Lenten Reflections from the Villanova Community 2022
“The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet’s capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world. The effects of the present imbalance can only be reduced by our decisive action, here and now. We need to reflect on our accountability before those who will have to endure the dire consequences.”

—Pope Francis, *Laudato si’* (On Care for Our Common Home), 2020
Villanova University recently joined other Catholic organizations around the world in signing on to the Laudato Si’ Action Platform. This commitment to work together to care for our distressed planet and redress the suffering of the world’s most vulnerable people guides many of the reflections in the days ahead.

As we begin this sacred, penitential season, we invite you to consider how you, through prayer and action, can join the faithful and all people of good will as “we set out on the long path of renewal” (LS).

—Your Friends in Mission and Ministry
We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5:20)
Remember: You are earth, and to the earth you shall return!

These stark words remind us that our life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself. These three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole is disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations.

Lent is a special time to recall and restore the intimate relationship between the materially poor and the fragility of our planet. We are always capable of going out of ourselves toward the other. If we can overcome our individualism and self-centeredness, we will truly be able to develop a different lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society. Everything is interconnected.

—The Rev. Arthur Purcaro, OSA, PhD, ’72 CLAS, Assistant Vice President, Mission and Ministry

What evidence do you see of this rupture in your own life, in your family, at Villanova, in our society?
He is like a tree planted near running water, that yields its fruit in due season. (Ps 1:3)
Every new year, I review my photos, calendar and spending from the previous year. Who I give time to, what I do and where I spend money describe what I value. Sometimes we say we value something but then choose the opposite. I live a healthy life, but then I drive two blocks to the store. I want to be closer to God, but then I skip morning prayer.

These readings are a powerful trifecta: Choose life; don’t hang out with sinners; and “gain the whole world” at the risk of forfeiting yourself (Lk 9:25). We make hundreds of decisions—choosing God and helping our spirit grow, or making choices that diminish us and move us farther away. Honk the horn, or be kind to the slow driver? Yell at your kid, or hug him? Tell the truth or a small lie? And do friends and family boost us up the spiritual ladder or drag us down?

Sometimes it’s hard to tell. Sometimes it’s hard to admit.

—Sue Schultes ’87 VSB

What daily habit can you begin today to align what you say you want with what you do?
This, rather, is the fasting that I wish. (Is 58:6)
Today’s reading from Isaiah focuses on what it means to fast, and more importantly, how our views of what God wants us to do may not be the same as what God really wants of us. God asks, “Is this the manner of fasting I wish, of keeping a day of penance: That a man bow his head like a reed and lie in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?” (58:5).

God corrects our faulty definition. To truly fast, we need to make it a part of our everyday lives by the way we treat others. Fasting isn’t just what happens during Lent. “This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: … Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless” (vv. 6–7).

For all of us, Lent is a time to reevaluate how we are following God each and every day.

—Joyce E. A. Russell, PhD, The Helen and William O’Toole Dean, Villanova School of Business

Are you acting the way God wants you to act? Or are you doing what is easy?
Then your light shall rise in the darkness. (Is 58:10)
My grandmother was our matriarch, fount of wisdom, legendary negotiator and authority on cast-iron skillets. One of twelve children and born during the Depression, she was married young (it is forbidden to discuss at what age) to a marine. No wonder her patience was unyielding—with one exception. The speediest way to rile Betty Hickman was to point your finger at others.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God provides a lesson in Love Thy Neighbor. Using themes of food and hunger, injustice and oppression, He speaks of the damage inflicted when we point fingers. To “remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech” requires that we do more than refrain from finger pointing. It is a call to action to rebuild what is broken. God gives us not only the perfect handbook (works of mercy) to fulfill His great commandment but also the promise of restoration and renewal in our hearts, our community, our world.

—Melissa Hickman Bailey ’20 MPA

What practical steps can you take to love your neighbor?
The same Lord is Lord of all. (Rom 10:12)
As I held our first-born in the hospital room in late 2020, I reflected on what it means to say that this is “my” son. “Mine” didn’t apply to him the same way that it applied to “my” phone or “my” car. In those early-morning moments, I began to appreciate how Declan was teaching me a new way to relate to the world: Rather than showing possession, “mine” helped me see the God-given nature of our relationship. Recognizing that giftedness made me want to do everything I could to encourage his flourishing.

I think that our Lenten practices invite us into a similar way of relating to all of creation. Instead of harmful kinds of “mine-ing,” part of what we are called to in prayer, fasting and almsgiving is to say to God with our whole lives: “All of this is Yours.”

