



Reflections  
for Lent 2023



## Reflections for Lent 2023

### **Dear Sisters, Associates, Family and Friends,**

As Sisters of the Holy Cross, we welcome you to this sacred time of recognition and recommitment to our presence in the cycle of living, dying, giving and receiving new resurrected life as disciples of Jesus.

We thank our dear and dedicated sisters in Maryland who have accepted to companion our Lenten journey with insights both from the Scripture texts and their own life experiences. Looking inward, they give recognition to the lifelong process of growing in self-awareness of being both frail in times of darkness and still graced as instruments of Jesus' presence, in empowerment of others to reach out to the most in need in today's world.

May we follow their learning of the need to stop, to see, with compassion and God's love, how to be instruments of hope at the foot of others' crosses and witnesses, through transforming love, to resurrection.

**Sister Mary Tiernan, CSC  
General Councilor**

# Ash Wednesday

February 22, 2023

Joel 2:1–2, 12–17

Isaiah 58:1–12

Psalm 51:1–17

2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

As we begin the Season of Lent, we hear the prophet Joel delivering a message of warning from God to the people in the southern Kingdom of Judah. He declares: “Rend your hearts and not your clothing.” In other words, “Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.” This season offers us favorable moments to reach out to the poor, the lonely and those who do not have the basic necessities to thrive in their own homeland. Lent also provides a golden opportunity for each person to strengthen and/or heal one’s own relationship with our Lord through prayer, Holy Hours, the sacrament of reconciliation and Mass as often as possible.

The Church also gives us advice by encouraging us to set aside time each day to discover and to use resources that will enable us to live a more fruitful life. These resources may also empower us to become closer and more intimate with our Lord. Several key pillars that characterize this season and enable us to become more selfless and attentive to God’s voice are prayer, meditation and spiritual renewal, as well as fasting and almsgiving. These key assets involve not only what we are willing to give up — such as limiting time on our tablets and computers — but what we are willing to take on in sharing our God-given gifts and talents with those who are neglected and disregarded.

The prophet Isaiah too makes suggestions in Isaiah 58:1–12. He encourages a specific approach to fasting that could easily supplement the more traditional forms that most people are accustomed to using. He recommends that we choose to loosen the bonds of injustice, and that we let the oppressed go free. Moreover, he also champions sharing bread with the hungry and caring for the homeless. He declares, “Your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly.”

Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, brings further light to the environmental injustices that are particularly prevalent in areas where the poor and the marginalized reside. He asserts that the violence we render is evident in the sickness of the water, the soil and the air. As a result,

Mother Earth is being laid to waste and her inhabitants are crying out in pain. During this Lenten season, may we strive to think less of ourselves and more about our brothers and sisters who are less able to do things for themselves because they lack access to basic services or opportunities that could provide them with the essential necessities that could enable them to live a better life.

The future of humanity and our planet Earth does not rest solely in the hands of powerful leaders. It is essentially in the hands of those who have the ability and humility to organize and influence others to bring about change for the betterment of our common home and all her inhabitants. May we strive to become beacons of hope to those living on the fringe of society. May we serve them with compassion, empathy and sensitivity. And may our lives manifest value in God's eyes — not because of any kind of secular success — but by how we treat the neediest of God's children, who suffer even more when Earth continues to deteriorate because of our negligence and carelessness.

— *Sister Sharon Ann Mihm, CSC*

### **Reflection questions**

- If we are going to fight climate change, secure clean energy, and demand justice, how might you personally take action? Perhaps you might consider taking time to reflect upon this question by writing down your thoughts. You also might consider creating a poem or developing prayers or a prayer service relating to those who are suffering and vulnerable.
- Consider empowering others (relatives, friends, neighbors and/or parishioners) to better serve those who are oppressed and neglected — in other words, those most in need! One might also consider signing petitions related to justice issues and writing letters to those who represent you in Congress and in your state on behalf of those who suffer gravely because of the ill effects of climate change.



# First Sunday of Lent

February 26, 2023

Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7

Psalm 32

Romans 5:12–19

Matthew 4:1–11

## Seeds...

The Gospel for the first Sunday of Lent, Matthew 4:1–11, tells us that Jesus was led into the desert to be tempted. We know how Jesus endured and rejected these temptations and what they symbolized. But why the desert? What does it symbolize? The desert looks barren but there is life — seeds awaiting water to grow and blossom.

In my life there are barren places, deserts. These deserts are waiting for me to open to the waters of God's amazing love to grow and blossom. Like Jesus, I must be open to the grace of God, my creator, guide, friend.

There are seeds in me that need tending to in order to grow. There are seeds that need to be unburied or find a new direction or need to die.

— *Sister Mary Virginia Herr, CSC*

## Reflection questions

- Can I accept God's help in recognizing the seeds in me?
- How can I unbury the seeds in me?
- How can I tend these seeds?

