

Lenten Reflections 2015



The Lenten Journey

From ashes to ashes, dust to dust

An outward sign of inner need

For new beginnings

For repentance

For a Christ-like life

For freedom from worldly desires

Journeying with Christ

To the streets of Jerusalem

To the heights of Mt. Calvary

To the cross, and the pain

Dying to self

For salvation

Jean Lange, PBVM Associate

**Ash Wednesday
February 18, 2015**

“Return to me with your whole heart.” Joel 2:12

“Be ambassadors of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 5:20

No half-hearted, hypocritical Lenten resolutions this year, we promise ... especially after pondering the Joel-based admonition to “return to me with your whole heart” and Paul’s challenge to the Corinthians to “be ambassadors for Christ” in terms of modeling reconciliation.

How will I re-focus my actions today through the lens of living “wholeheartedly” and as “an ambassador for Christ?” Pope Francis I offers us the broad-spectrum invitation to “heal the wounded” ... an appropriate task for a “wholehearted, reconciling ambassador of Christ.”

During these coming Lenten days of prayer, fasting and almsgiving may we experience as well as share the mercy and compassion of our gracious God. Amen.

Jennifer Rausch, PBVM

Joel 2:12-18; Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-14, 17;
2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Thursday
February 19, 2015

“See, I have set before you this day, life and good, death and evil.” Deuteronomy 30:25

“For the Lord, watches over the way of the just, but the way of the wicked vanishes.” Psalm 1:6

“What profit does it show if you gain the whole world and lose yourself.” Luke 9:25

Where is my heart? My Spirit? Do I take the necessary time to reflect upon my life? How do I spend my time? Where do I use most of my energy? How do I spend my resources?

God has given us life and good. What do I name as “good?” There is death and evil around us. What do I name as evil? Am I losing myself to things, attitudes, judgements? Are my profits consuming me or am I using them to become the person God wants me to be?

Take the time to reflect upon the questions and write your Spirit-inspired response. Share with someone.

God of Lent, help me to walk in life and goodness.

Charlotte McCoy, PBVM Associate

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 1:1-4 ,6; Luke 9: 22-25

Friday
February 20, 2015

“This rather is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, setting free the oppressed, sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless, clothing the naked when you see them and not turning your back on your own.” Isaiah 58:6-7

This month citizens will focus on diet and exercise for a healthy heart; the American Heart Association will collect money for research and review the statistics regarding heart disease. February is American Heart Month. Isaiah would be pleased.

Dr. Oz recommends 10,000 steps a day and Kellogg’s offers heart-healthy cereals. Isaiah, on the other hand, suggests a “heart-expansion” program via a particular kind of fasting characterized by: releasing, sharing, sheltering, clothing, attending – pulling out of ourselves, sharing ourselves, stepping out to let people “have a piece of us.”

Sometimes those bound are in prison and sometimes they are tethered instead by addiction, ignorance, poverty, lack of opportunity, illness, loneliness, depression or aging. We free the oppressed when we visit, listen, teach, assist, pray, care, attend – or just show up.

Helping others by expanding our hearts can put a strain on our time and resources. But if we follow Isaiah’s suggestions, a heart check at the end of Lent will likely reveal significant “stretch marks.”

Joan Lickteig, PBVM

Isaiah 58:1-9; Psalm 51:3-6, 18-19; Matthew 9:14-15

**Saturday
February 21, 2015**

“Jesus said to them in reply, ‘Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners.’” Luke 5:31-32

None of us is exempt from the “sickness” of temptation and sin. It afflicts us all and of course our sin has an effect on others. This Lenten season is a perfect opportunity to search our souls and hearts for those sicknesses; greed, avarice, gluttony, jealousy, dishonesty – whatever it is that pulls at us and pulls us away from our Lord, and to repent and ask for forgiveness and healing.

Dear Jesus, you are the Great Physician, the Great Healer. Let me truly repent of my sins and call upon your grace to heal me and make me whole again. Come to me today and heal me from my sins.

Michelle Covey, PBVM Associate

Isaiah 58:9-14; Psalm 86:1-2, 3-4, 5-6; Luke 5:27-32

**First Sunday of Lent
February 22, 2015**

“At that point the Spirit sent him out toward the desert. He stayed in the wasteland forty days, put to the test there by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and angels waited on him.” Mark 1:12-13

The same Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness accompanies us to help us see beyond the wilderness. The Holy Spirit enables us to endure the suffering, to see beyond the busyness of life and seek the quiet; time for prayer, reflection and self-examination. As we set aside this busyness of life we are able to see the benefit of being pulled out of our comfort zone to experience the unexpected events in our lives in a more positive way. The temptation may be to blame God for allowing difficult things to come into our lives, but as we begin to see these times as moments of grace, we will soon find assurance in knowing that once again the Holy Spirit has helped us move into a new comfort zone and into a deeper relationship with God.

How do I meet God in my fears, joys, misunderstandings, suffering, temptations, work or other challenges?

Holy Spirit, help us through the wilderness. Help us let go of the control and let God take charge. Help us to find the quiet times to smooth out the roughness in our souls as we continue our journey of faith.

Rita Cameron, PBVM

Genesis 9:8-15; Psalm 25:4-9; I Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:12-15

Monday
February 23, 2015

“And all the nations will be assembled before him and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right side and the goats on his left.”
Matthew 25:32-33

Will we be like a sheep or a goat? During the Lenten season and always we need to ask ourselves, did we give food to the hungry, a drink to the thirsty and welcome to the stranger? Who are the hungry, the thirsty and the strangers? They are people we encounter every day. They may be well fed but craving love and acceptance. They may be misunderstood and long for a tall glass of understanding. They may be lonely and long for a smile and a “hello” from you.