—Mat Verghese ’18 MA, Campus Minister for Liturgy

Which parts of your life can you entrust more to God’s providential care?
I was ... a stranger and you welcomed me. (Mt 25:35)
In this third Lenten season since the start of the pandemic, the fatigue we are all feeling has truly set in. However, these years have shown the necessity and truth behind the words “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” During this time, this love has been shown by our desire to care for those we can see in our own communities and those who are farther away. We choose to wear a mask, get vaccinated, stay home when needed and think of others before we act.

These small actions of love don’t go unnoticed, especially by families like mine. I’m the parent of a medically complex child, and he has represented, in many ways, the “least” described in Matthew’s Gospel. During these trying times, when our son has been more vulnerable and at risk than many, we have relied on the love of our neighbors, known and unknown, to help keep him safe and carry our family through.

—Ashley Chiarello Stewart ’08 VSB

Who can you be a “neighbor” to this week?
Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Mt 6:8)
Words mean things.

Every section of the Liturgy of the Word today focuses on the power of communication—not only on the words (or Word), but on the intent that comes with the words. The word of God animates and enriches the world because he deemed it so. The cries of the poor reach God, as do our praises. The word of God feeds and sustains us. In the Gospel, Jesus instructs us not to “babble like the pagans,” filling the air with indiscriminate phrases and quid-pro-quo promises in hopes of bending the Divine will. “Your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Mt 6:7–8).

Intent, attentiveness, effort, resolve: These transform a need into a prayer. They transform preoccupation into conversation. We are humble participants in a conversation that was started by God, and he has an ear for authenticity.

—Chesley Turner ’05 CLAS, ’19 MS, Director, Center for Church Management

Which parts of the liturgy feel different when you participate with intention? What are you thinking when you pray the Our Father?
There is something greater than Jonah here. (Lk 11:32)
Apparently, Jesus hasn’t impressed. Despite his having cured illnesses, cast out demons, raised the dead, calmed the stormy sea, fed the multitudes and taught with authority, the crowd still “seeks a sign” from him. Whereas Jonah’s preaching brought the Ninevites to their knees, Jesus, who clearly “is greater than Jonah,” is failing to reach this “evil generation” (Lk 11:29–32).

Sometimes people today also miss the obvious and demand more evidence: Prove that climate change is real. Show again where systems may be biased. Explain why that homeless person can’t get a job.

Perhaps we don’t need more signs. Perhaps we just need to open our ears to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor—and, with God’s grace, respond with courage and compassion. “A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me” (Ps 51:12).

—Suzi Wentzel ’14 MA, Director of Communication, Mission and Ministry

Do you see signs of God’s presence in the world?
Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. (Mt 7:12)
A long hospital stay several years ago gave me new insights into prayer. I realized that my prayers were often a detailed list of things I wanted God to do for me and how I wanted Him to do them. After repeated setbacks and a realization that I had no control over my outcome, my prayers became much simpler. I prayed for God’s presence and for His will to be done—whatever it was—and I gave thanks. “Letting go and letting God” led to a deep, inner peace that is difficult to describe.

Queen Esther’s prayer came from deep within her soul. It came from a humble acknowledgement that only God could help her and from the faith that God would answer her. Jesus’ comforting words encourage us to ask God for what we need, and to have confidence that He will hear us and give us what is good for us.

—John Bangert ’76 CLAS

How can I do better at letting go and letting God?
Go first and be reconciled with your brother. (Mt 5:24)
A few years ago, I gave up lying to myself for Lent. During my daily Examen, I’d ask: Where did I see myself as greater or less than I am? How did I miss God and hurt others when I was busy lying?

Today’s readings are “high stakes” and “high bar.” We visit the holiness and hierarchy of Ezekiel’s time, alongside the problem of faith leadership colluding with empire in Matthew’s time. In both, accountability and obedience are personal requirements from a God who desires for us to live.

I can feel shame creeping in, that lie that I could never be enough. Then I feel ego, tempting me to believe I’m already above the bar (and how dare anyone question that).

In those lies, I miss God, and I hurt others. Making a new heart and a new spirit isn’t an act of craftsmanship; it’s a commitment to surrender.

—Lindsey B. Carfagna, PhD, Lead Learning Experience Designer, Office of Online Programs

What do you need to let go of and honestly bring to God?
So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt 5:48)
In the First Reading, we hear Moses speaking about God’s covenant with the Israelites. The phrase that resonates with me is “you are to walk in his ways” (Dt 26:17).

A woman came to the parish office where I work, begging for help. She had tested positive for COVID-19 and was asked to leave the shelter-and-recovery program where she was staying. She came to our parish because we are a faith community that helps people.

