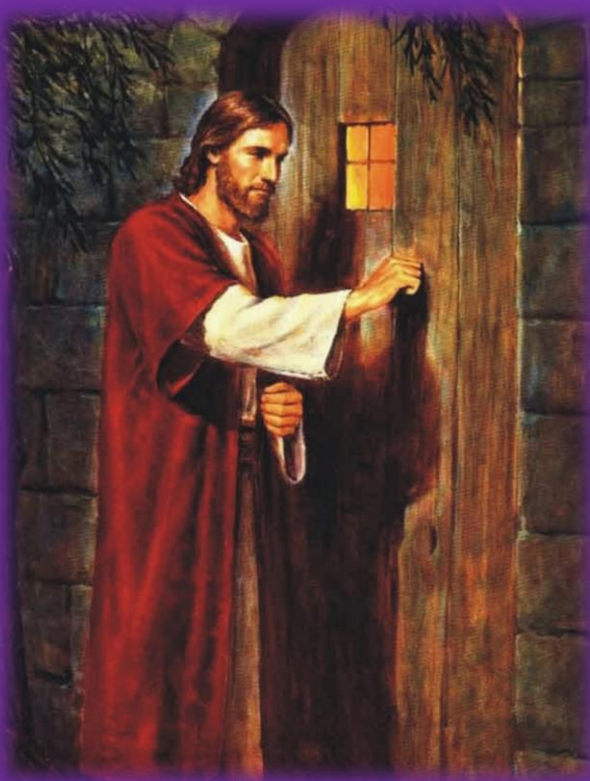


Reflections for the Lenten Season



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**The West Virginia Institute for Spirituality
Retreat and Training Center**
1601 Virginia Street, East
Charleston, West Virginia 25311
304-345-0926
Website: www.wvis.org
Email: wviscr@aol.com
Facebook: The West Virginia Institute for Spirituality

INTRODUCTION

“Lenten” is the Middle English word for “Spring”, or “new beginnings.” In the Christian tradition, “Lenten” was shortened to Lent and represents the name of the second and final Penitential Season in the Church Calendar.

Jesus wants to make His HOME in our homes and in our world. He gives us these new beginnings by knocking on the doors of our HOME. When we open our doors of our HOME to invite Jesus in, He helps us to see our dwelling place for/with Him with new, renewed eyes. He suggests ways to “Spring Clean” or “remodel” our HOME. Once we complete this cleaning and remodeling process, He then gives us an increased desire and the necessary graces to share our HOME with others.

HOME is the theme of the 40 Lenten Reflections and the six, Sunday, Watch...Pray Photo Prayers. All the authors have prayerfully grappled with and pondered what it means to make their homes with and for Jesus. These interfaith authors are sharing their unique experiences and concept of HOME with you.

We challenge you on your Lenten journey to Easter to allow Christ to be your guide. Journey with Jesus into the dryness as well as beauty of the deserts in your life. Then on Easter Sunday, celebrate the profound aspects of His Desert Experience, Cross, Death and Resurrection.

Sincerely,
Susie Pace and Bob Harrison, Co-editors
WVIS Lenten Reflections

Authors

Sister Carole Riley, CDP, Ph.D.
Bob Sylvester, M.A.
Deacon J. Peter Minogue
The Reverend Alan K Webster
Donna K. Becher
Reverend Marykaye Jacquet
Elaine Soper, Ph. D
Michael J. Folio
Liz Deal
Kathryn M. Lester
Tom Octave, MM
Rev. Dr. Rindy Trouteaud
Father Bill Petro, M. A.
Sister Mary Irene Sorber, SCC, MS
Elaine Chwalibog
Dorothy France Tullmann, Ph.D., RN
Donna (Dee) Kochirka, RN MA
Kristen Klick
Deacon Thomas Soper
Sister Gail Pankowski, SCC, BCCC
Gerri Wright, MBA, MAPM
Doris A. Westfall
Bob Harrison
Ann Winton, M.A.P.M.
Julia Harrison, M.AA.T.
Mary Malamisura, PT
Dr. Brenda Wilson
Christina St Clair
Rev. Julie Hitsman, Chaplain
The Rev. Cheryl Ann Winter
Dr. Raymond Lowther
Andrew Chwalibog, BA, JD
Sr. Linda Hylla, CDP, LCSW
Pam Steelhammer, M.A., M.B.A.
Father J. Patrick Foley, Ph.D.
Mary E. Quick, M.A.
Bruce Neal
Margaret (Susie) Pace, M. Ed., M.A.
The Reverend Kent Higgins
Sister Molly Maloney, OSF, M.A., LMT

Ash Wednesday



Watch ... Pray

Let me follow You into the deserts of my life.

Ash Wednesday

Long have I waited for your coming home to Me and
living deeply Our new life. (based on Hosea 14)

REFLECTION:

As I write this Ash Wednesday Reflection, I am aware of our **“Coming Home Theme.”** Immediately, I recall and begin humming the song from Weston Priory **“Come Back to Me with All Your Heart.”**

Lent is a time for all of us to return “home” in covenant with God. Traditionally, new members are welcomed “home” during this Lenten Season. Jesse will be one of our WVIS retreatants welcomed into a faith tradition. He is now a seeker, a Catechumen. Some of us might think of ourselves as “penitents”, sinners who repent and practice disciplines of kindness, mindfulness, balance during Lent; some of us, the faithful, continue our journey offering welcome to the stranger (Genesis 18, 1-15), most especially welcoming the stranger in our own heart.

In our violent and fearful world, hospitality, welcoming the stranger-being Christ among us -presents a challenge. For some, we are the only Christ visible. So, we imagine ourselves as a guesthouse, opening not only our doors but also our hearts.

I was in Pittsburgh when the massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue occurred, and I felt haunted by the image of these Pittsburghers, trying to find a welcoming safe space. As I was praying back in WV, I saw two of B’nai Jacob Synagogue exit doors across from WVIS. So, I walked across Elizabeth Street and provided our WVIS house keys to our Synagogue neighbors. WVIS is the closest to the B’nai Jacob Synagogue’s two exit doors. Although I hope our neighbors will never need those keys, I wanted them to have the option of coming home to WVIS in any crisis. I hear God’s ongoing yearning for me, and, as I remember my mortality, I seek to provide a welcoming space so that each day I live in a spirit of gratitude and welcoming.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- ✚ Welcome each interruption today as an invitation.
- ✚ Name when you have a difficult time keeping your inner door open.

Sister Carole Riley, CDP, Ph.D.

Executive Director WVIS

Charleston, WV

wviscr@aol.com

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

“Blessed are they who hope in the Lord”-Responsorial Psalm

REFLECTION:

On this Thursday after Ash Wednesday, I am reminded of a recent experience of discovering a HOME in Jesus. One evening, after a foreboding discussion with friends about the conditions of the world, I sank into a deep depression. All I wanted to do was crawl into bed and pull the covers over my head. I almost immediately cried out to Jesus for help. In the ensuing dream, an Angel of light appeared and sat on my lap, listened and consoled. We concluded with a Communion service which included a super-size host!

We are all capable of God experiences like this. Do we ever totally understand their path to God's home? How can we accept transformation of this power deeper than any force living within? Do we ever fully understand our truth in these surprises? How important is it to comprehend?

The following poem reminds of the precious time of every moment of the day:

Lost Time

On many an idle day have I grieved over lost time.

But it is never lost, my Lord.

Thou hast taken every moment of my life in thine own hands.

*Hidden in the heart of things thou are nourishing
seeds into sprouts,
buds into blossoms, and ripening flowers into
fruitfulness.*

*I was tired and sleeping on my idle bed
and imagined all work had ceased.
In the morning I woke up
and found my garden full with wonders of flowers.
-Rabindranath Tagore in Gitanjai (“Song offering”)*

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Crawl into bed, pull over the covers, ask God for help!

Bob Sylvester, M.A.