Their silent pleas can be unrecognizable on the exterior, but as Jesus said, “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me and what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.”

On Judgment Day will you be placed on God’s right side or left side?

Dear Lord, help me to see you in each person that I encounter today.

Deb McClimon, PBVM Associate

Leviticus 9:1-2, 11-18; Psalm 19:8-10, 15; Matthew 25:31-46

Tuesday
February 24, 2015

“And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Matthew 6:12

I love that we give the Sign of Peace in Mass right after we say the Lord’s Prayer. It’s my way of saying “All is good between us” to my family and friends; the little transgressions that may have happened between us lately are forgiven. Really, the love we share is much more important than any wrongdoing. Of course, I realize I’m lucky in the sense that I’ve not experienced serious wrongdoings with my family or friends.

However, this part of the Lord’s Prayer is also the most difficult for me. I know I should be a more forgiving person, but, quite frankly, I struggle with this sometimes. I’m not sure if it’s because I think to forgive a serious offense means that I pretend it didn’t happen, or that my pain, sorrow or anger is not valid, or that if I’m vulnerable it will happen again. It is only with God’s help that I can overcome these feelings, and I can have peace in my heart.

Lord, please give us the grace to become more forgiving people.

Judy Munshower, PBVM Associate

Isaiah 55:10-11; Psalm 34:4-7, 16-19; Matthew 6:7-15

Wednesday
February 25, 2015

**“On Judgment Day the Ninevites will stand up and give evidence that will condemn this generation, because when Jonah preached to them they changed their lives.”
Luke 11:32**

The Season of Lent provides many opportunities for personal transformation. Most likely a week ago today (Ash Wednesday) I was firm in my intention to be faithful to Lenten practices: Pray - Fast - Give Alms! How's it going? In what ways have I recognized the “preaching” of present-day Jonahs and opened my heart to conversion?

Journal keeping could be a helpful practice as you reflect on your Jonah experiences.

“Teach me, O Gracious One, that I may know my weaknesses, the shortcomings that bind me, the unloving ways that separate me, that keep me from recognizing your life in me. Restore in me the joy of your saving grace, and encourage me with a new spirit.” Psalm 51:3, 12

Beth Driscoll, PBVM

Jonah 3:1-10; Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19; Luke 11:29-32

Thursday
February 26, 2015

“Ask and you will receive.”

“Treat others as you would have them treat you.”

Matthew 7:7,12

I ask myself many questions in a day. What do I want to eat for lunch? Where did I put my keys? Do I have enough time to do one more job? In the readings today, Jesus calls me to a deeper asking. How can I step out of my comfort zone today? How do I offer free space for others where change can take place? What do I need to let go of so that new possibilities can emerge? How do I learn to embrace my vulnerabilities so that I can engage in my life from a place of authenticity? How am I living Holy Fire? In asking these deeper questions, I will know with an open heart how to treat others.

What deeper questions are you being called to ask today?

Jesus, in asking the deeper questions, transformation happens. Help us to look deep within and know that you are there with us. Give us the courage to walk in the questions.

Joan Brincks, PBVM

Esther C:12, 14-16, 23-25; Psalm 138:1-3, 7-8; Matthew 7:7-12

Friday
February 27, 2015

“Out of the depths I call to you Lord; Lord, hear my cry! May your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, Lord, mark our sins, Lord, who can stand? But with you is forgiveness and so you are revered.” Psalm 130:1-4

Help God! The bottom has fallen out of my life! Master, hear my cry for help. Listen hard, open your ears. Please Lord! Listen to my cries for mercy!

What terrible event in our life has commanded such a plea of mercy to the Lord? How do we cope with emergencies? Do we get angry and loose our temper? Are we so shattered by news that we throw ourselves into a frenzy? Are we so overcome with shock that we cannot move? Do we plead to God for mercy? How dare we command God for mercy!

We do not need to yell or plead. The Lord, who is always by our side, knows our every movement. The Lord is kind and forgiving, attentive to our every need. Be grateful the Lord is not a scorekeeper, marking down every time we have a problem and call out for help. Be calm in the storm and the violent, raging waters will settle into a gentle flowing stream.

When we feel helpless and alone and there is no hope, take the immediate action of prayer. Pray to the Lord for mercy. Then, be still, be calm. Recite or sing this song we all know only too well.

Hear O Lord, the sound of my call. Hear O Lord and have mercy. My soul is longing for the glory of you. O hear, O Lord and answer me. In you O Lord, I place my cares and all my troubles too. O grant, dear Lord, that someday soon, I'll live in peace with you.

Darla Budden, PBVM Associate

Ezekiel 18:21-28; Psalm 130:1-8; Matthew 5:20-26

Saturday
February 28, 2015

“...if you love those who love you, what recompense do you have? Do not tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers (and sisters) only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same?”
Matthew 5:46-48

It was 1986; I was in New York City with other Dubuque Presentation Sisters for a Presentation Institute. We were touring Manhattan on foot after attending a noon Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral on 5th Avenue. We decided to walk back via 9th Avenue and found that it was a hangout for “Winos” and “Bag Ladies.” Having been warned to not give money to beggars because they would just use it to buy booze, I turned my back on a poor woman who asked me for money. “Sure, you have a nice warm bed to sleep in!” she snapped as I walked away. I had judged her and ignored her!

Remembering how Nano Nagle served the poor and ragged in Cork, without judging them, I reflect now on this scripture passage from Matthew and renew my decision to help the poor wherever they are and whatever need they have, if it is in my power to do so.

Dolores Zieser, PBVM

Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Psalm 119:1-2 ,4-5, 7-9;
Matthew 5:43-48

Second Sunday of Lent March 1, 2015

“... he strictly enjoined them not to tell anyone what they had seen, before the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” Mark 9:9

When we don't clearly know the answer to something, we tend to avoid discussion about it. We have been given only bits and pieces of what it will be like for us after our death when we rise to new life with Jesus. Sometimes, I try to compare it to going to a new place where I've never been before and think of how much I liked being there. But even that comparison pales in the reality Jesus has in store for us in eternity.