Shouldn’t we all be helping people since we are to walk in God’s ways? We did not shut the door like the innkeepers in Bethlehem. We opened the door and took care of this woman by providing lodging at a local hotel. How can we, as a society, help those who do not have a way to take care of themselves?

—Karen Victorino, Friend of Villanova

How can you be Christ to others?
Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my chosen Son; listen to him.” (Lk 9:35)
The Transfiguration of Jesus was a glorious moment for Jesus and his disciples. Bright light surrounded him in his brilliant clothing. Hope and light filled the scene on Mount Tabor. On Good Friday, we see Jesus on another mountain, Calvary, facing his crucifixion and death. There were no shining garments or brilliant lights. There was a torn, shredded loincloth on a bleeding and bruised body crowned with thorns. Dark, ominous skies were the backdrop. But in radically different ways, the Transfiguration and the Crucifixion pointed to his glorious resurrection.

During Lent, we are called to these mountains to see Jesus in all his glory and witness his suffering and death. Through our prayer, penance and almsgiving, we acknowledge the hope that points to our resurrection and new life. The Transfiguration encourages us with Jesus’ love and hope as we face the joys and trials of our daily journey. Let us follow the light of Jesus.

—Frank Herron ’63 CLAS

Do you listen to Jesus each day for direction in preparing for your own resurrection?
The measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you. (Lk 6:38)
The readings today help illuminate the gifts of love, patience and mercy that God has for us. Something striking about the First Reading is how irrational sin is. Daniel talks about how Israel knows the commandments laid out by God and yet, despite this, still sins against God. Why?

Often it is easy to place our trust in our pride rather than in God. As creatures made by God in His image and likeness, we are created with an internal compass already pointing toward God. We are made to be loving and to be merciful, as our Creator is loving and merciful. However, rather than search internally for this compass, we often just look away toward others in judgment and condemnation.

Resist that temptation. Pride leaves no room for Christ. Lent is a time to find that compass, embrace humility and accept the infinite gift of God’s love in our lives.

—Joseph Citera, Assistant Director for Campus Programs, Student Involvement

Do you allow God to be your “magnetic north”?
Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow. (Is 1:18)
I’ll bet the scribes and Pharisees did not see themselves as hypocrites. In fact, I’ll bet they probably saw themselves as role models. Maybe that’s why they called such attention to their piety. They may have thought that by taking places of honor and being the center of attention, they could provide a better example to the people. “See how hard I’ve worked at following the law? See how I am rewarded?” They were secure in their righteousness and felt entitled to the “good things of the land” (Is 1:19) because they followed the law.

Jesus redirects our attention. There is more to faith than following the law. We should live our faith so that we carry other people’s burdens, not add to them. To cultivate a servant’s heart, to make justice our aim, we have to get proximal to the victims of injustice. They are our brothers and sisters.

—Maura O’Hare Hill ’93 CLAS

How close are you to the poor, to victims of injustice? How can you help to carry their burden?
The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.
(Mt 20:28)
Today’s readings remind us of our obligation to serve and protect the poor and vulnerable in our local and global communities: “Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant” (Mt 20:26). We are reminded that we are beneficiaries of God’s love and protection and must work to pass that love and protection to others. These readings align with Laudato si’, specifically the commitment to respond to the cry of the poor.

This Lent, I encourage you all to do something every day to respond to the cry of the poor. There are many initiatives here at Villanova that give students, faculty, staff and friends opportunities to serve the vulnerable. On days when active participation is not practical, do something to educate yourself about migrants, refugees or children at risk.

If we are to emulate the life of Jesus, we must be servant leaders who understand the needs of those we serve.

—Michelle M. Kelly, ’94 FCN, ’12 PhD, Associate Professor, Nursing

Whom do you feel called to serve? How can you get started?
Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD. (Jer 17:7)
At first, I have difficulty relating to the rich man in Luke’s parable. I don’t think of myself as wearing expensive clothing or eating sumptuous meals; I give money and groceries to various charities. However, *Laudato si’* challenges me to recognize my great abundance compared to almost everyone else in the world—not just the needy and marginalized in my own community, but the migrants, refugees and impoverished groups everywhere on the earth.

Are my donations mere scraps off my table, or am I truly sharing my many blessings, including not only my tangible wealth but also my mindful actions, lifestyle choices and advocacy in promoting meaningful change and sustainability for all?

This Lent, may we all accept the challenge to hear the cry of the poor and live in greater solidarity with our impoverished brothers and sisters.

—*Deborah Morris Hastings*, Friend of Villanova

*What changes can you prayerfully make to live in greater solidarity with the poor and vulnerable of the world?*
Finally, he sent his son to them. (Mt 21:37)
The Word today calls us to reflect on how we live as members of our family of origin, our faith communities and our world. Who are the privileged and who are the marginalized? Are we brothers and sisters? The Word challenges us to “metanoia” (spiritual conversion).

