2020 Lenten Reflections
from the Villanova Community
“Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2).

As we begin this holy season, our gaze is fixed on Easter and the glory of Jesus’ Resurrection. But we should also be immersed in the “now.” It is in this moment that God is loving us, guiding us, healing us.

We hope these brief reflections help everyone to be attuned to the Divine Presence, eager to fulfill the desire of the psalmist: “Oh, that today you would hear His voice” (Ps 95:7).

May God bless our Lenten journey!

Your Friends in Mission and Ministry
We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5:20)
As we begin Lent, we might be tempted to ask, “What must I do to gain God’s love and mercy?” The true, startling, unbelievable answer is, “Nothing.” We can do nothing to earn or merit God’s love and forgiveness. They are divine gifts that are showered on us without conditions or limits.

Precisely because we realize that we are loved and forgiven through no merit of our own, we can show our gratitude by imitating and testifying to God’s love. We strive to reveal God’s love and mercy by loving and forgiving as God does. Worship, then, is an act of gratitude, not an online purchase.

A more Christian question would be: “What can I do to better reveal God’s love and mercy in our world?” Today our faith invites us to hear the cry of the earth and of the poor—to remember that we are dust of the earth and that the earth is our common home. It belongs to and is meant for all. We are called to share with everyone what has been freely given.

―The Rev. Arthur Purcaro, OSA, Assistant Vice President, Mission and Ministry

FEBRUARY 26 | ASH WEDNESDAY
JL 2:12-18   PS 51:3-6B, 12-14, 17   2 COR 5:20-6:2   MT 6:1-6, 16-18
I have set before you life and death. ... Choose life. (Dt 30:19)
We have just begun another Lenten journey. This is the second of the 40 days (and six Sundays) we have to repent and prepare to receive at Easter our most special guest, the Risen Jesus Christ.

Moses gives clear directions for the journey. He foretells “life and prosperity” for those who obey the Lord, and he assures them of a beautiful reward: “to live and grow numerous” (Dt 30:15-16). I suggest that those of us who have been blessed with children and grandchildren can especially appreciate the gift of life of which Moses speaks. “Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the LORD, your God” (vv. 19-20).

Jesus asks us to “go all in” with Him on this journey by carrying our crosses daily. He explains just what such a commitment will entail. “Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Lk 9:24). Let’s commit ourselves today and make our way to heaven with the joy promised to us since the days of Moses.

—James P. Magee ’75 CLAS
This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly. (Is 58:6)
Apparently, the tendency of self-righteousness to lead people into thinking that they are “deserving of more” and “more deserving” was as much a problem in Isaiah’s time as in ours. Just as strong is its tendency to obscure one’s culpability in mistreating the vulnerable—a few good deeds or a bit of fasting repairs the wound.

Fasting can mean making personal sacrifice, but not for some selfish reward, as through an exchange, this for that. Nor is it a Spartan test of will: “Let’s see if I can make it 40 days without (fill in the blank).”

Fasting is a self-emptying, allowing us to be filled with God’s guidance. It’s a clearing away of distractions that prevent us from hearing and answering the cry of the poor, the groaning of a world in pain. It’s a sacrifice of praise, recognizing how God fills us with love. If we grasp this and live accordingly, “then shall [our] light break forth like the dawn” (Is 58:8), and all will know God’s blessing. If we can attempt this self-emptying, we will participate in the Way of the Cross, in the fullness of the mystery of the God of Life.

—Gregory Grimes, PhD, ’05 CLAS, Continuing Faculty, Theology and Religious Studies

FEBRUARY 28 | FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY
IS 58:1-9A PS 51:3-6B, 18-19 MT 9:14-15
If you remove from your midst oppression, ... then light shall rise for you in the darkness. (Is 58:9b-10)
I hate going to the doctor. I will try every home remedy and over-the-counter drug before finally caving. The funny thing is that I think we tend to do the same thing in our spiritual lives. Our relationships are rocky, we feel lonely, we lack energy or confidence, we are exhausted from work or school, and we’re struggling to cope. Yet we refuse to go to the doctor. We vent to our friends and our moms. We convince ourselves that we can just push through and it will pass.

But we need a doctor. The doctor. Jesus is at our service 24/7. Although it’s so easy to hit our knees, we pridefully convince ourselves that we do not need help solving our problems. Other people who don’t know how to manage time or talk through their issues—they need the doctor. Not us.

Jesus came for all of us. We all need His assistance. We can try every homemade or store-bought remedy, or we can simply stop for a moment, lift our hearts to Him and tell Him our symptoms. Jesus will prescribe us the medication we need.

—Cecilia Spesia ’21 CLAS
The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve. (Mt 4:10)
Man was created in the image of God. He enjoyed holiness but not for long. He was tempted by the serpent and had his purity tainted.

After His baptism, Jesus, the Son of God, went into the wilderness and fasted for 40 days. One would expect that God in human flesh would be too radiant after these days of prayer for the evil one to approach, yet He was tempted three times.

It is essential that we be aware of our dignity as creatures made in God’s image and also our vulnerability and exposure to challenges and ways that are against the path Christ has traced for us. Lent offers us a great opportunity to sanctify ourselves and build our resistance to the lure of enticements and the glitter of temptations.

During these holy days, may God create a clean heart within us and give us back the joy of His salvation for those times we have traded it for temporal pleasures. May He give a willing spirit to His beloved children and the grace to proclaim His praise (Ps 51:12, 14, 17).

—The Rev. Deji Dada, Graduate Student, Church Management
For I was hungry, and you gave me food. (Mt 25:35)
Aristotle wrote that one finds happiness and fulfillment “by loving rather than in being loved.” It seems he was onto something, as his philosophy was affirmed in today’s Gospel.