# Second Sunday of Lent

March 5, 2023

Genesis 12:1–4

Psalm 121

Romans 4:1–5, 13–17

Matthew 17:1–9

## Sit and Do Nothing and Be Transformed

The Genesis reading considers the call of Abram: a call to radical change, to leave everything he knew and go to another place that God would show him. God promised that Abram would be a blessing to those with whom he came into contact.

Psalm 121 promises that God will be with us day and night.

In Romans, Paul encourages us to see that God blesses us as we work, and even if we are doing nothing, because we believe in God's transforming love that creates and recreates and makes possible what we may think impossible.

The Gospel reading traditionally for the second Sunday of Lent is the Transfiguration. Jesus took Peter, James and John up to a mountain, and before their very own eyes they saw his Essence. They saw his connection to the past, the present with them, and his future mission. They were stunned and afraid and didn't know what to think or do. However, Jesus reassured them and asked them not to speak of it until later.

So now it is our time and place. We don't have to be silent.

— *Sister Paula Goettelmann, CSC*

### Reflection questions

- Where do we see signs of transfiguration, i.e., beauty, clarity, essence of the divine?
- Do we believe as Abram did that God is blessing others through us, day and night?

## Third Sunday of Lent

March 12, 2023

Exodus 17:1–7  
Psalm 95  
Romans 5:1–11  
John 4:5–42

### Woman at the Well

We know little about the woman who met Jesus at the well in a small Samaritan town in the heat of the day. We know that she has had five husbands and that the man she is with at this time is not her husband. She also can hold her own in a conversation.

Clearly, she knows her history and the meaning of being a Samaritan in the presence of a Jew. Yet, she is drawn into Jesus' kindness and respect; she listens. This man is not like the others, he sees her as a person, he knows her, and does not reject her life story. He wants to talk with her. He offers her living water. When he speaks of life-giving water gushing up

from the spring, her first response is to ask for it so that she will not have to go to the well each day to experience the scorn of others.

Then something more beautiful awakens within, the hope that this Jew could be the Christ and the faith that the water is more than well water but life-giving water welling up to eternal life.

Jesus planned to wait for the woman to come to the well, where he would ask her to “give me a drink.” As they talked, his words stirred her very being. There is something wonderful about him, he speaks truth. He raises her up with unconditional love. The woman, filled with the Spirit, needs to share the good news with her friends and town! She brings them to Jesus, and Jesus stays with the Samaritans at the dismay of his disciples.

— *Sister Ruth Marie Nickerson, CSC*

### Reflection questions

- Has there been a time when I was busy about many things and was interrupted by an unplanned conversation or presence of someone that moved me to ponder the unexpected message?
- The cleansing water of baptism has washed over us. Yet we know that, like the woman at the well, we are sinners too and desire transformation of our hearts and relationships. Have I spent time this Lent reflecting and seeking forgiveness and rejoicing in God’s unconditional love?

## Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 19, 2023

1 Samuel 16:1–13  
Psalm 23  
Ephesians 5:8–14  
John 9:1–41

### “...I am the light of the world.”

As I read repeatedly the passage from John for this reflection, I was amazed at how real this Gospel message is in everyday life. It reveals the struggles we face between good and bad, power and powerlessness, poor and rich, believers and non-believers, upper class and lower class, upper caste and lower caste, literate and illiterate, professional and amateur, justice and injustice, immigrants and inhabitants, inclusivism and

racism, prejudice and fairness, blindness and openness, sinfulness and holiness, darkness and light, dominant and non-dominant, minority and majority. These are the categories made in the societies where we live. The Pharisees, who have privilege, status and respect in the society, especially in the practice of faith, had the most difficulty accepting Jesus, his words and his actions. The Pharisees prodded the blind man about Jesus to pull him down, because “He had done a good act, opened the eyes.” One may fall in darkness unknowingly (unknowingly in the eyes of human judgment), but as soon as that person acknowledges and wants to return to the light, God is overjoyed.

There is a familiar saying, “When it is dark enough, you can see the stars.” Or Barbara McAfee’s song lyric, “Every time I go into the darkness, I return with fistfuls of jewels.” There is value in the darkness of our lives, Isaiah prophesied thousands of years ago, saying, “I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.” So, it is decided, mandated by the call of God, to come out from our darkness, remove the scales from our eyes, throw away our blindfolds and live in the Light of Jesus, who shows the way, the truth.

— *Sister Angela Golapi Palma, CSC*

### Reflection questions

- Am I afraid of my darkness? Am I able to touch and acknowledge it? Am I ready to take the scales from my eyes and to be a person of light?
- In our last general chapter, we expressed our call to be “transforming love, for the life of the world” and asked God to “humble us in our common call to holiness.” How do I “hurry, then, and take up this work of resurrection” in this chaotic world, bringing God’s love in my life as well as to others with whom I live, minister and meet as I continue the journey?



# Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 26, 2023

Ezekiel 37:1–14

Psalms 130

Romans 8:6–11

John 11:1–45

**“I have said this for the sake of the crowd, that they may believe.”**

As I was preparing this reflection, I saw a photo of my special needs niece, Allie, wearing a t-shirt stating, “Don’t stop believing.” This Gospel reading for today is the last of the signs in John’s Gospel, and it occurs right before the passion and resurrection of Jesus. I noticed that in all of Jesus’ interactions leading up to the raising of Lazarus, he is encouraging and explicitly calling on his disciples Martha and Mary to believe. All his conversations with them and his actions call forth deeper faith that he is the “resurrection and the life.” It calls forth Martha’s declaration of faith, “Yes, Lord, I believe you are the Messiah . . . .”

It seems to me that Jesus is working hard to make sure we have a way to believe; he wants us to believe. He knows that faith in a loving God can be very difficult in dark times. His disciples are clearly worried about going anywhere near Jerusalem. Martha, Mary and Jesus are in grief at the loss of a loved one, and Jesus calls on all to Believe! After the sign, the raising of Lazarus, and the growing belief of the people, the Sanhedrin decided that Jesus must die. The darkness is getting worse.

We too live in dark and confusing times. We sometimes wonder where our God is. Somehow, when it is darkest, Jesus sends us a sign — maybe a special needs niece, with a t-shirt that says, “Don’t stop believing.”

— *Sister Brenda Cousins, CSC*

## Reflection questions

- How am I being called to faith and new life in these dark times?
- What signs of faith and hope do I experience amid the darkness of our world?



# Palm Sunday

April 2, 2023

Isaiah 50: 4–7

Psalms 31:9–16

Philippians 2:6–11

Matthew 26:14–27, 31, 66

Isaiah has prepared us for our mission in spreading God's word to those he has selected to reflect it to others, arousing them to do the same. He encourages us to follow his example and do as he has done. "I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame."

Paul, in speaking to the Philippians, continues Isaiah's message. He urges them to purge the enmity from their hearts and prepare their souls for God's gifts of peace and love. Accepting God's love in our hearts is all we will need on our journey.

With all the preparation above, Matthew takes us to the Last Supper and the crucifixion of Jesus. "Tonight your faith in me will be shaken, as Scripture has it: 'I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed.'" And then all the pain and sorrow that we know so well follows.

## Old Gold

by Sister Dorothy Anne Cahill, CSC

Gold now shines	This is the glory,
With a gentle dream,	This is the gift
As years consume	Of lifetime spent
The living dross.	Beneath the Cross.

— *Sister Kathleen Weber, CSC*

### Reflection questions

- In Isaiah, how is God preparing me physically to spread his word to others?
- In Philippians, how does God use us to prepare others to accept his gifts of love, peace and gratitude?
- After reading Matthew, take a few minutes and try to see yourself in a few of these people: Mary, Judas, Pilate, Simon, one of the women at the tomb, or any others of your choice. Try to touch their feelings, love, courage or fear and growth.

# Easter Sunday

April 9, 2023

John 20:1–9

Colossians 3:1–4

## “Tell us, Mary, what you have seen?”

In this portion of John’s narrative, we find Mary Magdalene going alone in the dark, returning to the tomb where Jesus had been buried. Grief-stricken and distraught, she needs to be close to her beloved Jesus. She arrives and sees the stone rolled back. So even more distraught, she runs in the dark back to tell his disciples.

Have you ever tried to run in the dark? Stumbling, unsure, the whole range of twisted emotions. In so many ways in our world today, we are impelled to run in the dark as we confront concerns about care of Mother Earth, our countries, our congregations, our families, our friends, ourselves, how to go, or at least from familiar past? What is inside the dark space of our anxieties?

The Gospel tells us how Peter and John ran and looked inside, having to find tangible proof of their tortured and dead brother. And then they went home, but Mary stayed and wept. Today’s segment of the Gospel stops here with Mary, staying and being simply present.

The reading from Colossians reminds us that we have “died and now are hidden in Christ.” Hidden in Christ — what a profound way to describe simply being present. But we know that death, move that changes, or other events in life that we experience as “dying” are not the end of the story. We know with rock solid certainty, as the sequence reminds us, what Mary proclaimed, saw and experienced: “Jesus my hope has risen.” It’s what we say this Easter day of 2023 in our current realities, as we are called to live out that rock solid truth that “Jesus my hope is risen.”

— *Sister Rachel Callahan, CSC*

### Reflection questions

- Returning to our Ash Wednesday reflection, how has the desert been for you during this Lent?
- What realities must we see, embrace and respond to?
- How can I/we hurry toward the work of resurrection simply by being attentive and responsive? Giving even as our own limitations and energies allow?



Reflections  
for Lent 2023



[www.cscsisters.org](http://www.cscsisters.org)