



LENT REFLECTIONS 2023



**Catholic
in Recovery**

INTRODUCTION

Catholic in Recovery began in 2015 with the mission to unite individuals and families seeking freedom from the darkness of addiction by integrating the sacramental life of the Catholic Church with 12-step recovery principles. The first CIR group began in San Diego, California in 2017, launching a fellowship that now has 70 local in-person meetings across the United States and reaches around 1,500 people weekly across the world via virtual meetings.

Catholic in Recovery's 2023 Lenten Reflections is meant to accompany you to deepen your recovery and relationship with Jesus Christ through the season of Lent, one day at a time. You are not alone. As was the case in the early Church, when its members would unite to accompany new Christians into the Church, Lent is a season meant to bring us closer to God and each other while we distance ourselves from the behaviors and attitudes that keep us in bondage to sin. We pray that this daily reflection book can be of value to you along your journey.

Scott Weeman
Founder, Catholic in Recovery

Cover: "Christ in the Desert" by Ivan Kramskoi, "Ash Wednesday" by Julian Falat p. 1, "Christ Carrying the Cross" by Tiziano Vecellio Titian p. 2, "Still Life with Fish" by Gaetano Cusati pp. 3-10-17-24-31-38, "Saint Joseph with the Flowering Rod" by Jusepe Ribera p. 4, "Christ in the Desert" by Ivan Kramskoi p. 5, "Moses' Descent from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments" by Ferdinand Bol p. 6, "God the Father" by Jacob Herreyns p. 7, "Crucifixion with the Virgin and St John" by Hendrick Bruggen p. 8, "Grace" by Eric Enstrom p. 9, "Angels in adoration of the Sacred Heart" by GB Chiari p. 11, "Transfiguration" by Tiziano Vecellio Titian p. 12, "Divine Mercy" by Eugeniusz Kazimirowski p. 13, "Jesus Washing Peter's Feet" by Ford Brown p. 14, "The Flagellation of Christ" by Peter Paul Rubens p. 15, "The Virgin and Child under an Apple Tree" by Lucas Cranach p. 16, "The Return of the Prodigal Son" by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo p.18, "Woman at the Well" by Carl Heinrich p. 19, "Elisha refuses the gifts of Naaman" by Pieter Fransz p. 20, "Parable of the Wicked Servant" by Domineco Fetti p. 21, "Moses with the Tables of the Law" by Guido Reni p. 22, "The Tribute Money" by Jacob Backer p. 23, "Sacred Heart of Jesus with Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Louis Gonzaga" by José Páez p. 25, "Healing of the Blind Man by Jesus Christ" by Carl Bloch p. 26, "Saint Joseph and the Christ Child" by Guido Reni p. 27, "Ezekiel's Vision" by Raphael p. 28, "Jesus is being identified by John the Baptist" by Ottavio Vannini p. 29, "Baptism from The Seven Sacraments" by Pietro Novelli p. 30, "The Annunciation" by Henry Tanner p. 32, "The Raising of Lazarus" by Rembrandt p. 33, "Joseph the Carpenter" by Georges de La Tour p. 34, "The Jews Gathering the Manna in the Desert" by Nicolas Poussin p. 35, "The Garden of Earthly Delights" by Hieronymus Bosch p. 36, "The Sacrifice of Abraham" by Rembrandt p. 37, "The Israelites Passing through the Wilderness, Preceded by the Pillar of Light" by William West p. 39, "Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem" by Félix Leullier p. 40, "The Anointing at Bethany" by Peter Paul Rubens p. 41, "Rest In The Syrian Desert" by Eugen Bracht p. 42, "Judas Iscariot, retiring from the Last Supper" by Carl Bloch p. 43, "Last Supper" by Ilya Repin p. 44, "Head of Christ Crowned with Thorns" by Guido Reni p. 45, "The Entombment of Christ" by Carl Bloch p. 46, "The Ressurrection of Christ" by Giovanni Moroni p. 47



FEBRUARY 22, 2023

Ash Wednesday

We begin the season of Lent on Ash Wednesday, launching a 40-day retreat into the desert with Jesus. During this season of renewal and cleansing, we are strengthened in virtue by shedding things that keep us from knowing, loving, and serving Jesus. Today's Gospel reading provides the *what*, *how*, and *why* of Lent from a perspective consistent with our daily practices in recovery.

Jesus refers to what are known as the three pillars of Lent—prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. As we learn in recovery, abstinence from a compulsive behavior, addictive substance, or unhealthy attachment is best achieved when replaced by self-sacrifice, service, and prayer. Therefore, we seek to make intentional progress in each of these three areas of our spiritual life over the next six weeks. How shall we do this? Jesus makes this very clear—do these things anonymously!

“But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret.” | **MATTHEW 6:3-4**

“But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret.” | **MATTHEW 6:6**

“But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden” | **MATTHEW 6:17-18**

Why the secrecy? He might be putting a positive spin on a common phrase heard in the rooms of 12-step recovery meetings—you're *only as sick as your secrets*. This refers to the shame that we carry as we hide the truth from ourselves, God, and others. Per Jesus, you're *only as healthy as your secrets*. As we commit to regular, anonymous acts of prayer, self-sacrifice, and sharing what we have (while deflecting glory to God), we begin to see our soul heal and become well. As such, we get to witness the miracle of another day free from the shackles of addiction. | **REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.**

— Reflection Questions —

- What commitments are you making toward prayer, fasting, and almsgiving this Lent?
- How do you relate to the notion that you're only as sick or as healthy as your secrets? What secrets define your spiritual health?

FIRST READING Joel 2:12-18

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6.

SECOND READING 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2

GOSPEL Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18



FEBRUARY 23, 2023

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Today's readings remind us that God has given us the path to life and prosperity. But as Moses told the Israelites in the Old Testament and as Jesus reminds us in the Gospel, we have to choose that path for ourselves. We have to choose life and prosperity each and every day. Choosing God's path yields happiness and joy. Not choosing His path yields only death and doom.

Similarly, our choices can either lead us further away from a drink or closer to one. Today's Gospel reading proclaims that we must pick up our cross daily and follow Him, echoing another choice we must make for life as opposed to death. While our addictions and unhealthy attachments can be heavy crosses to bear, God promises us that if we choose to put Him first He will give us the grace to carry our crosses to salvation. And today's readings illuminate these very truths.

“Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the LORD, your God, obeying his voice, and holding fast to him.” | DEUTERONOMY 30:19

“If, however, your heart turns away and you do not obey, but are led astray and bow down to other gods and serve them, I tell you today that you will certainly perish.” | DEUTERONOMY 30:17-18

“Then he said to all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’” | LUKE 9:23

The Responsorial Psalm reminds us that the Lord alone is our hope. We can sometimes place our hope in other people, places, and things, which can lead us further away from Jesus. At our worst, we might even seek hope, renewal, and relief in alcohol, drugs, or some other unhealthy addiction, which only leads to unhappiness and enslavement. Yet, even in the midst of life's difficulties, today's readings remind us that we can choose to place our steadfast hope in the Lord instead. | REFLECTION BY JANA I.

— Reflection Questions —

- Are you choosing to walk with Jesus in your daily life or to turn your back on Him? Are your actions leading you closer to a drink (or some other unhealthy attachment) or further away from one?
- What do your daily habits reveal about who or what you are placing your hope in?

FIRST READING Deuteronomy 30:15-20

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6

GOSPEL Luke 9:22-25



FEBRUARY 24, 2023

Friday after Ash Wednesday

On this first Friday after Ash Wednesday, the readings highlight one of the three pillars of Lent: fasting. In today's first reading, the prophet Isaiah is firmly told to condemn the people's ways of fasting. Instead of mere exterior displays of affliction, fasting should entail an authentic denial of ourselves with prayer and fraternal charity. As we read, "Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house; Clothing the naked when you see them and not turning your back on your own flesh?" (Isaiah 58:7)

In other words, fasting is not genuine without a conversion of one's way of life. And isn't this type of genuine conversion what also helps us develop a healthy sobriety? As we come to realize, abstaining from our addictions and harmful compulsions is not enough to sustain a healthy and successful recovery. We must also join a 12-step program rooted in fellowship and conscious contact with God.

Today's Responsorial Psalm is a familiar one. It draws from one of the seven penitential psalms known as the *Miserere*, which was composed by King David. Many verses from these psalms are recited during Mass. During the offertory, as the priest washes his hands, he prays, "Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sins" (Psalm 51:2). Relatedly, we find in today's Responsorial Psalm this refrain: "A heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn." It's a sincere plea for God's forgiveness and one that we might reflect on often. As today's readings remind us, humility and contrition are two important pillars of recovery. We must ask the Lord to be truly humble and sorry for past sins to grow and change. Having a clean heart enables us to be more loving to others, and with such a heart our recovery and lives become easier as we walk with the Lord. | [REFLECTION BY LORETTA L.](#)

— Reflection Questions —

- How can fasting this Lent enhance your relationship with God and help give you a cleaner heart?
- How can you work on being more humble and contrite to progress in your recovery and spiritual life?

FIRST READING Isaiah 58:1-9a

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 18-19

GOSPEL Matthew 9:14-15



FEBRUARY 25, 2023

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

It's a beautiful situation we find ourselves in, being able to experience Lent through the lens of our Catholic faith as well as the Twelve Steps. We can use the steps to prepare ourselves for Easter. In Step Four, we are invited to identify, in our own heartfelt words, what our past has looked like under the siege of addiction or unhealthy attachments. We share this account with another person (Step Five) and are likely to feel not only an internal release but a lighter, physical state of being as well. Then Step Six and Step Seven offer us a perfect opportunity to “fast” from our shortcomings and character defects, allowing room for the risen Christ. On this first Saturday of Lent, we encounter Isaiah.

“If you lavish your food on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; Then your light shall rise in the darkness, and your gloom shall become like midday ... And you shall be like a watered garden, like a flowing spring whose waters never fail.” | ISAIAH 58:10-11

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and support from a sponsor, we are led through Step Eight and Step Nine to offer reparation for our past behavior. When we make amends, we indeed “satisfy the afflicted,” those we have hurt prior to our finding recovery. Throughout our journey, we can interpret Isaiah’s words “bestow your bread on the hungry” similarly to bestow your “recovery” on the suffering as we work Step 12: “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*). As Catholics, this message sheds the light of Christ. This Lent, may we enhance our own inner conversion to attract others to want what we have. | REFLECTION BY MARY BETH R.

— Reflection Questions —

- What might fasting from shortcomings and character defects look like for you this Lent?
- How have you experienced Step 12 as a reflection of your faith?