WVIS Associate Spiritual Director

bsyl@msn.com (304) 552-9661

Friday after Ash Wednesday

“Fear not for I am with you always.”-Isaiah 43:5

REFLECTION:

Lent is a time for us to focus on simplicity, purity and asceticism. Luke 4:1-13 is the Gospel reading for the First Sunday in Lent. In its reading, we learn Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit, and led into the desert. The desert becomes a Holy place of testing and trial. For Jesus and for us, this desert experience is a time of stripping away all the superfluous aspects of our lives, and all the distractions so that we may concentrate on God's plan for our minds and hearts.

On this desert journey, Jesus encounters Satan who plans three challenges. The word Satan comes from the Greek word, *Satanas*, which means, one who throws something into the path of another. The three temptations of Jesus are more than challenges for the Son of God, they are meant to be instructive to all of us in every era of history.

The Son of God was tempted by Satan to turn stone into bread. We all know Jesus' response that one does not live by bread alone. Jesus was hungry; He might want something to eat. The larger question is that sensual pleasures do have their place, but only if they are rightly ordered. These pleasures must be for the will and purpose of God. Fasting and abstinence during Lent help us to achieve this proper focus and mindfulness.

The second temptation was that Jesus was offered all world power over the dominions. If Satan was able to offer this, perhaps it indicates that all worldly power does belong to Satan! Jesus' response was that you shall worship the Lord your God and him alone shall you serve. Jesus' water in the form of grace will never leave you unsatisfied. As we receive that grace from God, we are then obligated to give it away, so that we will receive even more grace. Being able to share the gift of grace with others is far more satisfying. Saint Therese of Lisieux, Mahatma Gandhi and Saint Theresa of Calcutta exhibited God's power, yet they all made an impact on humanity.

Jesus's final temptation was to jump off the edge of the temple and into the arms of angels. The temple was the worship place of God. Why would Jesus want to leave the temple? If we think that we are the center of the universe, then we are in for a big fall from grace.

As Jesus said to Satan, do not test God unnecessarily. Remember that life is about asking what we can do for God and not what God can do for us.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

As we travel on this Lenten journey, may we be more sensitive to the needs of others and reflect more deeply on God's plan for our lives. When we wake up in the morning, we should ask what we can do for God and not focus so much on our own needs.

Reverend Mr. J. Peter Minogue, Permanent Deacon
Saint Patrick's Parish, Hinton, WV
pminogue@dwc.org

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

“My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest.” (Isaiah 32:18)

REFLECTION:

Home is where the heart is, home should be a secure place of love and joy, but what happens when that security is taken away?

My youngest son lives in New Orleans. Recently just before Christmas, his new home was broken into and items were stolen. He called me lamenting that he was shaken to the core and fearful “they” might come back. A neighbor saw the perpetrator enter the house through a window and called the police, but it was several hours before they arrived at the scene. My son was angry at the thief, the police, and angry that he now felt unsafe in a place in which he had been at peace, secure, and undisturbed, until now. Now he felt violated and disturbed.

He gathered a community of friends who assisted in repairing the window, the thief used to enter the house. The community lamented, and slowly began to be thankful for the neighbor who saw the intruder and called for help. They vowed to be mindful of one another and keep an eye on one another in the future. He learned, “stuff” is simply that, “stuff”, and the gift of community is a unique gift and can be cultivated, shared, even in a broken and hostile world. His home was not simply contained within the walls of one house but was all the homes in his community. In this community all homes can be secure, undisturbed, and peaceful. If we help one another and keep an eye out for one another.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

✠ Be alert and keep your eyes open today.

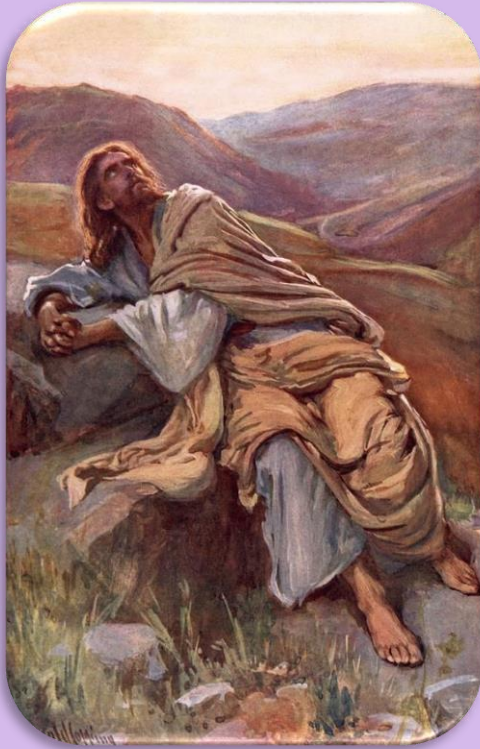
✠ How can I be a good neighbor to my community today?

The Reverend Alan K Webster

Rector St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church Charleston, WV

Kwebster229@gmail.com

First Sunday of Lent



Watch ... Pray

Let me turn my face toward You.

Monday - First Week of Lent

“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?” –Mt. 25:37-40 NABRE

REFLECTION:

As Jesus rebuffed the devil in the desert yesterday, I confidently begin the Lenten “housecleaning” of my soul. I think, as I reflect on today’s reading, “Yep, I’m a sheep.” “I go to church regularly; I usually remember my collection envelope and even sing in the choir.” “I have my morning prayer ritual.” “Great!” “So far, clean and tidy in this little corner of the world, my interior HOME.”

“WAIT A MINUTE, Jesus!” “Do you mean I should acknowledge the humanity of those panhandlers from whom I avert my gaze, that Manna Meal soup kitchen volunteer request email I deleted, the addict hunkering in a corner of the alley, or the immigrant at the border begging for asylum (oh yeah, I was going to call my legislator to add my support)?” “Jesus, are you really asking us to deal with all of THAT?” ... “but isn’t that asking a lot of us?”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian executed by the Nazis warns in *The Cost of Discipleship* “Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. ...Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”

“Living and incarnate.” “YOU.” “NOW.” “In my world...on MY street...my HOME.” The first order of housecleaning this Lent is apparently to, “Open our eyes, Lord- to truly see you.”

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Listen prayerfully or recall the song, “*Whatsoever You Do*” by Willard F. Jabusch;

Tuesday - First Week of Lent

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. (James 4:8)

REFLECTION

Fanny Cosby was an American mission worker, poet, lyricist, and composer. Her lyrics show great insight considering she lost her sight after birth. She was one of the most prolific hymnists in history, writing more than 8,000 hymns and gospel songs, including: "**Pass Me Not, O Gentle Saviour**"; "**Blessed Assurance**", and "**Close to Thee**."

Close to Thee

Thou my everlasting portion, more than friend or life to me,
All along my pilgrim journey, Savior, let me walk with Thee.

Not for ease or worldly pleasure, nor for fame my prayer shall be;
Gladly will I toil and suffer, only let me walk with Thee.

Lead me thro' the vale of shadows, bear me o'er life's fitful sea;
Then the gate of life eternal, May I enter Lord with Thee.

My mother used to sing "Close to Me" when I was a girl. I still hear her singing this hymn when I am faced with new challenges, opportunities and growth. Seeing within forms the basis of our spiritual intellect and insight. Seeing within even makes us ever mindful of how "close to us" our God really is. As we see within, the truths of God are perceived and received spiritually, so that our souls are made alive through the Spirit. When we draw nigh unto Him; He will likewise draw nigh unto us.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

During this Lenten Season, pray that we will "see" the need to draw, "CLOSE TO THEE."

Reverend Marykaye Jacquet
First Baptist Church Volunteer
Charleston, WV
Venable40@AOL.COM

Wednesday - First Week of Lent

“Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.”
(Revelation 3:20)

REFLECTION:

As I read this Scripture I smiled. I thought about how I would feel if I heard these words from Our Lord Jesus. I put myself in the scene. Let's take a moment and walk through this together.

We were at “home” talking, having a cup of coffee. All of a sudden, we heard a knock at the front door of our “home.” In a loud voice, we heard a man say: “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice, open the door.” We looked at each puzzled. Who could this be we thought? He sounded so familiar!

Then we heard more... “Listen, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.” Puzzled we went to the door. And to our surprise it was Jesus, Our Lord. We did open the door and He did come in to our “home” and eat with us. What an experience!

