2019 Lenten Reflections
from the Villanova Community
It’s time to “turn around,” the literal meaning of the word conversion.

During Lent, we not only turn our hearts and minds back to God, but we also “turn around” and recognize, through the eyes of Christ, who we are called to be: the image and likeness of God, not individually but as a people.

The Lenten traditions of fasting, praying and giving alms can lead us to be in solidarity with those in need—to act for them and with them, following Jesus more closely as he shows us the way.

Share a meal with the person begging at the gate. Wash the feet of one who has no home. Comfort one who is bereft. Forgive an enemy. Shoulder another’s cross.

Modeling St. Augustine, we journey together toward the Truth that sets us free and the triumphant chorus of “Alleluia!”
Return to me with your whole heart. (JL 2:12)
I’m excited, as I am every year, for the beginning of the Lenten journey! Knowing that these forty days will culminate in Easter, I will focus on a spiritual metamorphosis through prayer, meditation and spiritual fasting.

My Lenten mornings begin with daily readings from the American Bible Society and the US bishops’ website. Meditating on the Word of God in a quiet place (“When you pray, go to your inner room ... and pray to your Father in secret” [Mt 6:6]), I ask for the grace to be more like God, “for gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness” (Jl 2:13).

For spiritual fasting, I commit myself, with God’s help, to avoiding bad thoughts and asking the Spirit to help me live the values Christ teaches. Last but not least, I commune with God at church.

May this Lent bring you true happiness through God’s love.

—Paul Mattis, Personal Enrichment Student
If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross. (LK 9:23)
Lent coincides with 40 Days for Life, a movement to pray for and witness to the sanctity of human life from conception. At every stage of our lives, we must make choices. In Deuteronomy, the Lord states that if we choose life, we will be blessed, and he promises us a future. We can choose not to listen to him, but that means we will be cursed. This Lent, why not strive to “delight in the law of the Lord” (Ps 1:2) and be blessed?

The Gospel from Luke reminds me of these lyrics: “I have decided to follow Jesus; no turning back.” Again, we are invited to make a life-giving decision. What can we do to deny ourselves and follow him? Is technology an obstacle to forgetting ourselves? Maybe we can try to meet someone new and share the Gospel. Just introduce yourself and ask, “Have you heard the Good News?”

—Nicole-Bernadette Baker ’86 CLAS
This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: ... sharing your bread with the hungry. (IS 58:6, 7)
Today, and on all Fridays of Lent, we are called to abstain from meat. We also are asked to give something up for the season of Lent. Many deprive themselves of something they like or indulge in too frequently, which might result in a healthier lifestyle, but why else? If we sacrifice or fast without feasting on positive things, it may, at best, fulfill an obligation or, at worst, be futile.

The prophet Isaiah and Jesus challenge us to not only fulfill an obligation but also to do something positive for others: to release those unjustly bound, share our bread and clothing, shelter the homeless, and not turn our back on our own. This is the mission Jesus proclaimed, and it should be ours too!

We must stay humble and hungry, working for the good of others. “A heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn” (Ps 51:19).

—The Rev. Bernie Scianna, OSA, PhD, ’87 CLAS, Director, Fraternity and Sorority Life
Repairer of the breach, they shall call you. Restorer of ruined homesteads. (IS 58:12)
Today’s Gospel reminds me of a story that has stuck with me for years. A friend was having a conversation with her daughter after kindergarten one day. “Mommy, did you know that God loves me”—and then her eyes widened, and her voice became serious—“even when I’m bad?”

I sometimes forget that I’m loveable “even when I’m bad,” when I fall short of the person I want to be. When I think about the depths of that kind of unconditional love, I feel my eyes widening too.

It’s almost beyond comprehension, and yet, Jesus shows us what it looks like by breaking bread with some of the most reviled sinners in his day: tax collectors. Levi, the tax collector Jesus eats with, exemplifies the transformative power of unconditional love and acceptance. We know him better as Matthew, a saint, an evangelist and one of the Twelve Apostles.

—Colleen Donnelly, Assistant Director, Constituent Publications
The same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him. (ROM 10:12)
These readings remind me that God is always present, especially when I am in trouble and need. When life is tough, scary, stressful, fearful; when I feel under fire, God’s faithfulness will protect me and lead me to a “land flowing with milk and honey” (Dt 26:9).

I am responsible for extending this understanding of God, who is “Lord of all” (Rom 10:12), to those around me. Acknowledging this love that calls us to be in right relationship with each other, Augustine penned his Rule, a set of guidelines to enhance “values which underlie the life of a vibrant community.” As Villanovans, let’s consider some of these during Lent to amplify relationships on campus and in the world: Before all else, love God and then love your neighbor. Live harmoniously, intent upon God, one in mind and heart. Share your wealth and talents cheerfully. Avoid quarrels or reconcile them quickly.