FIRST READING Isaiah 58:9b-14

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 86:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

GOSPEL Luke 5:27-32



FEBRUARY 26, 2023

First Sunday of Lent

Today's readings for the First Sunday of Lent remind us of the grace that floods our lives when we surrender our old ways and seek to be led by Christ. Over the course of 40 days, Jesus takes us into the desert to proclaim or renew our obedience to Him. Three pillars of Lent that draw us closer to Christ are fasting, almsgiving, and prayer.

We might suffer a little bit during this process, but we can be affirmed that the voluntary suffering of the cross is far more redemptive than the self-centered suffering of addiction and unhealthy attachments. We journey together so that in our weakness we may find unity and in unity, victory. Aligning ourselves with the suffering of our Lord and the needs of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ rededicates our commitment to recovery and a spiritual way of life. By God's grace, we have encountered a solution and a fellowship with others who have found freedom from the cycle of addiction and spiritual darkness.

We can seek Jesus as our guide who knows the real human forces of temptation, as described in today's Gospel reading:

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry." | **MATTHEW 4:1-2**

Many 12-step principles are woven into the story of Christ's temptation in the desert, and we can learn much about surrender in the most challenging moments of our recovery. For Jesus, the gesture of turning His will and life over to the care of God is not a one-time act. Rather, it is full of daily and momentary choices. Love and commitment are affirmed through these choices.

The season of Lent is an opportune time to get back to basics and reestablish spiritual practices such as prayer, fasting, and sharing our resources. Basically, this is a chance to trust God, clean house, and help others. It doesn't have to be over the top. As Saint Mother Theresa once said, "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love." | **REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.**

— Reflection Questions —

- What challenges and temptations do you primarily face in your recovery journey today? How has God transformed your life to protect and guide you in the midst of temptation?
- What plans do you have to seek renewal and virtue during this season of Lent?

FIRST READING Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17

SECOND READING Romans 5:12-19

GOSPEL Matthew 4:1-11



FEBRUARY 27, 2023

Monday of the First Week of Lent

“The LORD said to Moses: Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy.” | **LEVITICUS 19: 1-2**

Our loving God is speaking to His children in today’s first reading. He reminds us that He is holy, and He expects us to be as well. In fact, He stresses it. He also gives Moses the Ten Commandments, the basis of our Judeo-Christian laws. It’s these commands that help us stay in line and on the “straight and narrow.” But God gives us laws not to admonish us if we break them or merely offer us a list of things we “can’t” do. Rather, He gives them to us to guide us toward happiness and joy. As our loving Father, He gives us these guidelines for our flourishing. The Commandments spell out how we’re called to relate to God and each other. Don’t they look familiar to another set of guidelines we see in recovery? The Twelve Steps also spell out how to relate to our God and each other, as well as how to combat sinfulness in the form of addictions and unhealthy attachments.

As we focus on today’s Gospel, let’s keep the steps in mind. Jesus is revealed as the just judge who will separate the goats from the sheep. In other words, Jesus will separate the ones who kept the law (the sheep) from the ones who didn’t (the goats).

Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me’” (Matthew 25: 37-40).

The ones who adhered to God’s laws, or guidelines, are the ones who will reap the benefits of life. The same is true in our recovery journey against addictions and unhealthy attachments. It’s by following our guidelines—the Twelve Steps—that we can reap the benefits of recovery. Our loving Father delights in the opportunity to assist us and get us back on track whenever we stray from either set of guidelines. Yet, through prayer and the sacraments, we can keep the Lord close to us as we work the steps to find healing and new life. | **REFLECTION BY JEFF R.**

— Reflection Questions —

- How have the Twelve Steps, prayer, and the sacraments helped keep you “on track”?
- In what ways have you felt God’s mercy and love throughout your recovery journey? How might God be inviting you to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, or do some other act of corporeal and/or spiritual mercy?

FIRST READING Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 15

GOSPEL Matthew 25:31-46



FEBRUARY 28, 2023

Tuesday of the First Week of Lent

The Lord's Prayer is given to us by Jesus in today's Gospel reading. It is a perfect and all-encompassing prayer. It is fascinating that it naturally contains the Twelve Steps and the sacramental life of the Church as well. The opening address, "Our Father who art in heaven," implies that we are members of a community dependent on a Higher Power, God the Father. He is our Father through the grace of our baptism. When we call upon Him, we acknowledge that He can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves (like in Step One and Step Two).

By praying "thy Kingdom come, thy will be done," we impart Step 11 and Step Three, respectively, turning our will over to Him so that we may decrease and He may increase. We then ask for forgiveness, admitting we have defects of character and are in need of His grace and mercy. This calls to mind the whole of Step Four through Step Nine. Through God's immeasurable love and sacrifice, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is available to us. We understand it is only through humbly receiving God's forgiveness that we can extend forgiveness to others.

We also recognize that resentment and unforgiveness in our hearts could quickly put us on a familiar path of destruction. Therefore, we ask for God's protection from temptation and evil. We have tried to accomplish this on our own and we have failed. Yet, through our powerlessness to protect ourselves, our Father has revealed to us that He is our ultimate protector. And so we ask Him to lead us under His saving power, going forth with Step 12 and sealed with the Sacrament of Confirmation. | REFLECTION BY STEPHANIE N.

— Reflection Questions —

- *What is God currently doing for you that you cannot do for yourself? Can you recall a time you realized you were being protected by God in the midst of powerlessness?*
- *Is there someone you still struggle to forgive whom God wants you to hand over to Him with more intentionality and trust?*

FIRST READING *Isaiah 55:10-11*

RESPONSORIAL PSALM *Psalm 34:4-5, 6-7, 16-17, 18-19*

GOSPEL *Matthew 6:7-15*



MARCH 1, 2023

Wednesday of the First Week in Lent

“I am broken, I am mended, I am stronger than ever.” These are the words I tried to repeat over and over again as I sobbed while reading *The Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross. I felt a gut-wrenching misery that would not go away. It lasted weeks. My family was worried; I was worried. This time would hopefully be the last time I would suffer the devastating effects of a relapse back into drugs and alcohol. I would finally find Catholic in Recovery and a fellowship of believers who understood. Like Jonah of the Old Testament, I was a reluctant child of God that had to be swallowed by a whale before I would finally give it all up to God. I thought I would never be able to figure this out on my own. Yet, as we read in *Alcoholics Anonymous*, “there is One who has all power—that One is God.”

The tears return today as I remember the extent of my agony. Like Jesus who would rise again after three days, I would only rise with Him if I turned my will and life over to Him—over and over again. I may not always be willing but as a sponsor once suggested, “Pray to God for the willingness to be willing.” That’s why, years after that “gut-wrenching misery,” I now try to start every day on my knees and proclaim to my God, “I am not worthy but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” Today we see this very insight: “...a contrite, humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn” (Psalms 51:19).

Could this really be all God is asking of us? In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus references the Old Testament to explain His descent into hell and subsequent resurrection: “Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation” (Luke 11:30). We too must not doubt the sign of Jesus’ resurrection—and His power to heal us of our addiction if we only ask for His help. It is a truth that we also affirm through the Third Step Prayer in *Alcoholics Anonymous*: “God, I offer myself to Thee—to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt.

Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!” | REFLECTION BY MARCIA G.

— Reflection Questions —

- Can you recall a time when you were brought to your knees because of sorrow from addiction or an unhealthy attachment and your realization that you were not able to find healing on your own? Are you grateful for what God has done for you that you could not do for yourself?
- Do you need to pray for the “willingness to be willing” to surrender your life and will over to God?

FIRST READING *Jonah 3:1-10*

RESPONSORIAL PSALM *Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19*

GOSPEL *Luke 11:29-32*



MARCH 2, 2023

Thursday of the First Week of Lent

Lent is a time of prayer, and in our Gospel reading today Jesus instructs us to come to God always in prayer.

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” | **MATTHEW 7:7-8**

For those beginning recovery, these can be hard words to trust. We have long knocked at the doors of our addictions and unhealthy attachments expecting to be fed but have only been disappointed. We ourselves are not who we wanted to be and instead are filled with shame and regret, feeling unworthy to approach God’s door and ask for anything. Yet, Jesus reminds us what we’ve forgotten—God is our Father and we’re His beloved children. And He deeply desires to give us good gifts.

“Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish?” | **MATTHEW 7:9-10**

How can we believe the words above and learn to approach God with childlike confidence? Thankfully, we have the Step One prayer of surrender where we call out to God in anguish for relief from our addictions and unhealthy dependencies. Remembering our heavenly Father heard our cry for help and offered us the gift of freedom and joy, we can continue to knock and seek good things from the Lord so that we might share them with others in recovery and beyond.

We can trust that God will continue to answer our prayers and give us good things. And He offers us the greatest gift of all, the savior of the world and His beloved son, Jesus. During this Lenten season, let us ask God for the grace to keep approaching His door in prayer and expecting to receive the Bread of Life that is nothing less than Christ Himself. | **REFLECTION BY ANN A.**

— Reflection Questions —

- We have often knocked on the door of addiction and self-will looking to be fed. How have these doors offered you only snakes and rocks? How has God instead offered you bread and fish?
- Sometimes the things we hold onto keep us from receiving the good gifts God wants to give us. What are you holding onto and how might the Lord be asking you to let it go?

FIRST READING Esther C:12, 14-16, 23-25

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 138:1-2ab, 2cde-3, 7c-8

GOSPEL Matthew 7:7-12



MARCH 3, 2023

Friday of the First Week of Lent

In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches us how to reach out to those we've harmed and to forgive those who've harmed us. Recovery, by way of the Twelve Steps, lays out a path leading to ever-closer communion with Christ, ourselves, and others. As our desire to love God and our neighbor grows, we become more willing to honestly admit where we have wronged others and commit to making amends. While this can certainly be difficult, we're called not to shrink in fear from this task since we're living a new life rooted in the principles of recovery and Christ.

"But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, 'Raca,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna." | **MATTHEW 5:22**

Lent provides us with a unique opportunity to look back at our Step Four inventory to see if there is anyone to whom we still need to make amends. As always, we should first seek direction from our sponsor and pray for the courage and willingness to move forward with any amends. In cases where we have been harmed, this Lent we can also ask in prayer for the grace to be able to forgive.

For those we might not be able to make amends to in person (because it would be imprudent, the person is deceased, etc.), we can consider having a Mass celebrated or praying a Holy Rosary or Chaplet of Divine Mercy for the person. As today's readings inform us, we must be rid of our anger and resentment and do what we can to make peace with our neighbor! This is principally done through a relationship with Jesus Christ, who gives us the greatest example of forgiveness when He suffered on a cross for the sake of His executioners and prayed, "Lord, forgive them for they know not what they do." | **REFLECTION BY KATHY B.**

— Reflection Questions —

- What loving acts of forgiveness might you be called to do to imitate the merciful heart of Jesus?
- What are some of the graces you've received since starting your amends process? Is there a person that you feel called to pray for or reach out to today with a spirit of forgiveness and love?