Finishing this imaginative prayer, another thought came to mind... How often do we travel on with our business at hand and forget to feel the God that is always with us... always within us... always reaching out to us... and always calling to us to follow His way?

How often do we get so busy that we forget to listen to the soft voice that keeps calling us in every moment of every day?

PRAYER PRACTICE:

As we move forward today, let's take a moment periodically and say: Jesus, help us listen more closely to your word and follow you!

Elaine Soper, Ph.D.

Associate Spiritual Director

Director of Development, West Virginia Institute of Spirituality

Ronceverte, WV

elainesoper@gmail.com

Thursday - First Week of Lent

Whoever exalts race, or the people, or the State, or a particular form of the State ... [and] raises these notions above their standard value and divinizes them to [an] idolatrous level, distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God....” (Pope Pius XI, *With Burning Anxiety*)

REFLECTION:

Today is the 82nd anniversary of Pope Pius XI’s encyclical that warned the world about the dangers of the Nazi “cult”, the “myth of race and blood”, and the idolatry of nation over people. Six months after the encyclical’s release, the Nazi’s launched a heinous campaign to exterminate an entire race and erase God from the world.

Sadly, our tweeter feeds, Facebook streams, and TVs display the contemporary “cult” of national demagogues, the baffling “myth of race and blood”, and the cruel divinization of nation over God’s people. The brutal lessons of the Nazi cult have been repressed and replaced with the illusory virtues of nationalism, isolationism, and racism.

During this Lenten Season remember our call to preserve the world planned and created by God. Our humanity as God’s people is our true “home” on earth. We are united as one people because we are God’s people. Our shared humanity eclipses the divinization of walls and travel bans and the exaltation of nation or race.

Let’s never forget the “order of the world planned and created by God” and always remember that our true “home” rests not in nation or the repression of others but in each other united as God’s people.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- ✠ How is God calling you to promote the world planned and created by God?
- ✠ What walls separate you from God?

Michael J. Folio
Attorney and former Permanent Deacon
Hurricane, WV
michaelfolio@yahoo.com

Friday - First Week of Lent

“He shall live because of the virtue he has practiced.”

Ezekiel 18:22

REFLECTION:

When I was 16, my friend Joan’s parents died in a plane crash. I remember being in the kitchen when my sister called me to come and look at the TV. When I saw their names on the screen, my first thought was that they were finally being recognized for some good work they had done. Because that’s who they were: quietly generous people who worked on behalf of others, most recently helping a refugee family find a home in our small town.

Forty years later, I hold on to the truth that Ed and Carol reaped the reward of their lives, and they live now with God. They have inspired me to be my better self, to reach out and speak for those who can’t, and to make others welcome.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Speak to God today about the legacy you will leave behind. Ask God to help you see how you have helped to build the Kingdom over your lifetime, and how you are invited to keep building.

Liz Deal
WVIS Associate Spiritual Director
Huntington, WV
lizjdeal@gmail.com

Saturday - First Week of Lent

REFLECTION:

Be at home with Jesus. What does that mean? First comes the *desire to be with Jesus*. The Bible tells us all we have to do is desire to be closer to God, and we are closer; although not without *Grace*. Grace is the gift that allows us to come close to the concept of who our Lord and Savior is for us. When we think about what keeps us from that closeness, perhaps we can look at our own home. What keeps others out? Doors and windows – perhaps even signs “no trespassing”. Let us each ask ourselves, “What doors have I closed, what windows have I closed, what signs am I showing” that keep God at a distance?” As we approach Easter, let us clean house, in a figurative way, open the doors and windows that have kept us from an intimate relationship with the ONE who LOVES us.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Place both feet flat on the floor. Close your eyes and focus on what barriers you have established to keep your distance from God.

Focus then on the name of God. *Whatever name you are most comfortable using (Jesus, Father, Mother, Allah, or Sophia)*. Acknowledge God is already in your heart – Notice God’s presence and rest with God.

Kathryn M. Lester
Associate Spiritual Director
Charleston, West Virginia
Kmlster53@yahoo.com

Second Sunday of Lent



Watch ... Pray

Let me join my hands with yours.

Monday - Second Week of Lent

"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."-Luke 6:36

REFLECTION:

Jesus invites us to create in the home of our hearts a place that is abounding in the mercy of God - a heart of mercy that challenges our human critiques of others in light of the boundless love and mercy of God.

Mercy towards others is a gift that we can offer that will create a world that is full of the love of God. It is sometimes the easiest thing in the world to pass quick judgement on another person or to let our prejudice and the blindness of our hearts speak instead of the mercy of God in a situation.

Jesus challenges us to be merciful, to be loving, and to be the presence of God in the world here and now. As we continue our Lenten journey, may we create in the home of our hearts a place where we extend and share with others the mercy of God.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Today, think of a person or situation in your life that is need of the mercy of God. Discern if God is calling you to pray for the person or situation or to offer to the person or situation the mercy of God through a kind word, a gesture of reconciliation, a holy conversation or simply a loving embrace. Today, extend to the world around you, the mercy, the loving kindness of our God who calls each of us and all of us beloved.

Thomas Octave, MM

Spiritual Direction Intern

Associate Professor of Music and Chair

Saint Vincent College, Latrobe PA

Director of Sacred Music, Diocese of Greensburg

Tuesday - Second Week of Lent

Now as they went on their way, (Jesus) entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-42, NRSV

REFLECTION:

It sounded like a creative way to handle an assignment: walking 21 labyrinths and writing reflections about those experiences. Everywhere I went I googled Worldwide Labyrinth Locator and found the nearest labyrinth...indoors, outdoors, five-circuits, seven-circuits, Chartres pattern, Cretan pattern, rustic stone construction, burnished inlaid wood construction.

For the pilgrim, the labyrinth represents the circuitous journey to God's heart-home, finding in it rest? inspiration? clarity? before returning to the starting point with deepened awareness. The trouble is, I could never make it to the center! I could see God's heart-home from a distance, but something always distracted me – one exquisite rose in a side garden, a dance of leaves across the cold, gray stone, a rush of starlings filling some low lying branches.

God, however, is an ever-patient host, eager to welcome the pilgrim searching for Home. On an ill-kempt labyrinth hidden in some woods outside of Washington, D.C., I crossed the threshold to God's heart-home quite by accident. Finding the rock-lined path destroyed by vandals or indifferent hikers, I spent hours combing the nearby creek for rocks and then carefully reconstructing the circular pathways, stone by stone, until, at last I reached the center, bewildered and covered with mud and scrapes and scratches. My "walk" to God's heart-home, much of it on my hands and knees, revealed the one needful thing: God, only God, always God.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Imagine God welcoming you with open arms into the divine heart-home. What is the one needful thing you hope to find?

Rev. Dr. Rindy Trouteaud

Pastor, Central Presbyterian Church PC(USA)

Athens, Georgia

rindy@trouteaud.com

Wednesday – Second Week of Lent

“One thing above all is important: The return to the Father”.

Conjectures of a Guilty By-stander, p. 171

“Merton showed us the way home – to God, to the world, to oneself. The experiential contact with the Living God encompassed Merton on all sides...”

Merton’s Book of Hours, Kathleen Deignan, p. 17

REFLECTION:

In His home, Jesus experienced God as a Father/Mother in ministry, beginning with His baptism when He heard His Father say, “You are my beloved Son, I delight in you.” In the Scriptures, He felt His Father speaking to Him, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.”

The disciples, John, James and their mother experienced Jesus. Initially, they tried to manipulate Him into being a secular ruler. But Jesus asks them, “Can you endure what I am about to endure: rejection, suffering, crucifixion, humiliation, abandonment, mockery, emotion abuse?” He was inviting them to participate in the Paschal Mystery.

What is my experience of Jesus? Teacher? Moralist? Judge? Person? As a young adult, using my desperate neediness, I was invited into my pattern of the Paschal Mystery. I said: Jesus, if you are alive, I need to experience you NOW! I was given peace and courage to endure the difficulties of my Passover from fear and powerlessness to trust in God and hope for the good that would come of this. I was moving home to be with God through surrendering to God. This now is my life-long journey.