—Bernadette Dierkes, Director, Creative Services
I was ... a stranger and you welcomed me. (MT 25:35)
Jesus reminds us that to love by serving society’s most vulnerable is the only way to build up the Kingdom of God. I cannot help thinking of Servant of God Thea Bowman, FSPA.

Born in 1937, Sister Thea was the great-granddaughter of slaves and a member of the pioneering generation of black Catholic teenagers who desegregated this nation’s white sisterhoods. She also challenged the Church to abide by its social teachings and welcome all equally: “Be woman. Be man. Be priest. Be Irish-American, be Italian-American, be Native American, be African-American, but be one in Christ.” Engraved in her headstone, per her request, are two simple words, “She tried.”

We are called to take stock of our commitments to humanity. Are you in solidarity with those fighting injustice? Will you able to stand before God and say you welcomed strangers, fed the hungry, clothed the naked and visited the sick? Will you be able to say you tried?

—Shannen Dee Williams, PhD, Assistant Professor of History
Look to him that you may be radiant with joy. (PS 34:6)
One of my favorite books to read with my daughter is *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein. The story traces the lives of a boy and his favorite tree. As the boy grows, the tree gives of itself whatever the boy needs: apples for food, branches for shade, its trunk for a boat. When all it has left is a stump, the tree offers itself as a seat for the boy, now and old man, to rest.

Isaiah recalls how God constantly provides for our needs, “giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats” (Is 55:10), and how we are called to provide for the needs of others. While sometimes we play the role of the boy, looking to the tree to provide whatever we need, at other times we are called to play that of the tree, in solidarity with those we serve.

—*Jim Gallo*, EdD, Director, Center for Church Management
A steadfast spirit renew within me. (PS 51:12)
On a recent flight, I reflected on the word fasten and whether it had any reference to Lenten fasting we do during Lent. To fasten one’s seatbelt means to join the two pieces so that they hold tight. Today’s reading tells us that after Jonah’s preaching, the people of Nineveh proclaimed a fast, abstaining from food or drink to purify themselves. It was a way that both pieces, body and soul, fit together in a secure and fast way.

The hunger pangs that come with fasting invite us to look beyond the physical and discover the spiritual, and to join these two aspects. St. Augustine preached: “It is the business of human beings living this mortal life to hunger and thirst for justice” (Sermon 400). May our physical hunger and thirst lead us to find ways to be in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are most in need.

—The Rev. Joseph L. Farrell, OSA, ’85 VSB
You built up strength within me. (PS 138:3)
“Ask ... it will be given to you” (Mt 7:7). Yes, we ask often for things that do not come in the way or at the time of our asking. For some things, we pray with a continuous desire in faith; our deep longings are known to God even though no words are spoken.

In fact, in our humanness, we need words for prayer, even if God does not. Why? Because our words help us to name our desires, to realize how much this desire has grown and to remind us to awaken the desire that matters, “arousing ourselves more intensely to increase it. For a more worthy result ensues when a more fervent love has preceded” (Augustine, Letter 130, 9, 18). It’s also a way of calling the heart back to prayer from the cares and concerns that tend to cool down our most important desires.

—Father Allan Fitzgerald, OSA, Director, The Augustinian Institute
LORD, hear my voice!
Scripture challenges us to reflect on our image of God, who God is and who we are in relationship to God and to each other. The prophet Ezekiel images God as a harsh ruler and fair judge who rewards those who are virtuous and condemns those who have broken covenanted faith. God expects us to be responsible and intentional in how we live our lives. God rejoices when a person recommits to the covenant!

Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew reflects God as teacher, judge and interpreter of the law. To be in right relationship with God, we must be advocates for reconciliation, justice and peace. God calls us to live lovingly as brothers and sisters, and we are invited to the altar only when we walk together. “Go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:24). We are not invited alone.

—Beth Hassel, PBVM, DMin, Director, Center for Faith and Learning
Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect. (MT 5:48)
Today’s text from Deuteronomy comes near the end of Moses’ address to the people of Israel, following the giving of the law. Moses calls them to not simply obey the rules that shape their life together as a community, but to observe them with heart and soul. As a people who are “peculiarly [God’s] own” (Dt 26:18), they are held to this higher, or deeper, standard: to make God’s ways a part of their very being.

Jesus echoes and extends that calling. Heart-and-soul observance becomes participation in the radical activity of God. Love your neighbor? Yes, but also your enemy. Pray for your friends, colleagues, co-believers? Of course, but also for those who make your life miserable. Be perfect, Jesus says, as God is perfect. It’s a call, not to the fearful pursuit of a life without error or failure, but to the breathtaking risk of embodying God’s extravagant love.