In the story from Genesis, Joseph, the dreamer, is sold into slavery by his own brothers because they are jealous of his being the favored, gifted and youngest one; they do not love as “brothers.” In the Gospel parable told by Jesus as he challenges the religious authorities, the vineyard farmers seize, beat, stone and kill for their own gain and do not love as sisters and brothers. Jealously drives them to kill the heir, their “brother.”

The kingdom will be given to those who live as brothers and sisters! We pray with the psalmist as we beg for mercy: “Remember the marvels the Lord has done.”

—Beth Hassel, PBVM, DMin, Director, Center for Faith and Learning

Are you authentically sister or brother in your family of origin, your faith community and your world?
I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. (2 Sm 7:14)
In today’s Gospel, Joseph is presented with an impossible situation: believe that his virginal bride has conceived a child by the Holy Spirit and marry her, or set her aside and expose her to the shame and punishment certain to be directed her way. Caught between these two improbable choices, Joseph dreams of an angel, who urges him to take Mary as his wife, despite everything.

Mary must have been frightened when she considered the consequences of telling Joseph the truth. At the same time, Joseph must have been deeply hurt by this news, enough to consider divorce. But Joseph chooses to step into the unknown with Mary, putting aside all expectations of the day and his personal pride. Joseph’s story reminds us that God’s work is often quiet, calling us to let go of convention, to protect the vulnerable and to let love guide our path forward.

—Liz Remelius,
Program Coordinator, College of Professional Studies

How is God working quietly in your life?
He crowns you with kindness and compassion. (Ps 103:4)
In Exodus, we see that God hears the cry of his afflicted and suffering people. Through Moses, He will rescue them. The psalm reiterates that the Lord is kind and merciful. As He did for Moses and Israel, the Lord will do for us, pardoning our sins, healing our ills, rescuing us. Paul cautions that God’s mercy will not protect those who do not follow his ways. “Whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall” (1 Cor 10:12).

The Gospel echoes Paul. Jesus warns us that if we don’t repent, we will perish. Yet, even with these bleak predictions, Jesus holds out hope. God continues to hear the cry of his people, nurturing us the way the gardener does the fig tree that is slow to bear fruit. He is the God of Second Chances, if only we will take advantage of what He is always offering.

—Patricia L. Rizzo ’96 MA, University Advancement

Is there a Moses in your life, leading you from suffering and back to the Lord?
Send forth your light and your fidelity. (Ps 43:3)
When I was 11 years old in 2003, my mom discovered a lump. After many appointments and tests, she learned that she had breast cancer. She had no idea this lump would lead to chemotherapy, radiation treatments and multiple surgeries. It ultimately resulted in a very tough year for her and her family. By summer 2004, she was cancer free.

In the reading from 2 Kings, Naaman, a Syrian, is also on a difficult journey to be cured—of leprosy. Naaman thinks that if he can see the prophet of Israel, he will immediately be cured. When he does finally meet him, Elisha tells him to bathe in the Jordan seven times. With reluctance, Naaman eventually does what he is told and is freed from his illness.

Jesus endured suffering to free all of us from sin and make us “clean.” He trusted in God’s plan for him and rose up triumphant.

—Hope Megan ’15 FCN

How does your faith sustain you when the journey is full of unknowns?
Deal with us in your kindness and great mercy. (Dn 3:42)
A theme that is present in all of today’s readings is mercy, which fits perfectly with the Lenten season because we are being called to be especially mindful of the gifts of God’s grace and mercy. The psalmist sings, “Good and upright is the LORD; thus he shows sinners the way” (Ps 25:8).

These gifts can sometimes be challenging for us to receive because the world encourages us to be independent and self-sufficient. Therefore, we must work to humble ourselves so that we can be open to receiving God’s assistance through these freely given gifts.

In his book, *Thoughts in Solitude*, the Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, offers a poignant question that illustrates this struggle: “What is the use of praying if at the very moment of prayer, we have so little confidence in God that we are busy planning our own kind of answer to our prayer?”

—David Walsh ’15 MA, Campus Minister for Sports and Spirituality

*What can you do to become more open to God’s help in your life?*
Whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.

(Mt 5:19)
Today’s readings provide food for thought, right down to the final lines of the passage from Matthew’s Gospel in which Jesus tells us that “whoever breaks one of the least of the commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven” (5:19).

Those words, seemingly straightforward, caused me to stop and think. Is everybody part of the Kingdom of heaven, as the Gospel suggests? Exactly which commandments are involved? The First Reading refers to the “statutes and decrees” taught by Moses (Dt 4:1). The New Testament gives us the two Great Commandments.

