



---

# LENTEN JOURNEY

---

Through the Desert to the Eternal Spring



GUIDED SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS FOR EACH SUNDAY GOSPEL OF LENT THROUGH  
EASTER SUNDAY

BY ANGELA M JENDRO

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the New American Bible, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

## Strength in the Lord

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent

### **Gospel Luke 4:1-13 NAB**

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written,

*One does not live on bread alone."*

Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me." Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written:

*You shall worship the Lord, your God,  
and him alone shall you serve."*

Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written:

*He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,*

and:

*With their hands they will support you,  
lest you dash your foot against a stone."*

Jesus said to him in reply,  
"It also says,

*You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test."*

When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

### **Meditation Reflection:**

Directly after Jesus' Baptism, the inauguration of His transition from His Hidden Life in Nazareth to His public ministry, the Spirit led Him into the desert for a time of preparation first - to fast, pray, and face temptation. In the same way, the Holy Spirit periodically draws us away from the noise of life and the distractions of the senses to be able to connect with God in a deeper interior way. In some cases, we choose to place ourselves in quiet reflection by going on a

retreat or planning a weekend of solitude. At other times, the circumstances of life create that solitude for us.

It reminds me of standing ankle-deep in the waves of the ocean on the beach. As the water cascades over my feet it carries with it a flurry of sand, shells, sea-weed, and teems with life and energy. Then it recedes, drawing back everything it had just placed before me. Even the sand around my feet recedes leaving me only two small mounds beneath my arches.

Times of solitude can feel lonely and a little barren like the desert. However, they can be opportunities for prayer and preparation for the next mission God has for us when the water will return, replenished and shimmering.

The devil of course hates for us to follow Christ and he especially despises when we build the kingdom of God. He therefore attempts to derail us in any way possible. He prevents us from God's work in a myriad of ways tailored to our own personal weaknesses. The devil distracts us with physical pleasures and the lie that if we don't satisfy our body's whims and desires, we will die, or at least be so miserable it's not worth living.

During Lent, we face this lie and temptation, strengthening or will over our body and seeking joy in the Lord by giving up sweets, pop, alcohol, snacking, over-sleeping, staying up too late, etc., and replacing them with added prayer or spiritual exercises.

Another tactic favored by the devil is to redirect the trajectory of our work by aiming our talents at building the kingdom of self rather than the kingdom of God. He tempted Jesus with an enticement of kingship without the cross. Similarly, Satan attempts to promise us success and happiness without the suffering of the cross, if only we would exchange our faith in God for faith in ourselves.

Lastly, if we thwart both pitfalls through strength of faith and love, the devil makes his last attack by twisting God's own words and attempting to skew our relationship with the Lord. The devil hates the Church because Christ empowered it with His authority to preach truth and correctly interpret Scripture by the power of the Holy Spirit, as well as the grace of Christ to live it. If we listen to the Holy Spirit through Christ's Church the devil loses his power to trick us "and will depart for a time".

If we pay careful attention, we can learn the tricks of the devil in our own lives. St. Ignatius of Loyola began to notice this too and developed rules of discernment that have become a classic in the Christian life. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you grow in self-knowledge and provide the grace to overcome temptation so as to live in the freedom of the kingdom of God and work unhindered for His glory.

### **Consider:**

- ❖ Spend some time in prayer reflecting on your average day. Consider what things unnecessarily slow you down, distract you, make you late, frustrate your work, or prevent you from getting started on something. Implement a plan to combat one of them.
- ❖ Consider the three categories of temptations from the Gospel today and how each one applies to you. This Lent build strength by combatting the pleasure that has a hold over you, the suffering you are trying to avoid or the status you are trying to achieve, and grow in knowledge of your faith to protect you from the deceptions of the devil.
- ❖ Look back on your life and reflect on how God prepared you before raising you up for something. How did you feel beforehand and after? Have you experienced deeper and richer faith after a time of solitude or difficulty?

### **Make a Resolution (Practical Application):**

- ❖ Commit to a Lenten resolution even if you fail at it periodically. Give something up and/or do something extra to strengthen your relationship with Christ and weaken your relationship with sin.
- ❖ Read (or listen to the audiobook) C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*. It's short, entertaining, and enlightening. It's a satirical work which features letters from an experienced demon to a lesser experienced one about how to tempt humans.
- ❖ Listen to Fr. Timothy Gallagher's podcasts on St. Ignatius' discernment of spirits. He presents Ignatius's ideas in an understandable and relatable way. ([discerninghearts.com](http://discerninghearts.com))

## Mount Tabor Moments & Transfiguration in Christ

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent

### **Gospel Luke 9:28b-36 NAB**

Jesus took Peter, John, and James and went up the mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But he did not know what he was saying. While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen.

### **Meditation Reflection:**

The relationship between Jesus' divinity and humanity will always be veiled in mystery. Nevertheless, at times the Lord pulls aside the veil and lets the glory of His divine love for man shine through the humanity of the His Son. Jesus became man to share in our human experience, to walk in our shoes and our struggles, and thereby conquer them for us and in us through grace. As a result, He provides the perfect example for us to follow.

Today's Gospel account is instructive for our own faith journey. Notice how Jesus went up the mountain to pray, a task that required effort and endurance. He took with Him only a few of His closest companions. He spent time alone in prayer persisting even when the apostles fell asleep.

