

## WEDNESDAY 17 MARCH

### *Share Jesus' love*

Isaiah 49:8-15; John 5:17-30

Jesus is gentle. He does not come to sweep away everything that is familiar to us, or to change the way we worship. By saying that he has not come to abolish the law, Jesus tells us what the purpose of the law has been all along. In his words and his actions throughout the Gospels, Jesus reveals that the purpose of the law is to teach us how to love God and our neighbour. Of all the commandments, these are the greatest.

God's love is a thread which extends from the beginning of time until the present day and beyond. Jesus invites us to share in this love, and to share it with others. Lent is a journey of suffering and self-examination, but it is also a journey of love. At the heart of any sacrifice there is love and hope.

**Enlighten me, Lord, so that I may show your love where it is most needed today. Amen.**

## THURSDAY 18 MARCH

### *See the goodness*

Exodus 32:7-14; John 5:31-47

The world is full of goodness and yet we sometimes allow ourselves to be consumed by the news of evil in the world. We have been conditioned to see the bad rather than the good. Even when Jesus performs acts of goodness, such as in today's Gospel, man's suspicious nature leads to allegations of evil.

You may know how it feels to have your good intentions viewed in the wrong light. Jesus fought this battle many times during his ministry. Today we should reflect on how we view other peoples' actions. Do we dismiss someone's act of kindness because they are usually selfish? Do we suspect an ulterior motive when somebody does something kind for us? Everything good comes from God. To accept the goodness of others is to accept God, just as to love another person is to love God.

**Lord, help me to see the goodness in everyone I encounter today. Amen.**

## FRIDAY 19 MARCH

### ST JOSEPH, SPOUSE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

#### *Follow in the footsteps*

2 Samuel 7:4-5. 12-14. 16; Romans 4:13. 16-18. 22; Matthew 1:16. 18-21. 24 or Luke 2:41-51

Today's first reading reads almost like a love letter. God's people have turned their backs on him, but are coming back, repentant. He promises not to reject them and to shower them with love. This is our God – the One who calls us back time after time, forgives our transgressions and provides for us. Centuries later, the scribe in Mark's Gospel shows a deep understanding for the faith of his ancestors from the first reading. The essence of his religion is to love God with all his heart.

Today we celebrate the feast of St Joseph. He was a courageous man who listened to the Lord, at great personal risk. He knew that by taking Mary as his wife, he was loving God and his neighbour more than himself. Let us follow in the footsteps of St Joseph, the scribe and the ancient Israelites, fully aware that love is our vocation.

**Let me come back to you today, with all my heart. Amen.**

## SATURDAY 20 MARCH

### *No need to hide*

Jeremiah 11:18-20; John 7:40-52

For many of us, having sacrificed so much last year, it may feel hard to make sacrifices this Lent. We have already learnt how to live without family, friends, work, freedom and normality. God does not demand too much of us. His law is not to stack hardships upon his people, nor to test our faithfulness to him. Any sacrifices we make during Lent should give us freedom rather than burden us. They should offer us the chance to listen to God more, to love others more, to reflect on what really matters in life.

Luke's Gospel shows us that we should humble ourselves before God and never be afraid to acknowledge our sinfulness before him. Let us sit with God and be our true selves. With God there is no need for pretence and no need to hide. He knows us more than we know ourselves!

**Speak, Lord, your servant is listening. Amen.**

## DISCUSSION POINT

This week's readings have centred on coming back to God. The story of the people of God is not a smooth one – we make mistakes, we fail to trust in him, we abandon God. We all fall short. Do I have faith that God will welcome me back with open arms? Do I know that I am truly loved and accepted by him, no matter what mistakes I have made in the past?

*Natasha Pritchard, a lay Catholic chaplain in a Liverpool hospital, worked to support patients, families, carers and all who needed support during the Covid-19 lockdown.*

## Lent Week Five

# REAP

Live with integrity and hope, and we reap a harvest of joy. Eldred Willey reminds us that it is Jesus who draws us to himself.

## SUNDAY 21 MARCH 5TH SUNDAY OF LENT

*The Augsburg prayer house*

**Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-33**

As a Catholic teenager, Johannes Hartl found prayer boring. The idea of getting excited about prayer was not current in the German circles where he moved. However, an encounter with God flipped him around. In 2011 he gathered a group of friends who started praying day and night. Nine years on they had clocked up over 70,000 hours in an unbroken chain of prayer. Around 100 young people were pursuing a full-time Bible study course with Johannes.

In today's Gospel we see Greeks seeking Jesus, and running up against a language barrier, as Johannes had done. They get around it by approaching Philip, who was likely to have known Greek, and Jesus glimpses a vision of a kingdom spreading beyond the lands he had walked, to Greek and Germanic tribes. When we lift him up, we do not need to attract people: it is Jesus who will draw them to himself.

**Holy Spirit, enflame my lukewarm heart, so that my prayer becomes a furnace which pulls in others by its heat. Amen.**

## MONDAY 22 MARCH

*What is written?*

**Daniel 13:1-9. 15-17. 19-30. 33-62; John 8:1-11**

A company lawyer once explained how he deals with people who attack his employer or infringe her rights. "I write them a polite letter, mentioning that I am a lawyer who works for the company. I don't need to say anything intimidating. The mere fact that a lawyer is involved is generally enough to make belligerents back off."

Confronted by belligerents in today's Gospel, Jesus does not raise himself to his full height in an intimidating fashion. Instead he settles down to write something, as any expert lawyer would. He does not need to come up with an argument for the defendant who is standing in front of him. He just mimes his usual question: "What is written?" He wins simply by who he is.