FIRST READING Ezekiel 18:21-28

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-7a, 7bc-8

GOSPEL Matthew 5:20-26



MARCH 4, 2023

Saturday of the First Week of Lent

In recovery, we often hear the phrase, “half measures avail us nothing.” In today’s first reading, Moses exhorts us to observe statutes and decrees with *all* of our heart and *all* of our soul, not *half* of our heart and *half* of our soul. In other words, not in half measures. Sometimes we don’t do things wholeheartedly and then wonder why we aren’t reaping any rewards. This might be with respect to our faith, sobriety, relationships, recreation, careers, health, and so on. It’s not until we learn to act wholeheartedly that we’ll have any true and lasting success.

So, when should we commit to acting in all areas of our lives wholeheartedly? There is no time like the present. In the past we’ve likely made excuses, promising to get sober or abstain or deepen our faith life tomorrow, only to realize that “tomorrow” never comes. That’s why we’re called to embrace recovery today—in this present moment—with all of our heart. As we read, “Today you are making this agreement with the LORD: he is to be your God and you are to walk in his ways” (Deuteronomy 26:17).

Jesus challenges us in many ways. In today’s Gospel reading, He gives us a particularly difficult challenge. He calls us to love our enemies.

“But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you...” | **MATTHEW 5:44**

When we decide to serve the Lord and walk in His ways by loving and praying for all who “persecute” us, we escape from our self-centered wills that leave us unfulfilled and enter into a life of grace and joy. When we trust our loving Father and accept His challenges we become better versions of ourselves. And through our daily challenges of wholeheartedly serving the Lord, we learn to love ourselves and others as well as gain a deeper sense of purpose. | **REFLECTION BY JANA I.**

— Reflection Questions —

- Are you living wholeheartedly in all of your decisions and actions? What can you do today to make sure you are?
- Who will you serve today and how? What “enemy” of yours can you pray for?

FIRST READING Deuteronomy 26:16-19

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 119:1-2, 4-5, 7-8

GOSPEL Matthew 5:43-48



MARCH 5, 2023

Second Sunday of Lent

As we continue through Lent, today's Gospel reading has us reflecting upon the story of the transfiguration of our Lord.

"After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light." | MATTHEW 17:1-2

A spiritual awakening is often discussed as a necessary component of finding new life in 12-step recovery. This moment proved to be just that for the disciples who witnessed it. However, it can also remind us that we must continue to follow the direction of Christ and surrender our will to Him. Peter and the others were literally asleep but became fully awake to see His glory. Like Peter, John, and James, the glorified nature of Jesus is revealed to us and awakens us from spiritual sleep.

Peter then petitions Jesus to pitch tents and stay atop the safety of the mountain. We can relate to the experience of Peter, who wished to stay in the presence of the fully-revealed Christ. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke each precede their accounts of the transfiguration with the story of Peter rebuking Jesus for proclaiming that He must suffer and die.

We may wish for our own spiritual journey to be void of suffering, in which case it is important to recall the words of Jesus: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Abstaining from our addictive behavior while denying ourselves of temporary earthly pleasures during Lent aligns us with the will of God.

Prayer and meditation guide our attitude toward suffering and help us accept our daily cross. We might find ourselves praying for comfort or for God's will to be bent toward our own. Rather, prayer is the practice of becoming willing to bend our will toward that of the Lord. He will often give us moments of growth and opportunities to trust Him if we are committed to our recovery. At times, He will dazzle us with His grace as we climb the mountain of freedom. | REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.

— Reflection Questions —

- How is Jesus asking you to take up your cross and follow Him? How are you responding?
- What progress have you made along your spiritual journey?

FIRST READING Genesis 12:1-4a

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22.

SECOND READING 2 Timothy 1:8b-10

GOSPEL Matthew 17:1-9



MARCH 6, 2023

Monday of the Second Week in Lent

When I came into the rooms of recovery many years ago, I didn't come in because I was on a winning streak or looking for self-actualization. I was beat up. I was a shell of a person. I was extremely negative, cynical, and judgmental, especially toward myself. But as I began to recover, I learned I had to cease "fighting anything and anyone," including my addiction, compulsive behaviors, and unhealthy attachments (*Alcoholics Anonymous* 84).

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus illuminates a related insight.

"Be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful. Judging Others. Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you." | **LUKE 6:36-38**

This is not unlike the ninth step promises of recovery, which detail how our commitment to recovery will offer us new freedom and happiness. Jesus' call for us to be merciful, forgiving, and generous comes with a promise: "Give and gifts will be given to you." I've learned in recovery that when I'm more merciful to, accepting of, and generous to others and myself, the more I experience God's love as a gift that leads to serenity of spirit. | **REFLECTION BY KEVIN S.**

— Reflection Questions —

- How have you experienced God's mercy and forgiveness since you have come into recovery?
- What mercy and forgiveness might you need to grant to yourself and/or those close to you?

FIRST READING Daniel 9:4b-10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 79:8, 9, 11 and 13

GOSPEL Luke 6:36-38



MARCH 7, 2023

Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent

During this Lenten season, we look for the Pharisee in our own hearts. The desire for prestige and power that Jesus describes in today's Gospel reading is familiar to those of us in addiction. We have tried to control our feelings of shame and unworthiness by building up our ego and pride, to "widen [our] phylacteries and lengthen [our] tassels," until we become trapped and burdened by the heavy load (Matthew 23:5). We become blocked from God, and He is the only one who can free us from this bondage of self.

Freedom begins in the third-step decision to turn our will and lives over to the care of God. We allow Jesus to look past the false fronts of our ego and directly into our hearts so He can do what He wills. He sees our pride and the fear that creates it. He exhorts us to cast them behind us, promising that He will create a new heart and a new spirit of humility and love. He makes things "right" and in our new freedom, we can finally serve God without fear in a spirit of humility.

"Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted." | MATTHEW 23:10-12

As people of faith in recovery, we are radically transformed, taking on the role of humble servants. We seek daily to walk this new path of obedience to God and to show others the loving way we have found. We take the last seat at the table by being of service to those who have just walked through the doors of recovery for the first time. We share our lowest moments, our weaknesses, in order to help others become strong in their faith. Seeking always to glorify God, the true master, and not ourselves, we pray, "Thy will, not mine, be done." | REFLECTION BY ANN A.

— Reflection Questions —

- Do you recognize your inner Pharisee? How have you pretended to be what you're not or been overly concerned with how others view you?
- How does fear keep you in bondage to self-will and how might you turn your will and life over to Christ, the true master, each and every day this Lent?

FIRST READING Isaiah 1:10, 16-20

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 50:8-9, 16bc-17, 21 and 23

GOSPEL Matthew 23:1-12



MARCH 8, 2023

Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent

The Son of Man will be handed over, condemned to death, mocked, scourged, crucified, and raised on the third day. This is the “inside information” that Jesus shares with His closest friends on the way to Jerusalem in today’s Gospel reading. This information must have been shocking and nearly impossible to believe. Yet, it is the truth revealed by Jesus Himself. He leaves no room for mistaking the cost of following Him: the cross of suffering.

The first three steps of recovery are sometimes summarized this way: “I can’t. He can. I will let Him.” In the Gospel, the mother of James and John clearly believes Jesus can do what she cannot. Indeed, she wants good things for her sons; who can say that wanting heaven forever with God is wrong? When Jesus probes more deeply, inviting her to count the cost of drinking from the cup He is to drink, she does not hesitate to accept it. However, because she is entrenched in the scarcity mindset of worldly power systems, which are exclusive and calculating, she is unaware of what this means. She does not know what she is really asking Him.

When I think back to my active food addiction, I recall my “deals” with God: *Just this one last binge during this stressful patch, God, and I am done once and for all.* Or, *I know You will forgive me for this later in confession.* Like the mother of James and John, I wanted to “use” God’s power and take advantage of His generosity so that my will could be done. I tried to manipulate God to justify my disordered desire, which was the numbing of feelings with food. I didn’t know what I was asking. I wasn’t calling on God in my distress, embracing my cross, and asking humbly for mercy in my poverty and weakness.

I am in awe of God’s solution to our sinfulness: the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Himself. As Saint Thérèse reminds us, just as water flows to the lowest point, so too does Jesus’ merciful blood flow to the “lowest point” of our being when poured out. Mary, intercede for us, that we may be as receptive to God as you were and humbly receive the great gift of His mercy. | **REFLECTION BY STEPHANIE N.**

— Reflection Questions —

- What are some obstacles you face or have faced to receiving God’s mercy? How has your “asking” of God changed since you have begun your recovery journey?
- Is there a time when God did not give you what you asked Him for which you are now grateful? Why?

FIRST READING Jeremiah 18:18-20

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 31:5-6, 14, 15-16

GOSPEL Matthew 20:17-28



MARCH 9, 2023

Thursday of the Second Week of Lent

We are reminded today of keeping our focus on the higher things of God and not the things of the world that will pass away. In our first reading, we are all reminded of our human weaknesses and powerlessness over things of this world, including our addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments. But our Lord gives us hope.

“Blessed are those who trust in the LORD; the LORD will be their trust. They are like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: It does not fear heat when it comes, its leaves stay green; In the year of drought it shows no distress, but still produces fruit.” | JEREMIAH 17:7-8

All things are possible with God, and Jeremiah points out that the one who trusts in the Lord and perseveres will bear fruit. When we persevere in recovery, we also succeed and bear fruit in our lives. When we follow our Father’s will we experience joy. In the Responsorial Psalm, we hear this same affirmation: “Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.”

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus tells the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, and how the rich man, after squandering his life on the things of the world, pleads from the underworld that he may warn his brothers of his terrible fate. He tells Abraham that if they saw a dead man raised they would repent. Abraham responds, “If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31).

But someone did rise from the dead. And He did it for us. Jesus Christ is our hope and our salvation. Our perseverance in our faith, as well as in our recovery, can help us endure the challenges of life and keep our eyes fixed on Heaven. By being diligent in our prayer and sacramental life, we can sustain our recovery and find salvation through Christ, just like Lazarus. | **REFLECTION BY JEFF R.**

— Reflection Questions —

- How might the Holy Spirit be inviting you to keep your eyes on the things of God and Heaven?
- Can you recall any deceased loved ones who were examples of holiness and faith for encouragement? Is there someone no longer alive you feel called to pray for?

FIRST READING Jeremiah 17:5-10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6

GOSPEL Luke 16:19-31



MARCH 10, 2023

Friday of the Second Week of Lent

Today's reading speaks of Joseph of the Old Testament and the trials God allowed him to endure at the hands of his brothers, which prepared Joseph for his life to come. Today's Responsorial Psalm summarizes God's plan for him and his family. Today's readings call to mind our need to be purified before our loving God—our need to become spotless before entering His kingdom.

