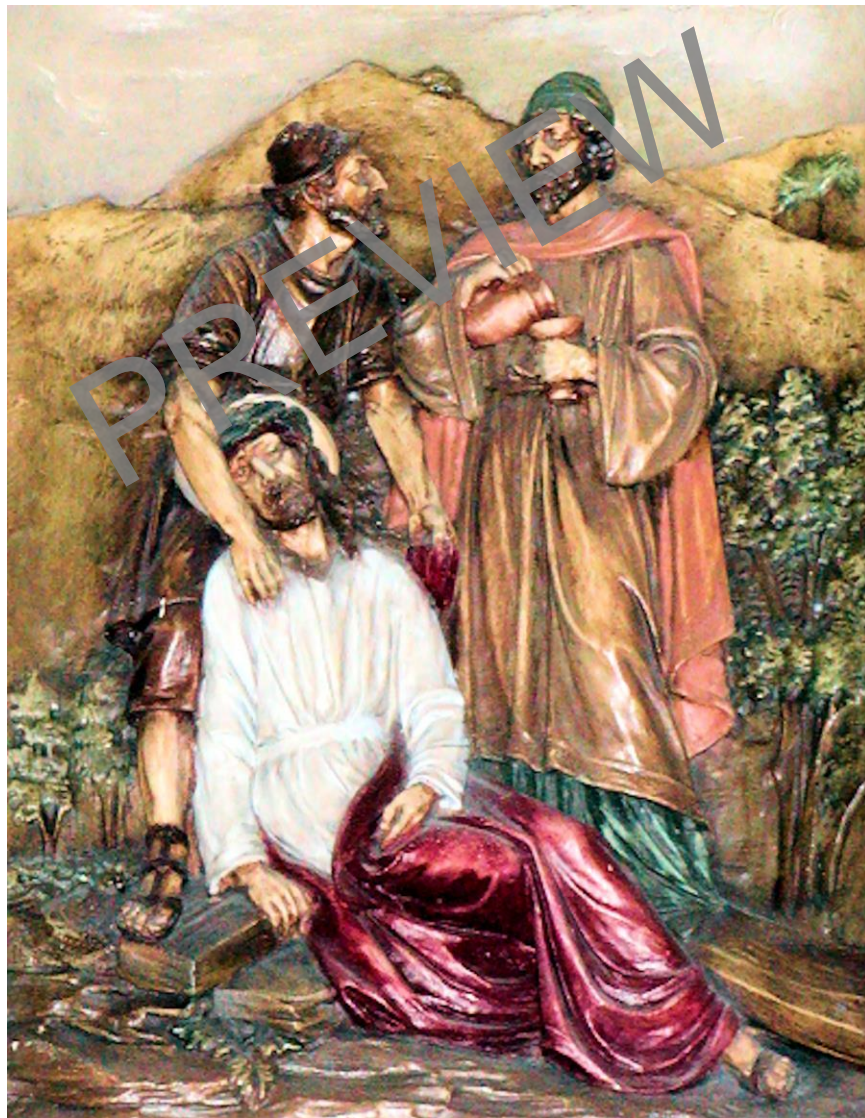


The Lenten Journey to Calvary and Resurrection

A Bible Study for Faith Sharing Groups

For Liturgical Year 2017 Cycle A and RCIA any year

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Ash Wednesday

How healing will your Lent be?

Read:

Joel 2:12-18

Ps 51:3-6, 12-14, 17

2 Corinthians 5:20 – 6:2

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Reflect:

What needs to be resurrected in your life?

For Easter to be more than just a day of colored eggs, fattening chocolates and big dinners, Lent needs to be more than just 40 days of obligatory sacrifices like meatless pizza on Fridays.

To experience the joy and power of resurrection, we have to take a journey through the experience of mourning and repentance. We have to experience the powerlessness of death: the death of our selfishness, the death of our worldliness, the death of behaviors that are not Christ-like.

In today's first reading, God beckons: "Return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning." Fasting is worthwhile only if it improves our self-discipline so that we can resist sin and grow in holiness. We're hypocrites, like Jesus describes in in today's Gospel passage, if fasting produces no inner changes.

What will your journey through Lent be like this year? What daily exercises will promote greater holiness? Here's a suggestion: Identify one fault – just one for starters – and choose a daily activity or an abstinence for the duration of Lent that will help you overcome this behavior.

Tell God about this fault. He is beckoning: "Return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning."

The readings from Joel and Psalm 51 remind us that God is merciful toward those who recognize their sin-



fulness and regret it so much that they're truly motivated to change. Dealing with our need to change can feel overwhelming and shameful, but if we keep our focus on God's mercy, we feel helped, healed, and finally resurrected.