**Jesus, sinless one, thank you that, although I may be weak, you are strong in me to defend those who are needy. Amen.**

## TUESDAY 23 MARCH

*Look and live*

**Numbers 21:4-9; John 8:21-30**

He had so wanted that job. For him it was a dream come true to lead an organisation like this. But she had refused to uproot and move across the country with him. As their marriage reached breaking point, he faced reality and resigned. But he carried a resentment in his heart which festered as the years went by.

One afternoon they went to see *The Passion of the Christ* at the cinema. Afterwards they went for a walk in the country – for hours, unable to say a word. All he knew was that when they got back to the car, all the resentment was gone.

The suffering of Christ on the cross destroys sin in the soul. All we have to do is look at it, as the Israelites looked at the bronze serpent in the desert and were healed. It's that simple. If you believe that Jesus is he, you will not die in your sin.

**Jesus, Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, you are worthy of everything. Amen.**

## WEDNESDAY 24 MARCH

### *Life's point of no return*

Daniel 3:14-20. 24-25. 28; John 8:31-42

"There is a point at which everything becomes simple," wrote Dag Hammarskjöld, "And there is no longer any question of choice, because everything you have ever staked will be lost if you look back now." For the Secretary-General of the United Nations his unhesitating action was to fly to peace talks to resolve the Congo crisis. For the young men in today's first reading it was to worship the true God and him alone.

Scripture is full of expressions of trust that God will deliver and it is rare to find a phrase like this one in Daniel: "even if he does not". Sometimes – like the young men – we will be delivered and sometimes – like Hammarskjöld, whose plane was shot down – we will perish in the furnace. Either way, the refusal to weigh up chances will leave a gift of courage and will inspire others to a dangerous obedience.

**Father, there are no chances with you; help me to say the yes which gives meaning to my life. Amen.**

## THURSDAY 25 MARCH

### THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

#### *The song of Kobane*

Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10;

Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38

In autumn 2014 a famous Kurdish singer recorded a song called "Kobane" from a precipice on the top of one of Iraq's highest mountains. It was the name of a Syrian town where a handful of young Kurdish women were making a last stand against ISIS. To the world's astonishment, the women counter-attacked and opened the border, across which a column of Iraqi Kurds, moved to action by the soul-stirring song, stormed across to rescue them.

In today's Gospel the angel Gabriel appears in Nazareth, a town built on the edge of a precipice. He stills the fear of a young woman and acclaims her readiness for the coming combat. Whatever God is asking of us, will we be stirred into action by the angel's song and respond with Mary's unhesitating assent? Sometimes it takes young women to believe that nothing is impossible with God.

**Father, help me to take Mary as my example, and respond without hesitation to your call. Amen.**

## FRIDAY 26 MARCH

### *I bet you*

Jeremiah 20:10-13; John 10:31-42

In 1981 the German actor Karlheinz Böhm appeared on a TV show. Appalled by images of starvation from Ethiopia which he had seen, he turned to the camera and held up a coin. "I bet you," he said, "that not one-third of you will go to the nearest post office on Monday morning and send one Deutschmark to the President. If you do, I will take it all to Africa at my own expense. And I hope I lose." Over a million Deutschmarks flooded in and Böhm went on to launch a hugely successful aid organisation for Ethiopia, which continues today.

Sometimes people simply don't respond to good intentions and good actions, as we see in today's Gospel, when Jesus is forced to cross the Jordan to go into hiding. But sometimes they really do. Let's never become cynical. There is more goodness in people that we often realise.

**Father, help me always to believe in the potential for generosity of those around me and inspire me to draw it out. Amen.**

*"The Church is now the Word made flesh, the image of the living God - when it acts in humility, gives its life for the life of the world, when it serves and washes feet, when it looks like Jesus."*

Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

## SATURDAY 27 MARCH

### *Viva Cristo Rey!*

Ezekiel 37:21-28; John 11:45-56

After he was elected pope in 1978, St John Paul II travelled to Mexico. Over a million Mexicans turned out to meet him on what was supposed to be a private visit. Ten years later the Pope put aside political caution to beatify the Mexican Jesuit Miguel Pro, killed by firing squad in 1927.

Pro, who like the Pope was a former actor, had harnessed all his theatrical skills to appear in every imaginable costume, evading police so that he could be "everywhere and nowhere" distributing the sacraments. He was finally betrayed and executed – his last words being "Viva Cristo Rey" – long live Christ the King! Even the Lord spent a period of his ministry in hiding from the authorities. What an inspiration for all of his followers who are forced to do the same!

**Jesus, thank you for the wonderful witness of your martyrs and may we catch some of their courage. Amen.**

## DISCUSSION POINT

This fifth week of Lent highlights the virtue of fortitude. Note down half a dozen times when you have done something brave because you knew it was right. Share them with a family member and ask if they will share a similar list with you. What gave you the courage to act on what you believed?

*Eldred Willey works as a communications officer for the Diocese of East Anglia.*

Dr Mabel Adhagiuno reminds us that Holy Week celebrates love beyond anything we can imagine – but which we can try to imitate.

## SUNDAY 28 MARCH

### PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

*No twenty-first-century superhero*

*Procession:* Mark 11:1-10 or John 12:12-16;

*Mass:* Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Mark 14:1 – 15:47

You enter Jerusalem greeted by hosannas. Imagine the clapping and shouting of the crowd, the hope of the people, the surge to get close to you.