Thomas Merton’s writings have companioned me, enabling a growing surrender – choosing to trust and receive confidence in God and in myself, as I live in and through my Paschal Mystery (My return to the Father).

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Choose these words from Jesus’ to companion you: “Father, into your hands I place _____ (Insert your need here), with gratitude and trust.”

Father Bill Petro, M.A.

WVIS Associate Spiritual Director

Thursday – Second Week of Lent

Homemaking

“Keeping a home not only requires time, energy and creativity, but it also calls for skills and experience. I believe homemaking is an art to pursue the development of any piece of art demands time and talent.” - Dorothy Kelley Patterson.

REFLECTION:

It has only been a few days following the funeral of one of our Sisters. As her accomplishments were being read, her first ministry caught my attention...”homemaker”. This term was always used for those Sisters who turned our convents into homes. And I must say that until I heard the term again at her funeral that I began thinking about how important and how powerful homemaking can be.

In a newly combined convent of 92 religious women, making this new house into a home is exciting, yet quite challenging and at times a little daunting. I feel the need to really pray about what the concept of “homemaking” means for me as the local coordinator and fellow Sister. Does “homemaking” mean love for each member of the home, whatever their personality or illness; or joy, awareness of needs, creativity, positive outlook, good relationships with the various staff members? Is all homemaking to be done out of love for the One who has brought us all together and one another? In short, homemaking is a lifestyle imitating and living a Eucharistic way of life.

Home-making
Loving
Joyful service
Being present, smiling
Listening deeply, awareness
God-like

PRAYER PRACTICE:

During your time of prayer, use the image above as a prayer starter to find your way to being a “homemaker” at home, at work or simply meeting people on the street or in a store. What does “homemaking” mean for you?

Sister Mary Irene Sorber, SCC, MS
WVIS Associate Itinerant Spiritual Director
wvismaryirene@aol.com

Friday – Second Week of Lent

“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him, and make our home in him.” Jn.14: 23

REFLECTION:

It is Friday, the traditional day of the week for penitential practice during Lent. We are called to abstain, fast, and pray, often making the Stations of the Cross, to en flesh what is hopefully occurring within: taking stock of actions, attitudes, and patterns that need changing to bring them into alignment with the teachings and example of Jesus.

What comes to mind is an experience I had many years ago driving home from a 5 day retreat. I had a CD playing religious music and was singing along filled with gratitude for a grace filled retreat. All of a sudden what flashed in my mind was a picture of the Trinity, all three, dressed in hard hats, work shirts and jeans, with tool belts hanging around their waists, putting up yellow caution tape all around my inner self. They were talking, saying, “We’re going to have to take this one down to the studs...” (My husband and I had just completed a bathroom renovation in our old house so I was familiar with this process!) The banter continued and we, the Trinity and I, laughed together good heartedly. We knew that my home had “good bones” but renovation was needed and who better to be in charge of the reconstruction? What is so wonderful is that God did not wait until the job was completed before God moved in. It has been an ongoing reclamation process while God has been at home through it all.

I love this memory because there was no worthiness test, no shaming, no condemnation, no judgment felt whatsoever. There was only the feeling of the four of us rolling up our sleeves with good humor and saying, “We’ve got a lot of work here. Let’s get to it!” We were in it together making a home that was fit for all of us!

PRAYER PRACTICE:

It is only through the Holy Spirit’s revelation that we can know our sinfulness. In what area(s) is the Spirit calling for a renovation of your home? Are you engineering it yourself or is God in charge? What tools are you using? How’s it going midway through Lent? Time to take stock.

Eileen Chwalibog
Associate Spiritual Director WVIS
Huntington, WV
Grace51@aol.com

Saturday – Second Week of Lent
Home is where the heart is. –Pliny the Elder

REFLECTION:

The California Camp Fire of 2018 virtually wiped out the little town of Paradise, CA. Many of my favorite memories of being an undergraduate nursing student at California State University, Chico were week-end trips to Paradise to pick apples and/or visit the amazing Bonanza ice cream parlor. Now it is all gone. And, so are homes—about 14,000 of them—gone in a flash.

As I sit in our new home in Oakhurst, California gazing out at the beautiful Sierra National Forest that could just as easily one day become an inferno and take my home, I wonder what it would be like. And what would “home” mean to me then?

We cannot pretend to comprehend what our brothers and sisters in Paradise are experiencing during what must be an intense “desert journey of daily life.” Reflecting on their plight causes any “desert” we may be experiencing shrink in comparison. But whether small or large, our desert journey can lead us to Jesus—who had no home at all for the last three years of his life (Matthew 10:24).

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Reflect on the devastation of those in Paradise, CA who have lost their homes. Think about a more personal “desert” in which you find yourself today. Imagine Jesus looking at you with eyes of love saying, “I am here. Come home to me.” If you can, then say, “Yes, Lord Jesus. I want to make my home with you.”

The peace of Christ be with your spirit.

Dorothy France Tullmann, Ph.D., RN
WVIS Spiritual Director Intern
Oakhurst, CA
dftullmann@gmail.com

Third Sunday of Lent



Watch ... Pray

Let me see Your handiwork from above.

Monday – Third Week of Lent

“And coming to her, he said, “Hail favored one! The Lord is with you...Behold, you will conceive in womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus...and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever.” Luke 1:28-32

REFLECTION:

It has been an especially difficult year in my hometown of Pittsburgh. The brutal massacre of the those worshipping at the Tree of Life Synagogue and the Grand jury report of sexual abuse perpetrated in the Catholic Church has devastated the community. Fueled by fear and anger, darkness threatens to destroy our Home. Congregants no longer attend services at the Synagogue, and many Catholics have left the Church. Also, there is an ongoing invasion of the Petro-Chemical Industry that is fracking the land and building a cracker plastics manufacturing plant, “The largest in the World.” The toxic chemicals emitted into the air and water are jeopardizing the health and lives of all living creatures within the tri-state area. Overwhelmed by the threats to my hometown, I wrestle with having to leave this city or taking an active role in change. I find myself reciting a line in the chorus of Leonard Cohen’s song entitled “Anthem”:

“Ring the bell that can still ring.

Forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack, a crack in everything

That’s how the light gets in.”

As we reflect on today’s Gospel reading of the Annunciation, Mary responds to God’s call by participating in His plan of creation. She trusts God’s call to be a home for Jesus, the Light of the World. Mary’s acceptance to the home of the Christ child illuminates our understanding of “home” as more than a place or dwelling, but an indwelling. Recognizing that home is not only a place to rest my head but it is a place where my soul finds peace. I take daily walks in the woods. Being close to God’s creation restores my soul and energizes me to move forth, and I find peace.

We carry the love of Christ in us through our response to God’s call. As the community strives to recover from the darkness, we look for God’s saving action in the response to others. Throughout the Pittsburgh neighborhoods, thousands of “STRONGER THAN HATE” Yard signs have appeared. Support for the victims and social justice groups have formed, addressing the alleged cover-up and demanding change within the Church. New Environmental groups are forming and uniting with other activists to demand politicians take action to curtail the harm and destruction of our air, land and water.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Where does your soul find rest? How can you be a home to others?

Donna (Dee) Kochirka, RN MA deekochirka@gmail.com
WVIS Associate Spiritual Director Intern, Pittsburgh, PA,

Tuesday – Third Week of Lent
Just So We Can All Be Together...

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”-John 14:3 ASV

REFLECTION:

My husband is the youngest of seven children. He was raised in a tiny white frame house. I was never there when it was a bustling, bursting-at-the-seams house. When I came to know this house, only Herma, my husband's mother, lived there.

As I walked through the front door of that white frame house for the very first time, I was overcome with a feeling of warmth and welcome that I will never forget. A pot of chicken and dumplings was simmering on the stove and the whole house was bathed in the comforting aroma. It was a holy moment for Herma; her son had come home. She relished every opportunity she had to spend time with one of her children, but the prospect of bringing all seven together was cause for real celebration. It did not matter if it was in her little house or at a crowded Chinese restaurant; a family gathering was sacred to her.

