

# Lenten Reflections | 2017



**There may be chaos in the world,  
but hope will never die.**

*Let us not allow ourselves, then, to be discouraged by trials, no matter how numerous or bitter they may be. Afflictions, reverses, loss of friends, privations of every kind, sickness, even death itself, 'the evil of each day,' and the sufferings of each hour, all these are but so many relics of the sacred wood of the true Cross which we must love and venerate.*

– Blessed Basil Anthony Moreau, Circular Letter 34

Dear Sisters, Friends and Associates,

As we approach the Lenten season, we are aware of so many crises in our world. These 40 days in our liturgical year call us to take time to examine our individual lives, our societies and the wider world. In our *Constitution and Statutes*, the Sisters of the Holy Cross proclaim that we are a “congregation whose missionary charism is to respond to the needs of the Church” (Paragraph 2). I would add that this response calls us to cross borders and boundaries of every kind. We are called to read the signs of the times. In our last General Chapter, the Congregation, reading the signs of these times, stated, “It is our responsibility to work to implement a culture of peace and nonviolence.” The Holy Cross International Justice Office Executive Committee recently committed to collaborate among the branches of Holy Cross in cultivating nonviolence and peace, and in caring for the world as a sacred trust for the present world and for future generations.

We can look to the examples of others who followed the path of nonviolence and peace. Some of these great leaders include Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, and Malala Yousafzai. They followed varying religious beliefs, but all fell in love with humanity and with God’s creation. A well-known Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore, wrote, “The universe is full of schools and I am the student of all.” We can look to these great practitioners of nonviolence as our teachers as we work toward a culture of peace and nonviolence.

It is my prayer that these Lenten reflections will help us to look inward and consider how, by our daily actions, we can help to transform our own lives and our world, making the resurrected, nonviolent, peacemaker Jesus visible among us.

I am very grateful to our Sisters Shibanlin Nongsiej, Elmolin Lyngkhoi, Renuka Pegu, Molly Jacob, Lucy Lalsangzuali, Rose Mary Marngar, Jacenta Dkhar and Parboti Gomes who reflected on the Scriptures and provided these reflections for us. May this year’s Lenten and Easter seasons bring grace-filled blessings for all of us.

In Holy Cross,

*Sister Angela Golapi Palma*

Leadership Team Member

# ASH WEDNESDAY

March 1, 2017

Joel 2:12-18 | 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2 | Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

*Jesus, bring me back upright when I am knocked down. Help me to never forget that when I have you, I have everything.*

Now and again we are flattened by a really heavy blow, but we do not stay down because Jesus is with us. We may be treated badly by others and may have to go through hard times, but because of Jesus, our life is full of blessings. We may appear to have nothing but because we have Jesus, we actually possess everything. We may be sorrowful but we always are rejoicing.

God's power at work through the presence of the Spirit empowers us to press on with a discerning wisdom that only he can provide. We are consoled by the fact that, yes, there will be suffering, and, yes, there will be hardships; but at the end of the day, there is the conviction that we really do have everything, which gives a joyful richness to life that involves right relationships with God, with others and with ourselves.

Our Lenten task is to look to our inner motivations before we get preoccupied with how we are coming across to others. We like to present a tidy appearance to the world, but we all have closets and Jesus reminds us to clear them of selfish motives and shallow goals. Being able to say, "I am who I appear to be," is a good goal for all Christians.

We do not need to make a big show of helping someone in need. Doing it to impress others is not proper giving at all. It is just another way of getting something for ourselves, and Jesus warns us against this trap. Many Christians have sought to only serve God but have inadvertently become famous for their selflessness, like St. Teresa of Kolkata.

Jesus goes on to contrast "treasures on earth" with "treasures in heaven." Our earthly possessions are temporary and prone to decay and loss, while gathering treasures in heaven refers to conducting oneself in anticipation of God's rewards and living in such a way as to build up incorruptible stores.

*Sister Shibanlin Nongsiej*

## Reflection Questions

1. In our self-examination during the Lenten season, how do we present ourselves to the outside world? Who are we on the inside, as a person?
2. How do we reconcile these two different realities, our outer and inner selves?