But the crowd I'm in today doesn't consist of the Jews of two thousand years ago but today's humanity. What do we hope for? Our world has experienced Covid-19. We haven't been in control. People have died. People we will never see again – at least not in this world. For some, Covid-19 is as nothing compared to abuse, terrorism, hazardous migration, social injustice, exploitation of nations and corruption. There is racism and strife. Our list of tribulations is endless, Jesus. We want suffering gone!

And as you draw nearer, I know a man on a donkey isn't the image of a twenty-first-century superhero. I see your face set like flint. Our eyes meet and I realise you don't work miracles in the way I imagine - in the way I would like.

**Hosanna, Lord, we greet you! Transform our world. Amen.**

## MONDAY 29 MARCH

*Justice is love*

*Isaiah 42:1-7; John 12:1-11*

The reading from Isaiah speaks about the servant bringing true justice to the nations. You do not cry out or shout aloud. You do not waver until true justice is established on the earth. You are the light of the nations. What do these intriguing words mean to me? I think if we were to have a serious tête-à-tête, Jesus, your idea of justice would be different from mine. I mean, aren't you crazy to leave 99 sheep to go in search of one? Aren't you unfair to pay the vineyard workers the same when some laboured all day and others just for an hour? But then I can be blind to the fact that your justice, your light, is not a human one. I can be blind like the Pharisees who failed to marvel at the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection. Instead they sought to kill you. Your justice is love – generous, gratuitous, humble, gentle love.

**Jesus, take the scales from my eyes; put new reasoning within me and make me Christ-like. Amen.**



*Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfilment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love.*

Pope Francis

## TUESDAY 30 MARCH

### *Troubled in spirit*

Isaiah 49:1-6;  
John 13:21-33. 36-38

John's reading starts with you being troubled in spirit. You know one of the disciples will betray you. I wonder what bothered you more, Jesus? The fact that the betrayal was a catalyst for a chain of events which would lead to your killing or the fact that you were betrayed by a friend? Let's face it, Jesus, I betray you too. It can even happen within hours of being reconciled with you at the sacrament of confession. Where are you tangible? You identify totally with each person so whatever I do to the least, I do to you. It's daunting to think my betrayal distresses you. I have the capacity to upset God. Your distress spurs me to be more attentive to my neighbour but it also moves me because it shows how much we, I, mean to you.

**Jesus, help me remember that when I hurt another, I hurt you and if I do hurt you, help me to redouble my efforts quickly so that I can make amends. Amen.**

## WEDNESDAY 31 MARCH

### *Mysterious logic*

Isaiah 50:4-9;  
Matthew 26:14-25

In the reading from the prophet Isaiah, what strikes me is the suffering servant's absolute trust that God will intervene. I'm struck by your confidence to be exposed in all your naked vulnerability. You exposed your face to insult and spittle, your beard to assault. You say, "I shall not be shamed." "I am untouched by the insults." The reality is that people are shamed. They are trampled on. They are spat upon. Rights are abused. I know how I want to react if someone offends my pride, belittles me, ignores me. Yet you ask me a different response. You are asking me to trust in the face of actual mistreatment, misuse, abuse. You don't protect me from the pain. You use it to edify me. This is mystery. Your logic is different from mine. When others cause me pain, I'm hurt. Perhaps offering the other cheek is saying not so much "this insult does not touch me" but rather "this cannot separate me from your love".

**Lord, help me have unbounded trust in your love. My confidence sometimes oscillates like a weathervane whereas you want me always to point upwards to you. Amen.**

## THURSDAY 1 APRIL

### *MAUNDY THURSDAY*

#### *Fix on the feet*

*Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper:*  
Exodus 12:1-8. 11-14; 1  
Corinthians 11:23-26;  
John 13:1-15

John presents the tableau of you washing the disciples' feet during the last supper. There is the fine detail of you removing your outer garment then tying a towel around your waist. I can imagine the disciples' stinky, sweaty and dirty feet. You had strong carpenter's arms. I think you hunkered down and gave those feet a good scrubbing. You asked us to copy your example.

The word "serve" derives from the Latin *servus*: slave. You're asking me to be a slave to each person. You expect me to serve and love each person as I would like to be treated were I in their place. And if I find it hard to behave like this because if someone annoys me, has offended me, unnerves me or has an antipathy for me (which might be mutual), I'll try to fix metaphorically on the feet. If I concentrate on the feet and not the faces, I'm not conditioned by the memories of negative behaviour and treat everyone equally.

**Jesus, help me be your carbon copy in every situation life brings me. Amen.**

**FRIDAY 2 APRIL**  
**GOOD FRIDAY**

*X-ray vision needed*

*The Celebration of the  
Passion of the Lord:*

**Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12;**  
**Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9;**  
**John 18:1 – 19:42**

Good Friday: the celebration of your passion. Hope embodied in a carpenter's son riding a donkey only a few days before is now crushed with suffering. There is nothing attractive about you. You are despised and rejected. The Son of God is dead, crucified as a common criminal and evil seems to play the winning ace. And this is your answer to the past and present crowd who welcomed you on Palm Sunday? You tell me, your kingdom is not of this world. It's the kingdom of heaven and in that kingdom, suffering has immense value because you have redeemed it.

You've passed through the tunnel, taken up everything negative and transformed it through your own suffering. Only at night do we see the stars. The night of suffering helps me to see you. It gives me x-ray vision and eyes to see everything in its true perspective.