She would always say: “Just so we can all be together.” She said it so often that this simple phrase is etched on the hearts of all her children. This simple phrase reminds each of us of her unconditional love and it binds us together. Though Herma has been gone for many years, we can still hear her say: “Just so we can all be together.” Her words remind us that we are family. They prompt us to make phone calls, send birthday cards and make plane reservations. And when we get together, the love that we share transports us back to the tiny white frame house where we can smell the chicken and dumplings.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Invite a friend to share a meal with you. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving. Listen for the voice of God as you are nourished in body and spirit.

Kristin Krick
Ashland, Kentucky
kkrick9@roadrunner.com

Wednesday – Third Week of Lent

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away,

not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter

will pass from the law,

until all things have taken place."- Matthew 5:17-19

REFLECTION:

We tend to think of the Law as restrictive, prohibitions on how to live so that we don't offend God in any way. Jesus is telling us that the Law in itself is more than this, it is not bad, but perhaps the interpretation of the Law is the problem. This is always the problem when the original intent of a law is forgotten or because of an agenda, the Law is distorted. Jesus fulfills the meaning of the Law, and that meaning is what brings us into close relationship to Jesus Christ. How does Jesus do this? Jesus does this in viewing the absolute worth of each and every individual. We are all under the Law, that is, we are all under the Creator's watchful gaze. To live in the Law means to live as Christ lived. We know this to be the Law of forgiveness, mercy and love. God is Love.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

For the remainder of this Lenten Season, let us place ourselves under the Law. Let us move into a close relationship with Jesus through fasting and penance that we might reflect on the life of Jesus as we approach His death on Good Friday with the hope that comes from His Resurrection on Easter Sunday. The Law is the Law of Love.

Deacon Thomas Soper

Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston

WVIS Associate Spiritual Director – Intern

thomassoper@suddenlink.net

304-667-9732

Thursday – Third Week of Lent

“Listen to my voice, I will be your God and you will be my people.”

REFLECTION:

There are many voices that we hear and will listen to in our lives. It is our challenge to hear God’s voice in the people we meet each day. As a chaplain in a super busy city, I hear many, many voices each day, voices of patients, families and friends. They all have one desire - for themselves and their family member.

When can I go home?

When can we go to the place where we are most comfortable, secure and have the inner peace we all so desire?

Going home after a hospital stay is to be in the arms of comfort, security, love and friendship.

Going home has different meanings: to a physical home, to resume their lives in a healthy way, to be with and in a place we love and know, or to our heavenly home to continue a relationship with God and to be at peace and in the comforting embrace of the God who loves us.

During this season of Lent, we all center more on our journey within. We search for that place in our hearts where we know and find our God.

We also yearn to find our way to our heavenly home.

This is the place where we belong. Will we accept the challenge to seek our home?

Will we concentrate on being better, on loving more and centering our lives on what really matters?

This is God calling us this Lent to begin, may we begin our journey home to Him. This is a life time challenge, and it takes more than Lent to accomplish. Are we ready and willing to accept and to begin?

PRAYER PRACTICE:

✠ When I hear God’s call today what will I do?

✠ Do I view my day to day life as my joyful journey home to God’s embrace?

Friday – Third Week of Lent

May this be a safe place
Full of understanding and acceptance,
Where you can be as you are,
Without the need of any mask
Of pretense or image.

– To Bless the Space Between Us (For a New Home p19)
by John O'Donohue

REFLECTION:

Although this quote is from a blessing for a new home, it could easily be Jesus' words to us. Ideally, a home provides more than just a shelter; it is a sanctuary for those who dwell within its walls. When we respond to Christ's invitation to enter into relationship, we are coming home in a sense to a place of safety where we are understood and accepted as we are. We are known and loved in this dwelling place and the more time we spend here, the more at peace we become.

When I bought my new home about five years ago, my one certainty was that I needed to create a sacred space just to be in the presence of the Divine. I have a special room, my Sanctuary, which provides a sense of peace just being there. Even when traveling, in my heart I can bring myself back to this place of serenity knowing that Christ travels with me and, therefore, I am always home.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Light a candle (or build a fire if you have a fireplace). Gaze into the flame(s) and allow the light and warmth of Christ to enter into your heart. Be still in God's presence.

Become aware of any challenging situations you are currently facing. Rather than looking at those experiences as negative "*why me*" moments in your life, ponder what the Holy Spirit is inviting you to learn about yourself. Without judgment, ask this question - how can I come home to my true self that God has created me to be?

Gerri Wright, MBA, MAPM
Spiritual Director
Charleston, WV
gerwright1@aol.com

Saturday – Third Week of Lent

REFLECTION:

For most of us, our Christian journey is a fairly smooth road with a few obstacles along the way. We strive to follow the rules of both God and man. But on occasion, we find ourselves in the desert and are not as sure-footed in staying on the right path. For a while, we tend to rely on our own instincts and past experiences to find our way out of the barren, dry land. Sometimes we wander for a short period before getting our bearings. Too often we wander for longer periods and get deeper into dryer and harsher territory.

If we truly want to get back to the place of water...and living water, at that...we should follow the scriptures. Proverbs 3:5-7 are wonderful words that God has left for us no matter where we are in our journey through life. ⁵Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. ⁶In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. ⁷Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Jesus wandered in the desert. What did He do? He watched. He prayed. Shouldn't we do the same?

Doris A. Westfall
Dunbar Church of the Nazarene
Dunbar, West Virginia

Fourth Sunday of Lent



Watch ... Pray

Let me bask in the light of Your love.

Monday – Fourth Week of Lent

“If we’re always
Starting over
Ev’ry brand-new morning
Then we’re always
Starting out
With the end in doubt.
We can leave life for tomorrow
Or grieve all that we thought we’d do
Or make each moment new.”

From the lyrics of the song, “Always Starting Over” from the Musical IF/THEN with music by Tom York and lyrics by Brian Yorkey.

REFLECTION:

Idina Menzel belts out this song near the end of the Broadway Musical IF/THEN as reminder to all of us that each new day is a new beginning and a chance to start over. The lyrics further challenge us to put yesterday behind us and live for today.

April 1, 2019 is an especially noteworthy day to be prayerfully reminded of these ideas or concepts. Until 44 A.D., April 1, was the beginning of the New Year. When the Julian Calendar was adopted in 45 A.D. January 1 became the first day of the New Year.

In fact, the original definition of an “April Fool” was the term applied to anyone who did not let go of April 1 or the past to embrace the present or the future.

God challenges us to let go of the past and live in the present. God does this primarily through the teachings of Jesus.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Power prayers typically begin with self-emptying and openness words to the will of God. Some examples of these power prayer words are as follows: Show me; Teach me; Reveal to me; Remove from me; Search me, or Open me.

Select one of these Power Prayer phrases and use the phrase as the opening for your daily talk with God.

Bob Harrison
WVIS Volunteer
Charleston, WV
DRBOBWV@AOL.COM

Tuesday – Fourth Week of Lent

Home: Center or heart of something; source; place where something is discovered, founded, developed.

American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 5th ed.

2011. Online. <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/home>

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been ill for a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be well?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up" Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your mat, and walk." Immediately the man became well, took up his mat, and walked. John 5:6-9

REFLECTION:

Homelife with four older siblings was loving, noisy, and entertaining. I looked to my siblings for a sense of direction. I felt lonely and bored when they left for school. I would sit at the end of the sidewalk and wait for my sister to come home. The ill man waits for someone to place him the pool. Jesus asks him, *do you want to be made well?* Healing occurs through dialogue with Jesus and obedience to His command. Jesus longs to do the same for each of us. Jesus felt at home in prayer with God the Father. At God's table there is an open seat. Join Jesus in prayer with the Father. Be strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Be affirmed in your unique gifts and particular calling. Consider a concrete action to take today for the welfare of another or others.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Jesus is foundationally our home, the source of life and wellbeing. Midway through the day pause for a wellness assessment using the Short Examen Prayer:

Short Examen Prayer

- ✠ Up to this moment of my day, for what am I most grateful? I thank Jesus.
- ✠ Up to this moment of my day, for what am I least grateful? I share this with Jesus.
- ✠ 3. I ask Jesus for what I need.