During this solitude Moses and Elijah appeared to Him, representing the Law and the Prophets, both of which Jesus would fulfill. They spoke with Him about His mission and the Father overshadowed them in a cloud speaking words of confirmation and encouragement. Similar, if we persist in prayer, the Lord will guide and encourage us Himself and through others.

Seeing Christ so transformed, Peter, John, and James didn't know what to think or do. Peter offered to pitch tents for everyone, not comprehending what was happening, but trying to at least offer some kind of service. Christ usually appears humbly in our lives, veiled in His humanity. He does this so well that we too often react with surprise and an awkward response when we awake to moments of His glory.

This experience of light and glory strengthened Christ as well as the apostles for the upcoming darkness and suffering of Calvary. It was an experience so profound that they “*fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen.*” Peter and James would still abandon Christ in His direst moment but later repented at their actions. Of the apostles John alone would remain with Jesus at the Cross. Through darkness, disillusionment, and intense pain, that confidence in God’s call and the experience of His encouragement strengthened them to persevere.

Conversion tends to be a slow process of turning away from sin and toward Christ daily. However, during this long road, we sometimes experience a Transfiguration moment wherein God reveals His plan, His mission, or His love for us in a profound and tangible way. St. Paul’s moment occurred on the road to Damascus. St. Peter’s occurred when Jesus appeared to him after His resurrection and asked him three times if he loved Him then called him to feed His sheep. These moments may confirm our call to the Christian faith, or they may confirm our call to our vocation.

Mother Teresa began her mission to serve the poorest of the poor after a profound experience in prayer. She had already been a nun for 15 years when, while on a train travelling to the Loreto Convent in Darjeeling for a retreat, she heard the voice of Christ speak to her. Missionary of Charity and postulator of the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of Mother Teresa, Fr. Brian Kolodiejchuk recounts in his book *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, that,

*“Though she would persist in letting the details remain veiled in silence, she later revealed: ‘It was a call within my vocation. It was a second calling. It was a vocation to give up even Loreto where I was very happy and to go out in the streets to serve the poorest of the poor. It was in that train, I heard the call to give up all and follow Him into the slums.’”<sup>1</sup>*

Fr. Kolodiejchuk further records that Mother Teresa considered the date of this mystical experience (September 10, 1946), as the beginning date of, and her entrance into, the Missionaries of Charity. Christ had asked her to “*Come, be My light*” in the darkness of the poorest of the poor. Jesus continued to speak with her through a gift of interior locutions into the middle of the next year. During this period, she presented her concerns to Christ, her happiness serving as a Loreto nun, and her feelings of inadequacy. In her letter to the Archbishop she wrote, “These thoughts were a cause of much suffering – but the voice kept on saying ‘*Wilt thou refuse?*’” Her love for Jesus could not refuse Him anything and so she said yes to His request.

Mother Teresa had a “Transfiguration moment”. She was thirty-six at the time. The next fifty years of sacrifice and suffering would be motivated by this single call of Christ. She faced many set-backs, rejections, and challenges both materially as well as spiritually. She experienced an interior darkness (meaning lacking in light to see) in which she couldn’t see God or feel the

---

<sup>1</sup> Teresa, M., & Kolodiejchuk, B. (2007). *Mother Teresa: Come be my light*. New York: Doubleday.

closeness of union that she had enjoyed before. At first, she worried that her own sinfulness had caused the feeling of absence. On the contrary however, Fr. Kolodiejchuk records that,

*“With the help of her spiritual directors, she progressively came to grasp that her painful inner experience was an essential part of living out her mission. It was a sharing in the passion of Christ on the Cross – with a particular emphasis on the thirst of Jesus as the mystery of His longing for the love and salvation of every human person.”<sup>2</sup>*

As a result, what seemed a loss at first turned out to be an extraordinary gift. Some saints have been given the stigmata – the physical wounds of Christ. Mother Teresa was given a share in the suffering of Christ’s heart. She could not have done this however, without being firmly rooted in her faith in Christ first. She could look back to that Transfiguration moment on the train and confidently press forward in humility that Christ would bring to perfection the good work He had begun.

When we feel like we can’t see God or we become disillusioned in our vocation or work, rather than ask for another sign, think back to that first call. Remember your Mt. Tabor and the time you saw Christ transfigured in glory. When you feel most near to Christ’s experience of darkness on the Cross (*“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*), draw strength from your experience with Him during the Transfiguration.

**Consider:**

- ❖ Reflect on a time when you felt the presence of Christ or saw His glory.
  - Have you witnessed a mighty deed of His like the apostles when He calmed a storm or cast out demons?
  - Did you experience His mercy or love like the Prodigal Son or Peter?
  - Were you healed like the blind, lame, and sick in the Gospels?
  - Were you stopped in your tracks and knocked down like St. Paul?
  - Did you hear Him in “a still small voice” like Elijah?
- ❖ Reflect on times of “darkness” when you could not see or feel the presence of Christ?
  - Did it cause you to doubt?
  - Was Christ still with you even though you couldn’t see it at the time?
  - Did it increase your longing for Christ?
  - Did it deepen your connection to His experience on the Cross?