**Jesus, you say to follow you I have to renounce myself and take up my cross. Tough words, but you want me to experience like you the transformative power of suffering. Amen.**

**SATURDAY 3 APRIL**  
**HOLY SATURDAY**

*The story of hope*

*The Easter Vigil:*

**Exodus 14:15 – 15:1;**  
**Romans 6:3-11;**  
**Mark 16:1-7**

The beautiful readings of the Easter Vigil show how you never give up. We have thrown and still throw everything at you – infidelity, ingratitude, insubordination, indifference – but you're always faithful to the point of madness. The salvation story is not so much a story of our hope in you but one of your unending, unconscionable, unquenchable hope in us. I marvel at your constant patience when you come up against the brick walls of our lack of belief in your love, our not seeing that you can unravel the mess of our lives. Our thick skulls don't comprehend that your promise is not empty rhetoric. You really will make everything, EVERYTHING, work together for the good of those who love you. I start off the day with good intentions and sometimes I fall – a cross word here, a judgement there, a failure to imitate your example of love. I need a new heart and new spirit.

**Dear Jesus, break down my walls and remove my fossilised heart. Give me a new heart and new spirit. Amen.**

**DISCUSSION POINT**

Holy Week is Christ's journey from death to resurrection. He calls me to be a participant not a spectator because it is my story too.

What cross do I carry?  
Is suffering the best way to show him my love?  
Have I experienced that through the cross he wants to share his resurrection?

*Dr Mabel Adhagiuno  
is a member of the  
Focolare Movement,  
a doctor and is currently  
working in Nigeria.*



*“Christ, my hope, is risen!” This is no magic formula that makes problems vanish. No, the resurrection of Christ is not that. Instead, it is the victory of love over the root of evil, a victory that does not by-pass suffering and death, but passes through them.”*

Pope Francis

**SUNDAY 4 APRIL  
EASTER SUNDAY**

*Alleluia!*

**Acts 10:34. 37-43; Colossians 3:1-4  
or 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; John 20:1-9**

Peter explains your resurrection to Cornelius and how God “allowed you to be seen not by the whole people but only by certain witnesses”. I have sometimes wondered why you didn’t appear to the chief priests, the Pharisees and Pilate. You would certainly have been vindicated! They would have had to believe then. But you don’t force us. You respect our freedom. It’s up to us to take the first baby steps in faith which you watch solicitously.

You also want us to experience the resurrection not just at the end of time, but now in our everyday life. I remember one of the first times I experienced it. At sixteen I was invited to an international youth gathering in Rome. Mum refused her consent and I was terribly upset. Life stopped for me... Then I gradually stepped outside of my pain to help others around me with homework, the dishes, shopping. I felt inexplicable joy. Suffering deepened my relationship with you. You were all that mattered.

**Lord, help me die with you and rise with you in the little and not so little sufferings of daily life. Help me be an Easter child. Amen.**

*Alleluia!*

# TRAVELLERS

## IN HOPE

Regularly marginalised and criticised, Fr Dan Mason stresses that people from a Traveller background live in hope and celebrate their traditions.



When I tell people that I am the National Catholic Chaplain for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT) I tend to get a variety of responses.

Some people are fascinated and ask lots of questions about what my role as a chaplain entails. Others, particularly those who have had negative experiences with members of the Travelling Community or who have been exposed to critical stories in the media, tend to be much more circumspect.

While people are entitled to their opinions, what saddens me about my work is how members of GRT communities are routinely labelled and talked about in a way that would be completely unacceptable if the same labels were applied to any other ethnic minority.

The Traveller Movement, a charity which supports people from a Travelling background, regularly does an exercise where they take newspaper headlines about Travellers and swap the word "Traveller" or "Gypsy" for another group. When you do this the results are enlightening. Headlines like: "Stamp on the camps: war on Gypsy free for all" or "Prisoners, Terrorists and Gypsies should be handed more human rights declares Equality Quango" are seen in a different light when the word "Gypsy" or "Traveller" is replaced by another religious or ethnic group.

The effect of all of these headlines is corrosive. As Bridget McCarthy, an Irish Traveller, put it: "They [the media] say 'Gypsies' and 'Travellers' when they are speaking about a single Gypsy or Traveller. If a single Traveller breaks the law they write about it and say

'Travellers' - meaning all Travellers. I mix with people from the settled community at all levels. When a big story about a Traveller doing wrong is in the papers and they say 'Travellers are doing this'; I wonder about what the people I meet that day will be thinking."

It was for this reason that it was decided in February 2020 that the theme of that year's Racial Justice Sunday should be on celebrating the positive contribution that Travelling Communities make to the Church in England and Wales. The resources that were produced highlighted a statement that Pope (now St) Paul VI made in 1965, when celebrating Mass at a Roma Traveller site just outside of Rome, the first pontiff in history to do so.

In his homily St Paul VI declared to the thousands of Roma Travellers who were in attendance: "You are not on the margins of the Church... you are at the centre... You are at the heart of the Church."

Lent is a season when we are encouraged, not to turn inwardly on ourselves but instead to begin with ourselves and then to work towards bringing about a transformed life in community and relationship with God and with each other.

During Lent 2019 I was fortunate to be able to attend a debate which was held at the General Synod of the Church of England. The motion that was being debated was for all members of the Church to speak out publicly against racism and hate crime directed against Gypsies, Irish Travellers and Roma, and to urge the media to stop denigrating and victimising these communities.



## Celtic Blessing: “The Path”

*God bless the path on which you go,  
God bless the earth beneath your feet.  
God bless your destination,  
God be a smooth way before you;  
A guiding star above you,  
a keen eye behind you this day,  
this night, and forever.*

*God be with you whatever you pass.  
Jesus be with you whatever you climb.  
Spirit be with you wherever you stay.*

*God be with you at each stop and each sea,  
at each lying down and each rising up,  
in the trough of the waves, on the crest of the billows.  
Each step of the journey you take.*

This prayer is often used at Masses with Travellers.