—Rev. Julie Sheetz, PhD, Associate Director for Ecumenical and Interfaith Outreach
Master, it is good that we are here. (LK 9:33)
Today’s Gospel describes a theophany—an appearance, or revelation, of God. The cloud that overshadows the apostles and the voice that comes from it, saying, “This is my chosen Son; listen to him” (Lk 9:35), echo an earlier theophany, the baptism of Jesus. The smoking fire pot and the flaming torch that appear to Abram in the first reading preview these two theophanies. We remember St. Augustine’s dictum, “The New is hidden in the Old, and the Old is revealed in the New.”

At the Transfiguration, Christ’s “face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white” (Lk 9:29), giving us a hint of what is to come: the greatest theophany of all, the Resurrection, when Jesus arises in “his glorified body” (Phil 3:21). Let us, like the apostles, fight off our slumber, become fully awake, and see the glory of the Trinity revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.
Give and gifts will be given to you. (LK 6:38)
Who is the first saint, the first person to enter into glory with Jesus? Not St Peter; not Jesus’ mother, Mary; not even someone like the tax collector, who turned his life around. It is the convicted criminal, crucified alongside Jesus, who turned to Jesus as his last hope.

Our salvation does not depend on our goodness or worthiness, but rather on God’s goodness and God’s willingness to love us into true happiness!

As God has shared so abundantly with us, without our “deserving” such affection and care, so too are we called today to graciously share God’s love and forgiveness, not to “merit”—as though that were possible—but rather as a sign of gratitude for God’s unmerited, overabundant, bounteous love.

Solidarity is the key: Just as God has chosen to share with us, so too are we called to share with one another. Sounds like a divine plan!

—The Rev. Arthur Purcaro, OSA, STD, Acting Vice President, Mission and Ministry
I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. (2SM 7:14)
In today’s Gospel, the angel of the Lord tells Joseph, “Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her’” (Mt 1:20).

If we are in a tough situation or faced with a difficult decision, Joseph’s actions remind us to put our faith in God and not act on our feelings.

When it was my turn to lead the opening and closing prayers at our parish’s pastoral council meetings, I chose Proverbs 3:5-6 because it’s a reminder of the importance of asking God to show us the way: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, on your own intelligence do not rely; in all your ways be mindful of him, and he will make straight your paths.”

This Lent, how can we listen to what God is asking of us?

—Matt Kirsch, Assistant Director of Communication and Marketing, Office of the Provost
The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve. (MT 20:28)
As a parent, I get it. You want what is best for your kids, you think you know what “best” is, and you just need to bring God up to speed. The mother of Zebedee’s sons is the perfect example. I imagine her, with James and John in tow, approaching Jesus deferentially and making her bold request: “Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and one at your left, in your kingdom” (Mt 20:21).

How often my agenda is different from God’s! It’s tempting to seek security and prestige for those we love by playing by the world’s rules. Jesus needs to remind me again and again that “you do not know what you are asking” (Mt 20:22). The way of love is one of service and sacrifice. Let us trust that the Father, our true parent, wants and knows what is best for us.

—Suzanne Wentzel, ’14 MA, Office for Mission and Ministry
Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD. (JER 17:7)
Villanova in mid-March is a place of hope, and yet there is an underlying fear that what we hope for will remain unrealized. We are at once encouraged and dispirited by what has not yet come to pass.

Today’s readings remind us of our frailty as creatures and our resilience as children of God. Jeremiah bemoans that the heart is “tortuous” (17:19), yet the psalmist says that those who hope in the Lord are like trees planted near running water, yielding fruit in due season (1:3). In the Gospel, Lazarus is fragile and alone; his “wealth” is his hope. Close to him a man lives in earthly splendor but has no faith. In time, the truth emerges.

We rejoice as snow yields running water to reveal the gifts of a new spring. The splendor that awaits us, however, is the truth that underlies all earthly beauty. It’s worth the wait.

—Jonathan Mack ’18 CLAS
Remember the marvels the Lord has done. (PS 105:5)
In today’s texts, readers are confronted with two difficult passages: Joseph’s brothers sell him into slavery, and Jesus recounts the Parable of the Tenants. Joseph’s brothers and the vineyard workers have an opportunity to choose righteousness over greed, but they allowed the prospect of immediate profits to cloud their judgment.

We are often confronted with choices that pull us between what is convenient and what is right. It is convenient to consume resources without thought of the future, but is it right to deprive the next generation of soaring trees and clean air? It is convenient to turn away from stories of injustice, but is it right to allow the continued suffering of the marginalized and vulnerable?

Sometimes it is difficult to see past the immediate benefit to the lasting harm. But we are called to make tough choices so that we can help move the world toward peace and justice.

—Liz Remelius, Program Coordinator, College of Professional Studies
He heals all your ills. (PS 103:3)
Lent is a time when we contemplate and repent of our sins. This does not mean that Lent is gloomy. The prophets, the psalmists and the Gospel writers tell us that God is faithful and kind, the One who casts our sins into the sea, the One who redeems our lives from destruction and crowns us with kindness and compassion, the One who runs to us with open arms like the father whose son has returned.