The difference, of course, is that, beyond just happiness and fulfillment, Christ’s followers who honor Him through service and self-sacrifice, translating His mercy for us into mercy toward others, will also receive eternal blessings.

A few months back, I had “one of those days.” You know the ones—where the stress builds up, you have to make one hard decision after another, and even the simplest choice feels burdensome. My reaction was to look for a relaxing (read “indulgent”) way to alleviate my anxiety. A nap? Dinner out?

God provides a better way to find meaning, peace and joy. By offering ourselves in service to “one of these least” (Mt 25:40), we show God our love for Him. I ask myself, “How can I live my life wide open, regularly and freely translating God’s love into action?” We may need to embrace interruption or discomfort to do this, but it will not compare to the joy we will receive in turn.

—Ivy Wang, Operations Coordinator, College of Professional Studies
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done. (Mt 6:10)
Between the hustle and bustle of work and the technology that surrounds us everywhere we go, it is easy to push aside self-care and self-love—or to equate loving ourselves with going to a spa and indulging in chocolate. These notions oppose the traditional “Lenten promise” to be drawn to the needs of others. Ultimately, they benefit only the self.

If we alter our mindsets and start today to exercise self-care in a stress-free, sustainable and healthy way, we can be more present and accessible for others. Adapting examples from the Bible, one can picture David composing music on his lunch break; Rebecca seeking help from her therapist, the Lord (Gn 25:22); and Jesus, who was always in demand, finding the time and space to pray.

Doing something spiritually, physically and mentally for yourself does not have to be difficult or selfish. It will bring you back to living in the moment, for yourself and for others. We include ourselves when, as Jesus taught, we call upon “Our Father,” pray for “our daily bread” and ask that “our trespasses” be forgiven (Mt 6:9-12).

—Marissa Kurt ’20 MA
A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. (Ps 51:12)
Today’s readings led me to pray about the things I need to change in my life:

Lord, help me to be more like Jonah, that I may submit to Your will and have the courage to call out evil and injustice regardless of personal risk.

Help me to be more like the people of Nineveh, that I may hear the call to repentance and act on it rather than harden my heart.

Help me to be more like the king of Nineveh, to recognize that salvation comes from Your grace and to seek your boundless mercy for forgiveness.

Help me to remember that the life, death and teachings of Your Son, Jesus, are timeless, a sign for this age and every age. Help me to hear His words, reflect on them, and act on them.

Create in me a clean heart. Amen.

—John Bangert ’76 CLAS

MARCH 4 | WEDNESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT
JON 3:1-10  PS 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19  LK 11:29-32
Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (Mt 7:7)
When I asked the Holy Spirit to inspire my reading of today’s Scripture passages, a story of God’s goodness came to light. I saw how, in the First Reading, the anguish of Queen Esther’s prayer for God’s assistance receives its answer in the Responsorial Psalm: “When I called, you answered me; you built up strength within me” (138:3).

In the Gospel, Jesus says to His disciples, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7). We have it from our Savior. If we ask for what we truly need, God, in His infinite goodness, can never deny us.

When my high school students pepper me with questions, even in my flawed humanity, I can’t deny them what they really need: my attention, showing them that they are seen, known and loved. God in His goodness won’t deny us, either. This Lent, as we journey toward Easter and new life, let us approach God confidently in prayer and ask for what we truly need, assured of His faithfulness and His deep desire to show us how intimately we are seen, known and loved.

—Mary Grace Mangano ’14 CLAS

MARCH 5 | THURSDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT
EST C:12, 14-16, 23-25 PS 138:1-3, 7C-8 MT 7:7-12
Be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Mt 5:24)
We are made in the image and likeness of God. Yet, the Lord’s ways are not our ways. We go astray. We allow our weaknesses and shortcomings to get the best of us. We are sinful. But God’s kindness and mercy are abundant. He forgives our transgressions time and time again. God continually invites us to reflect, repent and reconcile—quite simply, to start anew. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, nor does He hold our iniquities against us.

In the Lord’s Prayer, we pray that our trespasses will be forgiven “as we forgive those who trespass against us.” We are called to be Godlike. We are not to be angry with our brother. We are not to hold grudges. Before we bring our gifts to the altar, we are to reconcile with our sister. This is not easy to do. It can be difficult to let go. Our memories can be long. Pride can take hold of us. Yet, forgiveness is at the heart of today’s readings and, indeed, the Gospel message.

Perhaps this Lent we can commit to forgiveness. Let us pray for the strength to be abundant in kindness and mercy.

—James Trainer, PhD, Associate Vice President, Strategic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness

MARCH 6 | FRIDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT
EZ 18:21-28  PS 130:1-8  MT 5:20-26
He is to be your God and you are to walk in his ways. (Dt 26:17)
“So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). These words at the end of today’s Gospel always strike me as odd. Does Jesus expect us to be perfect? If humans can be as perfect as God, why did Jesus come at all?

But like love, success and happiness, the perfection that Jesus calls us to is different from that of the world. In our culture, perfection means never making a mistake. That is why perfectionism is not generally a positive quality; it causes us to obsess over that which will never be ours and to pridefully fear criticism or correction.

God’s perfection does not obsess over mistakes. It is not rooted in fear of failure. Jesus teaches us that perfection is loving our enemies. It is loving the people around us who do not or cannot return our love. It is perfect love. Simple, but not easy. Yet Jesus reminds us that “for God, all things are possible” (Mt 19:26). Our perfection doesn’t come from ourselves, but from Perfection Himself. Ask Him to help us be perfect. Ask Him to help us love.