As I write this, my 90 year old mother is not doing well. She seems to be losing more of her ability to do normal things with each day. Her speech is often only limited to a “yes” or “no” answer and her sentences are limited to three to five words ... and then what she wants to say gets lost somewhere between her mind and her mouth. Her physical mobility has diminished to the point of needing two people to assist her just getting out of bed. Last night when I stopped at the nursing home, one of the few things she uttered to me was a question, “Can I go?” I asked her where she wanted to go, but there was no reply. I think I probably knew the answer that she couldn't say, but because I, myself (like the apostles) question “what rising from the dead” means, I was not able to answer her. Deep down, I know and believe, because of my faith and loving relationship with God, that rising from the dead is truly what I want for my Mom (and myself) but as with anyone we love, permission “to go” is not easily given. Trust, hope, and assurance through God's word will make my questioning more clear! And I am praying that the clarity I desire will come quickly. Then I'll be able to say, “Yes, Mom, you can go.”

Jesus, you showed your apostles what “rising from the dead” meant when you conquered death by giving up your own life because of your love for each one of us. You then revealed yourself to them at your resurrection. Help our questioning minds to believe that rising from the dead means the same today as it did then: it is a rising to new life. And for those who know you, love you, and serve you in this world, that promise is eternal.

Karen Bonfig, PBVM Associate

Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18; Psalm 116:10, 15-19;
Romans 8:31-34; Mark 9:2-10

**Monday
March 2, 2015**

“We hope for pardon and mercy from the Lord, because we have rebelled against God. We have not listened to the voice of Yahweh.” Daniel 9:9-10

If Daniel, the prophet reprimanded the people of Israel for not listening to the voice of Yahweh, how much more in these times are we out of sync with God? Luke’s Gospel challenges us to be merciful and forgiving in a society where moving forward means stepping over whomever gets in the way of my progress.

God of justice and mercy, help me this day to be aware of your voice as you speak to me in the quiet of my heart. May my own voice as your disciple, speak to others of compassion and not competition.

Paula Schwendinger, PBVM

Daniel 9:4-10; Psalm 79:8-9,11,13; Luke 6:36-38

**Tuesday
March 3, 2015**

“Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples. ‘The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees are the authorized interpreters of Moses’ Law. So you must obey and follow everything they tell you to do; do not, however, imitate their actions, because they don’t practice what they preach. They tie onto people’s backs loads that are heavy and hard to carry, yet they aren’t willing even to lift a finger to help them carry those loads. They do everything so that people will see them. Look at the straps with scripture verses on them which they wear so that people notice how large they are. Notice how long are the tassels on their cloaks. They must not be called Teacher, because you are all brothers and sisters of one another and have only one Teacher.’” Matthew 23:1-5, 8

In our world today we can see blatant, narcissistic behaviors in some church and world leaders who proclaim they work “for the people” but function to maintain their personal positions, live with privilege, and separate themselves from “the people.” We hear downright biases and lies, often cushioned in pious, God-based references. We are warned in this passage to see these issues as they are, not to follow the leaders who feed only their own status, but to run to the one true Leader for truth in service.

Do I fine-comb issues of church and politics to keep from being blinded by embellished untruths? Do I dare to confront abusive, self-serving treatments of people and nature as best I can?

Carol Kane, PBVM Associate and Former Member

Isaiah 1:10, 16-20; Psalm 50:8-9, 16-17, 21, 23;
Matthew 23:1-12

Wednesday
March 4, 2015

“We can.” ... “Anyone who aspires to greatness must serve the rest.” Matthew 20:22-24

“We can” is a simple phrase stating one’s willingness, energy, and passion to do whatever is asked. If Jesus asked, wouldn’t you respond promptly with enthusiasm no matter what the task?

Like Jimmy and Johnnie, Zebedee’s sons, I try to respond quickly, proudly and calmly with “I can.” In this gospel Jesus continues the conversation, “Anyone who aspires to greatness must serve the rest.” Like the sons probably did, I give the Lord a reassuring smile to let Jesus know I’m willing to do **WHATEVER** and do it well for anyone who needs. My enthusiasm for Jesus’ or the community’s invitation to serve is all I need.

However, through the years I have come to realize that at times I have demonstrated resistance to this invitation. Basically, Jesus is challenging me to change my plan, to forget my want or let another’s preference come first. That can be tough if the plans are complex or have been in place for a time or I am tired and just don’t feel like completing the task right now. At times I don’t want to understand that Jesus’ words mean dying to self. Dying to what I think is important or needed or the better piece is still hard even after years of trying. There is still a lot of **SELF** and not so much of **JESUS** in me.

When it comes to consistently living Nano’s words to love one another and responding to Jesus’ question, “Can you drink of the cup I am to drink of?” I falter. It is only by the grace of God and the faith filled actions of coworkers that empower me to drink from **THAT** cup.

Join me in praying St. Augustine’s words: “Our entire task in life consists in healing the eyes of the heart so that they may be able to see God - in those we serve.”

Marilou Irons, PBVM

Jeremiah 18:18-20; Psalm 31:5-6; 14-16; Matthew 20:17-28

Thursday
March 5, 2015

“There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table.” Luke 17:19-21

This is the only parable where Jesus mentions someone’s name. And that name is Lazarus. Who is Lazarus? He is the poorest of the poor. He is the homeless, he is the disenfranchised, he is the illegal immigrant, he is the sick, he is the lonely, and he is the unborn. Yes, Lazarus has a name, a God given dignity. He is made in the image of God and loved by God.