During the debate one of the speakers reminded us of a passage from St John's Gospel where Jesus says: "There are many rooms in my Father's house." The speaker pointed out that in the original Hebrew "rooms" can also be translated as "caravans" or "stopping places".

In the Christian tradition, hope is one of the three theological virtues along with faith and charity. Hope is defined as being a combination of the desire for something and the expectation of receiving it.

My experience working with members of the Travelling Community is that despite everything, despite the obstacles that they have to face and the prejudices they have to overcome, there is still a hope that the traditions and ways of living that have been handed down through the generations may continue to be passed on to future generations.

As we celebrate this Lenten season, commemorating the journey that Jesus made into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights, my prayer is that, just as there are many stopping places in heaven, so our churches should also be stopping places, beacons of hope for all of those who are weary and in need of a place to rest.

**Fr Dan Mason is the National Catholic Chaplain for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.**



# A SONG OF THE EARTH



As we approach Easter, a time of singing, perhaps it's a moment to listen to the music in the world around us. Mary Colwell suggests, "the birds are putting into songs what we most deeply feel but cannot express".

I asked a musician friend recently why he composed and sang. "I have to, to make sense of the world. Music connects my head to my heart." Simply and beautifully put. We open our mouths and sing because we need to express what is innermost. It is a mysterious process. Our private feelings of joy, sorrow, love, despair, hope, and myriad others, are translated through song into vibrating molecules of air that enter our brains through our ears. A mystical transformation takes place, one which defies simple analysis and the physical becomes spiritual. Our hearts are filled with emotion. Music captures that which is deeply felt, and the rising, falling tumbling stream of tone and melody find every nuance between discord and harmony. It is a cliché to say music is another language, that music takes over where words end, but is undeniably true.

"There is nothing more musical than a sunset," said composer Claude Debussy, who dedicated so much of his life to turning the experience of nature into compositions that took the established musical world by storm. "Music expresses the motion of the waters, the play of curves described by changing breezes." The conductor, Leopold Stokowski, described the process of

composing as painting notes onto silence in much the same way as an artist fills a canvas with colour. "After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music," said author Aldous Huxley.

Physiologists can explain what physically happens to the human body when we sing, pointing to the engagement of a range of muscles and the release of hormones which then have a beneficial effect on our psyche. Psychologists can tell us how this rush of chemicals produced by music acts as a social binder to create communities that are united by conviction and emotion. It is the feeling of togetherness and shared purpose we experience when singing anthems and hymns.

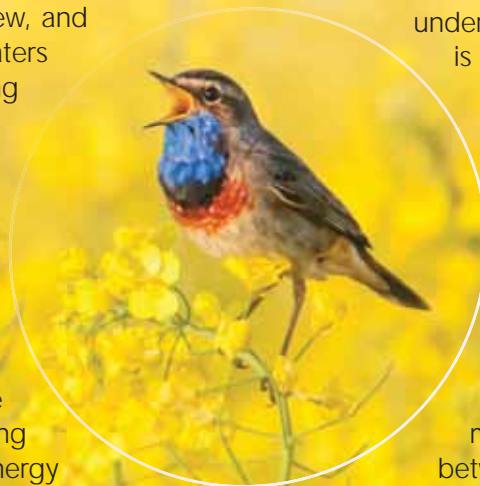
Musicologists pick apart the intricacies of sound to discern how individual components create a whole experience. They read music as if it were a book, extracting and dissecting the form and structure of phrases and movements. There are many ways to intellectualise the act of creating music, all of which are fascinating and enlightening, but exactly why we have this relentless drive to create music to express ourselves is beyond knowing: it is raw and *primaeval*.



We compose out of a need to communicate emotion, but we also react to the world of sound around us. We drink in nature, absorbing its tempo and rhythms. We bathe in the lyricism of birdsong, accompanied by a gentle underscore of the wind in trees. We are lulled into contemplation by the rhythmic lapping of waves, and are drawn to the dancing interplay of sunlight on water. This performance of the vitality of the natural world, the constant creation and re-creation of meaning, transports us to an inner place – to God.

Imagine a world where the only sounds left were those of the human world. A large part of us would die.

We find birdsong so beautiful because it works like a piece of music. It can be simple and pure or a complex flurry with phrases, rhythms and pitches. It can transition between sadness and joy, energy and quietness. Like any great composition, the song of a bird like a wren fires our emotions, and we are swept along by expectation, anticipation, tension, tension release and surprise. One small, feathery body can take us on a journey of delight. The birdsong we admire and love the most are those with a similar tone to the human voice. It is as though the birds are putting into songs what we most deeply feel but cannot express. The almost too-painful wail of a great northern diver is perhaps the most intense soul-song on earth. It drifts across misty lakes, the singer hidden from view, and it is as though the waters themselves are crying out to us. Ancient folklore says it is the sound of those who had drowned and can find no peace in their watery depths. Yet, the sudden, commanding songs of thrushes, like the nightingale or song thrush, pulsate with energy and power. They demand we listen and pay homage to their maestro performances.



Birdsong, though, is not simply a wall of sound. The pauses between phrases are just as poignant. They are full of meaning, as all quiet spaces are. They build up an arc of suspense, confirming or overturning our expectations of what is about to come next. The silences that are dotted through birdsong are the essential gaps that give the phrases a place in our hearts. Many phrases together tell us a story with a beginning, middle or end, but they must be separated by a moment of silence.