**Make a Resolution (Practical Application):**

- ❖ Journal about your Transfiguration moment(s) and keep it to look back on during times of darkness.
- ❖ Encourage or visit someone struggling or suffering.
- ❖ Read the lives of the saints. Read one a day or at least one a week.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## Living in Denial

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent

### **Gospel of Luke 13:1-9 NAB**

Some people told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. Jesus said to them in reply, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!"

And he told them this parable: "There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none, he said to the gardener, 'For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. So cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?' He said to him in reply, 'Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not you can cut it down.'"

### **Meditation Reflection:**

The mystery of God's Mercy and Justice extend beyond the limits of our comprehension. Nevertheless, Jesus exhorts us to never forget that God is both. God's mercy makes salvation possible through even the smallest opening of repentance and desire in our hearts. At the same time, the mercy we experience on a day to day basis, the undeserved blessings God showers as a doting Father, can also lead to complacency.

Mercy means healing and transformation. In our complacency we can begin to think that we deserve our blessings and forget our sins, or worse forget our blessings as well. St. Paul reminds us in I Corinthians 10:1-12 that the Israelites, after witnessing the mighty hand of God liberating them from Egypt and walking on dry land through the Red Sea, reverted to doubt, fear, and grumbling in the desert. In consequence, although liberated by God from Egypt, they died in the desert unable to enter the Promised Land. God can work mighty deeds in our lives. His mercy will cut through any sin. God's forgiveness is not merely "spiritual dry-cleaning" as Pope Francis has termed it. God's work heals and transforms. This process ought to bear fruits therefore of virtue, sanctity, and love. In fact, one of the ways St. Teresa of Avila verified the authenticity of a spiritual experience was by the fruits of virtue that accompanied it.

Jesus warned in today's Gospel that God's mercy is inextricably united to God's justice. God has given us free will. He will honor that gift. If we choose to reject the opportunity for life which comes through healing from sin, then at some point we will die. God offers us more chances

than we deserve but they are limited by time and by our choices. We cannot receive the fruits of mercy until we choose to acknowledge and repent of our sin.

Unfortunately, the general cultural view denies the reality of sin, excusing it away. In consequence, as Pope Francis has preached on Mercy (recall the Year of Mercy 12/8/2015-11/20/2016) he concomitantly needed to preach on sin. In a *First Things* article, titled “The Pope’s Theology of Sin”, William Doyno Jr. provides context for the relationship between sin and mercy and presents Pope Francis’ insights regarding the process of reaching the first step – acknowledgement and repentance:

*“The first part is to recognize the darkness of contemporary life, and how it leads so many astray: Walking in darkness means being overly pleased with ourselves, believing that we do not need salvation. That is darkness! When we continue on this road of darkness, it is not easy to turn back. Therefore, John continues, because this way of thinking made him reflect: ‘If we say we are without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.’”<sup>3</sup>*

Why is seeing our sin so important? Isn’t it a bit depressing? If it was analogous to learning you had an incurable cancer, then yes. But if it’s analogous to learning you had a cancer that can be cured with early treatment, then it’s a huge relief. If we do not suffer under the oppression of sin, we do not need a redeemer. When we live in denial of our sins and addictions, we refuse the opportunity for help. For example, if a person lives in denial of their regular rude or hurtful comments under the rationalization that they are just “speaking their mind”, then they will soon lose relationships and friendship. If a person lives in denial of their intemperance in spending or greed for possessions beyond their means, they will eventually suffer bankruptcy. Similarly, if we live a self-centered life rather than a God-centered life, at some point we will experience the harsh reality of our choices.

After opening our eyes to our sins (with the help of the Holy Spirit), the second part of the process is to take them to Confession; not with an attitude of a quick shower but with a humble, and deeply contrite heart. The word Pope Francis used to describe this feeling is one we shy away from in our culture – shame. Yet, when we feel genuine shame for our sin, it also motivates us to change and open ourselves up to receiving help and grace.

The final part of the process he writes, is:

*“having absolute faith in God to renew us: We must have trust, because when we sin we have an advocate with the Father ‘Jesus Christ the righteous.’ And he ‘supports us before the Father’ and defends us in front of our weaknesses.”<sup>4</sup>*

Rather than despair at our weaknesses and imperfections, Pope Francis reminds us to put our trust in Christ. We must acknowledge that we cannot change on our own and allow Jesus to

---

<sup>3</sup> Doyno, William Jr. “The Pope’s Theology of Sin.” *First Things*. August 2013. <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2013/08/the-popes-theology-of-sin>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

apply His healing grace to our souls – enlightening our minds, strengthening our wills, and fanning the flame of love for God and neighbor.

In conclusion, the mystery of God’s Justice and Mercy requires us to make an active decision to turn away from sin and accept God’s help. Because grace is freely given by God, fruits of that grace are expected too. If we do not bear fruit, we can conclude that we have not actually been receptive to grace. If we do bear fruit, it will evoke feelings of gratitude and love because we know who we are, and from where those virtues truly came.

