

# Third week of Lent

'If today you hear his voice,  
harden not your hearts.'

—response to Psalm 94(95)



## BE STILL

- Light a candle as a reminder of God's presence.
- A jug of water may provide a visual prayer focus this week.
- Take a moment to allow whatever is in your heart to rise, and offer your thoughts to the loving care of the Lord today.

## SING OR LISTEN

'[O Lord, hear my prayer](#)' (Taizé) (AOV1 17, GA 431) or  
'[Hosea \(Come back to me\)](#)' (AOV1 30, CWB 715, G 484,  
GA 213) or '[Return to God](#)' (CWBII 298, G 478, GA 304).

## THIS WEEK

- Tuesday 17 March: St Patrick (solemnity)
- Thursday 19 March: St Joseph, husband of Mary (solemnity)

## GATHERING PRAYER

God of the depths,  
As we enter this third week of Lent, we thirst for deeper  
knowledge of you and your ways.  
Help us to better understand the mystery of our own  
hearts, and to discern your will for our lives.  
Amen.

## GOSPEL

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar, near  
the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well  
is there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down  
by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan  
woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Give me  
a drink.' His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.  
The Samaritan woman said to him, 'What? You are a Jew  
and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?'—Jews, in fact,  
do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied:

'If you only knew what God is offering  
and who it is that is saying to you:

Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask,  
and he would have given you living water.'

'You have no bucket, sir,' she answered 'and the well  
is deep: how could you get this living water? Are you a  
greater man than our father Jacob who gave us this well  
and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?'

Jesus replied:

'Whoever drinks this water  
will get thirsty again;

but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give  
will never be thirsty again:

the water that I shall give  
will turn into a spring inside him,  
welling up to eternal life.'

'Sir,' said the woman 'give me some of that water, so  
that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here  
again to draw water. I see you are a prophet, sir. Our  
fathers worshipped on this mountain, while you say that  
Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.'

Jesus said:

'Believe me, woman,  
the hour is coming  
when you will worship the Father  
neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

You worship what you do not know;  
we worship what we do know:

for salvation comes from the Jews.

But the hour will come

—in fact it is here already—

when true worshippers will worship the Father in  
spirit and truth:

that is the kind of worshipper the Father wants.

God is spirit,

and those who worship

must worship in spirit and truth.'

The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah—that is,  
Christ—is coming; and when he comes he will tell us  
everything.' 'I who am speaking to you,' said Jesus  
'I am he.'

Many Samaritans of that town had believed in him on  
the strength of the woman's testimony when she said,  
'He told me all I have ever done', so, when the Samaritans  
came up to him, they begged him to stay with them. He  
stayed for two days, and when he spoke to them many  
more came to believe; and they said to the woman, 'Now  
we no longer believe because of what you told us; we  
have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is  
the saviour of the world.'

—John 4:5–15, 19–26, 39–42

The Gospel of the Lord.

## WEEKLY POCKET PRAYER

'If today you hear his voice,  
harden not your hearts.'

I pray that I may have the grace and  
wisdom to hear God's word to me and to  
take it into my heart.



‘Our only desire and our one choice should be this:  
I want and I choose what better leads to God’s deepening life in me.’

—St Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*



## PONDER THE WORD

After the first reading, what words or phrases struck you from this passage?

Re-read the gospel. Take a moment of silence to reflect upon how God is speaking through this text. Noting down some responses to the following may assist with reflection:

### I think about my life:

- What is God asking me to listen to?
- What does God want me to pay attention to?
- What is God prompting, directing, leading and guiding me to in this reading?

### I think about my community and the world:

- What is God asking of us at this time?
- What is God wanting us to attend to in our community and our world?
- What is God prompting, directing, leading and guiding us towards?



*The Water of Life* sculpture by Stephen Broadbent, Chester Cathedral

## REFLECT

Let me take you to Chester Cathedral in England. Among the hedges in the cloisters sits a sculpture of a man and a woman, the two of them intertwined. The woman is leaning over the male, who looks as if he’s sitting on the ground. A bowl of water links the two of them together. The sculpture clearly depicts the gospel passage in which Jesus meets the woman at the well. He is waiting for her there and asks her to give him some water. It looks as though the woman is offering the water to Jesus but the writing around the border of the statue suggests something different: ‘the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’

The woman is simply talking about water, H<sub>2</sub>O; Jesus is talking about something much deeper—a living water that will well up to eternal life. The word *eternal* very often evokes for us an afterlife, but it also means fullness of life. This water gives us fullness of life now, not just after we die. In fact, the hands of Jesus in the sculpture are holding the hands of the woman as they both hold the water bowl, suggesting that it is Jesus who offers the water.

As the woman in the sculpture drinks this water, it is though she springs out of Jesus. By giving her the water, Jesus makes it possible for her to be filled with this living water so that she flows out of him. Jesus gives us new life to go out and live it to the full. This is a beautiful interpretation of the gospel because, as we know, the woman comes to the well with a fairly compromised life. She’s had five husbands, and the one that she has now is not her husband.