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## FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

March 5, 2017

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7 | Psalm 51 | Romans 5:12-19 | Matthew 4:1-11

As we reflect on the temptation of Jesus, we are aware that temptation is not one isolated event. All of us experience temptation in our lives at times. It happens when we are uncertain of who we are and unclear of what we are meant to be. That is why the evil one prefaced each of his temptations to Jesus with the phrase, “If you are the Son of God ... .” Every temptation strikes at the heart of our identity—who we truly are!

Every time we give in to temptation, no matter how small it may seem, part of our true self is chipped away, weakening further our sense of identity. We have a wonderful shelter in God whose heart always welcomes us. God offers us sustenance and strength during this time when we are weak and feel alone.

We pray to God who dwells within: Our loving Father, who is with us in good times and bad times, we turn our hearts to you and proclaim that nothing can come between us and your love, even when we are troubled or worried or persecuted, or lacking food or being attacked. We can grow through difficult times, because of the power of your love at work in our lives. We offer ourselves to you, that you may help us to remember our true identity in the midst of our daily lives.

*Sister Elmolin Lyngkhoi*

## Reflection Questions

1. The Gospel speaks about three great temptations: pleasure (bread), power and failure to accept responsibility. These temptations may affect us also. How have they affected me and how have I responded?
  2. What is the temptation that causes me the most trouble? What steps can I take to deal with it?
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## SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

March 12, 2017

Genesis 12:1-4a | 2 Timothy 1:8b-10 | Matthew 17:1-9

The first reading invites us into the world of Abraham and Sarah, our ancestors in faith. There it is, the journey of faith. Is not that what life is? For the faithless, life is more like a competitive ladder of success to be climbed. For the faithful, it is a journey that takes us to new places in our souls. The summons for the journey begins somewhere deep inside each of us. For some, it begins with hard, nagging questions, and it is often a puzzling or hurtful experience. Curiosity leads others to look at the bigger world and to wander in and out of other people's lives and in the process, they meet God.

Whenever we travel we encounter difficulties: roadblocks, detours, accidents and delays. In the spiritual journey to God we also encounter difficulties. We give them a name: cross, doubt, death, divorce, pain, sickness, sin—all of these are a cross, The Cross.

We learn early in life that the journey cannot be made alone. Even Jesus wanted companions for the journey; Peter, James and John accompanied him to the mountaintop, but they were not like Abraham. They wanted to stay at the mountaintop rather than to keep on travelling. It is always easier to rest and stay where you are. But that is not allowed—not for them and not for us.

In Lent, God asks us to undertake a transforming journey, so that we are changed. It is not enough to transform only our outside, like putting on spring clothes at Easter. The changes we are asked to make must take place

deep within, where our own true selves are waiting to change. But we often are frightened of change and are tempted to stand still when we realize that we are helpless to make changes ourselves. We need to turn back to God and totally surrender to him so that he can bring about the changes in us.

*Sister Renuka Pegu*

## **Reflection Questions**

1. As you enter the second week of Lent, what changes have you seen taking place in your life as a result of your observance of this sacred season?
2. What changes do you still want to make? What changes frighten you?

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## **THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT**

March 19, 2017

Exodus 17:3-7 | Psalm 95 | Romans 5:1-2, 5-8 | John 4:5-42

In today's readings, we see God as Giver, who gave us Jesus. God gave us the law and living water; the meaning of law is love and the meaning of water is life. Jesus experienced "thirst" in his life, in the agony of the cross, and talked about thirst with the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus' thirst was love for the Father which he demonstrated by fulfilling the Father's will while he was in this world. We see Jesus' unconditional love on the cross, fulfilling his mission to bring salvation for all. Through our baptism we are immersed in Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Our call today in this world is trusting God while standing in our prophetic role to share the Good News, to heal the sick and to become a bearer of hope for all around us. This is the witness we give to the gift of life we have received. St. Teresa of Kolkata began ministry on the streets and in the slums with the unwanted people of the city. She heard the voice of Jesus, "I am thirsty." Jesus was thirsty because of his compassionate heart for the suffering, the needy, the poor and the outcast.