**Consider:**

- ❖ How has facing your faults, though painful, made you a better person with the help of Christ? How are you different today than in years past?
- ❖ Has God ever “rebuked” you? Did it have a positive effect later or lead to greater freedom?
- ❖ Are there faults you continue to rationalize? Do you treat your spouse, children, or family members with the love they deserve, or do you excuse your behavior by saying they should love you as you are without an effort to change?
- ❖ Have you ever experienced the pain of seeing someone you love self-destructing or suffering due to living in denial of a serious problem? Have you offered help and been rejected? Consider how this relates to God’s perspective.

**Make a Resolution (Practical Application):**

- ❖ Read an examination of conscience and prayerfully reflect on it. Most parishes have a pamphlet by the confessional with an examination, you can also find some online. If possible, look for one tailored to your state in life (e.g. single, married, priest, etc.)
- ❖ Read the *First Things* article on Pope Francis’ Theology of Sin.  
(<http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2013/08/the-popes-theology-of-sin>)
- ❖ Choose one sin you have been avoiding admitting and actively root it out through prayer and practicing the opposite virtue. (For example – greed is combatted by generosity, a habit of critical remarks by encouraging ones, pride by humility, etc.)

## Open Arms of the Father

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

### **Gospel Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 NAB**

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So to them Jesus addressed this parable: "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' So he got up and went back to his father. 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. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

### **Meditation Reflection:**

We often live in denial of our sins and this can make it easy to imagine God as loving since we see ourselves entitled to His affections. However, when our hearts are really struck by the realization of a failure, when shame settles in our stomach at our weakness or self-centeredness, we can mistakenly assume God views us as a failure too and wants nothing to do

with us. Jesus corrected this false view by describing God's unconditional love in His Parable of the Prodigal Son, also known as the Parable of the Merciful Father.

In this parable, the father had freely given his sons everything he could – life, love, nurturing their growth, and even inheritance of his estate. The first son responded with obedience, loyalty, and service. The second son responded with ingratitude, an entitlement attitude, and complacency. When he arrogantly wished his father dead and demanded his future inheritance, his father not only allowed him to leave but also gifted to him the undeserved future inheritance. Mistaking license for freedom, the son lived foolishly for pleasure and self-gratification. Eventually however his funds ran out and the difficult times that followed revealed the short sightedness of his choices. The glamour of evil wore off when he found himself desperate enough to take a job caring for pigs (considered unclean by the Jews) and even more desperate when he felt tempted by his insatiable hunger to ask for some of their slop but was denied. As he hit rock bottom, he finally realized the generosity and goodness of his father.

Some Christians take their faith for granted. The spiritual gifts they had enjoyed from the sacraments, living in Christian fellowship, and possibly growing up in a Christian home seem less glamorous and more restrictive than worldliness. At first, missing mass on Sunday to sleep in, put in an extra day at work, travel, or any number of things might not seem that big of a deal. Next, spending time with worldly friends begins to outweigh Christian friends. As seeming independence and success increase, a person may feel he or she no longer needs God. They too mistake license for freedom and, taking their gifts from God, leave.

Over time however they begin to experience life without grace. The absence of God's peace, the kindness of His followers, the richness of Scriptures wanes and they begin to hunger. When hard times hit, without that spiritual connection to God, a person finds themselves starving and desperate. Where can one turn for help? A person who uses others, finds themselves *being* used by others. Alcohol or drugs lose their ability to satiate and only make matters worse if not out of control. All former numbing mechanisms - shopping, eating, gaming, gambling, travelling, even over-working cannot help but rather become enslaving.

When one hits rock bottom, crawling back to God can seem unthinkable and disingenuous. How could you ask God for help now when you so brazenly rejected Him earlier or slothfully let Him fall by the wayside. Don't you deserve to be miserable? Maybe God is saying "I told you so."

Jesus tells us otherwise. Our pride imagines God reacting this way. Jesus reveals that God is watching the horizon, waiting hopefully, and running to embrace us when we return. The father in this parable doesn't accept the demotion suggested by his son. He embraces him, and raises him back to the dignity he had left behind; transforming him from servant of pigs to a son.

The older son's jealousy reveals a hint of the same mistaken view as the younger son. Although he made the loyal choice, he still considered his brother's prodigal lifestyle as glamorous. As a result, it appears to him that his brother was rewarded for leaving so disrespectfully and rewarded for returning so degraded. However, the father and the younger son know the terrible poverty, anxiety, and shame his choices had brought upon him. The older son, though working in the fields all those years, also enjoyed the peace and dignity of living as his father's son. He did not experience the "glamour" of debauchery nor did he have the impoverishment of it either. Fr. Dubay, in his book *The Fire Within*, summarizes this misconception well:

*"Contrary to what the world thinks, attachments are killjoys. The worldly man and woman take it for granted that the more they can multiply experiences and accumulate possessions, the more they shall be filled with contentment. They so want to believe this that they will discount a constant stream of evidences to the contrary. Boredom at parties, hangovers after bouts of drinking, heartburn after overeating, aftereffects of drug abuse, emptiness after loveless sexual encounters and failure to find fulfillment in fine fashions or in expensive excursions make it abundantly clear that sense pleasures are not joy. No matter how intense they may be for the moment, they inevitably leave in their wake a vacuous disillusionment. Where one does find genuine joy is in the heart and on the lips of those who have generously given up all else to have Christ."<sup>5</sup>*

God loves us as a merciful father. He pours out blessings in our lives even if we will eventually take them for granted. A little time on our own however and we realize how much we rely on God's supernatural aid and relationship. He assures us that He is waiting anxiously for our return, running to meet us if we come back to Him and offering us the peace and protection of His home.