—Shea Szpila ’21 MA

MARCH 7 | SATURDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT
DT 26:16-19   PS 119:1-2, 4-5, 7-8   MT 5:43-48
Bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God. (2 Tm 1:8b)
God “loves justice and right; of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full” (Ps 33:5). “May your mercy, LORD, be upon us as we put our trust in you” (Ps 33:22).

Justice, kindness, strength and trust: what wonderful gifts! I often think about these gifts and the joy that comes from being part of a community that has received them. To these let us add forgiveness, as none of us deserves the forgiveness that Jesus offers us at all times.

It is a forgiveness that looks beyond our human failings, which Jesus understands, as he was human. It is underscored by the ever-present love with which Jesus accepts each of us, now and always. It is manifested in all good around us, good to which we are sometimes blind. Too often we focus on what is wrong rather than how much is right. This goodness comes from God and is everlasting.

We trust in God to love us always. It is trust that we need to bestow on others if we are to become Christlike. “Lord, it is good that we are here” (Mt 17:4).

—Rosario “Bud” Drago, Assistant Professor of Practice, Marketing and Business Law
For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you. (Lk 6:38)
Jesus tells us, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36). Stop judging. Stop condemning. Forgive. Give gifts.

This is what St. Frances of Rome, whose feast we celebrate today, did. During a time of civil war, church conflict and an outbreak of the plague, she served the poor, opened a hostel, founded a religious community and inspired others.

Our times seem similar in many ways. We too are called to do good and to serve. St. Augustine said, “You say the times are bad, the times are troublesome! Live good lives and the times will be good. We make our times; such as we are, so will be our times.”

Yes, there is trouble in our times. “We have sinned, been wicked and done evil” (Dn 9:5). But our great and awesome God is slow to anger and rich in compassion. We who have received mercy must show mercy to others. Let us look for the positive in others and in our times. Let us help alleviate pain and suffering. This is the journey of Lent: to become better, to help others become better and thus to make our times better!

—The Rev. **Bernard Scianna**, OSA, PhD, Director, Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life

**MARCH 9 | MONDAY, SECOND WEEK OF LENT**

**DN 9:4b-10**  **PS 79:8-9, 11, 13**  **LK 6:36-38**
Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow. (Is 1:18)
Jesus urges us to make Him the center of our lives. He says of the scribes and the Pharisees, “Their works are performed to be seen. … They love places of honor …, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation ‘Rabbi’” (Mt 23:5-7). While they are supposed to be the exemplars of the Jewish faith, their hearts have drifted away from God.

St. Thomas Aquinas said that humans typically have four “substitutes” to try to satisfy our eternal longings: wealth, power, pleasure and honor. All of these, of course, fall short. Only Jesus Christ can fulfill our deepest longings.

Lent is an excellent opportunity to examine our conscience. Which attachments prevent God from acting within us? How can we refocus to make Jesus the center of our lives, to make communion with Him our first, greatest and uncompromising priority?

Servant of God Walter Ciszek would pray, “As I seek to surrender to the Father’s will, may I come to trust that He will do everything for me.” May we purify our hearts to let the Lord ignite us with the fire of His love, and may we allow Him to transform us into great saints.

—Thomas Callahan ’21 MSA

MARCH 10 | TUESDAY, SECOND WEEK OF LENT
IS 1:10, 16-20   PS 50:8-9, 16B-17, 21, 23   MT 23:1-12
Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant. (Mt 20:27)
“I hear the whispers of the crowd, that frighten me from every side” (Ps 31:14)—not whispers these days, but thundering noise from radios, televisions, phones. As a mother of two teenage girls, my default is often worry, and, wow, it is difficult to turn down the volume. In fact, my eyes landed first on what’s frightening about today’s readings: snares, plots, pit-building. It took me longer to see the “light,” muddling through darkness before finding God’s kindness: “In your hands is my destiny, rescue me” (v. 16).

If I were allowed only one prayer, it would be for my daughters’ safety and happiness. I understand the instinct of the mother of Zebedee’s sons to muscle right up to Jesus and ask him to command that they be given places of honor. “You do not know what you’re asking,” says Jesus. “No, I do not,” say I! I’m certain that I get the questions wrong on most days.

What I understand from the Gospel is that we do what we can—we drink from the chalice; we strive for light and kindness. Maybe we question less and connect more: Find a person in that crowd, smile and say hello.

—Katherine Regan Lenehan, Program Coordinator, Office for Mission and Ministry
Blessed are those who trust in the LORD. (Jer 17:7)
Reflect on the main characters in Jesus’ parable: Lazarus and the rich man. Lazarus (Greek for “God has helped”) lived a difficult life. He was poor, covered with sores, and in need of the rich man’s food scraps to survive. Despite these challenges, Lazarus trusted and hoped in the Lord. When he died, he was granted immediate entry into heaven and placed next to Abraham.

The rich man valued earthly items. He didn’t trust the Lord and realized the error of his ways only after his death. Despite the rich man’s plea to save his family, Abraham tells him that their trust in God is so eroded that even if the rich man were to come back to life, he wouldn’t be able to save them from damnation.

How can we be more like Lazarus and less like the rich man? When we feel helpless or hopeless, do we place all of our trust in the Lord? As we reflect, let’s consider the quote from the First Reading: “I, the LORD, alone probe the mind and test the heart, to reward everyone according to his ways, according to the merit of his deeds” (Jer 17:10).