The gospel of Jesus Christ invites us to be free enough to see things in a new way. We have to learn to see with BIG EYES! In the midst of poverty and injustice, the gospel invites us to hear God’s invitation to respect the dignity of every human person and the need for justice for all. Sometimes this is hardest to do with the ones we love the most! To be compassionate to our family members, our students, our relatives, our children ... to treat every person with dignity, always!

Do we have BIG EYES? Do we see the suffering happening all around us? Are we compassionate? May the words of Jesus, “What you have done for the least of my brothers and sisters, you have done it to me,” move each of us to prayer and action.

Lent calls us to see in a new way, to see with BIG EYES! What is blinding you and me to the many social ills of this day affecting the very lives of our brothers and sisters? Gracious God, help me to see the dignity and wonder of my brothers and sisters even when I am overwhelmed by my judgments. Allow me to see with BIG EYES the poor, the hungry and the oppressed, right here in my midst, and move me to action to help relieve their suffering.

Becky Searcy, PBVM Associate

Jeremiah 17:5-10; Psalm 1:1-3, 4, 6; Luke 16:19-31

Friday
March 6, 2015

“Remember the marvels the Lord has done.” Psalm 105:5

Joseph’s brothers see that he is their father’s favorite and their jealousy leads them to harm Joseph. The tenants in Matthew’s parable choose to kill in order to get the master’s inheritance. Both groups are living in a kind of darkness.

When we see differently, we are able to act differently. The following Hasidic story challenges our way of seeing others.

An old Rabbi once asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and the day had begun.

“Could it be,” asked one of the students, “when you can see an animal in the distance and tell whether it’s a sheep or a dog?”

“No,” answered the Rabbi.

Another asked, “Is it when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell whether it’s a fig tree or a peach tree?”

“No,” answered the Rabbi.

“Then what is it?” the pupils demanded.

“It is when you can look on the face of any man or woman and see that it is your sister or brother. Because if you cannot see this, it is still night.”

-- Hasidic Tale quoted in Peacemaking Day by Day

As we look into the faces of our families, community, and all we meet today, try to see each one as a brother or sister. We remember the marvels the Lord has done for each person and rejoice in the diverse gifts of each.

Marilyn Breen, PBVM

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28; Psalm 105:16-21;
Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

Saturday
March 7, 2015

“You forgive our stubbornness, you heal our disease. You crown us with steadfast love and mercy.” Psalm 103:3-4

Parable of Divine Mercy: The Prodigal Son

This is a story of compassion, repentance and self-righteousness. The characters in the story include the father as forgiving, compassionate, patient, loving and generous. Can we imagine running toward someone who has offended us, taken us for granted or ignored us, and then welcoming them with open arms?

The Prodigal Son is represented as greedy for his inheritance, and his wastefulness, yet eventually decides to repent and humbly asks forgiveness from his father. Are we willing to ask forgiveness for misunderstandings of the past from peers, elders, family, friends, community?

The Elder Son comes off as the main character of the story, representing self-righteousness. He allows anger to take root in his heart which blinds him while he continues to hang on, unwilling to forgive. (He wore religion on his arm, but not in his heart). He seems to think more of law, merit and reward, than love and graciousness. It is the eldest son who provides a warning of awakening in our own hearts from complacency. The most valuable things in life are things you cannot buy or replace (family, friends, community...).

Is there someone in my life I might forgive today? Is there someone from whom I have distanced myself and need to welcome with open arms?

Raeleen Sweeney, PBVM

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20; Psalm 103:1-4, 9-12; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

**Third Sunday of Lent
March 8, 2015**

“Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money changers’ coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, ‘Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father’s house into a market.’ Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: ‘Zeal for your house will devour me.’” John 2:15-20

Jesus’ action seems quite revolutionary, but the disciples do not intervene to hold him back, as Peter did, for example, when Jesus announced his own tragic end. Clearly Jesus is not defending just property here, but rather the place where God is made manifest, where we connect with God. Jesus manifests himself also as a temple, where we become one with God. Everyone I meet today is also a living temple, manifesting God’s being. Do I not see it? The Guarani used to say “Once we defended ourselves with bow and arrow, but now with education and use of “Nee” – the word. What means do I have and how can I defend the temples of God in my life today?

Jesus, lend me some of your holy audacity to defend God’s presence – the holy temples where God is made manifest.

Maura McCarthy, PBVM

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19:8-11; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25;
John 2:13 - 25

**Monday
March 9, 2015**

“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me continually, ‘Where is your God?’” Psalm 42:2-3

Within every person is a deep longing for God. There are times when we feel separate from God; when we doubt our faith and we feel alone. These times are actually signs of a deep and abiding faith as we realize all is not right in the world that God made and we are turning to God to help. Prayer is not only for what we want but for God’s help in giving us the strength and courage to get through the ‘alone’ times.

Do I only pray for what I want? Do I pray for God’s grace to give me the courage to accept his plan for me?

Doris Wiegman, PBVM Associate

2 Kings 5:1-15; Psalm 42:2-3 and 43:3-4; Luke 4:24-30

**Tuesday
March 10, 2015**

“Azariah stood and offered this prayer:

**‘For your name’s sake do not give us up utterly,
And do not break your covenant,
Do not withdraw your mercy from us...
With all our heart we follow you,
We reverence you and seek your face...’”
Daniel 3:34, 41**

Today we pray with Azariah, whose name means “God helps,” one of the three young men cast into the fire by Nebuchadnezzar. His prayer for mercy resonates with our desire to find the face of God today. Joyce Rupp suggests that we “turn our inward eyes to see...that we are part of all of life. Each one’s joy and sorrow is my joy and sorrow, and mine is theirs.”