**Consider:**

- ❖ When have you felt truly sorry about something? What motivated the regret?
- ❖ Have you ever experienced the gift of forgiveness from someone?
- ❖ Is there someone you need to forgive?
- ❖ Reflect on the father in the parable looking out at the horizon and seeing his son in the distance. Consider how God is waiting for you with the same longing.
- ❖ Have you ever fallen for worldly deceptions? How did they turn out differently than what you first expected?
- ❖ How does your dignity as God's son or daughter outweigh and outshine the false beauty of the world?

---

<sup>5</sup> Dubay, T. (1989). *Fire within: Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and the Gospel-on prayer*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

**Make a Resolution (Practical Application):**

- ❖ Choose one sinful attachment to surrender and turn to God.
- ❖ Read Psalm 51 each day this week.
- ❖ Examine your conscience each night and pray an act of contrition.
- ❖ Return to God in the sacrament of Confession.

## New Beginnings

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

### **Gospel of John 8:1-7 NAB**

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more."

### **Meditation Reflection:**

Easter, for which we are preparing, celebrates new beginnings and forgiveness of debts; freedom and jubilation. During Lent Christ and His Church work to free us from two things that steal our joy – ingratitude and bitterness. To regain our joy we must overcome our own complacency about the gift of our salvation from slavery to sins in our lives. We must also let go of bitterness from the past and show the same mercy and compassion toward others that we have received from Christ. Like the Pharisees and scribes in today's Gospel, we are quick to demand strict justice for the sins of others while sweeping our own failures under the rug.

As we near the end of Lent, our sacrifices and austerity can feel burdensome and tiring. Our share in Christ's suffering however also anticipates a share in His resurrection. There's a saying that one cannot feast until they have fasted. It's a human reality that when we overindulge on a regular basis, we lose the ability to appreciate things. For example, kids who are spoiled with gifts constantly lose a sense of gratitude and, paradoxically, the joy of receiving a gift. Similarly, a person spared the work of chores or academic rigor loses the opportunity for the feeling of self-respect and pride at a job well done. Good work reaps satisfaction and deep joy. As the Psalmist proclaims,

*"Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing; Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, they shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves." (Psalm 126:5-6 RSV)*

Christians experience the same paradox in the life of faith. Examining our sins, rooting them out, asking for help, fasting, and praying is both tedious and sometimes tearful. However, only when we really come to grips with our weakness and sin do, we experience the joy of receiving the gift of salvation from our Redeemer.

Resurrection also means newness. We need to let God create something totally new rather than holding on to a past we can't change. God commands through the prophet Isaiah:

*“Remember not the events of the past,  
the things of long ago consider not;  
see, I am doing something new!  
... for I put water in the desert  
and rivers in the wasteland  
for my chosen people to drink,  
the people whom I formed for myself,  
that they might announce my praise.”*  
(Isaiah 43:18-21 NAB)

Christ offered the woman caught in adultery a new beginning, instructing her to *“Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”* Christ's words are more than a suggestion. As the *Logos*, the divine Word of God, Christ effects what He says. In consequence, when He tells her not to sin anymore, He also empowers her with His supernatural grace to do just that. The weakness she had succumbed to before was not only forgiven but replaced with strength to act virtuously. The sacraments of Communion and Confession offer the same graces. We receive both forgiveness and the strength of will to change. When we experience this gift of freedom it produces an abundance of joy and gratitude that spills over into a sharing of the same gift with others.

Pope Francis has often reflected that, *“There is no saint without a past, and no sinner without a future”* (a quote attributed to St. Augustine)<sup>6</sup>. St. Catherine of Genoa provides one such example. She was prayerful and devoted as a child. At age thirteen she even tried to enter a convent but was turned away because she was too young. Then at sixteen she entered an arranged marriage. Unfortunately her husband was unfaithful and violent. They had no children and his spending landed them in bankruptcy. In consequence, she became depressed and lukewarm toward her faith, turning to worldly comforts instead.

These only made her feel worse however, and when she was twenty-six, she felt deep regret for the current state of her faith life in contrast with her zealous spiritual aspirations as a child. Rather than turning from God, she humbly threw herself before Christ's mercy by going to Confession and praying for Him to restore her previous devotion. She didn't try to perfect

---

<sup>6</sup> For further reading on this topic, see Pope Francis' General Audience address from April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016 <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/04/13/160413a.html>

herself on her own first to be “worthy” of prayer, instead she acknowledged her weakness and asked Christ to save her. He responded generously and in a remarkable way. He immediately restored her faith and, in His superabundance, granted revelations and extraordinary spiritual gifts from God that would last the rest of her life.<sup>7</sup>

Christ offers us a new beginning. Let us pray for the grace to let go of the past and accept a new start.

**Consider:**

- ❖ Who do you need to forgive? What do you need to let go of from the past?
- ❖ What “new beginning” is Christ offering to you? What is holding you back?
- ❖ Reflect on the mercy the woman in the Gospel experienced and the joy and relief she must have felt. Consider how Christ offers this same opportunity to you.
- ❖ Consider areas of hypocrisy in your own life. What faults do you tend to be most critical toward? What faults of your own do you overlook or refuse to acknowledge?
- ❖ Consider a time you felt truly grateful. What gift did you receive? What made it so special?