As Saint Pope John Paul II explained during a General Audience in 1999, "For those who [at death] find themselves in a condition of being open to God, but still imperfectly, the journey toward full beatitude requires a purification, which the faith of the Church illustrates in the doctrine of purgatory." Saint Pope John Paul II continues, referencing 1 Thessalonians and encouraging us to "be perfect like the heavenly Father during our earthly life . . . sound and flawless before God the Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." Whether during this life or in purgatory, the Lord gives us opportunities to remove the marks sin has left on our soul, calling to mind the seventh step when we ask God to remove our defects of character.

Purgatory prepares us to be with God. But isn't our life on earth a type of purgatory, too, especially for those of us who are fortunate enough to find recovery? By working the Twelve Steps from time to time and working Step 11 and Step 12 continuously, aren't we undergoing a type of in-life purgatory? We'll continue this purgation process for the remainder of our lives, giving us a jump start on purgatory should God see that we still need purification when we die.

As Saint Faustina, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, and Saint John of the Cross remind us, we can let our sufferings here and now purify us and draw us closer to eventually seeing God's holy face after death.

We can consider God's love for our fellows who are suffering as well as our loved ones who have passed from this world. Souls' yearning for God in purgatory is so intense that it actually pains them to not be with the Lord. As St. John Chrysostom instructs us, "Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them" (CCC 1032). Therefore, let us call to mind our loved ones both alive or in purgatory, and offer up today's prayers, sufferings, and acts of service for their sake and the sake of all souls. | **REFLECTION BY MARCIA G.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *What aspects of your recovery help you "live out" your purgatory here on earth?*
- *Who are your deceased loved ones that you feel inclined to pray for? What can you offer up for them today for their sake?*

FIRST READING *Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a*

RESPONSORIAL PSALM *Psalm 105:16-17, 18-19, 20-21*

GOSPEL *Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46*



MARCH 11, 2023

Saturday of the Second Week of Lent

Today's Gospel reading highlights the journey of the recovering addict and those who have found freedom from attachments. Overlapped with the sacraments of the Church, the Twelve Steps provide a framework to experience how God longs for our return, renewal, and recovery.

As we realize our powerlessness and need for Christ, God may make a new creation of us. Reconciliation is made possible by the blood of Christ, who calls us to pick up our cross as we make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. By sharing it with Him, ourselves, and another human being, the shame and sin left by the stain of our trespasses are removed.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son tells the account of a pleasure-seeking son who asks his father for his inheritance and then squanders it on drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, and moral debauchery. Yet, even after all this, he only needs to turn toward his father with a contrite heart to experience compassionate forgiveness.

“While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.” | LUKE 15:20

This story captures the merciful love of the father and the saving grace received by the younger, prodigal son. However, it does not end there as Jesus remarks on the experience of the elder son. Filled with self-righteousness, the elder son scorns the idea of his father's acceptance of the prodigal, making a case for himself while pointing out the unfair nature of the father's embrace. While relating to the experience of the younger son, we must heed the warning and learn from the bitter angst of the elder son. Therefore, it is important for us to make a daily commitment to surrender ourselves to God's will and take on the compassionate attitude of the prodigal's father. | REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.

— Reflection Questions —

- What old things have passed away as you have taken on the identity as a beloved son or daughter of God? What new things have come?
- How do you relate to each of the characters in the Parable of the Prodigal Son?

FIRST READING Micah 7:14-15, 18-20

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12

GOSPEL Luke 15:1-3, 11-32



MARCH 12, 2023

Third Sunday of Lent

There are powerful forces keeping us from actively engaging in life-saving recovery. Shame, secrecy, and denial are built-in coping mechanisms that prevent us from being overwhelmed by the powerlessness of our situation. Unfortunately, they also keep us stuck in our seemingly intolerable situations. Fear and facts, which are commonly used to influence change, prove to be ineffective ways to overcome such obstacles. Instead, faith grows when we act on what little faith we have.

Our outlook and attitude about our condition can change when we are met with reactions that differ from our expectations. Typically, when we share the source of our shame with others, we expect condemnation and misunderstanding. The “magic” of recovery happens when others relate to our experience, embrace us with dignity, and share how they found freedom from a demoralized past. There is a word to describe the fruit of these interactions: hope. Today’s second reading establishes hope as an element of the Christian life that cannot be overlooked.

This “hope of the glory of God,” when passed along to each other, can spur willingness and create a foundation for honesty and change (Romans 5:2). Hope also strengthens us through challenges that we will inevitably face in our recovery.

This week’s Gospel reading tells the story of a woman meeting Jesus at a watering hole. He requests a drink from her and she, filled with shame, secrecy, and denial, rebukes Him. However, Jesus knows that the woman’s thirst is spiritual and not just physical. We can relate our own cravings to the gracious response of Jesus to this woman.

“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” | JOHN 4:13-14

Jesus then tells the woman her own story, an act that we may have experienced ourselves in a recovery meeting. She proclaims the “Fountain of Life” presented by Jesus and shares hope with her whole town. This is precisely how Christian hope and the message of recovery travels. | REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.

— Reflection Questions —

- What impact have the forces of shame, secrecy, and denial had on your recovery journey?
- How was hope presented to you as you made the transition into recovery and a spiritual way of life? How do you pass it along to others?

FIRST READING Exodus 17:3-7

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

SECOND READING Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

GOSPEL John 4:5-42



MARCH 13, 2023

Monday of the Third Week of Lent

Those of us who have spent much time in recovery programs understand that pride and closed-mindedness are huge detriments to progress. How many times have we seen one of our fellows say, “I’ve got this,” only to later see them fall into relapse? Our lack of humility can limit our progress in recovery by preventing us from being aware of our weaknesses and need for God and others.

In today’s first reading, we hear of Naaman, a successful military commander who is also a leper. Much to Naaman’s surprise, a messenger of Elijah and not the prophet himself proposes a strange method for healing Naaman’s leprosy: “Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will heal, and you will be clean” (2 Kings 5:10). Enraged by the lack of personal attention from the prophet Elijah as well as the simple but strange method of healing, Naaman refuses to do it. Yet, after reasoning with his servants, he humbles himself and submits to the request, bathes in the Jordan River seven times, and is healed.

How often do we question the message of healing in our own lives because of who delivers it? Or how often do we question the methods of recovery? Sometimes our own biases cause us to minimize the advice from others in recovery. Just as Naaman questioned the seemingly farcical method of bathing in a dirty creek, so might we also be tempted to question and refuse the simple advice of avoiding our drug of choice or attending a 12-step meeting. We might wonder: Could it be that simple? Yet, those of us firmly rooted in recovery would reply with a resounding “Yes!” Once we begin to work the steps we start to see that God is doing for us what we couldn’t do for ourselves. But, like Naaman, it requires honesty, humility, and open-mindedness to find healing for our wounds of addiction within the mysterious waters of God’s grace. | REFLECTION BY JON S.

— Reflection Questions —

- How has your pride interfered with recovery? What can you do today to work against it with God’s help?
- What close-minded biases have you held onto that may be hindering your progress? What can you do to be more open to God’s “messengers” of healing in your life?

FIRST READING 2 Kings 5:1-15ab

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 42:2, 3; 43:3, 4

GOSPEL Luke 4:24-30



MARCH 14, 2023

Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent

As we continue our Lenten journey, today we encounter a parable Jesus tells in the Gospel of a servant who works for the king and is responsible for a goodly amount of the king's resources. The king decided to settle accounts with his servants and brought in each servant to account for their dealings. One servant brought before him owed way more than he could repay, so the king ordered him sold into slavery along with his wife, children, and all his property.

“At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.’ Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan.” | MATTHEW 18:26-27

But when that servant went back to the ones who owed him, he was harsh and unforgiving, casting his debtors into prison. When word of this got back to the king, the servant was summoned by the king and scolded.

“His master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?’ Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt.” | MATTHEW 18:32-34

We who have been brought back from the brink of death because of our addictive substance, compulsive behavior, or unhealthy attachment need to show that same ability to forgive as our heavenly Father has shown us. We do well to recall the Lord's Prayer: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” (Matthew 6:12).

When we entered recovery and took those initial steps, our heavenly Father rejoiced, welcomed us home, and wiped away our debts as the king did in today's Gospel reading. Therefore, unlike the unforgiving servant, we must continue in all our affairs by being merciful and forgiving— both to ourselves and our neighbors. | REFLECTION BY KEVIN S.

— Reflection Questions —

- Reflecting on your own recovery, how did you “prostrate yourself” before our heavenly Father when working on your first, second, and third steps?
- How have you worked your experience of God's forgiveness into your dealings with others? What opportunities come to mind where you can do better?

FIRST READING Daniel 3:25, 34-43

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 25L4-5ab, 6, 7bc, 8-9

GOSPEL Matthew 18:21-35



MARCH 15, 2023

Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

Praise the Lord, Jerusalem! When others are full of joy and peace, it's contagious. We're attracted to them and strive to be like them because we want what they have. This is what Jesus wants for us, too. Moses states in today's first reading, "Hear the statutes and ordinances I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you" (Deuteronomy 4:1). We can accept this gift and "take possession" of joy and peace by observing the laws of our Creator who knows what's best for us.

Moses continues, explaining that if we observe God's laws carefully we give evidence of our wisdom to all peoples and to our "children and [our] children's children" (Deuteronomy 4:9). In the same way, when we work a good program of recovery, we give evidence to our fellows of the Lord's wisdom and power to bring healing and joy into our lives.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." | **MATTHEW 5:17**

Jesus came to fulfill God's promise to His people and to testify to the truth. If we live as God commands, we shall be blessed. When we recognize the Lord is the way, the truth, and the life, we are filled with joy. Yet, it can be easy to focus on the negatives in our lives and forget all of the blessings that come from God. Focusing on everything that is going wrong can lead to a downward spiral, allowing our addictive behaviors to take over. However, if we focus on praising Jesus—recalling how He has fulfilled and blessed us—our eyes can remain open to how good our Lord is. And when we do this, it's much easier to remain grateful and experience the fullness of joy, one day at a time. | **REFLECTION BY JANA I.**

— Reflection Questions —

- How can you be an example of the Lord's goodness and blessings to others today?
- Are you living each day in gratitude for all that our Lord has done for you? What areas of your life can you invite the Lord to bless and fulfill today?