The Japanese have a word for the meaningful gaps between objects or sounds – “Ma”. It is the nothingness, the empty space, the negative that gives definition to the positive. In other words, Ma is the recognition that the story is in the gaps as much as in the notes. The spaces in birdsong are for the heartbeat to be heard, the grappling with feelings to find some purchase, the sliver of light that give a glimpse of the divine. This is how we speak and sing, how we have always told each other about the things that matter most, through songs and tales full of phrases interspersed with meaningful silence. Shakespeare used silence and the song of birds to add seasoning to his work. The nightingale, owl, raven or dove flit through his plays adding meaning and poignancy to lines already laden with emotion. We know this form of singing language well.

Loud or soft, gentle or forceful, we understand it because music is a common language we share with the birds.

God dwells in birdsong, in the sweet notes and the gentle phrasing, in the power and the glory of full-throated song. God also sits in the silence, in those most precious moments between the sounds. God wraps his presence in song and as the notes fall away, our souls have been made ready to meet him.

Mary Colwell is an award-winning wildlife broadcaster, writer and environmental campaigner.

# PILGRIMAGE OF HOPE

Sickness can become a pilgrimage of hope and discovery. Claire Wright suggests that it can even be a journey of hope and gratitude.

*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”*

Matthew 11:28

I know what it is to be weary. Having struggled through cancer, postnatal depression, chronic fatigue syndrome and adrenal insufficiency, I know it more than many. I know what it is to feel weighed down by exhaustion, to feel burdened.

But don't we all?

You may not have felt the same physical exhaustion I have felt, because everyone's experience of life is different. But we all face pain, sickness and weariness in our lives. It can be so hard to see the good in the burden. To find rest in the pain.

Jesus' arms are always open, just waiting for us to rest in them. He knows burdens – he carried your burdens, and mine, and everyone's. No one has ever been nor will ever be as weighed down as he was as he walked that steep path to the cross.

If you are feeling weary and burdened today, try sitting with two stories: the Last Supper and the agony in the garden. In the garden, feel his pain, hear his cries, taste his tears. And listen to his words: “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.” Jesus begged his heavenly Father as we beg God with our most anguished, and perhaps most honest, prayers.

“Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Jesus ultimately found his strength, and rest for his soul, when he surrendered to the will of God. He knew his Father would bring good from this suffering.

Sitting with Jesus in his pain, knowing his heart broke and his body hurt for you, can bring great peace. And to pray the words that allow you to stop trying so hard to control the situation yourself: to surrender to God brings rest.

Just before the garden, Jesus was at the Last Supper with his friends. He laughed, he shared, he ate. And he gave thanks.

“When he had given thanks, he broke [the bread] and gave it to his disciples.”

Jesus did two amazing things in this moment, with the weight of the world on his shoulders and the hardest night of his life to come: he gave thanks and he broke the bread, wholeheartedly giving himself to us.

Gratitude has been shown over and over again to bring rest, peace and joy. Giving thanks in the hardest of times truly lifts burdens. It may not take away the pain. The sickness or suffering may still be there tomorrow. But giving thanks makes the breaking easier, the struggle simpler, the burden lighter.

If you are struggling this Lent, sit with Jesus at the Last Supper, and in the garden. Give thanks, cry out, surrender. And know that the broken way doesn't always mean the unhappy way. Lent 2020 was a strange one, full of pain and sickness. But we look forward in hope, just as we look forward to Easter every Lent.

We give thanks, we cry out, we surrender. We hope.

Claire Wright is a Brighton-based freelance writer who runs a faith blog and a healthy family food website, all while taking care of two lively toddlers.





# Flowers for HOLY WEEK

## The Judas Tree

This tree (*Cercis siliquastrum*) with its abundance of purple flowers is very familiar in Mediterranean areas around the Holy Week and Easter period. Italian tradition says that the buds wait for Holy Week in order to blossom.

Tradition also tells that the flowers were white before Judas hanged himself from the tree, at which point the flowers blushed for shame. From that point in time, the tree became known as the "Judas Tree" and chose to flower in Holy Week in order to remind us of the part that Judas played in Jesus' passion, death and resurrection.

## Passion flowers



This flower (*Passiflora*) is full of symbolism.

- ✦ The three stamens represent:
  - the three nails which pierced Jesus' hands and feet
  - or the three crosses of Jesus and the two thieves.
- ✦ The circle of ten petals symbolise:
  - Jesus' crown of thorns

- ✦ the leaves represent the spear that went into the side of Jesus.

- ✦ The passion flower normally lasts for three days and reminds us of the three days Jesus spent in the tomb.

## Dogwood tree



According to legend, the dogwood tree (*Cornus florida*) at one time grew upright, tall and strong. Its wood had many uses – which was why it was apparently chosen to become the wood of the cross on which Jesus died.

In response, God both cursed and blessed the dogwood. It would never again be tall and straight so that it could never again be used in a crucifixion.

At the same time, for evermore, the tree would be a reminder of both Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

Its beautiful snowy-white blossoms:

- ✦ flower just in time for Easter
- ✦ have four petals in the shape of a cross

- ✦ have indented petals, reminiscent of the holes made by the nails

- ✦ may have spots of colour, reminding us of drops of Jesus' blood

- ✦ have tightly-grouped stamens and pistils resembling the crown of thorns.

## Easter lily



Did you know that a cluster of Easter lilies (*Lilium longiflorum*) is sometimes described as "white-robed apostles of hope"? The lily is sometimes also called a "trumpet lily" because it is thought to proclaim the resurrection.