—Maj. Regina Thorp, RN, CEN, ’06 FCN

MARCH 12 | THURSDAY, SECOND WEEK OF LENT
JER 17:5-10    PS 1:1-4, 6    LK 16:19-31
Israel loved Joseph ...; and he had made him a long tunic. (Gn 37:3)
Today’s First Reading invites us to consider what pushes Joseph’s brothers to such extreme and violent actions. Jacob, the father, loves Joseph “best”; because of this preference, the brothers’ hatred grows until they plot to kill him. Judah proposes that they sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites, a plan that wins out in the end.

Joseph’s brothers succumb to their internal wounds of not feeling loved enough. Their comparison of the fatherly affection Joseph receives versus the lack of love that they feel gives birth to unacknowledged grief, which grows into anger, resentment, hatred and betrayal. Blinded by these strong emotions, the brothers rationalize that the only way to heal their lack of love is to eliminate Joseph—a decision that, rather than easing their suffering, contributes to it.

What is keeping me from being the most loving version of myself this Lent? How has comparison to the gifts or worthiness of others blinded me to the violence within my own heart? What can I do today to be more attentive to these walls within my heart so that I can begin to dismantle them?

—Michelle Sherman ’12 MA, Campus Minister for Retreats
He ran to his son [and] embraced him. (Lk 15:20)
Though Lent is the Church’s season of penance, this does not mean that it is a season of self-inflicted punishment. Rather, it is a season of mercy. As the USCCB puts it, “Penance is an experience of the gift of God’s boundless mercy.” Nothing we can do on our own can remove or atone for our sins. Christ has already achieved the ultimate work of atonement on the cross. Ours is “the God who removes guilt” and who “cast[s] into the depths of the sea all our sins” (Mi 7:18-19).

Hence, in penance, all we can do is repeat the words of the prodigal son: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son” (Lk 15:21). We trust in God’s mercy to remove our sins and begin the work of healing in us and in our world. The various penances that we take up for Lent, therefore, are instances of God’s grace and mercy. They help us to heal from the wounds of sin that distort our true selves hidden in Christ.

Let us willingly embrace our penances, recognizing them as instruments of God’s mercy.

—Timothy Long ’20 CLAS, Head Resident Assistant, Office of Residence Life
The water I shall give will become ... a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (Jn 4:14)
A tired Jesus sits by a well in Samaria. His disciples have gone to get lunch, leaving him to wait in what is, essentially, enemy territory. When a woman approaches the well, she is startled to be drawn into conversation about her faith with one who, by right of the ethnic, religious and gendered restrictions of the day, should have ignored her.

When she asserts to Jesus that she knows the Messiah is coming, it is to this woman, an outsider, that Jesus reveals His messianic identity: “I am he” (Jn 4:26). Through the sharing of a cup and conversation, boundaries are broken down. The woman is welcomed into communion with Jesus, and, by her witness, others follow.

By approaching an unnamed, marginalized woman, Jesus models God’s willingness to meet anyone anywhere. She is a stranger, living in a hostile land, who follows different religious practices, and Jesus does not care. He identifies her as worthy of love, respect and kindness.

John’s Gospel calls us to this kind of discipleship: one that demonstrates God’s faithful, indiscriminate love by defying the stigmas, misconceptions and differences that put boundaries between us and the world.

—Liz Remelius, Program Coordinator, College of Professional Studies
Then will I go in to the altar of God, the God of my gladness and joy. (Ps 43:4)
The thought that jumps out to me for today’s Gospel is that the people of Jesus’ hometown were frustrated with His teaching and almost wanted to put Him to a test. They were suspicious of this familiar person who grew up among them, and they seemed to challenge Him to perform miracles for them to prove Himself. How could this hometown boy be the Messiah?

It can be hard for us to see Jesus in those around us sometimes. He can take on completely unexpected forms that are so hard to recognize: the homeless person we pass all the time, the friend giving us advice that we may not want to hear, the coworker who might annoy us a little too much. These are all examples of situations in our everyday life in which God is trying to speak to us and teach us to accept those in our own “land” who may not seem to be just like us. We must learn to see God in everyone we meet, even in the most unlikely places.

This Lent, may we pray to be more accepting of those in our own land who are familiar to us but make us uncomfortable. Perhaps God is challenging us not to drive Him out but to invite Him to stay and be welcome among us in any form.

—Carla Generose Grimm ’97 VSB
Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior. (Ps 25:5)
Happy St. Patrick’s Day! Three weeks ago, we heard the words “Turn from your sins and believe the Good News.” Three weeks from now, we will renew our baptismal promises, proclaiming that we “reject sin, the glamour of evil, and refuse to be mastered by sin.”

I need to turn from the sin of holding grudges. To what end do I go to forgive someone? This is the question Peter asks Jesus. Peter thinks he is being generous in asking if seven times is enough. That is a long way from the accepted norm, “an eye for an eye.” Jesus responds that the answer is even more extreme. It is infinite times.

In the Lord’s Prayer, we ask God to forgive us the same way we forgive others. Do we mean that? St. Augustine says, “When we forgive, we are forgiven. We can say that every day, we can do it every day and it can happen every day.”

As I turn from my sins and prepare to renew my baptismal promises, may I let go of any grudges and forgive others. I will be freer to be a more productive person and certainly a more productive Christian.

—The Rev. Bill Waters, OSA, ’68 MA

MARCH 17 | TUESDAY, THIRD WEEK OF LENT
DN 3:25, 34-43  PS 25:4-5B, 6, 7BC, 8-9  MT 18:21-35
Whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. (Mt 5:19)
Today’s readings speak of rules or instructions given to the faithful. Moses says, “Hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching you to observe” (Dt 4:1). The psalmist refers to the Lord’s command and ordinances. Jesus, who asserts he has not come to abolish the law, says, “Whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:19).