In Romans we learn that we will not be disappointed because Jesus is our hope and giver of life. Today many women suffer from difficulties but happily

give life to their family, society and the world. These women are our mothers and sisters, who share love and hope unconditionally. During this Lenten season let us pray for one another that we may be filled with life-giving water, recreating us in God's image and sustaining us to receive, to drink and to share this generous gift of God.

*Sister Molly Jacob*

## **Reflection Questions**

1. Am I seeking to be a giver of life?
  2. How do I give witness to the "thirst" for God and his people?
  3. How am I growing in this gift of life?
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## **FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT**

March 26, 2017

1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a | Ephesians 5:8-14 | John 9:1-41

*I have come to this world that those without sight may see.* —John 9:39

Today's first reading tells us that God does not see as we see. Usually, we look at outward appearances, but God looks into the heart. Through Samuel God chooses David as the King of Israel; though David was young, God knew that David would remain faithful to him. Let us remember that God judges our hearts, not our physical appearance; therefore, outward appearance should not be our focus.

The Gospel gives us a beautiful story about the healing of a blind man. In the eyes of the world, the blind man is nobody, yet a person who could see Jesus with the eyes of faith. The others failed to see what the blind man saw because they did not want to believe in Jesus. This shows that real blindness is not with the eyes, but with the heart.

In our lives we can experience two kinds of blindness: physical and spiritual. To be spiritually blind is more harmful than to be physically blind. The Pharisees and the leaders in today's Gospel reading were spiritually blind. They knew that it was Jesus who worked the miracle in the man born blind, but they preferred darkness to light. The blind man had a desire to see; therefore, he not only received physical sight but also spiritual sight, the sight of faith.

Before baptism we all were blind and in darkness, just like the blind man before Jesus smeared his eyes with mud. Through baptism we are cleansed and anointed and become new beings, children of light.

Every moment Jesus is knocking at the door of our hearts. This Lenten season, let us examine ourselves so that we may continue to keep the light of faith burning in our hearts, giving light to all those around us.

*Sister Lucy Lalsangzuali*

## **Reflection Questions**

1. Are we ready to open our hearts to be touched and healed by Jesus?
2. Are we courageous enough to remove the darkness inside us and see with the light of faith?
3. Am I a Pharisee who treats others unjustly and labels them negatively, or am I a blind man who longs to see light?
4. Do we look at reality with God's eyes?

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## **FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT**

April 2, 2017

Ezekiel 37:12-14 | Romans 8:8-11 | John 11:1-45

Ezekiel, our first reading, challenges us to see ourselves in the grave which sin has dug, waiting for God's summons to life and for his Spirit which revives and recreates us. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, reminds us that disciples are required to be continually identified with Christ. Turning away from the flesh, we are to live in his Spirit, which brings life.

John's Gospel recounts another sign, or miracle: the raising of Lazarus. The reading invites us to reflect upon what it means to call Jesus the resurrection and the life. The scene described at Bethany is a sad one. Martha meets Jesus weeping, saying that if Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Yet, she remains confident that God will do whatever Jesus asks. Martha affirms her belief that there will be a resurrection of the dead on the last day. Then Martha's sister, Mary, comes to Jesus with the same confidence, saying that Jesus could have cured Lazarus.

Jesus asks to be brought to Lazarus' burial place, where he prays and calls Lazarus out from the tomb. At this sign, many come to believe in Jesus, but others take word of the miracle to the Jewish authorities, who begin their plans for Jesus' death. In raising Lazarus, Jesus shows his power over death so that when Jesus dies, those who believe in him might remember that and have hope. Just as Jesus calls for the stone to be rolled away from Lazarus' tomb, so, too, will the disciples find the stone rolled away from Jesus' tomb.