FIRST READING Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-20

GOSPEL Matthew 5:17-19



MARCH 16, 2023

Thursday of the Third Week of Lent

“This rather is what I commanded them: Listen to my voice; then I will be your God and you shall be my people. Walk exactly in the way I command you, so that you may prosper.” | JEREMIAH 7:23

As in our first reading today, throughout the Bible God reminds us to listen to His voice. What does listening to His voice mean? Listening does not simply mean hearing, which usually equates to having something go “in one ear and out the other.” Before we were ready to recover, indeed, before we accepted that our behaviors and ways of living needed to stop, the voice of God was still there—we just weren’t listening to it. Even if we were attending Mass and praying, if our heart wasn’t open to listening to the Lord then these graces likely had no effect on us.

“But they did not listen to me, nor did they pay attention. They walked in the stubbornness of their evil hearts and turned their backs, not their faces, to me.” | JEREMIAH 7:24

Prayerful listening means understanding and behaving in accordance with what we’re being told by the Lord. Most of us in the midst of our addictions, unhealthy attachments, and compulsive behaviors heard the warnings and calls to change from others as well as that still small voice within our conscience. God used our conscience and those around us to reach us, encouraging us to listen to His will and accept our need for recovery. Yet, as we enter and grow in recovery, nurture our relationship with Christ and our heavenly Father through the Holy Spirit, and listen to the voice of God, we begin to experience that wonderful promise from Jeremiah: “Walk in all the ways that I command you, so that you may prosper” (Jeremiah 7:23b). | **REFLECTION BY KEVIN S.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *In what ways did you finally listen to God that led to the start of your recovery?*
- *How has the promise that “you may prosper” come true for you since beginning your recovery and growing closer to God?*

FIRST READING Jeremiah 7:23-28

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

GOSPEL Luke 11:14-23



MARCH 17, 2023

Friday of the Third Week Of Lent

Letting go of the past and self-forgiveness are hallmarks of the recovery journey. Without the ability to let go and forgive, we become mired in feelings of shame, guilt, and self-loathing. We essentially cut ourselves off from experiencing a deep relationship with Christ, making it easy to return to destructive habits and away from the redeeming love offered by Christ. With Christ as our Higher Power, we no longer need to be brought down by old patterns and ways of thinking. As we read in today's first reading, "Return, Israel, to the LORD, your God; you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words, and return to the LORD; Say to him, 'Forgive all iniquity, and take what is good...'" (Hosea 14:2-3).

There is an acronym we hear often in recovery: F.O.M.O., or "Fear Of Missing Out." As we examine our lives and patterns of destructive behavior, F.O.M.O. can easily cause us to hang onto the past and romanticize destructive behaviors. Thoughts can bombard us: *How am I going to have fun with all of my friends if I give up alcohol, drugs, or overindulging in food?*

When we let go of our past as "rubbish" and accept Christ, we no longer need to fear we are missing out on anything! In today's Gospel reading, we hear about the life that the Lord is calling us toward: one of love for God and neighbor. And when we love God with all that we have and are, we realize that we already have everything we need to live healthy, happy, and free from our addiction. We come to see that we're "not far from the Kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). | **REFLECTION BY TREVOR M.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *Are you falling into F.O.M.O. or thinking about your past life of addiction? If so, how can you offer these thoughts up to God as "rubbish" and become "something new"?*
- *In what ways is the Lord asking you to love Him and your neighbor better?*

FIRST READING Hosea 14:2-10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 81:6c-8a, 8bc-9, 10-11ab, 14 and 17

GOSPEL Mark 12:28-34



MARCH 18, 2023

Saturday of the Third Week of Lent

Recovery emphasizes community for many reasons. One is to prevent living under the deception of self-sufficiency. The support of a community curbs our selfish tendencies. Community makes us aware of the other, work for the good of the whole, and reminds us that we do not have all of the answers. In Catholic in Recovery, we rely on the merciful solution of God's love through the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to find healing from our addictions and unhealthy attachments. We look to the boundless treasury the Church provides to teach us to live as God's beloved sons and daughters, adopted into His family through baptism. This treasury includes Mass and the Eucharist, sacred Scripture, prayers, the Saints, the Holy Rosary, and the sacraments. We depend on the supernatural grace of the Holy Spirit, particularly through frequent reception of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

However, our access to these riches contains a potential pitfall. We can be tempted to think that because of our participation in a church community we are "earning" God's grace. I know for myself there have been times when, because of the effort I put into attending Mass, Eucharistic adoration, prayer groups, and Bible studies, I considered myself "better" than others. Yet, when we fall into this state of mind, today's Responsorial Psalm should give us pause.

"For you do not desire sacrifice or I would give it; a burnt offering you would not accept. My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a contrite, humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn." | PSALMS 51:18-19

We might sometimes do "good things" to prop ourselves up rather than humbly approaching our Lord with a contrite heart, desiring only Him. While it is true that showing up requires an act of our free will and effort, we remember that Jesus Himself is the true gift—everything else is because of and for Him. We love Him only because He first loved us. God is always host and initiator, and it is truly good news that He has humbled Himself to be available to us in our journey of recovery. | REFLECTION BY STEPHANIE N.

— Reflection Questions —

- Are you putting faith in the "good things" you are doing more than in our savior, Jesus Christ? Are you allowing pride to put you "above" others in your life?
- How might you take advantage of the many wonderful treasures of the Church (the sacraments, prayers, Saints, etc.) to better conform your recovery and life to Christ?

FIRST READING Hosea 6:1-6

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 51:3-4, 18-19, 20-21ab

GOSPEL Luke 18:9-14



MARCH 19, 2023

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Fear and uncertainty can be a dangerous combination for those seeking recovery from addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments. When events take place around us that seem beyond our control, we have the choice to isolate ourselves in our own thoughts or seek connection with others close to us. Fear, secrecy, and denial tend to bubble when we stay in isolation, while personal connection yields peace, hope, and direction.

For many of us, addictive thought patterns and compulsive behaviors were the only tools we had in order to cope with the powerlessness around us. We learn that we must turn our attention inward and find God who dwells within us if we are to have a chance at lasting change. This begins by recognizing the things we can control, the things we can't control, and the difference between the two. A profound change takes place when we focus our attention on changing ourselves rather than taking inventory of how the world around us is not suitable. God supports our transition from victim to victory with the support of the Twelve Steps, the sacramental life of the Church, and the hope shared by our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We were blind, now we see. Jesus restores sight to a blind man in today's Gospel reading and allows us to understand the true miracle of recovery. At first, many are unwilling to believe the miracle that has taken place and some of the man's neighbors claim he isn't even the same person. We might experience the same when those from our past meet us in recovery. However, the man with recovered sight comes to believe as he continuously shares the miracle. Our transformation rests on the care and support of God and others. Therefore, let us turn to our Shepherd who has all power and refreshes our souls. | REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.

— Reflection Questions —

- *What tools have helped you remain in the solution guided by Jesus Christ?*
- *How has God personally restored sight to your life?*

FIRST READING 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 23: 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

SECOND READING Ephesians 5:8-14

GOSPEL John 9:1-41



MARCH 20, 2023

Solemnity of Saint Joseph, husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Saint Joseph is the foster father of Jesus, husband of the Blessed Mother, patriarch of the Church, and head of the Holy Family. This quiet saint's titles go on and on. And as God kept his promise to David about the birth of a firm ruler, Jesus, we too can learn to trust in God's promises within the depths of our souls. By surrendering our old life of addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments to Him, He frees us so that we can hear His voice and act with love, just as Saint Joseph did.

Saint Joseph listened steadily to God's voice and knew when to take action. He is a model for living Step 11 and Step 12 in recovery, striving daily to be in contact with God and serving Him and others. As we see in today's Gospel reading, even though Saint Joseph surely did not understand Mary's immaculate conception and pregnancy at the time, he remained open to hearing the Lord and, once he heard Him, acted with trust.

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her’ ... When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.” | MATTHEW 1:20-24

Saint Joseph was a pious Jew, one who closely followed the Law of Moses. We can consider another example of his willingness to listen to God and act accordingly. Although he and his wife Mary were poor, living on the paltry means of a carpenter, he still took his little family to the temple in Jerusalem for the required feast days to offer a pair of turtle doves and two young pigeons after Jesus was born. Not only would this have been a long and treacherous journey but it would have resulted in time lost working, which would have been no small cost to a poor man like Saint Joseph. Yet, this man of God, the father of Jesus, still trusted in God to take care of Him and his family with a spirit of humility. As we are all called to do in our recovery, He listened for the voice of God and, once heard it, acted promptly with faith and humility no matter the obstacles. | REFLECTION BY MARCIA G.

— Reflection Questions —

- What has Saint Joseph taught you from his example as a father, husband, worker, or obedient man of God?
- As you reflect on Saint Joseph, is there a particular intercession you want to ask him for related to your recovery or the recovery of another?

FIRST READING 2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 27 and 29

SECOND READING Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22

GOSPEL Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a



MARCH 21, 2023

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

As children, we should have felt physically and emotionally safe as we grew up. Yet, many of us came from dysfunctional homes where we had to learn at a very young age how to keep ourselves safe from the sick people who were our caregivers. Unfortunately, these childhood responses to our unsafe environments have ingrained in us faulty ways of coping as adults.

Some of us turned to addictions, others developed codependent relationships, and others retreated into our own world out of fear of relating to others in unsafe and unhealthy ways. We were sick people raised by sick people and couldn't see a way out until finding God and 12-step recovery.

In today's first reading, Ezekiel encounters an angel. As Catholics, we believe that God assigns an angel to each of us from the moment of our conception, a guardian angel. Sometimes when I think of my childhood, I think of my guardian angel being with me in the dark as I hid away from the chaos of my dysfunctional family. Today's first reading reminds us of the protective spirits that God offers us that we would do well to be mindful of as we work our recovery.

Like many of us, today's Gospel reading features another person who had been hurting for many years, a disabled man beside the pool at Bethesda. He was locked in his sickness, unable to find healing. Then, in a moment of clarity (maybe even after a nudge from his guardian angel), he heard Jesus ask, "Do you want to be well?" God's voice broke through to him, the way it does for so many of us in recovery! Suddenly, we are ready to surrender, admit our powerlessness, and allow God to set us free.

Today's Responsorial Psalm is a beautiful reminder that God and our guardian angel are always with us in trouble. We are given the wonderful promise that we are never left alone. | **REFLECTION BY CHLOE D.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *What childhood coping strategies are no longer working for you? What are other healthy and holy ways of responding to your pain and suffering instead?*
- *As you look back on your life, in what situations can you see the beneficial intervention of the Holy Spirit or your guardian angel?*

FIRST READING Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9

GOSPEL John 5:1-16



MARCH 22, 2023

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

“But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is at work until now, so I am at work.’ For this reason the Jews tried all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but he also called God his own father, making himself equal to God.” | JOHN 5:17-18

I was in a recovery meeting recently and someone with a few months of sobriety began sharing. He is someone I’ve taken an interest in and have enjoyed watching his growth. From what I can see, he takes his recovery seriously. He shared how an old friend of his, his Best Man at his wedding and a former drinking buddy, couldn’t believe he had gotten sober. His friend was coming to town for a visit and the man in recovery shared how he felt that his friend was, to paraphrase today’s Gospel reading, intent on “killing” his sobriety.