Ann Winton, M.A.P.M.
WVIS Spiritual Director Intern
Catechist Blessed Sacrament Church
Charleston, WV

Wednesday – Fourth Week of Lent

“I will cut a road through all my mountains, and make my highways level”- Isaiah 49:11.

REFLECTION:

Lent often is a contemplative time for Christians as we look within and reflect. Today our first reading comes from Isaiah, the marvelous prophet of hope. **“I will cut a road through all my mountains, and make my highways level”-Isaiah 49:11.**

I grew up at the foot of East River Mountain, which is a shining example of the mountains that our fine state has to offer. We have a tunnel that runs through the middle of East River Mountain. At the time the tunnel was built, the cost to the taxpayers was \$40 million. At the time, this tunnel was the most expensive construction project ever undertaken by the West Virginia Division of Highways. Prior to the opening of the East River Mountain Tunnel, travelers, wishing to cross East River Mountain had to navigate the narrow, twisting route of US 52 up and over the mountain. Our two states worked simultaneously, ***“...to make the highway level.”***

After the tunnel opened, the trip of leaving or returning ***home*** changed from a lumbering journey to one that was easier and safer.

Jesus wants an intimate relationship with us to reveal His healing, safe love, and to show His love to all those we encounter. During our Lenten season, let us work simultaneously together to project His intimacy and love onto others. And when we have to navigate winding, curvy events in our lives, know that our Lord will never forget us.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- ✠ When you are challenged by curvy roads in your life, how does God help straighten your path?
- ✠ What captivates and inspires you to rebuild yourself and be a better person?

Julia Harrison, M.A.A.T.

Pastoral Associate, Sacred Heart Catholic Church

Bluefield, WV

julia@sacredheartblfd.org

Thursday – Fourth Week of Lent

“We need to know that we can access God at anytime and in any place. We carry a chapel within us-a sacred space-and we can call on God at any moment.”

Becky Eldredge. *Busy Lives and Restless Souls*

REFLECTION:

This quote really came alive, when during an overscheduled and physically taxing day at work as an aquatic physical therapist, I laughingly looked at a co-worker and said, “I just want to go home.”

Instead, I took a brief break by standing in a shower stall. While standing there under the spraying water, I found myself repeating my deep breathing sequence that I practice in centering prayer.

In that brief silence, I found myself reaching deep inside to my soul’s home, to simply BE with Jesus for a moment. As I left the shower stall, I realized how refreshed my soul and mind were. It is, indeed, as Ms. Eldredge reminds us, that God is accessible to each of us in any moment. We are reminded that it is up to each of us to recognize and direct our desire to be at “home” within ourselves. God is always there, present to us, in that sacred space within each of us.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Recognize the chaos of a busy schedule or a trying time as an invitation to open the door within, by taking several deep breaths, letting your mind rest, and simply BE with God.

Mary Malamisura, PT
Aquatic Physical Therapist
Bluefield, WV 24701
mary@enjoybeing.com

Friday – Fourth Week of Lent

Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, “You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.”

John 7:28-29 NRSV

REFLECTION:

As we get closer to Passion Week, the readings start to reflect the conflict that Jesus is having with the authorities. In John 7, the people begin to speculate on whether Jesus is really the Messiah, and they logically prove that He is not the Messiah because Scripture says they will not know where the Messiah is from, but they clearly know where Jesus is from. We can hear echoes of the theme of home here. Where is Jesus’ home? In John 7:28-29 Jesus says that the people THINK they know where He is from, but His true home is with the one who sent Him, His Father in heaven. Our physical home is a place of security, a place where we take our meals and get our rest. We are grateful for home. But this passage reminds us that, like Jesus, our true home is with our Father in heaven.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

As you go about your home today -- straightening up rooms, preparing food, cleaning, preparing to sleep -- think about your true home. Use these day-to-day activities as an opportunity for prayer. Practice being with God in these activities. Express your gratitude for your home, and tell God you look forward to your true home in heaven.

Saturday – Fourth Week of Lent

"Will ye not come home brother? Ye have been long away,
It's April, and blossom time, and white is the May;
And bright is the sun brother, and warm is the rain.
Will ye not come home, brother, home to us again?"
from The West Wind by John Masefield

REFLECTION:

John Masefield's poem, *the West Wind*, used to make me cry.

After I emigrated to the United States, I missed the lavender-scented gardens of England. I yearned for baked beans on toast in a teahouse near a duck pond. I yearned for what I had left behind.

Often, I have dreamed of being lost in my natal city, London, where I wander and search the familiar streets, yet never can I find my way to my childhood home. All the red double-decker buses I board lead nowhere.

This dream-search for home might, in spiritual terms, be likened to seeking union with God: safe, innocent, protected and beloved.

Each and every person is on a journey, interconnected with one another and the earth, but also personal. We need spiritual guidance to grow beyond the limits of culture, society, and family. In order to mature spiritually, increasing our ability to love, to understand, to give, and to develop our unique gifts, we need help.

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink." (John 7:37 NIV).

PRAYER PRACTICE:

When you feel lost, ask for help through prayer, through friends, through awareness of Emmanuel: God with you today and forever.

Christina St Clair
christinastclair55@yahoo.com
www.xyzwords.com

Fifth Sunday of Lent



Watch ... Pray

Let me always thirst for our Father's will.

Monday – Fifth Sunday of Lent

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff - they comfort me.” - Psalm 23:4

REFLECTION:

One of the daily readings for today is Psalm 23, a favorite of mine. At first, I wondered if this passage related at all to home, but then I started to think about what home is. In its ideal sense, home is a place of safety and comfort, a place where we are surrounded by loved ones. While verse 4 is about a darkest valley, in a way it talks about taking that sense of home with us into the darkness in the form of safety, comfort, and the presence of God.

My husband and I moved to West Virginia a few years ago. We are far from family and new to the community. Recently he was out of the state visiting family, when I became quite sick while driving home from church, which is over an hour drive. I felt so alone and so far from home, alone in a foreign land and unsure of what to do. So I sat in my car and prayed. God nudged me to call a friend, who showed up, took care of me, and helped me make it home safely. In that moment, my darkest valley quickly turned into a welcoming home and loving people. The comforts of home are always with us as long as we carry God in our hearts.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- ✝ What places in your life (physical, emotional, spiritual) scare you?
- ✝ Where are your darkest valleys?
- ✝ How can you bring the comfort of home to those places?

Rev. Julie Hitsman, Chaplain
Charleston, WV
spencerpresbypastor@gmail.com

Tuesday – Fifth Week of Lent

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Theologian and Martyr, 1945

In following Jesus, people are released from the hard yoke of their own laws to be under the gentle yoke of Jesus Christ. ... Jesus' commandment never wishes to destroy life, but rather to preserve, strengthen, and heal life.”-Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*The Cost of Discipleship*)

REFLECTION

Today, in the Church, we commemorate the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazi Regime 74 years ago. I am by no means a Bonhoeffer scholar nor a scholar of the Great War, but I have always been drawn to the powerful writings and witness of this faithful man of God. He is one of my Spiritual heroes.

Bonhoeffer left his homeland of Germany twice as the Nazi's were coming into power. He first went to London to teach and then returned. Later he came to the US for safety, but felt compelled to return to the homeland, he loved, with a deep desire to rescue it from the hands of the oppressors.

Bonhoeffer's anti-Nazi teachings and activism led to his imprisonment and execution. He is reported to have prayed for his country to be defeated while he was imprisoned. He believed it was the only way that civilization would be saved from the evil of Hitler. One observer at his hanging reported that he had never seen a person so at peace with his relationship with Jesus at the time of his cruel death.

Bonhoeffer was able to return 'home' to face persecution because his true 'home' was in Jesus. He understood 'the gentle yoke of Jesus' as the only safety he needed as he worked for justice and civility. His courage was not human generated, it was courage of the Spirit.