**Make a Resolution (Practical Application):**

- ❖ Pray Psalm 51 each day this week.
- ❖ Choose one thing from the past you are bitter about and decide to let it go. Do something concrete to achieve this.
- ❖ Choose one thing from the past that Christ has forgiven you for, but you have not. Lay it before Him each day this week and ask Him to help you surrender it.
- ❖ Practice one work of mercy each day this week.
- ❖ Carry a small stone in your pocket this week. When tempted to criticize or complain grab the stone and hold onto it rather than throw it.

---

<sup>7</sup> For further reading, see the biography of St. Catherine of Genoa in the Catholic Encyclopedia online. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03446b.htm>

## Receiving Christ's Gift Graciously

Palm Sunday

**Gospel of Luke 22:14-23:56 NAB full version. Luke 23:1-49 NAB shortened version and reprinted here below.**

The elders of the people, chief priests and scribes, arose and brought Jesus before Pilate. They brought charges against him, saying, "We found this man misleading our people; he opposes the payment of taxes to Caesar and maintains that he is the Christ, a king." Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He said to him in reply, "You say so." Pilate then addressed the chief priests and the crowds, "I find this man not guilty." But they were adamant and said, "He is inciting the people with his teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to here."

On hearing this Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean; and upon learning that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod who was in Jerusalem at that time. Herod was very glad to see Jesus; he had been wanting to see him for a long time, for he had heard about him and had been hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at length, but he gave him no answer. The chief priests and scribes, meanwhile, stood by accusing him harshly. Herod and his soldiers treated him contemptuously and mocked him, and after clothing him in resplendent garb, he sent him back to Pilate. Herod and Pilate became friends that very day, even though they had been enemies formerly. Pilate then summoned the chief priests, the rulers, and the people and said to them, "You brought this man to me and accused him of inciting the people to revolt. I have conducted my investigation in your presence and have not found this man guilty of the charges you have brought against him, nor did Herod, for he sent him back to us. So no capital crime has been committed by him. Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him."

But all together they shouted out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us." — Now Barabbas had been imprisoned for a rebellion that had taken place in the city and for murder. — Again Pilate addressed them, still wishing to release Jesus, but they continued their shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate addressed them a third time, "What evil has this man done? I found him guilty of no capital crime. Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him." With loud shouts, however, they persisted in calling for his crucifixion, and their voices prevailed. The verdict of Pilate was that their demand should be granted. So he released the man who had been imprisoned for rebellion and murder, for whom they asked, and he handed Jesus over to them to deal with as they wished.

As they led him away they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country; and after laying the cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus. A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, 'Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.' At

that time people will say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' for if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry?" Now two others, both criminals, were led away with him to be executed.

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." They divided his garments by casting lots. The people stood by and watched; the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him and said, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God." Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine they called out, "If you are King of the Jews, save yourself." Above him there was an inscription that read, "This is the King of the Jews." Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal. "Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon because of an eclipse of the sun. Then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"; and when he had said this he breathed his last.

The centurion who witnessed what had happened glorified God and said, "This man was innocent beyond doubt." When all the people who had gathered for this spectacle saw what had happened, they returned home beating their breasts; but all his acquaintances stood at a distance, including the women who had followed him from Galilee and saw these events.

### **Meditation Reflection:**

Today marks the beginning of Holy Week with Palm Sunday. The Gospel follows Christ through the events of His Paschal Mystery beginning with His final entrance into Jerusalem and culminating in His death.

Recall the Pope's theology of sin. He teaches that the process of conversion begins with acknowledging our sin, confessing it with contrition to the Lord, then trusting in Christ's mercy to forgive and heal us. As we unite ourselves to Christ this week, remembering the events of His suffering let us contemplate the third aspect of conversion – trusting gratitude for Christ's mercy.

In the Office of Readings for today, a sermon by St. Andrew of Crete (d. 740), a bishop, offers a beautiful idea for how to honor Christ today...

“So let us spread before his feet, not garments or soulless olive branches, which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither, but ourselves, clothed in his grace, or rather, clothed completely in him. We who have been baptized into Christ must ourselves be the garments that we spread before him. Now that the crimson stains of our sins have been washed away in the saving waters of baptism and we have become white as pure wool, let us present the conqueror of death, not with mere branches of palms but with the real rewards of his victory. Let our souls take the place of the welcoming branches as we join today in the children’s holy song: *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel.*”

This response inspires us to approach holy week with an attitude of deep appreciation; to follow the footsteps of the suffering Christ and feel the grace of His mercy accomplished through His sacrificial love. Numerous Gospel accounts tell of Pharisees or Sadducees wanting to kill Jesus but being unable. Christ could have escaped the Cross, it was within His power. He *chose* to surrender Himself which was the only reason they could apprehend Him. He chose to suffer as the sacrifice for our sins for the sole purpose of our redemption – to be freed from slavery to sin and death, to experience healing and supernatural strength, to experience union with God as His beloved children, and that our “joy may be full” (John 15:11).