After he shared this, the room encouraged him to focus on keeping his sobriety the priority or, to quote Zig Ziglar, on “keeping the main thing the main thing.” The room encouraged him to establish personal and emotional boundaries with his friend and to tell him that if he couldn’t accept and respect those boundaries that their relationship couldn’t continue.

Jesus kept his focus on the singular goal of His salvific mission. He did not allow anyone or anything to detract Him from this—even the threat of death. As we read elsewhere in Scripture, “Therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame” (Isaiah 50:7). Like Jesus, our mission in recovery is to keep our “face like flint” to maintain sobriety and our relationship with God. If we lose this main focus then we risk losing our recovery and connection with our loving Father. | REFLECTION BY KEVIN S.

— Reflection Questions —

- Are there people in your life who are impeding your recovery? If so, are there actions you can take to ensure these relationships no longer pose a risk?
- What boundaries might you need to establish with others in your life to keep your focus on your recovery? What new spiritual practices can you adopt to keep this same focus?

FIRST READING Isaiah 49:8-15

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 145:8-9, 13cd-14, 17-18

GOSPEL John 5:17-30



MARCH 23, 2023

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent

In today's first reading, God tells Moses that the people "have become depraved." I know this firsthand, since the effects of alcohol, the lessening of my inhibitions, made it easy for me to make immoral choices. My own will could not help me escape the addiction. I was not free to choose.

God, rightfully so, continued His conversation with Moses regarding the Israelites, threatening to punish them with a fiery, consuming "blaze." Yet, Moses pleaded with the Lord, and in God's loving mercy He relented on "the punishment he had threatened to inflict on his people" (Exodus 32:14). Moses' imploring resembles our own surrender when we enter 12-step programs or return to our faith, asking for God's unmerited forgiveness. Our willingness to work the steps cements our desire to have God's will be our own so we are less prone to falling back into unhealthy behaviors.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reminds us that during Lent, "We recall the waters of baptism in which we were also baptized into Christ's death, died to sin and evil, and began new life in Christ." In recovery, we die to ourselves and begin a new life reflecting the risen Lord, the light of Christ, and His mercy that is available to all who desire it. At the end of the chapter titled "To Employers," in *Alcoholics Anonymous*, this key truth is reiterated about those who actively recover: "They have a new attitude, and they have been saved from a living death." Blessed are we who have salvation through our baptism and our recovery. | **REFLECTION BY MARY BETH R.**

— Reflection Questions —

- What has your experience been like working the steps? Do you still need some level of willingness to proceed?
- What does your "new life" in Christ look like?

FIRST READING Exodus 32:7-14

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 106:19-20, 21-22, 23

GOSPEL John 5:31-47



MARCH 24, 2023

Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent

We always have available the chance to unite our hearts to Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Those of us with a history of addiction once journeyed far from the path of love and self-sacrifice that our sobriety now requires. We were led by our own selfish desires and our path was littered with guilt and sinfulness. Yet, by surrendering to God we discover His gifts of forgiveness and sobriety.

Today's Responsorial Psalm speaks clearly about the merciful heart of Jesus who waits to free us from our sinfulness and addiction. When we humbly cry out to Him in a contrite spirit, He answers and saves us.

Lent provides the opportunity to receive, once again, pardon and peace for our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We should not be afraid to approach His throne of mercy and forgiveness during this season of cleansing and renewal. In addition to participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we might also consider speaking to our sponsor and/or spiritual director about working another fourth and fifth step if we haven't done so in a while. Lastly, Fridays are the days we recall how our Lord suffered and died for our sins on the cross.

Therefore, consider attending Stations of the Cross at a nearby parish today and invite a friend in recovery to join you. | **REFLECTION BY KATHY B.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *What new actions are you willing to take to journey alongside Jesus to Calvary? Are the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist playing a large enough part in your journey?*
- *Is there something you can give up today (in addition to meat) to draw closer to the Lord's passion?*

FIRST READING *Wisdom 2:1a, 12-22*

RESPONSORIAL PSALM *Psalm 34:17-18, 19-20, 21 & 23*

GOSPEL *John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30*



MARCH 25, 2023

Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Mary is a perfect model of surrender. Step Three, which entails making a decision to turn our lives and will over to God, can be so difficult and confusing. Perhaps Mary can reveal to us the secret of surrendering our wills to God. She shows us that surrendering requires neither certainty nor acting on our own strength. Rather, it requires a willingness to enter into the mystery of God even, maybe *especially*, with our complex human emotions and questions.

Mary may have more in common with us than we realize! She had uncomfortable emotions that required discernment, even though the message she received from the angel was sent from our heavenly Father. The angel greets Mary with the words, “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28). Luke’s Gospel reveals that Mary was “greatly troubled” and “pondered” this greeting (Luke 1:29). The angel then told her not to be afraid, implying that she probably was. She even questions the angel upon learning that she will conceive and bear a son though she is a virgin. Ultimately, even though she doesn’t understand it and seems to experience a host of emotions and uncertainty, she consents and identifies herself as a handmaid of the Lord, a servant of God.

We too are servants of the Lord by virtue of our baptism, and by participating in the sacramental life of the Church, this sheer gift of grace, we can live out our own “surrender” to God. It’s a type of surrender that is only made possible by a power greater than ourselves, one that Mary entered into with her emotions, questions, uncertainties, and, ultimately, willingness. | REFLECTION BY STEPHANIE N.

— Reflection Questions —

- How has the grace of the Holy Spirit increased in your life since you first encountered Step Three? What were/are some questions or fears you had/have about surrendering?
- Mary and Jesus give us perfect examples of surrendering to God’s will. Is there anyone else who is an example of this willingness to surrender in your life (even if not perfectly)?

FIRST READING Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 40:7-8a, 8b-9, 10, 11

SECOND READING Hebrews 10:4-10

GOSPEL Luke 1:26-38



MARCH 26, 2023

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Today's second reading challenges us to consider elements of life, death, faith, and attachment. Saint Paul references a contrast between flesh and spirit. How is the behavior of the flesh different from that of the spirit? Put simply, it is behavior that is "attached" or "addicted." We act from the "flesh" when we put a thing or a person in God's place.

For many of us, this resembled placing the pursuit of a substance (such as alcohol, drugs, food, money, another's body, or another's happiness) above the pursuit of God. We treated things like they're people and people like they're things. Over time, this process leaves us feeling dead inside. Our emotions dry up, and all that is left is the zombie-like desire for the things that don't really fill us. Outside of our addictions, we can fall into this pattern when we put our hope in the human powers of this world to save us. In our loneliness, we might even ask why we've been abandoned by God.

The story of Lazarus in this week's Gospel reading shines a light on this shared experience. Like Lazarus, we were tied up and bound by our addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments. They began as a way to cope with the world around us and ultimately brought us to a spiritual death. Our only hope is a spiritual awakening, promised by the Twelve Steps of recovery and the sacramental life of the Church. Our solution is characterized by total dependence on God. We cannot change yesterday and tomorrow is not promised. All things, including our faith and recovery, are a gift from God. Like Lazarus, Jesus cares enough to breathe new life into us so that we may properly order our lives and share the good news with others. | REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.

— Reflection Questions —

- How has your recovery been impacted by recent changes in your life? What new personal challenges exist today that were not present a month ago?
- What spiritual tools and practices help relieve you of expectations put on God and other people?

FIRST READING Ezekiel 37:12-14

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

SECOND READING Romans 8:8-11

GOSPEL John 11:1-45



MARCH 27, 2023

Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent

There is no hope. No one is coming for you. You are alone and dying, walking blindly through the valley of addiction. This was the false testimony of fear constantly running in our hearts. But into our darkness, God sent a savior not to condemn us but to save us.

“Then Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more’” (John 8:11). | MATTHEW 6:3-4

Those of us in recovery choose to turn away from the lie that we are lost and alone. Instead, we lift our tear-stained faces to heaven searching for God in the difficult and painful times of life. As we move forward in faith, engaging in the steps, the sacraments, and regular prayer, we find a growing consciousness of Christ’s presence in our every moment. And it’s the light of His presence that drives away want and fear, even death.

Our stories of recovery are stories of salvation. The insanity of addiction and sin is that we are blind to the beautiful life that Jesus is offering in Psalm 23. If we turn back to those still in the dark valley and share our experience, strength, and hope as we’re called to do in the twelfth step, we help light the way for others with love. We give them our testimony of hope by sharing with them, “We have been where you are, alone and afraid. But there is a way out of fear. A new life of hope, and you are never alone. Jesus, the good shepherd, is here with you, and with us all. We are safe and at peace in His arms. And if we follow Him, He will always lead us home.” | REFLECTION BY ANN A.

— Reflection Questions —

- In today’s first reading, Daniel’s heart was stirred by the Holy Spirit to speak the truth. How has speaking the truth been difficult for you? What are the consequences of listening to fear as opposed to the Holy Spirit?
- What is your experience of the light of Jesus’ presence during the difficult times of your life?

FIRST READING Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 or 13:41c-62

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

GOSPEL John 8:1-11



MARCH 28, 2023

Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

If we are honest, sometimes we don't handle the difficulties of life gracefully. In today's Old Testament reading, we see an example of the Israelites hiking through the desert and not handling their circumstances so well. They complain against God and Moses: "Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness, where there is no food or water? We are disgusted with this wretched food!" (Numbers 21:5). Yet, after fiery serpents bite and kill some of the Israelites, they repent of their grumblings and God offers healing to those who will look upon a bronze serpent.

The lesson from the Israelites draws to mind the recovery principle of acceptance. From *Alcoholics Anonymous*, we read that "acceptance is the answer to all my problems...I can find no serenity until I accept" whatever situation I am in "as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment. Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens in God's world by mistake." Granted, this is no easy feat. Life challenges us with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Still, as Scripture reminds us, we are called to pray, as we grow in our faith and continue to walk the steps of recovery, that we will begin to see that "all things work for good for those who love God and are called according to His purposes" (Romans 8:28). | **REFLECTION BY JON S.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *Is there anything you're complaining about to God that He wants you to hand over to Him with a spirit of trust and humility?*
- *What are some previous instances of suffering in your life from which you eventually experienced the Lord's healing? How might remembering God's faithfulness in those times help you endure with trust and peace in any current suffering?*

FIRST READING Numbers 21:4-9

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 102:2-3, 16-18, 19-21

GOSPEL John 8:21-30



MARCH 29, 2023

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

As humans, we have a natural hunger for freedom. From our earliest moments of self-awareness, we seek autonomy and independence. That's why it's not uncommon for a preschooler to announce to an older sibling, "You're not the boss of me!"