Very few of us will find ourselves in a situation like Bonhoeffer. However, we do face challenges in our lives that call on us to 'face evil', 'stand up to the enemy', 'battle against that which draws us away from God'. In those moments, remember where your true home is. Remember that our life in Christ gives us all the safety we truly need.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Where is God calling you to 'return home' to 'stand up to the enemy'?
How have you experienced Jesus as 'your true home'?

The Rev. Cheryl Ann Winter
Rector, St. Timothy's Episcopal Church
Hurricane, WV
cherylwinter57@gmail.com

Wednesday – Fifth Week of Lent

REFLECTION:

In the busyness of life, it is easy to let one's prayer life and spiritual contemplation lapse. If you're like many, that time frequently gets moved further down the list or put aside with assurances to come back to it later. But in reality, that just doesn't happen. As Christians we know how important it is to relish and prioritize our time to talk with God about our concerns, our burdens, to seek understanding or, simply, to give thanks for His many blessings and favor. As we grow in the grace and in the knowledge [2 Peter 3:18], we prepare for our individual callings and ministry. While going about our work with passion regarding what we do and how we love and care for others, this absorbs our energy and time. Even with good intentions, commitment, and, yes, self-discipline, it is easy to delay the health, the refreshment, the recreation our souls need. We find ourselves surrounded by a dry, arid, space, and ... pace. All in a meaningful effort to fulfill our purpose, we fail to check in; we don't go "home".

Often, when I leave a voice mail or email a message to a dear friend or colleague, needing a quick answer or sometimes just to touch base, I become disappointed in not hearing anything back. I wonder, "Why no response?" Even *ET-The Extraterrestrial* made an enunciated effort to "phone home."

During this Lenten season, with its intensity and weight, we are reminded to take inventory of where we are in our spiritual lives. Is God patiently waiting to hear from me? from you?

Phone home.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

How recently did you "phone home"?

Dr. Raymond Lowther
Former Senior Warden
St. John's Episcopal Church
Charleston, WV
ray.lowther@k12.wv.us

Thursday – Fifth Week of Lent

“I will give to you
and to your descendants after you
the land in which you are now staying”

REFLECTION:

In the first reading today God gave Abram not only a new name, Abraham, but also a home for him and his descendants.

When I entered the military in June 1967, the Army assigned me a “home of record” although I would never reside there again. It was where my father lived when I entered the military, and where my mailing address was when I entered the military.

Throughout 14 moves across 3 continents my true home was always where my family and I were living at the time and the community to which we united ourselves. Every move entailed entering into a new set of relationships, and the one constant was always our “church community”. God was always faithful to us by providing a community of friends who were of the same spiritual background as we. Every move was always a difficult because we were leaving our “family” of friends.

When I decided to take the job in Huntington, WV, I thought it would be only for a short period of time, and then I would transfer closer to my home, or so I thought. But once again God intervened and showed me how WV has become my “home”. God surrounded my wife and I with a community of friends and a deeper relationship with Him through our community. He has blessed us and given us a deeper spirituality and life with Him that I had not anticipated.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Recall the times in your life when you were placed in a new environment, and recognize God’s part in it.

Andrew Chwalibog, BA, JD
Huntington, WV

Friday – Fifth Week of Lent

If I do not perform my Father's works, do not believe me. But if I perform them, even if you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may realize and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father. (Jn. 37-38)

REFLECTION:

This experience of Jesus taking a stand against the Jews ready to stone Him makes a deep impression on me. My earlier days of going school was a battleground of those classmates with power and those without power. I attended a public school in a diverse community, and I was the target of bullying and verbal abuse. My first recollection of Jesus making a home with me was during the most vulnerable and difficult time of my life. I often escaped the physical abuse of classmates, and the name-calling took much longer to heal. I would run to the library in town to find comfort and compassion of the librarians working there. The power of Jesus' comfort and compassion was present. Given a job of dusting the wooden shelves after school, the library became my refuge and home to me.

Now today as an adult, I experience the healing power of Jesus in the five senses. Nourishing the body, mind and spirit is my way of honoring Jesus within. Loving beauty, I take delight in nature and watching it change through the seasons. I, too, am aware of the seasons of my life. Celebrating the cycles of death and rebirth is the evolution needed to create harmony and balance in the world. Newfound confidence with confronting injustice has become a routine practice and toxins that were home in my body are gone.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Become aware of your body language. What part of your body is getting your attention right now? What are you feeling? Journal and share with your spiritual companion or director.

Sr. Linda Hylla, CDP, LCSW

Affiliate of WVIS

srlindahylla@hotmail.com

Saturday – Fifth Week of Lent

“If you want the best seat in the house, move the dog.”

--Anonymous

REFLECTION:

What a wonderful experience to come home.

To come home to safety, to comfort, to love.

To live within the heart of the Beloved.

It is something every living creature deserves.

Nevertheless, in this country alone, there are millions of dogs without a forever home.

How heartbreaking it is that all of God’s loving creatures do not have homes and they have never known love, safety or comfort.

There are people who do not revere the sacredness of God’s four legged creatures.

There are people who abandon dogs on the side of the road, while the dog watches his person drive away. There are people who abandon dogs in Kanawha State Forest, leaving the helpless canines to fend for themselves. Some heartless people simply move and leave their dogs behind. Some of God’s beloved creatures are victims of horrible violence, unspeakable abuse and cruel torture. Some people leave dogs on chains without water and food regardless of weather. Some sociopaths train dogs to fight to the death.

Our love must be used to stop this frightening situation. Adopt and protect. Recognize the sacred. Look into the soulful eyes of any animal. It is impossible not to feel the love of The Beloved staring back

Remember.....

GOD SPELLED BACKWARD IS DOG

PRAYER PRACTICE:

✠ How can you offer the blessings of ‘home’ to the neglected and the abandoned?

✠ How do you find ‘home’ when you feel neglected and abandoned?

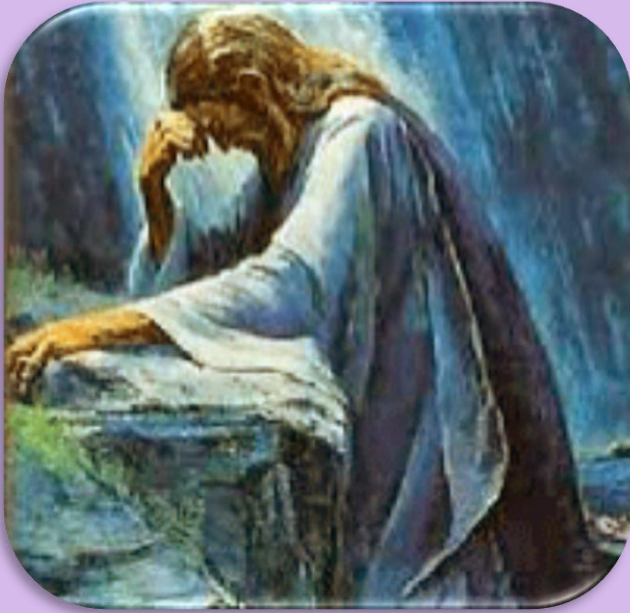
Pam Steelhammer, M.A., M.B.A.

Retired. Admirer of WVIS

Charleston, WV

psteelhammer@gmail.com

Palm Sunday



Watch ... Pray

Let me pray from depth of my heart and soul.

Monday of Holy Week

The End was near...– John 12: 1-11

REFLECTION:

...and Jesus knew it. Oh! the crowds, the curious, they still came, in great numbers, to gawk at Lazarus raised from the dead, to cry out to Jesus for any number of reasons. Yes, he was still popular – but he was a marked man. The ordinary people, nameless hordes, clung to him; but the religious power brokers hated him, precisely because their kind of power meant nothing to him. And in his apparent powerlessness, he threatened everything they stood for. Obviously, he would have to go.

For a few hours, he escaped to the home of friends for good food, conversation, perhaps some peace and quiet. But even there, with people all around, he could not shake off the growing sense of aloneness and poverty. No one is more poor and alone than the person who is going to die soon – and Jesus will die very soon. And of all the people there, apparently only Mary sensed his poverty, and realized that he needed to be affirmed. But a whole pound of costly perfume? Wouldn't a few drops have been enough?