Some individuals view the language of laws as restrictive. However, the Commandments and Beatitudes take on new meaning when viewed as guideposts to light our way on the path of life. Life is filled with many mysteries. The unknown can be a source of great worry, frustration and anxiety. And yet, for Christians, one thing is certain: the way to eternal life! We have been given a road map, a set of directives, to help us on our journey. In fact, Jesus Himself is the way.

While our earthly life may end in death, our ultimate destiny is heaven. Today’s Gospel acclamation affirms that Christ represents the pathway there: “You have the words of everlasting life.” This Lent, may we reflect on how well we use the guideposts we have been given.

—Teresa G. Wojcik, PhD, ’99 MA, Associate Professor, Education and Counseling
He believed, hoping against hope, that he would become “the father of many nations.” (Rom 4:18)
In those days when “Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together” (Mt 1:18), St. Joseph, I imagine, was excited and full of happy anticipation. He had a career and a spouse and was about to start a new life. Would he and his wife have a nice home? A big family? Would their children take over the family business? Were grandkids in the picture?

But things don’t always go as planned. I hear the sigh Joseph let out when he found out Mary was mysteriously pregnant. Then, an angel announced that the child would “save his people from their sins” (v. 21). We have an idea of what that means, but Joseph probably found it baffling.

How often do we think we know where our lives are going? We anticipate what’s coming next and then something unexpected and confusing happens. An illness. A new career opportunity. The loss of a loved one. A responsibility thrust upon us.

When that happened to Joseph, he resisted at first. But eventually he heard God’s call and obeyed. He accepted God’s will and not his own. I pray that I can do the same.

—Thomas P. Umile, PhD, Assistant Teaching Professor, Chemistry
You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Mk 12:31)
Today’s reading hits home for me regarding the reflection and inspiration that the Lenten season can provide. God is beckoning Israel back to Him and “calling them out” on the missteps they have taken. Like any parent, when you need to call your child out on their actions, you need to be specific, which is exactly how the passage unfolds. God tells Israel how they have frustrated Him by looking to false idols and thinking that foreign alliances would save them. If Israel owns its actions and vows to renew its commitment to Him, God will welcome the people into His warmth and greatness, speaking of how Israel will once again “blossom on the vine” (Hos 14:8).

This message speaks to me in many ways. It encourages me to be mindful, to contemplate the unintended consequences of my actions and to be more conscious of distractions that creep into my life (ahem, my smartphone). It also shows the power of owning and learning from my mistakes, letting go of grudges and experiencing forgiveness. Lent gives us the time to be thoughtful and self-aware, to prepare ourselves for a renewal of spirit.

—Meghan Petsko ’21 MA, Director, Graduate Tax Program
The one who humbles himself will be exalted. (Lk 18:14)
Today’s Gospel relates the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the one self-righteous and the other, righteous. It compels us to consider how we stand before God. Am I childlike in God’s eyes, trusting in Him in all things, or do I think I can be independent of the One who created and knows me?

During Lent, it’s prudent to consider how blessed we are and to be more grateful. Ask yourself if you have the attitude of a servant of God, or are you more like an employee who is rewarded by a paycheck for doing a good job?

The First Reading from Hosea is an invitation to return to the Lord. Some days, I forget that God is always with me and has a finger on everything I do. The prophet compares God to the spring rains that are sure to come, the dawn that rises daily and the morning dew. God wants us to be merciful and to know Him.

As we continue through Lent, let’s try to communicate daily with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who know us and want to hear from us.

—Nicole-Bernadette Baker ’86 CLAS
You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. (Eph 5:8)
Darkness and Light. These concepts are fundamental to our lives. In academics, we seek the light of understanding through the darkness of confusion. In our relationships, we seek love and harmony over misunderstanding and conflict. In our spiritual lives, we seek God’s salvation, not death.

We also follow rules designed to lead us to the light. Study. Manage our time. Abide by social-cultural norms. Follow Church teachings. But what happens when the light approaches us suddenly and seems to be in opposition to the rules? We can become uncertain, distrustful, anxious.

I imagine this is how the sons of Jesse and the blind man felt. The former had prepared from birth for the honor of becoming king, yet God selected David, the youngest and least prepared. Work was not to be done on the sabbath, yet Jesus chose to heal the blind man.

Our culture preaches that success can be reached by following certain rules. But God’s light is not subservient to these rules. God made us with the capacity to know His light when we see it. When that happens, be brave. Trust. Act.

—Julie Studer, Assistant Director, Tutoring Services, Falvey Memorial Library

MARCH 22 | FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT
1 SM 16:1B, 6-7, 10-13A  PS 23: 1-6  EPH 5:8-14  JN 9:1-41
There shall always be rejoicing and happiness in what I create. (Is 65:18)
Am I a person of faith? And how deep is that faith? In today’s Gospel, a royal official begs Jesus to come to his home to heal his dying son. This man lives in Capernaum, about 18 miles from Cana. Picture the man traveling, worrying about his son. He believes Jesus is his last hope. After making his plea, Jesus says to him and to us, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe” (Jn 4:48).

I imagine different tones of Jesus’ voice: frustration, resignation, sadness, kindness. The official persists. Jesus then calls him (and us) to a deeper faith. He tells him that his son lives and to go back alone. I think of the official returning home without Jesus by his side. What is changing in his faith life? Jesus challenges the man to believe and to trust in Him more fully, not only in what He does but in who He is. The man needs to let go and allow Jesus to work in his life in a different, unexpected way.