In prayer, we find the face of God in the wounds of the suffering and vulnerable. Does our prayer also bring us to find the face of God in the perpetrators of violence and injustice? If we hear the call to be in communion with all, are we allowed to decide who is or is not included?

**Show me your ways, O Beloved,
Teach me your paths;
Guide me in truth and teach me.
Your paths are loving and sure,
O Holy One,
For those who give witness to you
Through their lives.
Psalm 25: 6-8**

Joy Peterson, PBVM

Daniel 3:25, 34-43; Psalm 25:4-9; Matthew 18:21-35

**Wednesday
March 11, 2015**

“Therefore, I teach you the statutes and decrees as the Lord, my God, has commanded me, that you may observe them in the land you are entering to occupy.” Deuteronomy 4:5

I like to think of myself as a rule follower although that wasn't always true. (Just ask my siblings!) But clearly I have a ways to go. (I missed the deadline for getting this reflection done on time, for instance. Didn't exactly follow the rules.)

But what are the “statutes and decrees” we are “commanded” to “observe?” What are the rules? What are we being called to? God is calling us to observe his laws, the laws of love. Love God with your whole heart! Love your neighbor as yourself! Easy to say! Not so easy to do!

So maybe this Lenten season, our focus could be love, not just the law! That doesn't mean that we throw out the rules. It just means love comes first.

Gracious God, help me to always love as you love. Show me how to love in light of your law and bring me to your land.

Maureen Utter, PBVM Associate

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9; Psalm 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-29;
Matthew 5:17-19

Thursday
March 12, 2015

“Jesus forced a demon out of a person who could not talk. And after the demon had gone out, the person started speaking, and the crowds were amazed.” Luke 11:14

In explaining how he casts out demons, Jesus says, “The kingdom of God has come to you.”

How has the kingdom of God come to me? Where do I most notice God’s presence in my everyday routine? Where do I want to find God more clearly and directly?

Lynn Fangman, PBVM

Jeremiah 7:23-28; Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9; Luke 11:14-23

Friday
March 13, 2015

“Therefore you shall love the Lord your God with all your ... mind ...” Mark 12:30

How do I love the Lord with ALL my mind? How lovely to spend the day thinking only of Jesus, but I have too many other concerns that occupy most of my thoughts during my waking hours. So how do I honor this commandment?

“God is good, all the time; all the time, God is good.” If I think only good thoughts ALL the time, then isn’t that like thinking only of God with ALL of my mind?

This Lenten season, each time a negative thought comes to mind, I will purposely replace it with a positive thought; thereby, loving God with ALL my mind.

Dianne McDermott, PBVM Associate

Hosea 14:2-10; Psalm 81:6-11, 14-17; Mark 12:28-34

**Saturday
March 14, 2015**

**“O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity...”
Luke 18:11**

Hmmmm, how often do I tell stories about people that imply what the Pharisee says aloud in the gospel reading today – taking warped delight in the details of others’ shortcomings, sins and misfortunes? Like the Pharisee, I think I’m just a little bit superior to so-and-so who did such-and-such. Unkind thoughts and gossip are not compatible with the Christian life. God desires that we approach prayer and our fellow sinners with contrite, open hearts. Lent is a good time to become more aware of the judgmental attitudes that pop up in our daily conversations. As my mother often said, “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all.”

Zip your lip today when you are tempted to share something negative about someone.

Bernie Graves, PBVM Associate

Hosea 6:1-6; Psalm 51:3-4,18-21; Luke 18:9-14

**Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 15, 2015**

**“Early and often did the Lord send his messengers to them,
for he had compassion on his people...”**

2 Chronicles 36:19

Reflecting on this passage, let us consider who have been messengers in our daily lives:

Who offers me friendship when I am alone or lonely?

Who gives me hope or calms me when I am afraid or uncertain?

Who shares their presence when I am in doubt or overwhelmed?

Who comforts me or cheers me up when I have been hurt or am angry?

Who shares my joy and gratitude when I am celebrating or have been pleasantly surprised?

Who encourages me to forgive or to ask for forgiveness?

How does nature speak to me of my Creator's love?

Where is my quiet space when I want or need to be aware of and present to my God?

Thank you, Compassionate God, for all the ways you are present to me each day.

Pamela Quade, PBVM

2 Chronicles 36:14-17, 19-23; Psalm 137:1-6; Ephesians 2:4-10;
John 3:14-21

Monday
March 16, 2015

“Pay close attention now: I’m creating new heavens and a new earth. All the earlier troubles, chaos, and pain are things of the past, to be forgotten. No more sounds of weeping in the city, no cries of anguish; no more babies dying in the cradle, or old people who don’t enjoy a full lifetime ...” Isaiah 65:17-20

It is long years past since God spoke these words to us through Isaiah, the prophet, and yet, it seems there is more unrest, more violence and greater suffering in our world today than ever before. One might wonder where is this place of rejoicing and happiness of which God speaks, this place where there is no weeping or crying, where both infant and the elderly live a full lifetime?

Each day I ask for continued creation of the new heaven and new earth when I pray “thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” I pray for right relationships among all people and for the coming of God’s kingdom of justice and peace and joy. Will this new heaven and new earth ever be realized? Will God’s kingdom come? Perhaps the more relevant questions are:

How am I helping to create the new heaven and new earth?
How am I bringing God’s reign forward in my be-ing, in my prayer, in my thoughts, in my words, in my actions?

Jesus, open my heart and move my spirit to further your new creation by the way I live each day. Jesus, may your kingdom come ... in me ... and in our world.

Julia Wingert, PBVM

Isaiah 65:17-21; Psalm 30:2, 4-6, 11-13; John 4:43-54

Tuesday
March 17, 2015

Ezekiel forecasts the Promised Land will change its dimensions. The stream from the Temple flows out of old boundaries to new heights with greater wholesomeness. We, too, are encouraged today in 2015 to trust realistic changes in a human world.