When you want to show your love for someone, you don't ask yourself, "What's the least I can do to show my love?" That's a foolish question. What you ask is, "How much can I do to show my love?" And that is the question Jesus is asking. His answer? He will break the alabaster jar of his own body and pour out all the precious ointment of his life blood for the sake of all humanity, because all of us are threatened by death.

Jesus did not believe in "love on the cheap." He is not asking, how little can he do to show his love, but rather, how much can he do to show His love. So what Mary does is a symbolic representation of what Jesus is about to do – and what all of us, followers of Jesus, are called to do.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Today, offer a prayer of gratitude for those who have poured themselves out for you. And pray for the strength to do the same for others. Especially during this Holy Week, don't just admire Jesus – follow Him!

Father J. Patrick Foley, Ph.D.
Retreat Ministry – Parish Missions
WVIS Associate Spiritual Director
frjpf@sbcglobal.net
www.itnerantpapistpreacher.com

Tuesday of Holy Week

“Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life will lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.”

--John 12:24-26

REFLECTION:

Watching my garden over the fall and winter, the plants wither and gradually sink into the ground until it is not recognizable as a garden anymore, just a patch of dirt. As the spring and summer warm the earth, sprouts begin to appear in that same patch of dirt, sprouts from the plants that died last winter that logically should still be dead.

As J. Philip Newell says in his book One Foot in Eden, “Death is present in each day’s ending. It is present in each moment’s passing. . . A spirituality that is alert to creation. . . sees in death not a movement away from life but a grace through which we may move closer to life’s source.” Being alert to creation certainly enables us to see the way of things, the cycle of death and new life. It implies that there are little deaths we experience even as we live – perhaps the death of one’s ego, of one’s attachment to appearances and things, or one’s attachment to the illusion of self-sufficiency.

During this Holy Week, as we accompany Jesus through his suffering and death, let us allow these little deaths to happen, so we may “move closer to life’s source.”

PRAYER PRACTICE:

As you go about your day, be alert to the presence of death “in each moment passing.” How does it help you “move closer to life’s source?”

Mary E. Quick, M.A.
Associate Spiritual Director
Gandeeville, WV 25243
quickmar@gmail.com

Wednesday of Holy Week

“On a hill far away, stood an old rugged Cross
The emblem of suffering and shame
And I love that old Cross where the dearest and best
For a world of lost sinners was slain

So I'll cherish the old rugged Cross
Till my trophies at last I lay down I
will cling to the old rugged Cross
And exchange it some day for a crown

Oh, that old rugged Cross so despised by the world
Has a wondrous attraction for me
For the dear Lamb of God, left His Glory above
To bear it to dark Calvary.”

REFLECTION:

No visit to Youngstown, Ohio would be complete without a visit to Lake Park Cemetery where a memorial to George Bennard, the composer of the hymn the “Old Rugged Cross” is located.

George was a native of Youngstown, but was reared in Iowa. As a Methodist evangelist, Bennard wrote the first verse of "The Old Rugged Cross" in Albion, Michigan in the fall of 1912 as a response to ridicule that he had received at a revival meeting.

The back cover of these 2019 Lenten Reflections reminded me of this popular hymn and prompted me to write this reflection. In the deserts of our lives, Jesus birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection are as constant as the image of an Old Rugged Cross portrayed in the lyrics above or on the back cover of this reflection booklet.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Prayerfully ponder the images the Old Rugged Cross creates for you in your daily journey with God

Bruce Neal
West Virginia Reading Association Executive Director
Charleston, West Virginia
Bneal3@yahoo.com

Holy Thursday

Gethsemane – a place of prayer, blood, sweat, tears, isolation, quiet

REFLECTION:

Today, in my faith tradition, the Sacred Triduum begins this evening with Mass of the Lord's Supper. While preparing, the haunting words of a chant used in our recent Taizé Prayer Service keep running through my head:

"Stay with me, remain here with me, watch and pray. Watch and pray."

The garden of Gethsemane is the place Jesus went to pray the night before His death. He asked Peter, James and John to wait, watch and pray while He was at prayer. They slept!

Our life includes Gethsemane experiences. ... Our "Gethsemanes" are those places where our will wrestles to find its way to God's will. Taken from "Getting Through Your Gethsemane's" by Robert C. Crosby, D. Min., HuffPost, 2013.

If, indeed Gethsemane is a place 'where our will wrestles to find its way to God's will', how has our Lenten experience in Gethsemane been this Lent? Dry and barren? Rich and fulfilling? Loud and filled with challenges? Quiet and filled with contentment?

Was Jesus in Gethsemane with you? Did you spend time with Him? Did you 'watch and pray' or did you sleep?

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Take six minutes to **STOP** and **PRAY** with the Taizé Chant "Stay With Me". You may wish to Google "Stay With Me – Taizé on YOUTUBE."

My prayer for you is that the Gethsemane experience of today may enrich your Easter Season

Margaret (Susie) Pace
Spiritual Director
Princeton, WV
topsy@suddenlink.net

Good Friday

My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

REFLECTION:

Scan any obituary page and you will read so-and-so "has gone home to be with the Lord." Two points to make about that:

1) This is a statement of fact. It's not "we think" or "maybe" or "we hope." It's "we know." Why do we know? Because Jesus said so.

2) You didn't have to be with Jesus when He made the promise for it to apply to you. Much as I hate to admit it, you probably don't have to be a church-goer for the promise to apply. I doubt the thief on the cross with Jesus was. For my other-denominational friends, sorry, none of you has a special standing that means you alone are "in." And for my fellow Episcopalians, we're not special either – except that we are all special in the eyes of God.

In Baptism, we die to sin and are raised into life, claimed as Christ's own forever. And that carries with it the fulfillment of Jesus' commitment that there is a place prepared for us. We return to that place intended for us in creation. Home is there, waiting for us.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Contemplate what is meant by "Let your lights so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." And be thankful.

The Rev. Kent Higgins

Retired Episcopal Priest; former WVIS Board Member

Charleston, WV

revkenthiggins@gmail.com

Easter Vigil

“He is not here, but he has been raised.” Luke 24:5

REFLECTION:

Their names are recorded: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James. We know from different Gospel accounts that women journeyed with Jesus. Some provided for Him from their own resources. They listened to Him preach, pondered His parables, received His healing touch and became His ardent disciples!

At the break of day, these three women banded together to perform their final ritual of anointing Jesus’ body with sweet, aromatic spices. Like most of us who suffer tragedies, they resolutely put one foot in front of the other, hearts heavy with grief and headed towards the place His body had been laid. Who of us cannot resonate with the experience of going to the grave of a beloved? There is an accompanying sense of disbelief. Like Mary, the Mother of Jesus, words from the heart say; “How can this be”? Death viciously separates us from those we have loved in life.

What a shock when they arrived! The stone which they had seen covering the tomb had been rolled away. Surely their hearts must have been panicked and pounding when they could not find the lifeless body they expected to see. Instead, they are blinded by the light of two men in dazzling garments who appeared to them. Could they believe the words addressed to them: “He is not here, but has been raised.” Oh so slowly their minds returned to Jesus’ teachings; “The Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and rise on the third day.” Christ is alive! Jesus’ resurrection reveals that sin and death are forever conquered and new life is our destiny.

In these days of Easter, we, like the women and the Apostles, are invited to let this Easter mystery take root in our hearts. Let us ponder the words spoken to us as well: “He is not here, but has been raised!” Let us take time to allow the truth of the Good News to seep into our souls and to see the Risen Christ alive in our world through the eyes of our faith. Indeed, Christ is Risen!

PRAYER PRACTICES:

Pray with today’s Gospel: Luke 24: 1-12

- ✠ Using your imagination, enter the scene.
- ✠ Apply your senses as you pray with this passage. Journal afterwards.
- ✠ Use for a daily mantra this week: Christ is Risen, Alleluia!
- ✠ Throughout the week, prayerfully recite the Nicene Creed.

Sr. Molly Maloney, OSF, M.A., LMT
WVIS Associate Spiritual Director
wvisrmolly@aol.com

Easter Sunday



Watch ... Pray

Let me rise with You from life's deserts.