But this tendency toward self-autonomy can lead to independently and selfishly seeking physical and/or emotional pleasure beyond normal and healthy amounts, resulting in addictions, compulsive behaviors, and unhealthy attachments. In other words, they can lead to our enslavement. Jesus had something to say about this in today's Gospel reading.

"Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in him, 'If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.' ... 'Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.'" | JOHN 8:31-34

In recovery, we have come to know the reality of enslavement to chemical substances, unhealthy behaviors, and/or toxic relationships. Although in some cases our addictions could have led (or did lead) to physical and literal imprisonment, Jesus is speaking here about freedom of the spirit. Many an alcoholic has come to the point of saying, "I can't live with alcohol, and I can't live without alcohol." They have arrived at the "jumping off" point.

But that is exactly the point where Jesus stands ready to rescue us—to free us from our addictions or unhealthy attachments! When we have faith in Jesus and allow Him space in our lives, He frees us from the power of our addictions, compulsive behaviors, and unhealthy attachments. He frees us so that we can grow in a joyful relationship with God, our loving Father. | **REFLECTION BY KEVIN S.**

— Reflection Questions —

- How have you experienced freedom from the bondage of your addictions, compulsive behaviors, or unhealthy attachments in recovery? What areas of your life still need to be freed by Christ?
- How has greater freedom to love God and others transformed your life?

FIRST READING Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Daniel 3:52, 53, 54, 55, 56

GOSPEL John 8:31-42



MARCH 30, 2023

Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent

“Abram fell face down and God said to him: For my part, here is my covenant with you: you are to become the father of a multitude of nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I am making you the father of a multitude of nations.” | **GENESIS 17:3-5**

In our first reading, God gives a special mission to Abram. He is to be the father of Zion, the father of many descendants and future kings of Israel. But more than that, God gives Abram a new life—a fresh start—even in his old age. God gives him a new name to mark this fresh start as a new creation: Abraham. God makes a covenant with Abraham, and his descendants, to lead His people to the Promised Land.

Yet, part of that covenant entails keeping God’s commandments and doing His will. God will surely do His part but He wants us to do our part in following His will as well because He knows what is best for us. We must ask ourselves: are we doing our part to keep our covenant with God?

Of course, we can always do better. As fallen human beings, we are prone to straying off the path and falling back into our selfishness, unhealthy attachments, and sin. Yet, with our Lord Jesus Christ, we can begin anew each day. All things are possible for God, and each day can be the start of a new way of life more in line with God’s will for us.

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus reveals that He is the son of God—“I AM”—and that through Him all things are possible (John 8:58). With His grace we can conquer our addictions, unhealthy attachments, and sin as we become a new creation in Him. Jesus reminds us that we can overcome any tribulation as long as we trust in Him. Our loving savior desires to help us with every step of our recovery and spiritual journey. All we have to do is ask Him. | **REFLECTION BY JEFF R.**

— Reflection Questions —

- How has prayer aided you in your recovery journey over these last few weeks of Lent?
- How can you do more to “hold up your end” of God’s covenant and better follow His will?

FIRST READING Genesis 17:3-9

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 105:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

GOSPEL John 8:51-59



MARCH 31, 2023

Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Step One of Alcoholics Anonymous reads, “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.” It’s a direct statement, and for good reason. We must be thoroughly convinced of our powerlessness over our addiction or we have little chance of staying sober. Unfortunately, relapse can become a part of many of our stories when, after having a period of sobriety, we take our power back and end up drinking, using drugs, or partaking in some other addictive behavior, thinking to ourselves *this time it won’t be so bad*. But we are mistaken, and it’s usually only until we are in complete desperation and hopelessness that we accept our powerlessness over everything and everyone fully and cry out to God who waits lovingly and patiently for us to turn to Him.

“The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction terrified me. The cords of Sheol encircled me; the snares of death lay in wait for me. In my distress I called out: LORD! I cried out to my God.” | PSALMS 18:5-7

As we see in today’s readings, God hears us in our distress and suffering when we call out to Him, admitting our powerlessness and need for His help. Over time, we learn to rely more on God and less on ourselves. We learn to follow the example of others in recovery who have found a way out of their addiction and whose words, actions, and behaviors reflect our loving God. And we learn to embrace that same sense of peace and serenity no matter our trials as we journey toward healing in our own recovery. | **REFLECTION BY KATHY B.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *Lent is a good time to look back and reflect on Step One. What are some of the blessings you have received since you first surrendered that you can thank God for today?*
- *Who or what are the people, places, or things that you are currently powerless over and are making your life unmanageable? How can you ask your sponsor for guidance in these areas and call out to God for the grace to surrender these to Him?*

FIRST READING Jeremiah 20:10-13

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 18:2-3a, 3bc-4, 5-6, 7

GOSPEL John 10:31-42



APRIL 1, 2023

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent

As we get closer to Easter, the readings begin to lead us to the Promised Land and Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. In today's first reading, God announces that the Israelites will no longer have to live in two separate Kingdoms and that He will lead them to the Promised Land: "I will cleanse them so that they will be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezekiel 37:23). We are given a hope that God will save His people and that He will not give up on them. He will never forsake them.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus' many miracles and signs cause some Jews to believe in Him. But tensions and fears are rising amongst the Pharisees. Caiaphas, the High Priest at the time, prophesied that Jesus would die, not only for the nation but also to gather into one the dispersed children of God (and this points back to our first reading). As a result, they decided to kill Jesus.

As we know, after Jesus returned to Jerusalem and was welcomed as a king, He was killed. His road to His true kingdom was anything but easy. He suffered crucifixion and death for us, so that we sinners could be gathered by Jesus, just like the Israelites, and carried into the Kingdom of God. As Christ's journey to gain our redemption was difficult, so it is with us on our road of recovery from addictions and unhealthy attachments. Today's readings remind us that we must die daily to ourselves so we can reap the joy of sobriety in this life and supreme happiness in the life to come. | REFLECTION BY LORETTA L.

— Reflection Questions —

- What are you doing regularly to maintain recovery and strive for the Kingdom of Heaven? What are some other practices to keep you on the road of recovery that you might adopt?
- What recovery "promises" have come true as a result of recovery in your life?

FIRST READING Ezekiel 37:21-28

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Jeremiah 31:10, 11-12abcd, 13

GOSPEL John 11:45-56



APRIL 2, 2023

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Having been through our own personal crises and feelings of impending doom, we can appreciate the need for each other and complete reliance on God. Recovery literature describes the beauty that remains when we overcome death and suffering together.

"We are people who normally would not mix. But there exists among us a fellowship, a friendliness, and an understanding which is indescribably wonderful ... The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join in brotherly and harmonious action." | ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

We celebrate Palm Sunday today and join our Lord as He makes the climb toward Calvary. Jesus' disciples are sent in service to prepare the way of His passion. When the meal ended, Jesus and His disciples moved onward. While He invited Peter and others to stay awake in prayer, Jesus retreated on His own to pray.

"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will." | MATTHEW 26:39

The humanity of Jesus is on full display as He cries out to the Father. We might find comfort in knowing that even the Son of God had to suffer greatly. Perhaps we've found strength from God and others in the agony of our darkest hour while wishing away the cup of our addictions. We can make the same kind of humble surrender in matters big and small by praying, "Thy will, not mine, be done." It may need to be repeated often, but no set of circumstances is too small or too big to invite God into. As we approach Holy Week, let us adopt this trust in our Father's perfect and loving will for our lives. | REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.

— Reflection Questions —

- What has brought you hope over the past several weeks of Lent?
- Can you relate to the experience of having an "indescribably wonderful" fellowship? If so, how has this helped you remain faithful to the Father's will, even in the midst of great suffering?

AT THE PROCESSION WITH PALMS Matthew 21:1-11

FIRST READING Isaiah 50:4-7

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24

SECOND READING Philippians 2:6-11

GOSPEL Matthew 26:14-27:66



APRIL 3, 2023

Monday of Holy Week

Mary of Bethany had likely heard about Jesus healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, raising the dead, loving the outcast, teaching about a God of love, and eating with sinners. Perhaps Mary's heart was among the last of those prepared by John the Baptist to meet the Messiah and give up a life of self-destruction and despair. Perhaps she had an awareness of her need for mercy and knew she was without the power to change the course of her life, just like many of us in active addiction come to realize. Perhaps the deep pain within her soul prompted this fearless demonstration to anoint the feet of Jesus, an extravagant gesture of love and courage, despite those who criticized and degraded her.

Mary's need for spiritual healing, forgiveness, acceptance, and love overpowered any fear of social rejection or humiliation. She was at a crossroads between life and death. She had reached that critical state of being that can lead to an awakening of the spirit and the discovery of true happiness and freedom. Yet, to embrace such a life, she had to humbly recognize her need for God and surrender to Him. She must have sensed Jesus' gentle presence, moving her to trust Him to save her from the darkness within her.

In recovery language, Mary had "hit bottom," which brought her to the feet of Jesus. As the Gospel explains, she "anointed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair; the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil" (John 12:3). Deep within her soul, she must have trusted that God would embrace and restore her to wholeness. And anointing Jesus' feet moved Him to praise her action as worthy of eternal memory. In other words, Mary had moved through Step One and Step Two and entered into Step Three: surrendering to God.

Perhaps we in recovery can consider ourselves the "anointed" of God as well. And when we accept our own smallness and poverty of spirit, as Mary did, we are better able to treat others with reverent love—not from a place of privilege but from one of gratitude. | **REFLECTION BY MARYBETH B.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *On a daily basis, do you acknowledge your need for God's help when it comes to your addiction, attitude, and thinking?*
- *Have you found powerlessness to be the foundation of humility to enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ and attain sobriety? Like Mary in today's Gospel, is your love for Jesus reverent, humble, and extravagant?*

FIRST READING Isaiah 42:1-7

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 27:1, 2, 3, 13-14

GOSPEL John 12:1-11



APRIL 4, 2023

Tuesday of Holy Week

As we progress in our recovery journey we may come upon periods of dryness and difficulty. Times when we feel like we are not making much progress in our spiritual lives and when our commitment to sobriety and abstinence seems to be in vain. The prophet Isaiah comments on such times of dryness in today's first reading.