The Easter lily is full of symbolism:

- ✦ trumpet shape – herald of the resurrection, of rebirth and hope
- ✦ white flower – purity and sinlessness of Jesus
- ✦ bulbs are buried underground for three years before they flower – reminiscent of Jesus' three days in the tomb.



# Prayer inspiration

One of the important ways we can strengthen our relationship with God in Lent is through prayer. We don't always need to be in church to pray either. Prayer can be anywhere: school, the car, your room...

Have a look at the situations below, draw the scene and suggest a prayer under each picture that would help. We've done the first one for you:

Scene 1: You're going for a walk in the countryside, the weather is beautiful and so is the scenery...



Scene 2: Your best friend's granny is sick in hospital...

Prayer: Thank you, God, for creating such a beautiful world.

Prayer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Scene 3: It's right before your maths test and you're really nervous...

Scene 4: You can use your imagination for this one!

Prayer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Prayer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Help Fr John

Easter is just around the corner and Fr John will be busy with all the special services. He's going to need some extra altar servers to help him this year and he'd like you to design a poster asking for children and their parents to get in touch.

So, what is an altar server? Well, Pope Saint John Paul II said, "you are much more than simple helpers of the parish priest. Above all, you are servers of Jesus Christ, of the eternal High Priest... you, altar servers, are called in particular to be young friends of Jesus."

**Can you help  
Fr John in his search  
for responsible helpers  
by designing a poster?**



Top image: Goran Jakus / Shutterstock.com  
Bottom image: jzsj/commons.wikimedia.org





# ON EARTH AND OUTER SPACE

Very few people have had the opportunity to travel beyond Earth's atmosphere and to look back at our planet from outer space. More than one of those who did found that their experience changed them - for ever...

**"I felt the power of God as I'd never felt it before."**

James Irwin, Apollo 15 lunar module pilot, *The Home Planet*

**"Let me say... having walked on the Moon, that I am myself still awed by that miracle. That awe, in me and in each of us... must be the engine of future achievement, not a slow dimming light from a time once bright."**

Buzz Aldrin, Apollo 11 astronaut, *Daily News*, May 1997

**"The world itself looks cleaner and so much more beautiful. Maybe we can make it that way - the way God intended it to be - by giving everyone, eventually, that new perspective from out in space."**

Roger B. Chaffee, Apollo 1 astronaut

**"The biggest joy was on the way home. In my cockpit window every two minutes — the Earth, the Moon, the Sun, and a whole 360-degree panorama of the heavens. And that was a powerful, overwhelming experience. And suddenly I realised that the molecules of my body, and the molecules of the spacecraft, the molecules in the body of my partners, were prototyped and manufactured in some ancient generation of stars. And that was an overwhelming sense of oneness, of connectedness. It wasn't them and us, it was — that's me, that's all of it: it's one thing. And it was accompanied by an ecstasy, a sense of 'Oh my God, wow, yes,' an insight, an epiphany."**

Edgar Mitchell, Apollo 14 lunar module pilot, *In the Shadow of the Moon*

**"The entire space achievement is put in proper perspective when one realises that God walking on the Earth is more important than man walking on the Moon. I believe that God walked on the Earth 2,000 years ago in the person of Jesus Christ."**

James Irwin, Apollo 15 lunar module pilot

**"I realised up there that our planet is not infinite. It's fragile. That may not be obvious to a lot of folks, and it's tough that people are fighting each other here on Earth instead of trying to get together and live on this planet. We look pretty vulnerable in the darkness of space."**

Alan Shepard, Mercury-Redstone 3 and Apollo 14 astronaut, "What Does Moon Flight Mean Now", *The Seattle Times*

**"The view of Earth from space also shows a world without borders. There aren't any clashes. You just see this little tiny atmosphere that is the difference between life and death on this planet. It touches people in their soul, I think. I think nobody comes back without a sense of a higher being. Most come back thinking, 'Hey, God did an amazing job!'"**

Commander Randy Bresnik, *Expedition 53*, 8 June 2018

**"Since that time, I have not complained about the weather one single time. I'm glad there is weather. I've not complained about traffic, I'm glad there's people around... boy we're lucky to be here. Why do people complain about the Earth? We are living in the Garden of Eden."**

Alan Bean, Apollo 12 astronaut, *In the Shadow of the Moon*

**"To look at this kind of creation out here and not believe in God is impossible."**

John Glenn, *Friendship 7* astronaut and *first American to orbit the Earth*, circling it three times

**"I say my walk on the Moon lasted for three days and it was a great adventure. But my walk with God lasts forever."**

Charles Duke, Apollo 16 lunar module pilot, *In the Shadow of the Moon*



A small selection of **Redemptorist Publications** gifts and books, please visit [www.rpbooks.co.uk](http://www.rpbooks.co.uk) for much, much, more!



## The Real Easter Egg

The plastic-free design includes a large 24-page Easter story-activity book, a prize competition and a super thick milk chocolate egg (150g) with a lovely creamy taste. 35% cocoa – palm oil free.

Milk Chocolate **150g** Code: A1145 Price: £3.99



## Easter Blessings Cards

This pack of five stunning cards contain an Easter prayer written by Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

PACK OF 5 CARDS 160mm x 160mm  
Code: 1787 Price: £2.50



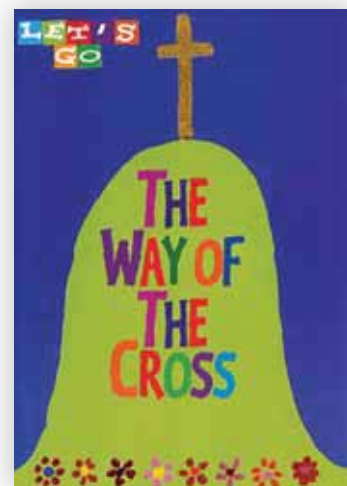
## The Third Day

Discover Easter as you've never seen it before

Alex Webb-Peploe and Andre Parker

Stunning new edition of this graphic-novel-style book faithfully illustrating the unadorned NIV text of Luke's Gospel. It has a gritty, contemporary feel to it that is far removed from the clean, bright, graphic versions of the Bible already available for younger children.