How often that is true for us! May we strive to become a people of deeper faith, who believe without seeing.

—Brian McCaffrey ’89 VSB
Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your mat, and walk.” (Jn 5:8)
After reflecting on the passages for today, I decided to go into Lent with the goal of being more mindful. Although I do not like to think it, I have, at times, been the man at the pool, feeling spiritually ill and crippled, waiting for someone to come and drag me into the water and make room for me within it. The thing I realize, however, is that while I am waiting on the invitation of others, God’s invitation is always there. All I have to do is say yes to His invitation, to become well and experience the fullness of life.

So, this Lent, I am trying to be more mindful of His call. One of my favorite activities is to go on walks around campus, especially early in the morning when everything is quiet. I love being able to breathe in the fresh air and feel that all within me is as peaceful as the environment around me. This Lent I want to take in the fullness of each breath, knowing that God has given me this wonderful life, and that I can experience the fullness and flourishing within it if I accept His life-giving spirit.

—Cathy Nguyen ’23 CLAS
Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.” (Lk 1:38)
God calls Mary to do something she never anticipated. Her first response, being “greatly troubled” (Lk 1:29), sounds like ours when we are faced with a challenging decision: “I think you are mistaken, God. I don’t think I’m up for this task.” God reassures Mary through the messenger. “Do not be afraid! You are filled with the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit will guide you through all challenges ahead. You will have everything you need to help me bring light into the world. What do you say now, Mary?” “May it be done to me according to your word” (v. 38).

Make no mistake. God is calling us too! Sometimes the noise in our lives keeps us from hearing God, but God is persistent, like that old cell phone commercial: “Can you hear me now?” Trust that God has a plan and a call for you. Who will be the messenger today? Where is God asking you to go?

Don’t be afraid. You are not alone. You have God. You have Jesus. You have the Holy Spirit, encouraging you. “You can do this! We can do this! Do you hear me now? What do you say?”

—The Rev. Rob Hagan, OSA, Senior Associate AD/Student-Athlete Welfare, ’87 CLAS
These works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. (Jn 5:36)
Today’s readings have a common thread of the human struggle to believe.

In the passage from Exodus, Moses learns from God that while Moses has been on the mountain, the Israelites have become distraught. Where is Moses; where is God? They need something tangible; they want to see their God. They ask Aaron, and he builds them a molten calf that they worship and call God.

God then tells Moses to leave so that God’s wrath can blaze up against the Israelites. But Moses speaks up for the people, reminding God that He had promised that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. God relents and does not inflict punishment (Ex 32:14).

In John 5:31-47, Jesus recalls the prophetic role of Moses as he urges those who do not believe that He is the Messiah to recognize the truth and have faith. “For if you had believed Moses, you would have believed me, because he wrote about me” (Jn 5:46).

May God strengthen our faith and hope in the eternal life offered us through God’s only Son (Jn 3:16).

—Lorraine McCorkle, Graphic Designer, University Communication and Marketing

MARCH 26 | THURSDAY, FOURTH WEEK OF LENT
EX 32:7-14   PS 106:19-23   JN 5:31-47
When the just cry out, the LORD hears them, and from all their distress he rescues them. (Ps 34:18)
In today’s reading, “the wicked” rage at having their hypocrisy and illegitimate behavior exposed. They lash out at the just person and decide to test and punish him. Bitterness and resentment have taken hold of their hearts, and they mock what they perceive as a threat.

This theme of vengeance continues in the Gospel, for the religious authorities who are angry at Jesus are seeking to kill him. Both readings foreshadow Christ’s crucifixion and shine a light on how we, as human beings, let negative emotions consume us.

History and daily life offer countless and horrifying examples of “others” being demonized, often to the point of violence. As kids, we are faced with the school bully. As we grow up, we experience divisions based on race, sex, age, religion, political beliefs—the list goes on. What makes us so vulnerable to fear and hate? Why is tolerance so difficult?

Hope is found in today’s responsorial psalm, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted” (Ps 34:19). We need to be mindful that we are not above God. We need to follow Jesus’ example, opening our hearts to the less fortunate and speaking up on their behalf.

—Megan Walsh-Boyle, Staff Writer, University Communication and Marketing

MARCH 27  |  FRIDAY, FOURTH WEEK OF LENT
WIS 2:1a, 12-22  |  PS 34:17-21, 23  |  JN 7:1-2, 10, 25-30
O LORD, my God, in you I take refuge. (Ps 7:2)
Today’s psalm repeats the phrase “O LORD, my God, in you I take refuge” (Ps 7:2). If sophomore year has taught me anything, it’s that change is inevitable. I have difficulty letting go, whether it be a situation I wanted to last forever or a friendship that I didn’t know would change over time. It’s hard for me to realize what God’s plan is through these experiences. However, I know that He isn’t abandoning me. I might not like all of the changes that have happened, but it’s comforting to know that God doesn’t want me to walk alone. “A shield before me is God, who saves the upright of heart” (v. 11).

It isn’t always easy to remember that the Father wants nothing but goodness for us. Learning to lean on Him and allow ourselves to take refuge in Him doesn’t happen overnight. How lucky we are, though, to be made in the image and likeness of One who loves us so much!

There are still two weeks left this Lenten season. It’s not too late to offer our hearts before the Lord and say, “To you I have entrusted my cause!” (Jer 11:20).

—Angelica Tiffany Garcia ’22 COE

MARCH 28 | SATURDAY, FOURTH WEEK OF LENT
JER 11:18-20   PS 7:2-3, 9B-12   JN 7:40-53
Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live. (Jn 11:25)
The expression “That’s the final nail in the coffin!” doesn’t signal a happy event. Something is kaput, irreversible, unsalvageable.