At the end of Lent stands the cross, the sign and gift of God’s forgiveness. And the cross looks forward to the resurrection of Christ, and of the people of God. Like the father of the prodigal son, God invites us to a celebration, “because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again” (Lk 15:24). As we repent, we do so with the blessed assurance that the feast is waiting.

—Rachel Baard, PhD, Assistant Professor, Lawrence C. Gallen Teaching Faculty, ACSP
I have witnessed the affliction of my people. (EX 3:7)
I used to be jealous of the dramatic nature of the burning bush but have learned that brushfires were commonplace in this environment. God’s call of Moses is not uncommon. Moses’ response is. Moses sees something different. He stops, listens and hears words he would have otherwise missed. He responds in reverence to God’s presence. He learns who God is and who he, Moses, is: God’s beloved, intended for liberation.

God’s invitation to Moses is ours. Through the physical fires of climate change, the firing of arms in violence, the fire of inequality perpetuated by injustice and the fire of desire for justice in our hearts, God calls us to conversion of sight and action.

Do I stop long enough to hear? Am I willing to speak words of freedom for those who suffer? Do I take off my shoes to stay longer, or rush past, prioritizing my own concerns?

—Brian McCabe ’11 MS, Associate Director for Outreach and Student Formation
Your justice I kept not hid within my heart. (PS 40:11)
Today’s liturgy invites us to examine how we make significant choices. It offers Mary as an example for reflection. “Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you. ... You have found favor with God” (Lk 1:28, 30). How did this young girl process this invitation and be enabled to respond?

In some mysterious way, Mary experienced the presence of God asking her to become someone she never imagined. Trusting that God was and would be with her, she listened, pondered and questioned, and offered her fiat, “May it be done to me” (v. 38). “The Angelus commemorates this event and the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Jesus (the words and a brief history may be found on Google).

This Solemnity invites us to follow Mary’s example by including God in our decision-making. Why not consider praying the Angelus, asking God to be with you as you make life decisions?

—The Rev. James Wenzel, OSA
Guide me in your truth and teach me. (PS 25:5)
When I read today’s gospel, I think of how often I go to church, say, “Forgive us ... as we forgive those who trespass against us,” and then later (and believe me, it’s not that much later), I feel angry and refuse to forgive someone for the way I was slighted—not recognized for my work, efforts or support.

How often do we ask the Lord to forgive us? Yet we harbor those hurts and continue to get angry at something that may have happened yesterday or even 30 years ago.

“Lord help me forgive those who have hurt me, misjudged me, slandered me (seventy times seven ... one million times one million!). I ask you to bestow your grace and favor upon me and my hardened heart. Holy Spirit, renew our hearts, heal our thoughts and help us to live the grace-filled life that you have set before us.”

—Martha Rath P ’10
Teach them to your children and to your children’s children. (DT 4:9)
During Lent we focus on growing in holiness, a process that begins in this life and leads to eternal life. In Deuteronomy, Moses gives the people God’s laws so that they “may live ... and take possession of the land” (Dt 4:1). By obeying the commandments, we, too, will grow in wisdom and understanding. We are called to reflect on the commandments, teaching them to our children and their children.

The psalmist, too, sings that God has revealed his word to us. Following the commandments will lead to peace and joy. “He has strengthened the bars of your gates; he has blessed your children within you” (Ps 147:13).

Finally, Jesus states that we must obey the commandments. If we break them and teach others to sin, we will be called least. He died that we may have access to heaven. Those who obey will be called greatest in God’s kingdom.

—Jane Frances Coburn P ’20
The kingdom of God has come upon you. (LK 11:20)
It’s hard for me, an immigration lawyer, not to reflect on this passage through the lens of migration. Throughout the scriptures, God calls us to welcome the stranger. Yet current-day policies at our southern border are unwelcoming—“they turned their backs” and “stiffened their necks” (Jer 7:24, 26)—toward the migrant and the word of God.

This passage is a call to action to open hearts and minds to love and charity for migrants and refugees. That will not happen through words alone. “When you speak all these words to them, they will not listen to you either” (v. 27).

Conversion of hearts and minds happens most profoundly through encounter. After working with refugee clients, my students gain a new sense of empathy and love. Let’s do what we can to promote such encounter, for many people suffer while waiting for us to exercise what is our privilege to help.

—Michele Pistone, JD, Professor of Law; Director, Clinic for Asylum, Refugee & Emigrant Services
You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (MK 12:31)
Today’s readings remind us that, to be a follower of Jesus, we must love both God and those around us. As humans, we are called to be connected to one another through relationships because we are naturally social beings. We portray our care by listening to the stories of our friends, talking to our families and praying for the sick.