One of the values of the reading the Scriptures is that they get us thinking. If we haven’t done so this Lent, maybe we can set aside time to regularly reflect on them, on our relationship with God and on our faith.

—Jim Morgan ’66 CLAS

When and where can you make time for what is most important?
Let us joyfully sing psalms to him. (Ps 95:2)
How often do I realize that my vision is limited? I am more attentive to my needs than yours. My privileged identities allow me to never worry about that regular part of your daily experience. My experience, identities and expectations regularly impact how I see the people and circumstances around me.

In today’s Gospel, the crowd sees Jesus’ healing care and accompaniment of a marginalized person as the work of a darker force. His transforming presence defies their existing framework for God and the world, leading them to denounce the Kingdom of God in their midst. Can this season of Lent be a time to examine the perceptions, biases and expectations that are limiting my ability to hear the cry of the poor and the groans of the earth? What movements of God am I missing or even denouncing because I have not yet been able to recognize them?

—Brian McCabe, ’11 MS, ’19 MA, Associate Director for Outreach and Student Formation, Center for Residential Ministry

Which of your perspectives might God be challenging you to enlarge?
May it be done to me according to your word. (Lk 1:38)
Life in the 21st century can be a sensory overload. However, the words of Isaiah still resonate today if we stop and listen: “The Lord himself will give you a sign” (7:14).

When we allow ourselves to be open to visual, as well as intuitive, signs, we are able to experience new and deeper bonds with one another and the world. While fully listening or observing others, we are also creating a space for them to connect with us.

It is through these connections that we may, like Jesus, “do your will, O God” (Heb 10:7) in the way we live, work, eat and offer support to others in need. Lent is the time to begin a “take on,” not a “give up,” outlook with clearer vision.

—Leeanne Rebic Hay ’80 CLAS

How can you actively listen to others and respond with words and actions to help?
The one who humbles himself will be exalted. (Lk 18:14)
Lent provides another opportunity for us to recognize our sins and ask for God’s forgiveness. In our connected daily lives, it is easy to become consumed with wanting to be more, do more or have more. When we seek God, we can move beyond this way of thinking and understand that what we have is always enough.

At times we might stumble into comparing ourselves with others, looking past our own sins and finding fault with theirs. Today’s Gospel concludes, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk 18:14). The Pharisee’s prayer is righteous, with no admission of sin. In contrast, the tax collector recognizes his sins and humbly asks for God’s mercy.

By understanding when we have sinned and taking action to repent for those sins, we will receive God’s favor and be “justified.”

—Christina Vuocolo ’05 MPA

When you pray, are you more like the Pharisee or the tax collector?
Whoever is in Christ is a new creation. (2 Cor 5:17)
I was once told by a scripture professor that the parable of the Prodigal Son is misnamed. In the end, the story told by Jesus is not really about the son’s prodigality, but ultimately about the father’s lavishness, which “goes all out” to welcome, embrace and restore to life. In the background, however, stands a critique, a question, even a caution that is embodied by the older son: a critique from the stance of faithfulness; a question surrounding merit; and a word that cautions us to love lavishly, that is, selflessly, like the father—not lavishly, that is, selfishly, like either son.

Ultimately, to love like God is to do so with no expectation of return; a love that reimagines motivations of fidelity; a love that isn’t deserved but freely given. And this type of love is poured out in all of our relationships—yes, even with the earth.

—The Rev. Kevin M. DePrinzio, OSA, Vice President, Mission and Ministry

How might I be challenged to rethink the type of lavishness to which I am called, and how might my relationship with the earth’s resources reflect this love?
There shall always be rejoicing and happiness in what I create. (Is 65:18)
Today’s readings pose a contrast for me of God’s limitless power and my human-sized faith.

Along with the prophet, we long for joy and happiness instead of tears and mourning. We rejoice with the psalmist in being rescued by our Lord from our enemies and even death. We feel the desperation of the royal official as he travels nearly twenty miles to beg Jesus to heal his critically ill child, and we witness the fruit of his faith: his son is miraculously healed, the official becomes a believer and his entire household is blessed with the gift of faith.

A prayer often uttered by my mother and frequently found on my own lips is “God, help us.” It is a prayer of faith. Usually when I don’t know how to proceed, it bubbles out of my heart as I recall that God is always with me, ever helping me.