Fortunately, with God, no situation, no person, is beyond hope. Through his prophet, God assures the exiled people—who perhaps feel like the walking dead—that they will be restored to their land and revivified. “Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and have you rise from them, O my people!” (Ez 37:13).

In the Gospel, villagers of Bethany must cope with a literal death: the passing of Lazarus. When Jesus arrives, his friend has been dead for days and his body is bound and entombed—surely, “the final nail.” But death will not have the last word. Jesus uses this moment of communal mourning to reveal the glory of God. “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live” (Jn 11:25).

After summoning Lazarus forth, Jesus tells the crowd: “Untie him and let him go” (v. 44). May we do the same when we meet those wrapped up in despair. Ours is a living hope.

—Suzanne Wentzel ’14 MA, Director of Research and Planning, Mission and Ministry
I fear no evil; for you are at my side. (Ps 23:4)
A crowd brings Jesus a woman accused of adultery, hoping He will encourage them to stone her. It sounds like a reality TV show—until Jesus says, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (Jn 8:7). Then He bends down and writes on the ground. Where are Jesus’ withering looks, his pointing finger, the drama? Instead, the crowd disperses, and Jesus tells the woman to sin no more.

Jesus is well aware of my sinful ways. Does that mean I should continue to sin? No. It means I continue striving to be and do my best. At every step Jesus is with me, even when I don’t notice.

We are not only the adulterous woman but also the crowd, the sinner and the judge. It’s easy to be critical, but Jesus doesn’t want us to condemn the woman. Building myself up to feel better than someone else usually leaves me feeling small.

Jesus also doesn’t want us to judge ourselves too harshly. Compassion for others and ourselves is what Jesus longs for, so I keep my head down and write compassion on the ground, just as Jesus taught me.

—Sue Schultes ’87 VSB
The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone. (Jn 8:29)
Today’s readings are difficult. They speak of a God who is vengeful and yet forgiving. They speak of distrust and glory. They speak of misunderstanding and belief. Where do we find ourselves in the middle of the fifth week of lent? We are in the depths, possibly working through our sins like the people of Moses. Or we are struggling and crying out as in the psalms. We may be confused about what the Word is saying to us, collectively or individually.

The passage that stands out to me is the line from Jesus when He says, “What I told you from the beginning” (Jn 8:25). For those He was speaking to, His words might refer to the beginning of their conversation (and perhaps Jesus was growing frustrated with their lack of comprehension?), but millennia later, Jesus is still telling us He has been with us from the beginning. Just as the One did not leave Jesus, so Jesus will not leave us. No matter what we have done or how much we feel in the depths, we have forgiveness and healing, thanks to God. We are loved.

—Kate Giancatarino, Director, Center for Service & Social Justice, Campus Ministry
You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (Jn 8:32)
Isn’t freedom wonderful? True freedom rests in Jesus and the knowledge that we are saved from our sin. Jesus’ listeners had a hard time understanding what He meant when He said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They protested that He implied they were not free and argued that they had never been anyone’s slaves (Jn 8:32-33).

Jesus wants us to know the truth and to understand that we are all slaves to sin. One way of knowing the truth is to study and reflect on Sacred Scripture so that we can truly follow Jesus. It’s easy to get trapped into thinking that going to church is enough. Jesus calls us into having a deeper relationship with him by making time in our life to read the Word of God and make a home for the Word in our heart.

We will always face temptation and we will sin, but we can ask God to forgive us and we can be set free from the power sin has over us. “If the Son frees you, then you will truly be free” (v. 36).

—Lorraine Miller, RN, ’86 FCN, Student Health Center

APRIL 1 | WEDNESDAY, FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

DN 3:14-20, 91-92, 95  DN 3:52-56  JN 8:31-42
I will maintain my covenant with you and your descendants after you. (Gn 17:7)
Today’s Gospel presents us with a stark choice: We either accept that Jesus is the Son of God, or we take up stones and deny him. As Catholics and Christians, we believe He is the Word of God, spoken from the beginning and into eternity; as He tells us: “Before Abraham came to be, I AM.” St. Ambrose observed that Jesus’ reply “reaches back into the past without end or limit,” signaling the eternal continuity of Christ and the realization that Jesus was not included in creation; creation is included in Him.

How should we react to Jesus’ statement? We can think that He’s a fool, someone who taught moral lessons but was the ultimate liar, claiming to be God. We can think He’s a madman and therefore easily ignored. Or, more dangerously, we can believe that He’s speaking the truth: He knows the Father, was sent by the Father and has come to fulfill God’s promises to Israel.

Through His covenant with Abraham, God promises us eternal life. All He asks is that we turn over our selfishness, greed, jealousy and lusts, take up our cross daily, and follow Him.

—Alejandro Gomez ’20 CLAS
I love you, O LORD, my strength. (Ps 18:2)
Have you ever felt overwhelmed? Under attack? Like everyone was turning against you or you were drowning in a sea of negativity? When you do, today’s readings can be a source of consolation and a reminder that you are not alone. In fact, you have something in common with Jeremiah, David and Jesus. Their response in challenging moments can help us through ours.

Jeremiah, David and Jesus all called upon the Father, and they were rescued from their distress. In Psalm 18, David gives the Lord one of my favorite names when he calls God “my deliverer” (v. 3). I have not used that name often in my prayer, but I can recall three experiences when I didn’t know what else to do or where else to turn. I handed everything over to God, my deliverer, and in all three cases, I found peace in the midst of turmoil. The grace of that peace carried me through those tough periods.