"Though I thought I had toiled in vain, for nothing and for naught spent my strength, Yet my right is with the LORD, my recompense is with my God. For now the LORD has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb..." | **ISAIAH 49:4-5**

Jesus is our perfect role model. He also endured temptations, dryness, and sufferings, and yet He always trusted His heavenly Father. Even during Holy Week, knowing that a dear friend would betray Him and He would suffer terribly on a cross, He still continued to trust His Father and keep His focus on His salvific mission of becoming a "light to the nations." | **ISAIAH 49:6**

"It is too little, he says, for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the survivors of Israel; I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." | **ISAIAH 49:6**

Our mission is to love God, follow His commandments and teachings, and, with His help, turn from our addictions, compulsive behaviors, and unhealthy attachments, which separate us from fully experiencing His joy in this life. As we do these things, we are able to hope in faith that we will one day live forever with our loving Father in heaven. | **REFLECTION BY KEVIN S.**

— Reflection Questions —

- Have you experienced periods of dryness or feelings of helplessness in your recovery journey? What have you done or are you doing to address it?
- How can you be of service to those who are experiencing difficult periods of dryness in their own recovery and spiritual lives?

FIRST READING Isaiah 49:1-6

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 71:1-2, 3-4a, 5ab-6ab, 15 and 17

GOSPEL John 13:21-33, 36-38



APRIL 5, 2023

Wednesday of Holy Week

Today's Gospel reading speaks of the betrayal of Judas at the Last Supper. Judas is central to the action at the table. This is a dark night. One whom Jesus loves betrays Him! We understand betrayal. We have been betrayed and have betrayed. However, unlike Judas, we remember that even in the midst of betrayal we can respond with hope, not despair. Jesus told His disciples that one of them will betray him, to which Judas said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi" (Matthew 26:25).

Jesus responded, "You have said so" (Matthew 26:25). Jesus offers no condemnation, sarcasm, or defensiveness.

Like Judas, we often think someone else is the problem, not ourselves. We tend to project our hate and ill feelings elsewhere. We are tempted to play the victim or create victims, both for the purpose of control and for denying personal responsibility. Our self-pity finds someone else to blame, accuse, attack, and gossip about. Pain is our common condition and if we do not *transform* it we will surely *transmit* it.

The contract that Judas made with men of murderous intent is so terrible that we must ask: why? What were his motives? Does the motive of an act make it any less a sin? Isn't our betrayal of God in our lives always a sin (a broken connection with ourselves, others, and God), regardless of the factors that drove us to the betrayal? Yet, we defend ourselves and diminish our sins with excuses. But if we do not take responsibility for our actions we will never repent—never ask for the Lord's forgiveness. As we continue our journey through Holy Week, let us ask for forgiveness from others as well as from the Lord. The eighth and ninth steps are especially helpful here.

Jesus accepted the fact that He could not control the behavior of Judas. He also recognized that He would suffer the consequences of Judas' betrayal. While none of us have been betrayed to the extent Jesus was, we too can experience a type of inner death when we are betrayed by loved ones. Yet, we can maintain our sense of self and find healing for our wounds by embracing the Twelve Steps and leaving the outcome of our broken relationships to God. And just as the healing of our hearts from betrayal requires time and patience, we must also allow those we have betrayed the same for their own healing. | **REFLECTION BY MARYBETH B.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *In what ways have you betrayed others and how have you attempted to heal those wounds through recovery?*
- *Has being betrayed hardened your heart, trapped you in grief, imprisoned you, or worked for your good? What are some of the blessings, lessons, or opportunities for growth that such a betrayal might be offering you?*

FIRST READING Isaiah 50:4-9a

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 69:8-10, 21-22, 31 and 33-34

GOSPEL Matthew 26:14-25



APRIL 6, 2023

Holy Thursday Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper

The mystery of Holy Week is that Jesus' life comes to its fullness not only by what He did but by what was done to Him as well. His passion, which means "to suffer," is the great testament of the love that He leaves us with. Today, we remember His last meal with friends as well as His gift to them and us: His own flesh and blood in the Eucharist. We also remember how He washed His disciples' feet in an act of unexpected and extravagant love, revealing a God who bends before us and desires that we treat each other with the same love and dignity God lavishes on us.

This is a night to remember how much we are loved, called, chosen, and the beloved of God. Jesus commands us to "do this in memory of [Him]," a memory steeped in forgiveness, reconciliation, and rebirth. We are the members of the body of Christ, the people of God, a community that gathers around the Word and Living Bread so that we may live out His presence in our world.

Jesus gives us an example of profound humility when He washes others' feet. We might respond to such an act of love as the psalmist does in the Responsorial Psalm "How can I repay the Lord for all the great good done for me?" (Psalm 116:12). The answer? To live as He lived, a servant for others.

When we deepen our awareness of this type of divine love, our response is accompanied by gratitude and joy. This awareness affects the way we revere ourselves and others. Life will continue to have its ups and downs but God's presence remains constant, moving us to serve others just as Jesus did when He washed His disciples' feet. Let's embrace once again this commitment to generous service that we are also called to do to maintain our recovery from addiction and unhealthy attachments as we prepare our hearts for the resurrection of our savior this Sunday. | REFLECTION BY MARYBETH B.

— Reflection Questions —

- In what specific ways can you give your heart, time, experience, strength, and hope to your family, recovery community, friends, and the Church with a spirit of self-sacrifice?
- How has the Eucharist deepened your relationship with the Lord and strengthened your recovery? Do you regularly receive the Eucharist with the intention of letting Christ transform, heal, and empower you?

FIRST READING Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18.

SECOND READING 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

GOSPEL John 13:1-15



APRIL 7, 2023

Good Friday of the Lord's Passion

My alcoholic parents divorced when I was eight years old and a few years later they both remarried (both to another alcoholic). I lived with my mom and her new husband, who we called Al. When Al drank he usually went into a rage. During these rages, I would sometimes hide in my room in the dark. But other times I would leave the house and go down the street to sit in a neighbor's tree. I called that tree the "Tree of Life." At the time I was unfamiliar with the tree with the same name from the Garden of Eden because I had left the Catholic Church when my parents divorced. I believe God drew me to that tree, and I would sit in it, talk to it, and feel safe in it during those dark nights. In those days, I felt safer on a dark street in a tree than I did in my own home.

Today's Responsorial Psalm reminds us of God's love and faithfulness toward us no matter the pain and brokenness we feel. It reminds me of my younger self, and in my imagination, I pray with that little girl in a tree with today's words from the Psalmist.

"Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your mercy. Do not let me be put to shame, for I have called to you, LORD." | PSALMS 31:17-18

As a Catholic adult child in recovery, I understand now how that "Tree of Life" prefigured the cross that gives us life. As we remain faithful to Christ, our own crosses can lead us to eternal life where there is no addiction, fear, rage, or pain. In fact, we can even experience a foretaste of the joy and freedom of heaven here and now by carrying our crosses with Christ and working the Twelve Steps of recovery.

Now when I feel anxiety well up, and that little girl inside me begins crying out for the love and attention she never received in those terrifying moments of abandonment, I can remind her of God's love—the Love that created the "Tree of Life" in the Garden of Eden, the Love that died on another tree on Good Friday for all of humanity, and the Love that offers us all freedom, peace, and everlasting joy. | REFLECTION BY CHLOE D.

— Reflection Questions —

- What Scripture verses remind you of the love God has for you, His precious child? How might the readings from today reveal God's particular love for you?
- How has recovery helped you overcome fear, despair, rage, or helplessness in your life?

FIRST READING Isaiah 52:13–53:12

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 31:2, 6, 12–13, 15–16, 17, 25

SECOND READING Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9

GOSPEL John 18:1–19:42



APRIL 8, 2023

Holy Saturday At the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter

Holy Saturday begins with darkness and an unknown emptiness among the followers of Jesus. As we imagine the disciples' fear and anxiety about the death of their friend and savior, we can recall the lack of hope we had when we arrived in the rooms of recovery. "This is not the way I had planned things to turn out for me," might be a common refrain among us until we realize the spirit of new life that lies ahead.

There are blessings in this moment of waiting if we patiently allow the Divine Physician to do His work. Perhaps we might pause and look back on all that God has done for us, has done through the multitude of liturgical readings for the Easter Vigil. God is the Author of Life who made the heavens and the earth and formed us in His own image. He promises abundance to Abraham, who was once hopeless and destitute. He led the Israelites out of Pharaoh's grip and into the land of milk and honey, just like He delivers us from the obsession of our addictions and compulsions. He sends prophetic voices to lead us on the right path and remind us of His faithfulness.

Recovery provides regular opportunities to reflect on and share what it was like, what happened, and what it's like now. There may be no better day than today to lean into self-reflection and recall God being present through the highs and lows of our own salvation. Saint Paul affirms the glory of Easter and the fruit of our collective darkness and unknown emptiness when surrendered to God.

"We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin. For a dead person has been absolved from sin. If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him" (Romans 6:6-8). | REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.

— Reflection Questions —

- *What were some moments in your life when darkness and emptiness were transformed into new life?*
- *How has God been present through the temptations and triumphs of your experience with addiction and the process of recovery? How has He been present through these last few weeks of Lent?*

FIRST READING Genesis 1:1–2:2

SECOND READING Genesis 22:1-18

THIRD READING Exodus 14:15–15:1

FOURTH READING Isaiah 54:5-14

FIFTH READING Isaiah 55:1-11

SIXTH READING Baruch 3:9-15, 32–4:4

SEVENTH READING Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28

EPISTLE Romans 6:3-11

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17,
22-23

GOSPEL Matthew 28:1-10



APRIL 9, 2023

Easter Sunday The Resurrection of the Lord

Alleluia! Christ has risen!

We've journeyed together throughout Lent in hopeful anticipation of Jesus Christ's resurrection. Today we stand together with each other and with the women and men who were first to witness the promise of our Lord come true—that He would die and be raised to eternal life.

Belonging to an honest and open fellowship gives us a spirit of hope that is nearly impossible to find when we are isolated in our addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments. When we stop working an *I* program and begin a *we* program, we see *illness* transformed into *wellness*.

The hope of the resurrection—which is fundamental to our faith—is realized more and more as we surrender ourselves to God, the sacramental life of the Church, and the daily principles of 12-step recovery.

Shared belief is easier to grow and maintain than isolated belief. The story of Mary Magdala, Peter, and John witnessing the empty tomb in today's Gospel reading is similar to how we share faith in recovery fellowships: one person sees God work a miracle, shares it with a few others, and together their faith and hope multiplies. The gift of recovery, just like the gift of life, can only be fully realized when we seek to give it away by sharing it with others.

The resurrection of our Lord continues to propel the growth of Christian communities and fellowships. While Jesus entered into the way of self-sacrifice and surrender to overcome death, He rose to bring new life to each of us. As people in recovery, we can find strength in the truth of His resurrection: "Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). | **REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.**

— Reflection Questions —

- How have isolation and loneliness been transformed into freedom and unity in your life?
- How has your hope in the resurrection of Jesus been shaped by your own personal resurrection in recovery?

FIRST READING Acts 10:34, 37-43

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23

SECOND READING Colossians 3:1-4

GOSPEL John 20:1-9