—Susan M. Leighton, Assistant Dean, Academic Programs, College of Professional Studies

When you experience sadness, fear and longing, how are you reminded that God is helping you?
Immediately the man became well, took up his mat, and walked. (Jn 5:8)
Today’s Gospel starts at the temple. From there, life, joy and meaning flow in the person of Christ, who reaches out to the people put in his life who have been rejected and “canceled” by their community. He doesn’t ask for an apology but instead seeks to love the man who is ill and to care for his needs in that moment. It’s also important that Christ heals by missioning him: He tells him to “rise, take up your mat, and walk” (Jn 5:8). He invites him to be on the move and among the people, regardless that it is a sabbath day.

These intricacies of the law don’t matter to Christ as much as the work, the spark of seeking out conversation, of reaching out, of caring for another’s needs. Jesus doesn’t heal through an invitation to worship, offer sacrifice in the temple, or pray more, but to go and to make something beautiful happen.

—Jack Doolin ’25 CLAS

Is Christ calling you to an “action item” as you reflect today? To whom is Christ calling you to reach out in a new way?
The hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God. (Jn 5:25)
I find that questions and answers take us on a journey of inhaling and exhaling breath. Our lungs fill with our questions and settle when we discover our deepest answers. During this fourth week of Lent, as the Lord emphasizes His presence to those of Zion, the reading includes a retort at the most human level: “The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me” (Is 49:14). While we learn that the Lord will cut a path through mountains and restore the land, it is not the sought-after answer.

I tend to wonder, how can God be present within our lives if we cultivate our own answers to the questions we ask of Him? During this Lenten season, how are you listening for the answers to your deepest questions? How can your inhales and exhales hold a key to faith in action within your life?

—Madeline A. Reynolds, Associate Director, Honors Program

How do you react when the Lord’s answer is not the one you were seeking?
I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. (Ex 32:13)
The Israelites have decided that they will craft their own idol to worship, a molten calf, rather than wait any longer for Moses to return. God becomes incensed at their lack of faith and devotion and threatens to destroy them all and give Moses a better group of people to lead. Moses comes to their defense and pleads with God to forgive the Israelites and spare their lives. “So the LORD relented” (Ex 32:14)—a consummate act of love.

I think of how often I have become so impatient or angry at those who have not responded to me, others or life itself with the type of reverence and love I feel is deserved and with the speed I desire. I have created my own “molten calf” in those moments and need to be reminded that I should forgive others their sins just as God has forgiven and continues to forgive mine.

—Carol W. Anthony, Faculty and Coordinator of Student Groups, Center for Peace and Justice Education

Are you slow to show mercy to others? Do you pray to God on their behalf?
The LORD is close to the brokenhearted. (Ps 34:19)
“The wicked said among themselves, ... ‘To us he is the censure of our thoughts; merely to see him is a hardship for us, because his life is not like that of others, and different are his ways’” (Wis 2:1, 14–15).

Because we are different, we can’t even look at each other. The “wicked” say among themselves that he is the censure, but we censure ourselves. We disapprove. We ban books. We hole ourselves away with like-minded people. How can we learn about lives unlike our own if not from reading and listening to other people’s stories?

Today’s my birthday. I’m an April foolish mix of optimism (dad) and worry (mom). Depending on the day, I can dip—or dunk—into either world. Today, I’ll choose optimism (not just because of the buttercream icing).

If the Lord is close to the brokenhearted, then isn’t He close to us all? By extension, we are close to each other. We are connected, even if it doesn’t always feel that way.

—Katie Regan Lenehan, Program Coordinator, Center for Peace and Justice Education

Whose story are you unwilling to hear? How can you connect with that person?
A shield before me is God, who saves the upright of heart. (Ps 7:11)
This excerpt from Jeremiah begins with a disturbingly violent and menacing undertone. Perhaps we can relate to the circumstances. A person has been wronged. Most hurtful: those doing the damage were once trustworthy; now they seek to destroy and obliterate. As a foreshadowing of Good Friday, Jesus is taunted in the Gospel, made to feel unwelcome and inadequate in his hometown of Galilee.

In today’s society, we might describe these events as one person being bullied or gossiped about by a crowd. Maybe we are that one person, hurt most easily by those closest to us. Maybe we are a member of the crowd, lashing out at others to mask our own insecurities or to avoid being the next target. Regardless of who we identify with, we can all receive strength from God, who knows our intents and hearts. As the psalm refrain asserts: “O LORD, my God, in you I take refuge” (Ps 7:2).

—Lisa J. Rodrigues, PhD, Associate Professor, Geography and the Environment

Have you asked God to help you recognize the value in others, especially those closest to you?
I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling. (Phil 3:14)
“Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (Jn 8:7).

Jesus did not tell them not to judge. He did not tell them to dissociate judgment from the infliction of harm. He did not even tell them to dissociate judgment from a display of cruelty.