Yet God calls us to something greater. He calls us to love all of those around us. We are called to see the homeless person, the criminal and the poor as children of God. Oftentimes, we close our eyes to the world by caring only about what directly influences our lives. We need to step back and remind ourselves that if everyone is a child of God, they all deserve the unconditional love that Jesus calls us to give. Only when we love can we call ourselves followers of Christ.

—Matthew Ziarnik ’22 COE
The one who humbles himself will be exalted. (LK 18:14)
Today’s readings ask us to reflect on the connection between our actions and our motivation. It’s important for us to act in a righteous way, but for those actions to be righteous, they must be born out of a motivation focused on God. God has placed a desire in our hearts to reflect God’s love to the world through the way we live. This desire should be the main motive for all we do.

We cannot have the superficial faith that Hosea accuses Ephraim and Judah of having. Their “piety is ... like the dew that early passes away” (Hos 6:4). Our faith must be strong and sincere. Money, fame and pride can be rewarding, but if they are what motivate us, we risk becoming like the Pharisee who acted in a good way but for his own pride and glory. “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled” (Lk 18:14).

—David Walsh, ’15 MA, Campus Minister for Sports and Spirituality
Whoever is in Christ is a new creation. (2 COR 5:17)
The parable begins with a common tale: a young person leaves home to lead a lifestyle that flaunts the family’s values and fritters away time and money.

When the son returns with a prepared speech, the story’s predictability crumbles. The father has been watching for him every day. He runs out to him and swallows him in a hug. No negotiating conditions; when someone comes back to life, you must celebrate. At least God must. When life is the goal, prodigal forgiveness is the norm.

The older child displays our standard methods of treating wrongdoers: standoffishness, demands for justice, refusal to be in the same house. If one part of Lent is repenting our “life of dissipation” (Lk 15:13), the other part is acquiring God’s perspective, where we see others in terms of life. We don’t know if the older son joined the party, but we decide if we will.

—Bernadette Rudolph, Faculty, Theology and Religious Studies
There shall always be rejoicing and happiness in what I create. (IS 65:18)
God, through the prophet Isaiah, announces that he will create a new heaven and a new earth, a world radically different from that of the past. Isaiah paints a picture of a world full of joy and happiness, where people enjoy good health and live long lives.

Jesus fulfills this prophecy. As with so many others, he cures the royal official’s son, restoring him to good health. In doing so, he brings joy and happiness to the son’s family and spiritual healing to the household. From the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus is in solidarity with suffering people. He demonstrates this solidarity through his encounters with them, encounters he didn’t try to avoid.

Let us pray for the courage to embrace such encounters in our own lives, that they will lead us to a deep solidarity with those in need and so continue creating a new heaven and earth.

—John Bangert ’76 CLAS
Come! behold the deeds of the LORD. (PS 46:9)
Today’s first reading draws forth the image of rivers of flowing water. The prophet Ezekiel speaks of an angel proclaiming to him, “Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall live” (47:9). This messenger reminds us that the Lord is forever making things new.

As new life springs forth around us, let us remember this image of waters of abundant life. Whatever dryness we are experiencing in life, be it spiritual or physical, God invites us to come to the water to satisfy our thirst. Even when it seems that all hope is lost, God is continually healing us and making things new. Like the man in the Gospel today, healed of his infirmity and blessed with the opportunity to walk after thirty-eight years, let us rely on the healing power of Jesus, trusting in his power to save as we wait in the desert.

—Melanie Dudley, ‘16 MA
I will ... make my highways level. (IS 49:11)
Could God care for us more than our own mother? Isaiah asks us. Isaiah’s response is yes! God’s love and mercy are beyond measure. God provides for us, especially in times of need.

If we are in prison, God says, “You are free.” If we are in fear, God says, “It is safe now.” To the blind God says, “Open your eyes,” and to the crippled, “Run swiftly.” God knows our troubles and will come through for us—although not always in the way or on the schedule we desire. It is said, “When dealing with God, we never get exactly what we want but always more than we expect.”

What usually works best for me is to recall how God has come through in my life. Lent is a time the Church offers us to look back and remember God’s work on our behalf, more than even our mother’s.

—Edward Hastings, PhD, ’73 CLAS, Director, Graduate Program in Theology and Ministry
These works that I perform testify ... that the Father has sent me. (JN 5:36)
In today’s readings, God is urging us to stop hiding from or avoiding him. In Exodus, God’s people have “turned aside from the way I pointed out to them” (32:8), worshiping instead a golden calf. In John’s Gospel, Jesus tells his listeners, “You search the Scriptures, because you think you have eternal life through them. ... But you do not want to come to me to have life” (5:39-40). Jesus encourages us to believe wholeheartedly in Moses and the Scriptures and begin to live.