Reflecting on Christ’s suffering however, especially if we have the courage to connect it to our own weakness and personal sins, requires more than a small amount of humility. It means we realize our dependence (something we hate in our culture) and our unworthiness. Christ endured things we could not, and when asked to offer something back in return, even trivial things, we often fail. How many of us sigh at the length of the reading on Palm Sunday, and yet how much easier to read it than to live it! How much longer it was for Christ to actually endure the events we recall!

Distracted thoughts and limited attention spans will always burden us due to our weakened nature from original sin. We can work to minimize our distractions however and lengthen our attention by changing our habits. For instance, we can replace some of our thoughts about worldly matters with thoughts of spiritual matters through regular Scripture reading, good Christian books and conversation, or listening to Christian talk radio. We can replace worldly images in our imagination with images of Christ through praying the psalms and listening to Christian music. Rather than secular songs interrupting our prayer, over time we might find Christian songs interrupting our mundane tasks instead.

This Holy Week let’s do our best to, as St. Andrew suggested, lay our transformed selves before Christ. Let us ease His suffering with songs of praise and thanksgiving. Let us offer Him hope on the Cross by demonstrating that His sacrifice will bear much fruit.

**Consider:**

- ❖ Take time to reflect on those things Christ has conquered in your life – sin, addiction, lies you had believed, fears, pride, loneliness, despair...
- ❖ Examine areas of your life in need of Christ. Imagine His blood washing over them and healing them. Invite Him to free you in that area as a grace of this Holy Week. Resolve to cooperate with Him in this effort.
- ❖ Sacrifice is the proof of love. Christ would have suffered every pain for you alone.

**Make a Resolution (Practical Application):**

- ❖ Pray the Stations of the Cross.
- ❖ Pray a psalm of thanksgiving each day for God's help.
- ❖ Pray psalm 21, the psalm Jesus quoted from the Cross when He said, "My God My God, why have you abandoned Me."
- ❖ Listen to Christian radio on your drive or as you get ready in the morning.
  - Ideas: local Christian music stations; download the Relevant Radio app and listen to Catholic programming.
- ❖ Offer encouragement to someone who is suffering.
- ❖ Offer mercy to someone in thanksgiving for Christ's mercy to you.

## The Easter Triduum

### **Meditation Reflection:**

During Holy Week we celebrate and reverence Christ's Paschal Mystery – His Suffering, Death, and Resurrection. To enter more deeply into this mystery the Church walks in the footsteps of Christ and the Apostles through special liturgies rich with extraordinary practices that recall and connect us in a unique way to the events beginning at the Last Supper and culminating in finding the empty tomb. These liturgies are called the "Easter Triduum." The USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) describe it in this way:

*The summit of the Liturgical Year is the Easter Triduum—from the evening of Holy Thursday to the evening of Easter Sunday. Though chronologically three days, they are liturgically one day unfolding for us the unity of Christ's Paschal Mystery. The single celebration of the Triduum marks the end of the Lenten season, and leads to the Mass of the Resurrection of the Lord at the Easter Vigil. The liturgical services that take place during the Triduum are: 1. Mass of the Lord's Supper (Holy Thursday) 2. Good Friday of the Lord's Passion 3. Mass of the Resurrection of the Lord.<sup>8</sup>*

What do we mean by *Paschal Mystery*? It recalls the sacrifice of the Israelites during the last plague in Egypt. God told Moses to instruct the Israelites to sacrifice an unblemished lamb, spread its blood on the door posts, then cook the meat and eat it. Then, when the angel of death came to take the firstborn son of every Egyptian it would Pass-over the homes marked with the blood of the lamb. Every year at that time the Israelites would recall this event and enter into it through celebrating the Passover. This was the meal Jesus celebrated at His Last Supper and to which He gave new meaning.

Whereas we ratify contracts today through signatures and notaries, in Old Testament times agreements were formalized in covenants and ratified with blood. At the Last Supper Jesus instituted the New Covenant ratified in His own blood. He chose the Passover sacrifice, which celebrated freedom from slavery in Egypt and death by Pharaoh, to reveal the fullness of the covenant through Him, which would free us from slavery to sin and eternal death. The blood which would be poured out to ratify this agreement would be His own and the sacrificial lamb, finite in its ability to atone for sin, would be replaced with His own perfect sacrifice of infinite value.

At the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday we contemplate the actions and words of Christ when He instituted the New Covenant. Christ changed the bread and wine into His own Body and Blood that we too might eat of the Paschal Lamb and receive the gift of freedom from God.

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/triduum/>

*“Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.”*  
Luke 22:19-20 NAB

To change bread and wine into His Real Presence, without a change in appearance, required a supernatural act. As a result, Christ also instituted the priesthood on that holy night. Jesus commanded the apostles to “do this in remembrance of Me.” Christ’s words, as the *Logos*, the divine Word of God, differ from ours. Whereas my words may or may not have an impact, Christ effects what He says. In Genesis 1, God said “Let there be light” and there was, along with everything else He created. When Christ says “do this”, He empowered His apostles to repeat the same miracle. Christ is the eternal priest who offers His one sacrifice to the Father over and over again for us. He does this through His priests whom He has consecrated and enabled through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. In preparation for this office, Jesus began the evening by demonstrating the nature of power in His kingdom. He washed the feet of the disciples. Washing the feet of infants is adorable, they’re sweet and pudgy. The feet of teenagers however become smelly and the feet of grown men who wear sandals... Greatness in Christ’s kingdom is marked by humility, sacrifice, and service. Below I’ll list the events of each day during the Triduum. Take time to contemplate some of them and consider how to more closely be yoked to Christ.