Instead, he bent down, wrote illegibly in dust and waited for them to finish with their testing questions. He knew they wanted him to fail and dare deny them their murderous sense of law. They were looking to have him put a stone into their hands. He found a way to get them to drop the one they were holding.

—James Wetzel, PhD, Professor of Philosophy and Augustinian Endowed Chair

Why should claiming sinlessness be harder than stoning a woman to death?
In verdant pastures he gives me repose. (Ps 23:2)
When I was growing up, my dad encouraged my siblings and me to memorize psalms, including Psalm 23. The psalmist invites us to reflect on the rich imagery of nature—green pastures, still waters. We are as sheep led by a good shepherd, who comforts and restores us. The shepherd protects us and tells us not to fear for He is with us.

Susanna walks through a dark valley and faces enemies. She is in a garden, the setting in which she is unjustly accused by evil men. Yet, God walks with her and protects her from her enemies. Susanna’s cry for truth bears testimony to the power of our voices. The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor plead for us to defend them against injustice, just as Daniel defended Susanna. May we listen for truth in these cries so that we may uncover injustice and proclaim the goodness and beauty of God’s creation.

—Audra Goodnight, PhD, Assistant Teaching Professor, Ethics Program

Do you attend to the cry of the earth? The cry of the poor?
What I heard from him I tell the world. (Jn 8:26)
“We are disgusted with this wretched food!” How often we complain bitterly about the way things go in our lives. This food is bland. This movie is mediocre. This evaluation is unfair. Sometimes it feels like a punishment from God to be stuck in the banalities of our daily existence.

In the book of Numbers, the Lord reminds the Israelites of His saving power—oddly, by raising up on a pole a bronze serpent, the sign of God’s anger at His people’s ingratitude. However, this serpent is also the mediator of God’s healing and forgiveness. Similarly, in the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM” (8:28). Jesus is the true mediator. He is raised up on a cross as a reminder of both our sinfulness and our salvation. The readings today prompt us to reflect on our idolization of material comfort.

—Elizabeth-Jane McGuire, PhD, Associate Teaching Professor, Augustine and Culture Seminar Program

Can you pinpoint those moments when you want to complain and, instead, remember with gratitude Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross for our sakes?
You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (Jn 8:32)
King Nebuchadnezzar witnesses how the saving power of God rescues the three young men from the fiery furnace. Upon seeing such an astonishing feat, he acknowledges and praises God.

We may not have experienced such dramatic scenes in our life, yet God still acts in and around us, drawing us to Him so that we, too, can acknowledge and praise God. The beauty of nature can be one such way for God to lead us into a contemplative experience, since we believe that the beauty of creation is a mark of the Creator.

If we have the purity of a contemplative gaze, we will recognize the imprint of God in every creature. Hence, we are called to protect our common home because it speaks to us of our Creator.

—The Rev. Carlos Medina, OSA, Friend of Villanova

When have you experienced awe in nature? What impact does your lifestyle have on the earth?
Look to the LORD in his strength; seek to serve him constantly. (Ps 105:4)
“He remembers forever his covenant which he made binding for a thousand generations” (Ps 105:8). With God’s covenant, we have the choice to follow His commandments so that we may have blessings in this world and the next. What exactly does that entail? The easy answer would be to attend Mass or services every week and pray often, but how can we integrate God’s goodness into our everyday lives?

One way I can think of is to reflect on these words spoken by Jesus: “If I glorify myself, my glory is worth nothing; but it is my Father who glorifies me” (Jn 8:54). It’s very good to show ourselves love when we attain a goal such as getting hired by our favorite company or performing well in an extracurricular activity. But if we turn these things back to God and acknowledge His help in all we do, the fruit we bear can be so much more beautiful.

—Angelica Tiffany Garcia ’22 COE

Do you find yourself running to the Lord with thanksgiving, or has it been a while since you intentionally did so?
The LORD is with me, like a mighty champion. (Jer 20:11)
In today’s First Reading, we hear the confidence of Jeremiah as he faces his adversaries: “The LORD is with me, like a mighty champion” (20:11). In the Gospel, we hear the confidence of Jesus as he faces his opponents, who pick up rocks to stone him: “The Father is in me and I am in the Father” (10:38).

I think what gave Jeremiah and Jesus confidence was that they recognized all the ways God had worked in their lives. Consequently, they felt assured God was not going to abandon them now. Isn’t that how we have confidence in our family and friends? We have experienced their trust, understanding, forgiveness, encouragement and love.

Next weekend, as we celebrate Easter, we will renew our baptism promises: that we believe in God, reject sin, reject the glamour of evil and refuse to be mastered by sin. We can be confident that God will be with us.