At this point, maybe Lent feels comfortable. Maybe I’ve decided the act of going through my Lenten promises is enough. These readings move me to reflect on what I am doing and whether I believe completely in God. Am I hiding from the Father behind these Lenten promises? Jesus calls me to remember why these practices matter and, through them, to be led to the Father.

—Keri Salanik, ‘19 CLAS
When the just cry out, the LORD hears them. (PS 34:18)
It is fitting that Lent begins in the darkness of winter. “Lent comes providentially to reawaken us, to shake us from our lethargy,” Pope Francis says. I find myself slowing down and turning inward to reflect on how I can be closer to God. As the light of spring begins to shine through, I feel ready for action and excited for the celebration of Easter.

The book of Wisdom shows us the thoughts of the “wicked” toward the “just one” (2:1, 12): doubt, fear, judgment and hatred. In the Gospel, Jesus bravely travels to places where he will be questioned. Blinded by judgment and fear, the people doubt he is the Christ. These readings remind me to look for Jesus in others and not to be quick to judge those who are different. I am called to action—to renew my commitment of service to others, especially our most marginalized.

—Erin Buckley ’99 CLAS, Office of the President
Sustain the just, O searcher of the heart and soul. (PS 7:10)
Today’s readings share a theme of trust: Jeremiah’s trust in the Lord, the psalmist’s trust in the just God and Jesus’ trust in the One who sent him. In contrast, the Pharisees’ misplaced trust in their rigid adherence to the law makes them want to kill Jesus. Nicodemus, a Pharisee, reminds them that their law requires them to hear Jesus before condemning him.

It is not unlike the news today. Political conflict, Church scandals, and human rights atrocities are everywhere. Social media is rife with accusations and judgment. Charity, love and understanding are hard to find. How are we to trust God and “hear” Jesus?

My parish is working to rekindle Perpetual Adoration, and God is blessing our efforts. Miracles abound. Adoration is a way to quiet our hearts and spend time with Jesus—a way to begin again to trust in God and to experience His love. Try it.

—Beth McMackin ’85
I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling. (PHIL 3:14)
A group of Pharisees angrily bring a woman who has been caught in adultery to Jesus and ask him what they should do with her. He replies, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (Jn 8:7). No one does. Even Jesus does not condemn the woman.

We can look at our Augustinian values to understand Jesus’ actions. Caritas is understanding that people make mistakes and caring for them when they do. Unitas is forgiving and standing in solidarity with those who have sinned. Veritas is admitting we’re not perfect and cannot judge others.

Thomas Merton wrote that “our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy,” because Jesus loves us unconditionally. When you go to Mass, immerse yourself in the grace, love, and Mystery that is larger than you can ever comprehend.

—Lindsay Gallagher ’22 VSB
In verdant pastures he gives me repose. (PS 23:2)
In the reading from Daniel, two wicked elders who have been appointed judges are guests in the garden of Joakim. They look at Joakim’s wife, Susanna, a God-fearing woman, with desire and proposition her, telling her that if she doesn’t do as they wish, they will falsely testify against her. Susanna chooses to trust in the Lord and refuses them. Her faith sustains her, even when she is facing death. She prays for deliverance, and the Holy Spirit works through Daniel to prove her innocence.

Susanna trusted in the Lord. She walked through a dark valley, but God was at her side (Ps 23:4). “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will ... have the light of life” (Jn 8:12).

In our world there is so much corruption. What is right? Who can we trust? Listen to your heart. Remember who walks with you through your trials.

—Lorraine McCorkle, Graphic Designer, Creative Services
The nations shall revere your name, O LORD. (PS 102:16)
Today’s psalm of lament, “LORD, hear my prayer, and let my cry come to you” (102:2), took me back to last semester. Bryan Stevenson, author of *Just Mercy*, this year’s One Book Villanova selection, visited campus and spoke about the racial injustice deeply rooted in the US justice system. He reminded listeners that we have to tell the truth to start to heal and to not lose hope.

The psalmist confirms that lament is a part of telling a truth that, with hope, we are invited to place before God in prayer and then to turn prayer into action. Theologian Elizabeth Johnson writes, “In prayer we cry out, protest, lament, shout indignation, say, ‘this should not be.’ [Lament is] an active engagement with God uttered in anguished hope that there will be an answer.”

Recall an injustice that cries out for your attention. How is God inviting you to act?

—Michelle Sherman ’12 MA, Campus Minister for Retreats
You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (JN 8:32)
Today’s Gospel paints a familiar scene of Jesus trying to teach a group who can’t seem to get his message. I sometimes wonder what’s going through their minds. How can they argue and debate with Jesus, of all people?

Then I realize how often I miss Jesus’ message. I pray, participate in my parish and got my ashes. I try to be polite, smile at strangers and retweet stories of social injustice using angry-face emojis. That’s enough, right? Or does God ask for more? Pope Francis tells us that “a prayer that does not lead you to practical action for your brother … is a sterile and incomplete prayer.”