+++++

**Holy Thursday:** Celebrates the night of the Lord’s Supper

1. Jesus washing the feet of Peter and the apostles
2. Passover celebration where Christ institutes the Eucharist and establishes the priesthood
3. Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane
4. Jesus’ betrayal by Judas 5. Jesus is arrested and put on trial before the Sanhedrin

+++++

**GOOD FRIDAY:**

Called “Good” because Jesus merits our redemption through His suffering and death.

Day of Fasting and Abstinence – No meat, only eat one regular meal or two small meals

Veneration of the Cross

Events:

- Jesus appears before Pilate
- Jesus is scourged

- The Carrying of the Cross
- The Crucifixion
- Christ's death and burial

+++++

### *Holy Saturday:*

- Jesus in the tomb
- Time of emptiness and waiting

### *The Easter Vigil:*

Most ancient practice in the Church – began Saturday evening and ended at daybreak Easter Sunday “Mother of all vigils”

It consists of four general parts:

#### **1. The Service of Light**

In a suitable place outside the Church, a "blazing fire" (*rogus ardens*) is to be prepared so that the people may gather around it and experience the flames dispelling the darkness and lighting up the night. Thus do the beauty of the fire, its warmth and its light, draw the liturgical assembly together. EV no.8<sup>9</sup>

The Paschal Candle, which will be used to light the baptismal candles throughout the year is also lit from this fire and placed by the sanctuary during Easter.

#### **2. The Liturgy of the Word**

This consists of nine readings which give an overview of God's work of salvation – from His creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God, their fall to sin, then God's efforts to restore us through covenants and promises which came to fulfillment in Christ.

7 readings from the Old Testament • Story of Creation (Genesis 1 and 2) • Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22) • The crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14 and 15) • The prophet Isaiah proclaiming God's love (Isaiah 54) • Isaiah's exhortation to seek God (Isaiah 55) • A passage from Baruch about the glory of God (Baruch 3 and 4) • A prophecy of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36) 2 readings from the New Testament. • Saint Paul on being baptized into Jesus Christ (Rom 6) • The Gospel of Luke about the empty tomb discovered on Easter morning (Luke 24:121).

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/triduum/roman-missal-and-the-easter-vigil.cfm>

**3. Christian Initiation**

Catechumens (adults who have not been baptized) and candidates (adults baptized in a non-Catholic Christian faith) receive the sacraments of initiation and are received into the fullness of the Catholic Church. Candidates receive Confirmation and Catechumens receive both Baptism and Confirmation.

**4. Liturgy of the Eucharist.**

+++++

**Octave of Easter:** Easter Sunday to the following Sunday (now Sunday of Divine Mercy); each day celebrated with special solemnity

**Easter Season:** lasts from Easter Sunday to Pentecost

# Behold, I Make All Things New

Easter Sunday

## Gospel of John 20:1-9 NAB

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

## Meditation Reflection:

Jesus is risen! Just when we think all is lost, He makes something new. Jesus took His most beloved disciples by surprise, and He takes us by surprise as well.

*"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* (Matthew 16:24-25 RSV)

Death scares us by its finality, and the shroud of the mysterious unknown that surrounds it. Yet, in Christ we can be confident that with death comes resurrection. Jesus had warned, and promised:

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."* (John 12:24 RSV)

Every change, even welcomed ones, require us to leave the old behind in order to embrace the new. It takes courage to leave a familiar prison, to embrace an unfamiliar freedom. Today, we celebrate the victory of Christ, Who provides both the courage and the freedom we desire.

God's love for us exceeds all our expectations. His intervention in our lives, especially when we surrender completely to His will, always surprises us. If we trust in Jesus each day, allowing Him to lead, He will bring richness, joy, peace, and deep love to our lives in ways we might not have foreseen.

Today we celebrate new life. We celebrate God's love. We celebrate God's power and His victory over sin and death. We celebrate His victory in our own lives and within our own hearts. Our confidence can be renewed, that no struggle or suffering can stop Christ. If we place our

trust Him, He will heal and transform us. Today, we celebrate our fresh start. During Lent, we endeavored to face our sins and bring our guilt before the Lord. Now, we get to leave that shame in the past, crucified with Christ, and begin something new.

Revelation 21:3-5 NAB *“I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away.”*

*The One who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.”*

**Consider:**

- ❖ Consider Christ’s victories in your life.
  - How have you grown?
  - In what way do you experience greater freedom than before?
  - What were you afraid of before, that you no longer fear?
  - What virtues has Christ developed in you?
  - How has your love for God and others deepened?
- ❖ How has God surprised you?
  - When did He give you something more than you asked for?
  - When did His plan lead you down an unexpected road?
  - When have you experienced His loving mercy when you didn’t think you should?
- ❖ Reflect on Christ’s love for you and His strength.

**Make a Resolution (Practical Application):**

- ❖ Resolve to begin anew today. Make a concrete step to leave the old behind, no matter how comfortable it is, and allow Christ to lead you forward.