John includes us among the crowd of blind, lame and paralyzed, waiting for the healing water to be miraculous by the Angel's power. Small-minded folks, who could not approve the compassion of Jesus on the Sabbath, scolded him.

Both the new Temple boundaries, and Jesus' attempt to cure on the Sabbath challenged old beliefs. We confidently sing Psalm 46 with a roar and a shout that God is in the changes of 2015 – changes deep as the sea and as high as the mountains. Furthermore, today, on the Feast of St. Patrick, we remember our sisters and brothers in Ireland and thank God for breaking the chains of their Penal Laws and lifting their spirits.

Virgie Luchsinger, SFCC, PBVM Associate

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; Psalm 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9; John 5:1-16

**Wednesday
March 18, 2015**

**“The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love. The Lord is good to all, compassionate to every creature. ... Your reign is a reign for all ages, your dominion for all generations. The Lord is trustworthy in every word. The Lord supports all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down. ... You, Lord, are just in all your ways, faithful in all your works. You, Lord, are near to all who call upon you, to all who call upon you in truth.”
Psalm 145:8-9, 13-14, 17-18**

The meaning to me of these parts of Psalm 145 is that God is so loving he is merciful rather than angry when I fall from grace and he will answer my cries for help when I pray. This is important because I too often need that mercy. I can be judgmental and selfish and lazy, etc. So I often need to beg forgiveness and ask for help to be what he wants me to be, to bring love to others instead of being self-centered.

Dearest God, I come to you once again in my humanity. Forgive me. I thank you and give you honor and praise. Help me to prepare for your glorious Resurrection by bringing your love to someone today who also needs to experience love and acceptance.

Janet Leonard, PBVM Associate and Former Member

Isaiah 49:8-15; Psalm 145:8-9, 13-14, 17-18; John 5:17-30

Thursday
March 19, 2015

**“Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called Christ. This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.’ When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.”
Matthew 1:16,18-21, 24**

I always find this reading one of awe. Joseph had great faith in God’s plan for his life as well as Mary’s. Taking some one with child in this time period was a great risk for anyone. Joseph trusted that God would see him through. It is also interesting that there is not much more written about Joseph after this.

Is Joseph our model for those who work behind the scenes? He does not need recognition for fulfilling God’s plan. How many blessings do we receive from God when we work without anyone knowing what we have been doing?

Jane Conrad, PBVM

2 Samuel 7:4-5,12-14,16; Psalm 89:2-5, 27, 29;
Romans 4:13,16-18, 22; Matthew 1:16,18-21, 24

**Friday
March 20, 2015**

“But we know where he is from. When the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from. So Jesus cried out in the temple area as he was teaching and said, ‘You know me and also know where I am from. Yet I did not come on my own, but the one who sent me whom you do not know is true.’” John 7:27-28

Growing up on the farm we were always concerned about where something was from. For example, the Oliver tractors were made in Charles City and the John Deere tractors were made in Waterloo, so they had to be good. The college our teacher attended was important. The pedigree seemed important. Today I see advertisements that give only the e-mail address and I do not like that. I want to know the city or country of origin. I would trust the companies or people if I know their background.

Jesus, we know you and trust you. Help us to practice our faith daily and be able to ask for forgiveness when we fail you. Help us to help others to be worthy of your promises, especially during the Lenten season. Can we trust others and work together serving God?

Harry Stanton, PBVM Associate

Wisdom 2:1, 12-22; Psalm 34:17-21, 23; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Saturday
March 21, 2015

“Each went off to his own house.” John 7:53

“His own house” makes me think of the safe place from which one views everything else. As Psalm 7 says, “shelter, refuge, shield,” etc.

The prophet Jeremiah describes himself as a “trusting lamb” compared to the evildoers hatching plots against him, to the point of killing him and erasing every memory of him. He relies on the Lord, not only for information, but to judge them.

The Pharisees and chief priests rely on scripture to defend their view of a messiah of David’s family coming from Bethlehem. But when one of their own, Nicodemus, reminds them of the law of a just hearing, they resort to ridicule. Their stance also condemns the temple guards and the crowd for listening to Jesus, to the point of calling them cursed.

Do I limit God in any way to my particular purpose? Do I listen to prophets and defend the truth? For whom do I speak out?

Ellen Mary Garrett, PBVM

Jeremiah 11:18-20; Psalm 7:2-3, 9-12; John 7:40-53

**Fifth Sunday of Lent
March 22, 2015**

**“I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”
Jeremiah 31:34**

Relationship. In today’s first reading, the prophet Jeremiah poetically depicts God’s covenant with Israel (and with us). Faithfulness, tenderness and mutuality mark this new covenant where God knows and is known. It’s kin-dom living. A refreshing vision in our current culture of living through/on social media where constructed private lives are “played out” in public through tweets, posts and the likes. Jeremiah offers us a view of what REALLY matters most – authenticity – being grounded in the inner light/life. This is the meaning for which people hunger.

How might fasting from technology offer us opportunities to be more fully present to those with whom we share life?

Barbara Ressler, PBVM Associate

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:3-4,12-15; Hebrews 5:7-9;
John 12:20-33

Monday
March 23, 2015

**“Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she answered. Jesus said, “Nor do I condemn you.”
John 8:10-11**

Jesus said only those without sin could throw a stone at the woman caught in adultery. But even Jesus, who had no sin, chose to not throw a stone, chose to not condemn the woman. There was no penance, punishment or long speech about her choices. Jesus chose to not condemn. He just says to avoid this sin in the future. He chose to encourage the woman to break away from that which hurt her.

How glad are you for the forgiveness of Jesus and his concern for you if you should decide to continue to hurt yourself through sin?