Has God been calling me to some practical action? Have I missed the message? Maybe I think I’m too busy or already do enough.

This quiet time during Lent can help me notice where I’m being called. And act on it.

—Thomas P. Umile, PhD, Assistant Teaching Professor, Chemistry
I will maintain my covenant with you and your descendants. (GN 17:7)
God seeks out Abram, offering a solemn invitation: a covenant of faithful love. It is as if God is wooing Abram, coming to him with an “open heart” that longs for relationship and trust in the promise that God’s committed love is steadfast. Do I sense God showing up in my life, desiring my attention? What might God be speaking to me?

In the Gospel, people badger Jesus with questions, perhaps wanting to disprove his authenticity. His words are too gracious for them to comprehend. Jesus is the Face of the extravagant Mercy of God, and its kindness is too much for them to take in. But Jesus remains confident in the knowledge that he is loved by the Father. Can I ask for the grace to let God be my God, no matter how generous God’s love might be? Can I be a witness of this covenant to others?

—Linda Jaczynski ’88 MS, Director, Center for Worship and Spirituality
Praise the LORD, for he has rescued the life of the poor. (JER 20:13)
I used to think of prayer as mailing a message to God because I considered God to be distant. In today’s psalm, David states, “In my distress I called upon the LORD and cried out to my God; from his temple he heard my voice” (18:7). That God hears David’s prayer “from his temple” reinforces my misperception that God is distant. Even the Lord’s Prayer begins, “Our Father who art in heaven.”

God, however, is not confined by space or time. Today’s readings highlight God answering our prayers. Jeremiah says, “The LORD is with me, like a mighty champion” (20:11). Jesus tells us that “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (Jn 10:38). The Father was that close to the people Jesus spoke to, and through his Holy Spirit, he is that close to us. I can pray “the Lord is with me” because He is.

—Gerald Dierkes, Access and Collections Coordinator, Falvey Memorial Library
I will turn their mourning into joy. (JER 31:13)
Lent is a time to reflect on life and the role death plays in God’s plan. The full life to which we are called, true holiness, means dying to our self and living for others. In the first reading, God draws us to fullness of life, which is to be holy. When we remove our idols and distractions, we are left only with God and who we are in God. In time, our divisions and the false separations we have created will be revealed as transient and rootless. We will stand before the One who alone can say, “It is I, the Lord, who make [you] holy” (Ez 37:28).

It is not our degrees, honors, or awards that can make us holy, but only God and who we are in God. What draws us together toward ever greater communion in God will one day lead us to union with God.

—Irene Rivera, Campus Minister for Hispanic Outreach
He humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death. (PHIL 2:8)
“The tattered outlaw of the earth, of ancient crooked will; starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb, I keep my secret still. Fools! For I also had my hour ... and sweet: There was a shout about my ears, and palms before my feet.”—G. K. Chesterton

The lowly figure of the donkey points to the paradoxical scene. King Jesus rides through Jerusalem on a work animal. The entry into the city paints a picture of meetings: Royalty meets commonality, power meets humility and heaven meets earth. Jesus is called blessed, and he is praised as the deliverer of peace. He meets his beloved children by revealing himself in solidarity with the poor and lowly. His quiet humility is matched by the humble beast of burden. Jesus is not separated from us in our poverty of spirit and body. He is with us and offers us true peace and comfort.

—Audra Goodnight, PhD, Catherine of Siena Teaching Fellow in Ethics
I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice. (IS 42:6)
Isaiah describes the servant in whom God puts his Spirit—one who is called to establish justice on the earth. At Baptism, we are called to be servants of God as disciples, to be a light for the nations by working to bring sight to the blind and free captives from prison.

The work of justice is not a solitary endeavor. It is God’s work through us, if we are in relationship with the Creator and all of creation. Justice must be about those on the margins of our world.

In the Gospel, Jesus goes to Bethany to be with Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Mary anoints Jesus with precious oil, a gesture that is personal, loving and extravagant, and that reminds us of God’s extravagant love for us.

Let us remember the power of love and how justice must be infused with love if we desire to grow in holiness.

—Barbara E. Wall, PhD, Vice President, Mission and Ministry; Associate Professor of Philosophy
I will make you a light to the nations. (Isaiah 49:6)
The First Reading opens with words filled with God’s truth. It’s mind-boggling to know that the King of Kings loved me from the moment I was conceived and already knew my name. He already had a plan for my life before I was born!

Jesus tells his disciples at Passover that he will be leaving them and they won’t be able to follow right away. Peter asks Jesus where He is going and why he can’t go with him. We often might be fed up with the world, and we wonder how perfect eternal life will be. Life would be so much easier without worries or anxieties. Through any difficulties we face, it can be easy not to feel God’s presence. The Lord is always with us, and he wants us all to be in heaven with him someday. Until then, we must fulfill his plan for our earthly lives.