As you read the whole scripture, you can see the deepening of her faith. At first, she sees only the differences between them: ‘You are a man and I am a woman. You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan.’ But after a while, she refers to him as ‘sir,’ and still later she says, ‘You must be the Messiah.’ At the end of the story, Jesus is referred to as the saviour of the world. This, then, is a story of conversion. All of us are invited to be filled with this living water.

Jesus cannot fill a heart, though, that is already full of its own desires and priorities. Like this woman, we must empty our hearts first before being filled with living water. Then, like her, we also will be transformed. We come to Jesus with our lives, sometimes in a messy way. At the end of the story, though, the woman goes out as one of the first missionary disciples to invite others to come to meet Jesus—the one who can give us living water.

Reflection provided by Fr Elio Capra

## PRAY

Gracious God,  
In your mercy, and in our deep need, help us to respond to you with open hearts,  
that we might drink deeply of your living water  
and worship you in spirit and in truth.  
Amen.



## DURING THE WEEK

What is God calling me to in my prayer?

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What is God prompting me to fast from?

—

Where is God guiding me to respond  
in generosity?



‘Our only desire and our one choice should be this:  
I want and I choose what better leads to God’s deepening life in me.’

—St Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*



## REFLECT

There’s something about the notion of a journey that I really enjoy. Even if we’ve travelled the same path many times before, we never end up in exactly the same place, because we’re changed by the journey, by the time and the people that we’ve encountered along the way. The end point of a journey is actually just a starting point for the next journey.

Today’s gospel of a man born blind is the story of a journey: from blindness to sight, from darkness to light; from despair to hope and faith. But it’s a journey also of sight to blindness.

In the Jewish culture of the time, physical ailments or conditions such as blindness were seen as a punishment from God for sin. So the disciples’ question of Jesus—‘Who sinned, this man or his parents?’—is understandable enough. But Jesus clearly states that neither sinned. He feels compassion for the man born blind and sets about healing him with spittle and earth and water. Water, which cleanses and gives new life, washes away his affliction. The man comes to see. He moves from darkness to light—from the despair of a life of begging to new hope and the possibility of a future.

Through his healing, the blind man—who is not named, interestingly enough—comes into the light. He also embarks on a journey of faith to a gradual discovery of who Jesus is. When asked who cured him, he responds that ‘the Man called Jesus’ is the one who worked the miracle.

Further interrogated by the Pharisees about Jesus, he responds that ‘He is a prophet ... if this man were not from God, he couldn’t do a thing.’ Needless to say, the Pharisees are less than impressed with this answer. Finally, he encounters Jesus again and Jesus states that he is indeed the Son of Man. The man born blind understands; he sees clearly now, not only with his eyes but with his mind and his heart as well. ‘Lord, I believe,’ he says, and worships him.

The Scripture scholar Fr Frank Moloney holds that there is another journey happening in today’s gospel. The religious leaders, the Pharisees, initially recognise the miracle—they see what is before them—but they quickly fall into darkness and despair. Obsessed by the question of how this miracle could possibly have happened, they sink—with eyes, minds and hearts closed—deeper into darkness. They cannot or will not accept who and what is before them in the person of Jesus. For although they are the custodians of the tradition of faith, they have fallen into blindness.

At times we too can be blind to the presence of Christ with us. Let our prayer today be one that gradually leads us on a journey, enabling us to see Jesus, who is our Hope, our Light, and our Way.

Reflection provided by Fr Werner Utri

## PRAY

Lord, in your graciousness, turn to us in love.  
Heal our broken spirits,  
soften our hearts  
and lead us in your ways.  
Amen.



*Healing the man born blind by Duccio di Buoninsegna*



## DURING THE WEEK

What is God calling me to in my prayer?

—

What is God prompting me to fast from?

—

Where is God guiding me to respond in generosity?

## WEEKLY POCKET PRAYER

‘The Lord is my shepherd;  
there is nothing I shall want.’

I cast my cares on the Lord.



# Fifth week of Lent

‘With the Lord there is mercy,  
and fullness of redemption.’



—response to Psalm 129(130)

## BE STILL

- Light a candle as a reminder of God’s presence.
- A stone or strips of cloth may provide a visual prayer focus for this week.
- Take a moment to allow whatever is in your heart to rise, and offer your thoughts to the loving care of the Lord today.

## SING OR LISTEN

‘[O Lord, hear my prayer](#)’ (Taizé) (AOV1 17, GA 431) or  
‘[Hosea \(Come back to me\)](#)’ (AOV1 30, CWB 715, G 484,  
GA 213) or ‘[Return to God](#)’ (CWBII 298, G 478, GA 304).

## GATHERING PRAYER

God of the depths,  
In this final week of Lent,  
help us to know that even in the darkness of the tomb,  
life rises up.  
Unbind us from our unbelief, and set us free.  
Amen.