By identifying and working on just one sinful tendency (choosing one selfish behavior or one fear or one flaw or one unloving habit as our Lenten project), we can give it to Jesus, and by the end of Lent nail it to his cross and hear him offer it to God as he cries out, "Father forgive them...!" It will die with Jesus, and we'll be resurrected to a new life, a new level of holiness with Jesus.

On Ash Wednesday, as you receive and wear your ashes, do it fully awake and aware of your need for forgiveness and your goal of overcoming a significant sin by Easter.

Why do we keep the black smudges on our foreheads all day? Not to win the admiration of others. It's a sign that we know we need to change! Otherwise, we should do as Jesus said: "When you fast, see to it that you ... wash your face" so that no one but God will know what you are doing.

My goal for Lent this year is:

5th Sunday of Lent

Read:

Ezekiel 37:12-14

Ps 130:1-8

Romans 8:8-11

John 11:1-45



Questions for Faith Sharing:

1. We can personalize the first reading by understanding that God will open our graves (whatever is dead inside of us) and will place his Spirit of Life within us. How does the Holy Spirit help us discover healing and

hope amidst our daily sufferings and dyings?

2. In the scripture from Romans, we are reminded again of the Holy Spirit within us. Since the Spirit is alive in you, what affect does this have on your Lenten journey? What is being purified, strengthened, and renewed?

3. In the Gospel, Jesus proves his power over death just before he enters Jerusalem and heads toward Calvary. How does this prove to you that your own sufferings and sacrifices will not lead to permanent disaster?

Reflect:

Lent is not about suffering and sacrifice. It's a corridor to new life.

Good Friday is not about evil and pain and death. It's the door that Jesus opens to invite us into that new life.

Yes, suffering is part of the Lenten journey (which can be experienced at any time of the year). Yes, Lent includes the sacrifices of fasting and abstinence, almsgiving and extra time in church. But these are just vehicles for the trip.

God uses our sufferings (if we let him) to help us grow in compassion, persistence, and ministry. Our sacrifices help us learn discipline (which is discipleship) so that we can purify our will and grow stronger in holiness. But the trip is not the destination.

Lent is all about reaching the resurrection: renewing our faith, entering a new life free of old sins, reconciling damaged relationships, and living in the Spirit of God more than we ever did before.

Which day is more important to your faith: Good Friday or Easter Sunday? That horrid day on Calvary was absolutely necessary for Easter, but we are living in the resurrection! Catholics are an Easter people. This means that nothing bad can ever happen to us that will not be transformed into blessings if Jesus is the Lord of our lives.

He proved himself to be the Resurrection and the Life by displaying his power over life and death. Now he wants to prove it again – to you and to all those who are watching.

Question for Personal Reflection:

What needs to be resurrected in your life? What will you do this week to accept the death of what has ended so that you can prepare for the new life that Jesus is preparing for you?

Passion Sunday

Read:

Procession: Matt. 21:1-11

Isaiah 50:4-7

Ps 22:8-9,17-20,23-24

Philippians 2:6-11

Matthew 26:14--27:66

Reflect:

The word "passion" has powerful implications. Theologically, we use it to describe the suffering love that Jesus endured for each of us when he was beaten, mocked and crucified as he willingly took onto himself the punishment and destructive forces of our sins.

The world counterfeits the word "passion" by applying it to strong feelings of romantic, even lustful, attraction.

We also use this word to refer to a strong motivation to do something that we enjoy or greatly care about, and this is why we can say that Jesus cared "passionately" about us while enduring The Passion.

The strong love that Jesus exhibited in his ministry and on Good Friday is a lesson on what it means to have "compassion" for others. We walk with them in their sufferings; we "suffer with" them. This is passionate love in its holiest form.

Read the scriptures for Passion Sunday with an eye on how they reveal Jesus' passionate love for *you*.

See yourself in the passion of the people who enthusiastically welcomed Jesus as well as in those who rejected and denied him.

Consider how much compassion Jesus must have felt for you when he subjected himself to the excruciating pains of his final hours. He did this for you despite how much you've hurt him through any lack of compassion for others. Rejoice in his passionate love for you! This will empower you to repent and grow stronger in holy love for others.



Questions for Faith Sharing:

1. Looking at the reading from Isaiah, what are some of the ways that good Christians sometimes beat on Jesus, pluck his beard, and spit on him?
2. How does your answer to #1 explain why Jesus emptied himself for you, as the reading from Philippians describes?
3. In what ways does the Passion of Jesus minister to us in our sufferings today?

Question for Personal Reflection:

Bring to mind the most painful way you are suffering compassionately with or for someone else. Connect this to what Jesus did. How does this help you feel more intimately involved with God's salvation plan? How does it make your life a modern Gospel?