Rita Menart, PBVM

Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30; Psalm 23:1-6; John 8:1-11

Tuesday
March 24, 2015

“With their patience worn out by the journey, the people complained against God and Moses, ‘Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in this desert, where there is no food or water?’” Numbers 21:4-5

Sounds like what can happen to us! Our patience is tested and so complaining takes over. God tries to remind us his grace is there for the asking. But, instead we complain. What happened to our good resolutions of reflecting on how good God is? Here is an opportunity to show Jesus we accept this inconvenience for love of him. We told him we would accept the challenges of today. Time to try again.

Dear Jesus, please forgive my complaining. I am sorry and realize I need your help as I begin again. Help me to be more watchful. Give me the gift of silence and humility. Mary, you are my example. How many times you kept silent and pondered all in your heart!

Dolores Moes, PBVM

Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 102:2-3, 16-21; John 8:21-30

**The Annunciation of the Lord
Wednesday, March 25, 2015**

“Mary said: ‘I am the maidservant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say.’” Luke 1: 37-38

What a profound statement for a young girl of fifteen or sixteen. At least that is the approximate age we have given to Mary at the time of this message from the Angel Gabriel. How many of us, at that age, or even older, could have spoken those words with such conviction and sincerity?

The Scripture readings from today’s feast are tied together in unique ways. In the first reading we hear “Ask for a sign.” Mary did. She could easily have uttered the words spoken in Hebrews, “I have come to do your will, O God.” In the Gospel we hear, “Let it be done to me as you say.” All responses speak of a deep love of God, trust in God’s promise and an openness to the will of God. Which of these three phrases could come from my mouth? I wonder.

As we come to the closing of Lent, perhaps we could ask ourselves if our Lenten penances and practices have led us to a deeper love of God, trust in God and openness to whatever it is that God may be asking of us.

Anne McCormick, PBVM

Isaiah 7:10-14; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38

Thursday
March 26, 2015

“When Abram prostrated himself, God spoke to him. ‘My covenant with you is this: you are to become the father of a host of nations. No longer shall you be called Abram; your name shall be Abraham, for I am making you the father of a host of nations. I will render you exceedingly fertile; I will make nations of you; kings shall stem from you. I will maintain my covenant with you and your descendants after you throughout the ages as an everlasting pact, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land in which you are now staying, the whole land of Canaan, as a permanent possession; and I will be their God.’

God also said to Abraham: ‘On your part, you and your descendants after you must keep my covenant throughout the ages.’” Genesis 17:3-9

God made a covenant with Abraham and all his descendants. Abraham was skeptical of the promises God made. He laughed to think that he and his wife (both in their 90’s) would be fertile enough to have descendants.

Let this be a reminder to us that all things are possible with God.

Mary Lou Mauss, PBVM Associate

Genesis 17:3-9; Psalm 105:4-5,6-7,8-9; John 8:51-59

**Friday
March 27, 2014**

“The Jews picked up rocks to stone Jesus. Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works from my Father, of which of these are you trying to stone me?’ The Jews answered him, ‘We are not stoning you for a good work.... You, a man, are making yourself God.’ Jesus answered them, ‘I am the Son of God. 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.’” John 10:31-42

Picking up stones and throwing them at others is something we learned to do as children, most likely by watching our friends or parents doing it to others. The Lord never picked up a stone. If he had, he would have turned it into bread. I know how we are capable of ignoring the 99% of the good in someone and fixating ourselves on the 1%. We can say and do the right things 99% of the time, but we will always be remembered for that one time we did not.

Let us ask the Lord for the grace to drop the grudges, anger and bitterness we hold onto and to convert our stony hearts to hearts made of flesh.

Cheryl Demmer, PBVM

Jeremiah 20:10-13; Psalm 18:2-3, 5-7; John 10:31-42

**Saturday
March 28, 2015**

**“Therefore, many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.”
John 11:45**

Some came to believe in Jesus, while others went to report to the Pharisees. Jesus' words and actions still divide people today in 2015 into believers and unbelievers. Some will act upon the words of Jesus, others will not. What accounts for this difference? Simply this – Christianity is about having a correct relationship with God through Jesus. Our belief in God will change us.

In which of the two groups will you be when you come to the end of Lent? What will you do to ensure that you are among the believers?

Lord Jesus, rid me of all that keeps me from surrendering my life to you and grant me the grace to experience the power of your transforming love in my life. Amen

Janice Hancock, PBVM

Ezekiel 37:21-28; Jeremiah 31:10-13; John 11:45-57

**Palm Sunday
March 29, 2015**

The Passion of Christ. Mark 14:1-15:47

This story, the most somber of the season, is one I don't anticipate hearing. The characters are caring and cunning, loving and lethal, inspired and ignorant, committed and cowardly. It is so difficult to hear the raw openness to humanity that takes the central character – the One I so love – on such an intense journey of emotion knowing what each scene is leading to. It is very sobering to hear.

However, this story does not end here – it pauses, then it continues. It is full of light and hope in the events that unfold “off stage”. It is the lived story of humanity now, every moment, every day, every experience, until our universe knows resurrection.

Oh God, may I be ever more caring, loving, inspired and committed. Today may I be to those within my sight and arms' reach a Christ-person. Amen.

Colleen Vlasisavljevich, PBVM Associate and Former Member

Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24;
Philippians 2:6-11; Mark 14:1-15:47

Monday
March 30, 2015

“Leave her alone.” John 12:7

What a cast of characters in this story with Jesus: a curious crowd, Lazarus a bit of a celebrity recently raised from the dead, Martha who tended to hospitality, Judas the betrayer who faked his concern for the poor and Mary who anointed the feet of Jesus with costly perfume and dried his feet with her hair.

Jesus who knew that his days were numbered spoke directly to Judas, “Leave her alone.” Jesus appreciated the importance of what she did.