Let us thank God for the examples in today’s readings and let us call on our deliverer to free us and those around us from whatever may be holding us back this Lent.

—Matt Manion, Professor of Practice, Management and Operations, VSB
There shall be one shepherd for them all. (Ez 37:24)
How do you respond to fear? In today’s Gospel, the Pharisees are afraid that “the Romans will come and take away both our land and our nation” (Jn 11:48). God had promised to make “the children of Israel … one nation upon the land” (Ez 37:21-22). Now the Pharisees see Jesus as a threat to both.

Caiaphas uses this fear to influence the Pharisees. He predicts that not only will they lose their land but the “whole nation” will “perish” as well. Caiaphas implies a false dichotomy: if Jesus does not die, the people will. “So from that day on they planned to kill him” (Jn 11:50, 53).

I wonder if they prayed to God before making that decision. It’s easy for me, with hindsight, to judge Caiaphas and the Pharisees, so I’ll ask instead how I respond to fear. Do I give in to it, or do I ask God for guidance? Do I avoid God when I believe He won’t support what I think should occur? Do I trust God enough to seek His will?

If I pray that I may know, or at least desire to know, God’s will, I won’t have anything to fear.

—Gerald Dierkes, Access and Collections Coordinator, Falvey Memorial Library
He humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death. (Phil 2:8)
The Palm Sunday Liturgy is a study in contrasts. It begins with the account of Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem to the accolades of a people who want to proclaim him their king. His ability to heal the sick, feed the multitudes and raise the dead fills them with awe and with a desire to profit even more from his power and accessibility. The palm branches they wave are signs of welcome, acceptance and praise. Jesus is their man—at least for now.

A strong beginning, however, does not guarantee a strong finish. Any sports fan knows that. So, too, many lovers. The human spirit is fickle; our minds and hearts are subject to great changes. As St. Augustine acknowledges, “I am a mystery to myself.”

As this week progresses, watch how your palm branch dries up and stiffens. Notice how appropriate a symbol it is of change, perhaps reminding us of our own inconstancy.

Notice also how inappropriate it is as a sign of welcome for Jesus, who was never anything but faithful, never less than perfectly loyal both to his Father and to us, to the very end.

—The Rev. Michael Di Gregorio, OSA, Prior Provincial
I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice. (Is 42:6)
When we have people over, I set the table with my grandmother’s china, which is nearly 100 years old. The gold edges with tiny flowers and the smooth feel of the china radiate memories: a crowded and noisy dining room, mounds of food, pretty tablecloths, the kids’ table, the aromas of the kitchen.

Friends will ask me: “Why do you use that china? It is old and fragile. Using it only increases the chance of breakage!” How true. A few pieces of the china are now chipped, and one piece has been broken. It is irreplaceable.

The Gospel today follows that thought. Mary is using the costly perfumed oil, creating a poignant memory of aromas and care for Jesus, surrounded by friends. When Judas questions the use of the oil, Jesus calms him. “We are here together today. Celebrate and take part in the memories being created here.”

We don’t know what is on the horizon. We are here now. Together with the oil and the century-old china, surrounded by friends and family, we rejoice in the moment.

—Suzanne Teleha, Center for Faith and Learning, Office for Mission and Ministry

APRIL 6 | MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK
I will make you a light to the nations. (Is 49:6)
Today’s Scripture readings reaffirm for us that, in good times and in tragic ones, we live in God. From the time we were formed in the womb, Isaiah says, God was there, calling us by name. It’s a rather awesome thought to contemplate.

John’s Gospel account of Jesus’ betrayal and his response to it reminds us that God is present when we love and are loved, as well as when we betray and are betrayed. In difficult times, it can be hard to believe Jesus’ promise that “you will follow later” and to hope that God will be part of the end of our earthly lives.

We are left with a question to ponder: “I will lay down my life for you. Will you lay down your life for me?” I find Thomas Merton’s observation helpful. “Traditionally, the ideas of prayer, meditation and contemplation have been associated with this deepening of one’s personal life and this expansion of the capacity to understand and serve others.” Does our prayer life open us to the possibility of something or someone greater than ourselves?

—Barbara Wall, PhD, Vice President, Office for Mission and Ministry
You who seek God, may your hearts revive! (Ps 69:33)
Thirty pieces of silver—we learn Jesus’ worth in the eyes of His enemies as he approaches His death. While we might be struck by Judas Iscariot’s willingness to betray Jesus for so little money—roughly a few hundred dollars in today’s currency—the amount also emphasizes just how little the elites of his society thought of him.

Worth only 30 pieces of silver, Jesus of Nazareth was of little account, even as he was singled out for arrest and execution. Though he had a substantial following as he approached Jerusalem for one final Passover celebration, Jesus remained a peasant interloper in their eyes. His life, and indeed his death, were of little value to the rich and powerful who demanded the respect of people like Jesus and his followers.

Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, Jesus acts. He draws his closest friends to the table with him. They recline. They eat. They drink. Jesus embraces this outcast role as the culmination of his ministry and invites others to join him—to reject the logic of power and embrace revolutionary love. We, too, can act and answer this call.

—William Horne, PhD, Arthur J. Ennis Postdoctoral Fellow in the Humanities
Because of his affliction
he shall see the light in fullness of days;
through his suffering, my servant shall justify many,
and their guilt he shall bear.
Therefore I will give him his portion among the great,
and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty,
because he surrendered himself to death
and was counted among the wicked;
and he shall take away the sins of many,
and win pardon for their offenses.

—Is 53:12