Code: 185564 ISBN: 9781910307557 Price: £4.99

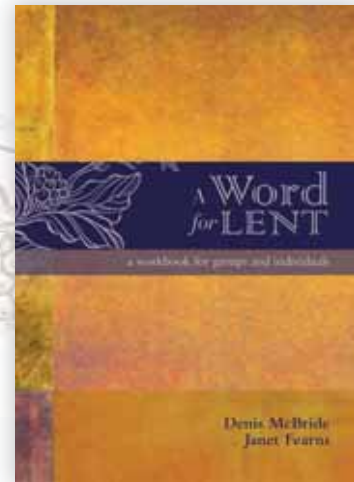
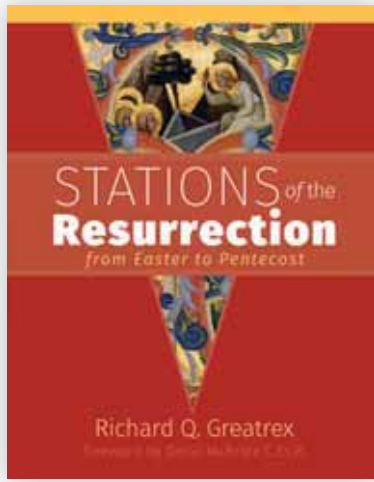


## Let's Go the Way of the Cross

Ellen Teague

The traditional devotion of the Stations of the Cross made accessible for children with bright illustrations. The pages can be personalised by the child and are "wipe-clean".

Code: 1312 ISBN: 9780852312087 Price: £3.95



## Stations of the Resurrection From Easter to Pentecost

Richard Q Greatrex, Foreword by Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

*Stations of the Resurrection* is a growing contemporary devotional, spiritual and liturgical practice. Encompassing both public worship and private prayer, this book travels with the reader from the sealed tomb to Pentecost through sixteen biblical episodes. Using readings, reflections, art and prayers in conjunction with suggested hymns and ideas for producing your own stations it offers a rich resource intended to refocus both congregations and individuals on the transformative joy, hope, grace and challenge of Eastertide.

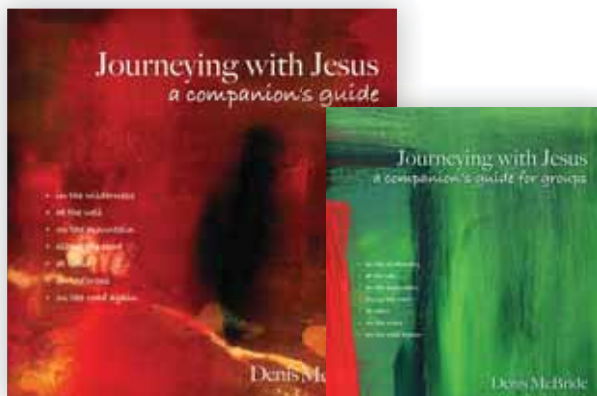
Code: 1841 ISBN: 9780852315453 Price: £12.95

## A Word for Lent A Workbook for Groups and Individuals

Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R. and Sr Janet Fearn

Whether alone or in a group, these Lenten Sunday Gospel reflections provide stimulating insights and ways into deepening personal prayer and commitment to Jesus. They are simple, practical, down-to-earth, heart-warming, challenging, and open up fresh possibilities for deepening discipleship and loving friendship with Jesus.

Code: 1863 ISBN: 9780852315682 Price: £4.95



## Journeying with Jesus A Companion's Guide

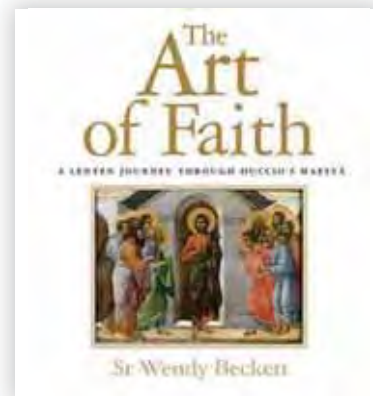
Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

*Journeying with Jesus* is a deeply spiritual and lavishly resourced programme of study for those who want to journey side-by-side with our Lord during Lent, either individually or in small groups. We begin our journey in the wilderness and finally sit with him at the table before accompanying him to the cross. The main purpose of the book is to encourage the reader to think about Jesus' journey and their own. How can the story of Jesus throw light on your own?

Code: 1467 ISBN: 9780852313589 Price: £14.95

## Journeying with Jesus A Companion's Guide for Groups

Code: 1469 ISBN: 9780852313596 Price: £4.95



## The Art of Faith A Lenten Journey through Duccio's Maestà

Sr Wendy Beckett

In this inspiring series of reflections on episodes from the life of Jesus, Sr Wendy Beckett guides us around a selection of panels from the Maestà altarpiece. Duccio completed his great masterpiece for the high altar of Siena Cathedral in 1311 but rather than seeing these paintings as something from a bygone age, Sr Wendy challenges us to examine how Duccio's representations offer us new meaning in our lives today.

Code: 1432 ISBN: 9780852313350 Price: £9.95