In the busyness of your life, take a few quiet moments to name for yourself what is important for you today.

Corine Murray, PBVM

Isaiah 42:1-7; Psalm 27:1, 2, 3, 13-14; John 12:1-11

Tuesday
March 31, 2015

**“My mouth shall proclaim your just deeds, day after day
your acts of deliverance though I cannot number them all.”
Psalm 71:15**

The above words from Psalm 71 are indeed beautiful. The “day after day” of proclaiming the good deeds may become more difficult during trying times. But in looking at today’s Gospel we see that Jesus was troubled as a friend had betrayed him. So Jesus faced the situation and after Judas left, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.” (John 13:31) This scene brings to mind the many people, Presentations and others, who continually pray and work with missions and other good causes to bring forth a better world. God is certainly in those deeds. Hopefully from trials comes something new. From Good Friday comes Easter Sunday.

**May we use the gift of this day to give thanks and proclaim
God’s just deeds – as many as we possibly can number
though we can never know them all.**

Mary Irene Stanton, PBVM Associate

Isaiah 49:1-6; Psalm 71:1-6, 15, 17; John 13:21-33, 36-38

**Wednesday
April 1, 2015**

**“Amen I say to you, one of you will betray me.”
Matthew 26:21**

Reclining at table, Jesus bares his soul to his closest friends: “one of you will betray me.” Their responses betray their greater concern – for themselves: “Surely it is not I?”

How deeply Jesus experienced the agony of Psalm 69:20:
“I looked for sympathy, but there was none;
for consolers, not one could I find.”

May we take the time to be present to one another, to listen with the heart, to enter into another’s pain, and then: “Speak to the weary a word that will rouse them.” Isaiah 50:4

**Compassionate One, grant us listening hearts that we may
be your caring presence for one another.**

Diana Blong, PBVM

Isaiah 50:4-9; Psalm 69:8-10, 21-22, 33-34; Matthew 26:14- 25

**Holy Thursday
April 2, 2015**

“If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” John 13:14-15

Jesus prepares his disciples for his own death, and he begins his preparation with an act of care – by washing their feet ... an act of humility and love. Jesus gave us this image of what the Church is supposed to look like, feel like, act like. Our position – whether as observer, washer or washed, servant or served – may be difficult. Yet we learn from the discomfort, from the awkwardness.

May we come to these three great days, this Easter Triduum hungry and full of excitement, parched and longing to feel the sacred water of the font on our skin, free for prayer and anticipation for reflection, preparation and silence. As members of this community, we should be personally committed to preparing for and attending the Triduum. Everyone is needed for this community of church.

Deb Jasper, PBVM Associate

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116:12-13, 15-18;
I Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15

**Good Friday
April 3, 2015**

“Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Now the other disciple was known to the high priest and he entered the courtyard ... with Jesus. But Peter stood at the gate outside. So the other disciple ... went out and spoke to the gatekeeper and brought Peter in.”

We have chosen to be FOR Jesus – to be disciples, followers. Yet, like Peter, do we sometimes tend to stay outside the gate; fearful or not wanting to get involved or...? If so, who or what invites me “in,” to be WITH Jesus in his last hours? Who can I invite to be closer to Jesus?

Jesus, I have chosen to be with you in good times and difficult times. Use me, as you did “the other disciple,” to invite others to experience the love you have for each of us and help us listen to your call each day.

Jeanine Kuhn, PBVM

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12; Psalm 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-17, 25;
Hebrews 4:14-16 and 5:7-9; John 18:1 - 19:42

Holy Saturday
April 4, 2015

“Give thanks to the Lord, who is good, whose love endures forever. Let the house of Israel say: God’s love endures forever.” Psalm 118:1-2

The scripture readings chosen for the celebration of the Easter Vigil are a testament to God’s enduring love. We hear the story of salvation told from creation to Jesus’ death and resurrection. In these scriptures we reflect on God’s saving love. We are also challenged to reflect on our own experiences of suffering and sacrifice and trust that they too will be transformed into new life and Easter joy.

Make a list of the times you have experienced God’s enduring love. Then pray your list as a litany. As you pray each experience, repeat the refrain “God’s love for me endures forever.” Spend some time reflecting on the areas of your life that still need God’s saving grace. Ask God to transform and bring new life to these areas.

Annette Kestel, PBVM

Genesis 1:1, 26-31; Exodus 14:15-15:1; Isaiah 55:1-11;
Romans 6:3-11; Psalm 118:1-2, 16, 17, 22-23; Mark 16:1-7

**Easter Sunday
April 5, 2015**

“Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark...” John 20:1

Like Mary of Magdala, we move forward through our lives, often striking out in darkness, not knowing what’s ahead. “We walk by faith and not by sight,” we sing. And so it is.

While life holds joy, it also entails great pain. We are acutely aware of our own. And, as Beatitude people, we also consciously and deliberately choose to align ourselves with those who suffer, who mourn, who hunger and thirst for justice, who are poor. We carry their stories in our heart and, with them, we peer ahead into darkness, unable to foresee outcomes.

But today God reveals an astounding turn of events with the rising sun: a resurrection.

Let us walk on. Let us continue to walk with the poor. Never forget it: there is hope.

Happy Easter, Everyone! This is the day we’ve awaited: God’s day.

We ask God’s blessings of peace and comfort for all who suffer. We remember our global Presentation family and pray that our solidarity will strengthen those who bear painful burdens. Let us remember one another and send our prayerful blessings to each person who shared and prayed with us in these daily Scriptural meditations.

Billie Greenwood, PBVM Associate and Former Member

Acts 10:34, 37-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23;
Colossians 3:1-4 or I Corinthians 5:6-8; John 20:1-9

Lenten Reflections 2015