Today's Gospel calls us to reflect on baptism as a dying and rising with Jesus. In baptism we die to sin's power over us, rising as children of God. In baptism we join ourselves with Christ, who conquered death once and for all so that we who believe in him may have eternal life. With Lazarus, Jesus calls loudly to each of us, today and every day, "Come out!" of the darkness of sin and death and "go free." With Martha and Mary, we are called to profess our belief that Jesus is indeed the resurrection and the life.

*Sister Rose Mary Marngar*

## **Reflection Questions**

1. As each of the readings is proclaimed, with what character do we associate ourselves?
2. Where do our sympathies and aspirations lie?
3. In whom do we find our spiritual posture most reflected?

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## **PALM SUNDAY**

April 9, 2017

Isaiah 50:4-7 | Philippians 2:6-11 | Matthew 26:14—27:66

Palm Sunday marks the dramatic entry of Jesus into this paradoxical Holy Week. These events challenge us to reflect upon our attitude in following Christ—how we welcome him one moment and reject him the next moment through our sins. Before the end of this week, the Messiah will be crucified. This is the week when the best of Christ and the worst of humanity are before us.

First, it is a week marked with passion and significance of that great drama,

that internal battle, wherein the beautiful and the ugly sides of humanity coincide with God's bountiful mercy and love.

Second, the passion of Christ reminds us about humanity's painful journey of life. At times, we are confronted with experiences in which we can only watch and weep helplessly, as Mary, the mother of Jesus, did while watching her beloved son's agony and death. We are reminded of those moments when we grope for answers, all alone in the dark.

Finally, there are times when, like Simon of Cyrene, a cross is imposed upon our shoulders, and we are asked to carry the burden of others. But when we do so, we, too, share not only in the suffering and passion of Christ, but also in God's plan of redemption for humanity.

As we enter into this Holy Week, let us pray that our lives will reflect the sacrificial love and mercy of Christ.

*Sister Jacenta Dkhar*

## **Reflection Questions**

1. Which part of the passion of Christ strikes you?
2. Spend some time in prayer, reflecting upon Christ's passion and what it means to you. What is God trying to say to you through this experience?

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## **EASTER SUNDAY**

April 16, 2017

Acts 10:34a, 37-43 | 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8 | John 20:1-9

*The world is at a point of violence, social dissolution and the presence of a gnawing question as to whether or not there is anything that can be done to change the direction set by leaders of governments. This is the world within which we are called to be saints and prophets, that is, to give witness to the possibility of a world of compassion, justice and community through the full and integrated living of our commitment as religious women. We know we do not hold this hope alone nor in vain. It is God who inspires and sustains us in our desires and who also calls individuals and groups from every corner of the Earth to join in solidarity to bring into existence visible examples of God's reign in our midst.*

– Sister Aline Marie (Steuer), reflection on the 2004 General Chapter

The Easter story: You have heard it before! You experience it in a different way every time you hear the story narrated.

Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning while it was still dark. She saw that the stone blocking the tomb had been moved away. In the picture on the cover of this booklet, you see broken twigs, quite wild looking, but from this “chaos” new life is growing, a sign of hope.

In the above reflection from the 2004 General Chapter, you read that “the world is at a point of violence, social dissolution and the presence of a gnawing question... .” From this situation we, the Sisters of the Holy Cross, respond to God’s call, and with great hope we are open to see the needs of the Church and the world.

In today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the offering of love, the victory of justice and the birth of peace call to delight you with exuberance for your discipleship. In the Gospel, Mary of Magdala, concerned about moving the stone, took the initiative and went courageously to the tomb and saw that the stone had been rolled away. She did not stop sharing the joy of the resurrection. Sharing moves you to sustain a relationship with others and with God. You share in the fulfillment of hope, the resurrection: You shall rise.

*Sister Parboti Gomes*

## **Reflection Questions**

1. Am I allowing myself to move forward, removing the “stones” or blocks in my life, such as anger, gossip, inability to share in community, not spending much time in prayer?
2. Am I bringing joyful hope to the broken world?

# NOTES

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*It is a blessing for you when they insult you for  
bearing the name of Christ, because it  
means that you have the spirit of glory,  
the Spirit of God, resting on you.*

– 1 Peter 4:14