—Angelica Tiffany Garcia ’22 COE
The Lord GOD has given me a well-trained tongue. (IS 50:4)
Love is a costly practice. Jesus’ love for us cost his life. As the embodiment of love, God calls us to be like Jesus and, potentially, pay a similar price.

Sometimes, we may try to love people without any cost to ourselves. This makes love appear cheap, easy and self-serving. We communicate to God that other people’s theologies, politics, social or economic status, or even their personalities are debts that love cannot pay down.

Jesus shows us that nothing is more important than love. As Jesus loved Judas, we are to love everyone, no matter the price.

How much are we willing to give up to love the people we see every day? Will we give up time, money or status? Our lives? Jesus calls us to love everyone, even those who work against us, all the way to Calvary. After all, Jesus did that for each one of us.

—Rusty Beckham ’14 MA
Do this in remembrance of me. (1 COR 11:24)
I have thought a lot about these readings over my years of teaching CCD. My favorite lesson is celebrating a Passover Seder meal, where we learn these traditions. The children are always surprised by the links between the meal and our Mass celebration. This is clearly laid out in these readings. They also enjoy physically experiencing this meal the way Jesus did at the Last Supper. It is one of the highlights of the year.

The faith Jesus gave us is a hands-on faith. We use all our senses, just as this Passover lesson does. I think it is a wonderful way to look at Holy Week and our time beyond. We are meant to participate fully, to be hands-on believers. Jesus shows us how—by physically washing the feet of his disciples. By eating a final meal with them. By giving his life for all of us.

—Lisa Ann Kelly ’83 FCN
Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. (Lk 23:34)
Not only are Christ’s words addressed to the masses clamoring for his death in Jerusalem, but they are addressed to all of us, whose sins put him on the cross. The forgiveness that poured forth from Christ’s wounds is poured afresh on us today in the confessional.

—Michael Caggiano ’18 COE, ’18 CLAS

Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise. (Lk 23:43)
Humbled, once more, by Jesus’ faith, I was called to check in on my own. I’ll share my diagnostic. Has my faith matured over the seasons? Does it wax or wane? I’m continually reminded that faith blossoms when shared and patches crevasses within. Let’s share together this season.

—Madeline Reynolds, Associate Director, Honors Program

Woman, behold, your son. … Behold, your mother. (Jn 19:26-27)
Even as he hangs dying in agony on the cross, Jesus shows his love and concern for his (probably widowed) mother by entrusting her to the care of his beloved disciple. Do we have the same concern for those who have nurtured us and perhaps now need someone to look after them?

—Francis J. Horn, OSA, ’72 CLAS, Villanova University Trustee
My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Mk 15:34)
Jesus cries out these words so that we never have to. What a beautiful picture of mercy: Christ using his last words to restate that his place on the cross means that we, reconciled by that cross, have a permanent place with the Father.
—Sarah Sprinkle ’19 CLAS

I thirst. (Jn 19:28)
Jesus accepts a small act of kindness amid his suffering. Who in our lives is thirsty? Do we see their thirst for love? For acceptance? For human connection? Do we offer companionship before it is too late? Do we give of our time before theirs dries up?
—Michael Knab ’93 CLAS

It is finished. (Jn 19:30)
Our work on earth is never truly finished until we die. At that final moment, will we be able to say that we have fulfilled our mission as children of God? Will we have given everything we had in the loving service of others? Will we have united ourselves fully with our Savior’s suffering and death?
—Elizabeth-Jane McGuire, Assistant Professor, Augustine and Culture Seminar Program

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. (Lk 23:46)
Jesus, leave me planted at the foot of the cross with Mary. Let my heart pour out for my children, family, friends and for everyone I meet. When the earth quakes beneath me, keep me there. When the pain is unbearable, chain me to the ground. May I come home to your embrace.
—Chrissy Cappello ’95 CLAS
Why do you seek the living one among the dead? (LK 24:5)
It wasn’t supposed to be a surprise. He had told them on the dusty roads of Galilee that he would be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and rise on the third day. Two angels, unpleasantly bright, were now reminding them of those unsparing words. But the women were there to bury a beloved, not calculate the moral necessities of a violently birthed life (too often the business of men). Mary Magdalene; Mary, the mother of James; Joanna—apostles of a different sort: “Why do you seek the living one among the dead?” (Lk 24:5).

I imagine their answer: “Because that time has come.”

Life confined to the living is survival, not solidarity. Better we call upon the dead and reach out to one another across oceans of dispossession. Such is love in time’s covenant. Discarded burial clothes may have amazed Peter, but the mourned-over body is also a sign of life to come.

—James Wetzel, PhD, the Augustinian Endowed Chair in the Thought of St. Augustine