Holy Thursday

Washing feet with Jesus

Read:

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14
 Ps 116:12-13, 15-18
 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
 John 13:1-15



To wash the feet of others is to be generous with what you have.

To wash the feet of others is to turn the cheek instead of retaliating when you're treated unfairly.

To wash the feet of others is to make adjustments in your plans so you can serve their needs.

Reflect:

Why did Jesus wash the feet of his disciples? Not because they were too lazy to handle their own hygiene and as their servant he wanted to make life easy for them! Rather, he gave them (and us) a model to imitate.

Naturally, we want Jesus to make our lives easier. Isn't that the purpose behind many of our prayers? Well, surprise! We do get what we ask for, but not the way we had imagined. When we imitate Jesus, it's the way we cope with the difficulties of life that becomes easier.

Have you washed anyone's feet lately? Maybe you haven't literally soaped up a friend's smelly feet as a sign of your unconditional love, but I'm sure you have given of yourself in a foot-washing way.

To wash the feet of others is to love them even when they don't deserve your love.

To wash the feet of others is to do good to them even if they don't return the favor.

To wash the feet of others is to consider their needs as important as your own.

To wash the feet of others is to forgive them even if they don't say, "I'm sorry."

To wash the feet of others is to serve them even when the task is unpleasant.

To wash the feet of others is to let them know you care when they feel downtrodden or burdened.

To wash the feet of others is to serve them with humility and not with any hope of reward.

Notice the posture of Jesus. He knelt. Imagine Jesus kneeling in front of you now, lowering himself to the level of your feet and tenderly ministering to your needs. He is in fact doing this, right now, today. And he will do it again and again, as often as you need him to care about you!

He is asking you to go and do likewise: Be the hands of Jesus that wash the feet of the people around you. You are the answer to their prayers!

By serving others, we gain understanding of what Jesus did for us 2000 years ago – and we become more observant of how he's ministering to us. We meet Jesus in the dirty feet that we lower ourselves to clean.

With Jesus, I wash the feet of:

Easter Sunday

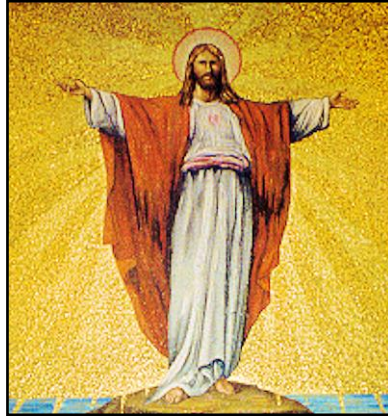
Read:

Acts 10:34a, 37-43

Ps 118:1-2,16-17,22-23

Col 3:1-4 or 1 Cor 5:6b-8

John 20:1-9



Reflect:

Are you ready to proclaim the Good News about how Jesus has helped you? What holds you back? Do you hesitate because you don't yet understand how the deaths in your life (the sacrifices, the lost hope, the broken relationships, etc.) have been resurrected into new life?

Such hesitation was the mental state of the disciples on the first Easter morning, as depicted in the Gospel of John.

The attitude of Peter in the reading from Acts is quite a contrast! The disciples now know their calling: They were empowered and commissioned to testify that Jesus is the Savior, and they fully embraced this vocation.

Do you understand how Jesus is turning your tragedies and other difficulties into triumphs and great blessings?

To "testify" means to share the truth based on your own experiences. Peter specifically proclaimed that everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins. Of course he did! Peter knew first-hand what it's like to need and then receive Christ's forgiveness.

We will not understand much about how our sufferings have led us to a new and blessed life until we start talking about it. The first inklings of insight awaken when we discuss it within our close, holy friendships, like Mary of Magdala did when she ran to Peter and John after discovering the empty tomb. They, in turn, told the other disciples.

It was while they were together – in community – that Jesus appeared and revealed his resurrection to

them. Later, after having lots of time to talk about it with friends, the Holy Spirit empowered them to go out and evangelize the world by sharing their experiences with anyone willing to listen.

Questions for Faith Sharing:

1. The empty tomb doesn't immediately make sense. What has been confusing to you during your faith journey? What has caused you to feel empty and frightened? Where might Jesus be in this?
2. How have your own experiences of being forgiven enabled you to feel more compassionate toward others? Does that change the way you talk to them about God and church and other spiritual or moral issues?
3. What is the biggest change that Jesus has brought into your life? What were you like before this change? How did God intervene? What were the results? This is your testimony. Practice sharing it by telling the story to your community of friends.

Question for Personal Reflection:

Name one person who could benefit from hearing about your faith experiences. What will you do to share your testimony with him or her?