## GOSPEL

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

Mary and Martha sent this message to Jesus, ‘Lord, the man you love is ill.’ On receiving the message, Jesus said, ‘This sickness will end not in death but in God’s glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified.’

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that Lazarus was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judaea.’

On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. When Martha heard that Jesus had come she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, ‘If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you.’ ‘Your brother’ said Jesus to her ‘will rise again.’ Martha said, ‘I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said:

‘I am the resurrection and the life.

If anyone believes in me,  
even though he dies he will live,  
and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.  
Do you believe this?’

‘Yes, Lord,’ she said ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.’

Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, ‘Where have you put him?’ They said, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept; and the Jews said, ‘See how much he loved him!’ But there were some who remarked, ‘He opened the eyes of the blind man, could he

not have prevented this man’s death?’ Still sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, ‘Take the stone away.’ Martha said to him, ‘Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day.’ Jesus replied, ‘Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said:

‘Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer.

I knew indeed that you always hear me,  
but I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me,  
so that they may believe it was you who sent me.’

When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, here! Come out!’ The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, let him go free.’

Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what he did believed in him.

—John 11:3–7, 17, 20–27, 33–45

The Gospel of the Lord.



*The Raising of Lazarus by Luca di Tommé*

## WEEKLY POCKET PRAYER

‘With the Lord there is mercy,  
and fullness of redemption.’

Lord, when I feel ashamed or humiliated,  
help me to see myself the way that you see me,  
and to view others with the same compassion.

Amen.



‘Our only desire and our one choice should be this:  
I want and I choose what better leads to God’s deepening life in me.’

—St Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*



## PONDER THE WORD

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## REFLECT

One reason the account of the raising of Lazarus is so powerful is that it is so vividly described by the gospel writer; it’s so easy to visualise ourselves at the scene—with the crowd at the grave of Lazarus—and to relate to these very relatable characters that St John gives us and the experiences they are undergoing.

We can all stand there with Martha and Mary, helpless and disorientated in loss and grief for their beloved brother Lazarus, and with the loss of their male relative, who secures their place in the society of Jesus’ day. What will now become of them? And we can relate to Jesus in this scene, too: his love for his family; his wanting to be with them and enter into their grief; his own tears and distress in the face of the death of a loved one.

Yet there is something disconcerting about Jesus’ presence in this scene, too. Jesus seems to understand the events going on around him differently from the other people gathered at Lazarus’ grave. We are curious, early in the scene, that Jesus seems so calm when the news of Lazarus’ illness reaches him. Why does he not set off at once to his friend? Does it not matter to him whether Lazarus is alive or dead when he comes?

When Jesus meets with Martha on the road, he overturns her religious expectation about the end-time raising of the just. Jesus tells her that wherever he is, death is already transformed by a fuller, more dynamic form of life. When Jesus meets Mary, the other sister who cries out her sadness, joined by her neighbours and relatives—all crying—Jesus is deeply affected. But the words St John uses suggest that he is almost indignant, almost annoyed at the sight in front of him. Is he upset for his friends? Or is he upset at the power of death, which can cause such loss and heartbreak?

And when John tells us that Jesus wept, the famous verse 33 in this chapter, he uses a different verb for Jesus shedding tears from that which he uses for the others. It’s as though St John is saying to us, his hearers, that there’s something different about Jesus’ experience of Lazarus’ death from that of the dead man’s sisters and neighbours and the crowd.

Jesus expresses more angry distress when he arrives at the closed tomb of his friend. St John tells us that in a great voice, the *phone megale*, Jesus orders the grave to be opened and the dead man to come out. Surely we are to understand that this is the voice of the Creator, who calls all things into being—as the psalm says, ‘the voice of the Lord, full of power.’ The one who keeps giving life, even to that which is dead and decayed. The one whose aliveness and creativity is not threatened or diminished by death. The one who opens our graves, as the prophet Ezekiel foretells this Sunday. Indeed, as St John tells us, he’s the one who keeps giving life to us, even at the risk of his own life, as this event at Bethany draws religious leaders to conspire against Jesus.

Wherever Jesus is present, the narrative shows, human death is real and its consequences distressing. But the grave is always open, and physical death is transformed by the creative power of God.

What is this power? St John makes it clear: it’s the power of love. Jesus’ love for his family and for Lazarus is what brings the transformation. And where people come to Jesus in faith, that creative power of love frees our life from the fear and anxiety death produces, so that we too can live for others.

Reflection provided by Fr Kevin Lenehan

## PRAY

Gracious God,  
We thank you for your Son, Jesus, who accompanies us in all our humanity:  
in bewildering loss,  
in tears of grief,  
in the depths of the tomb  
and in the joy of life restored.  
Help us to believe, so we might truly see your glory,  
and so that our lives might reflect your life-giving love.  
Amen.



## DURING THE WEEK

What is God calling me to in my prayer?

—

What is God prompting me to fast from?

—

Where is God guiding me to respond in generosity?