—The Rev. Bill Waters, OSA, ’68 MA

How have you seen God working in your life? Does that give you confidence that God will help you live out your baptismal promises?
He will turn their mourning into joy. (Jer 31:13)
Scattered, fragmented, broken. These are words that come to mind just as easily when experiencing our society today as when reading the passage from Ezekiel. Although it is easy to despair, feeling like we are in a never-ending cycle of crisis, God reminds us that He is hope. He is unity. And He is peace. “There shall be one shepherd for them all” (37:24).

Our collective challenge is to acknowledge Him amidst the loneliness, isolation and struggle we may individually face—to make time to listen and reach out, to both God and one another, so that we might move forward to the promise of new life.

—Denise Hanes Downey, PhD, CPA, ’05 VSB, ’08 MA, KPMG Endowed Professor in Accounting

In which situations can you be an instrument of God’s healing, hope and peace?
He humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death. (Phil 2:8)
Jesus made three recorded visits to Jerusalem. When he was brought to the temple as an infant, Simeon prophesied that Jesus would deliver God’s people and that a sword would pierce Mary’s soul. When he was twelve, Jesus made the Passover pilgrimage and stayed behind in the temple because he had to be in his Father’s house.

Today as we commemorate his final visit, we see how the earlier visits reflect truths about the mystery of our salvation, Mary’s sorrow and Jesus’ thirst to do the Father’s will. We who are happy to be in the crowd that acclaims his triumphant entry must not be surprised to find ourselves in the crowd that calls for his condemnation. By seeing ourselves among the guilty, we are humbled and open to God’s mercy.

Jesus entered Jerusalem fully mindful of the consequences. As we journey with him, may we be filled with zeal to do the Father’s will.

—The Rev. Deji Dada ’20 MS

*Do you feel connected to the sacrifice of Christ? Do you welcome the pain and strife that can come with transformation and growth?*
I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice. (Is 42:6)
Isaiah speaks to a despondent Jewish people in exile in Babylon. Their kingship has ended and their temple has been destroyed. They are looking for assurances that God will deliver them once again. The “servant” whom Isaiah mentions will “bring forth justice to the nations” (42:1). Under God’s law, just behavior requires not only honesty and integrity, but care for the vulnerable—the “fatherless,” “the widow” and the “resident alien” (Dt 10:18).

One of the major themes of Pope Francis’ ecology encyclical, *Laudato si’,* is to promote eco-justice. This focuses on things like the disproportionate impact that overconsumption has on the vulnerable members of our society. For example, studies find that, globally, poorer communities tend to be exposed to a higher concentration of air pollutants.

Perhaps Isaiah’s words can inspire us to ask ourselves what we can do to reduce pollution caused by our own overconsumption.

—Pat Campbell Jr. ’85 VSB, ’88 JD

*Which consumer behavior can you change to promote ecological justice?*
For you are my hope, O LORD; my trust, O God, from my youth. (Ps 71:5)
Today’s Gospel challenges me. I often find myself judging Judas (secretly plotting his betrayal) and Peter (assuring Jesus he’ll lay down his life for him) for their brazen attempts to appear better than they are. However, I also find their views of themselves to be very human.

Jesus reacts to the falsehoods told by Peter and Judas with compassion. He gently speaks truth into their situations at hand. I imagine he looks them in the eye and speaks clearly, but not in a condemning fashion. And he speaks to their hearts.

God knows us better than we know ourselves. God can see that we sometimes may need more time to grow, to change. Like Judas, I do not want to admit to the areas in myself where I am betraying others or telling falsehoods. Like Peter, I often find myself needing to relearn how to trust in the patient work of God.

—Abigail Gorman ’21 MA, Campus Minister for Service and Justice Experiences

God, what do You see in my heart? Can you gently speak truth into my current situation, the current state of my heart?
The Lord GOD is my help. (Is 50:7)
Waiting for my flight recently, I noticed four people standing nearby, speaking in sign language and paying close attention to one another. I watched in fascination as their fingers moved rapidly, speaking a language I do not know. As I watched them, I found myself listening more intently to the other people around me, talking on cell phones or with travel companions, and I reflected on my ability to hear.

Isaiah reminds us that “morning after morning [the Lord GOD] opens my ear that I may hear” (50:4). We hear all kinds of sounds around us every day—people talking, music playing, machines humming—often as background noise. To listen, though, seems to me to be more intentional. Listening is tuning in to what we hear, paying attention so that we can catch a deeper message.

This week, we hear the story of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection. Can we listen attentively?

—Madeline Bialecki ’82 CLAS, ’93 MA

Does noise in your life keep you from hearing—and listening to—God’s voice?
When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, “It is finished.”
And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.

—Jn 19:30