
Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2014

WEEK 1

Reader 1: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 4:1-11)

Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.' But he replied, 'Scripture says:

Man does not live on bread alone
but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'.

The devil then took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God' he said 'throw yourself down; for scripture says:

He will put you in his angels' charge,
and they will support you on their hands
in case you hurt your foot against a stone.'

Jesus said to him, 'Scripture also says:

You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'I will give you all these', he said, 'if you fall at my feet and worship me.'

Then Jesus replied, 'Be off, Satan ! For scripture says:

You must worship the Lord your God,
and serve him alone.'

Then the devil left him, and angels appeared and looked after him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

How easy it is to make decisions without reference to God or a true reverence for God! Have you noticed too how temptation often presents as a quick route to immediate happiness, tugging at our heartstrings, elevating self-sufficiency, self-satisfaction and even self-aggrandisement (living as if our choices were of no interest to God)? And yet the reality never matches the expectation.

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Over the years many people, strengthened in the Spirit, have modelled the good fight against temptation for us. Living bibles, they have illuminated the way to God and true happiness. Now it is our turn. For all our short-comings we remain the Lord's disciples in this time and place. Is the road an easy one? Not for most of us. We too have crosses to carry (Mk 9:34), wounded natures to contend with, but for all that we are not alone.

Is there a simple prayer or biblical phrase that helps you in your struggle? St. Philip Neri was many times heard to pray "Lord, do not trust Philip!" For others the phrase "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner!" engendered confidence.

This Lent may we be true to the deeper yearning of our hearts. St. Augustine put it well: "For you have made us for yourself O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you".

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Intercessions: Maybe the group might like to offer some prayers of intercession at this time.

Leader: Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

Concluding Prayer

Leader: Look with favour on our Lenten observance, Lord,

And while we subdue our bodies by self-denial,

Renew our spirit with the grace that prompts us to good works.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit.

God, for ever and ever.

Everyone: Amen.

Conclusion of the Hour

Leader: The Lord bless us, and keep us from evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

Everyone: Amen.

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When a priest or deacon presides the following conclusion should be used.

Leader: The Lord be with you.

Everyone: And also with you.

Leader: May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Everyone: Amen.

Leader: Go in the peace of Christ.

Everyone: Thanks be to God.

Week 1

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WEEK 2

Reader 1: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 17:1-9)

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone. There in their presence he was transfigured; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,' he said 'it is wonderful for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and from the cloud there came a voice which said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him.' When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them. 'Stand up,' he said 'do not be afraid.' And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but Jesus.

As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order. 'Tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

The striking characteristic of the Christian call to love is that it is not conditioned by an expectation of return. True Christian love, instead, is patterned after the love of Him who "first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19) and the pattern of Christ's love is the Cross, the humiliation, the agony, the death that he suffered for our sake.

And for all that which of us cannot empathise with the early disciples' misgivings in accepting Jesus' prediction of his passion and his teaching that everyone who wishes to be his follower must renounce themselves, take up their cross and follow him (Mt 16:24)?

Here we have the Blessed Trinity's response to Peter, James and John's misgivings ... and perhaps to our own. They are filled with awe as they realize that Christ's glory is also theirs, a glory not only to be experienced in the future, but from time-to-time here on earth.

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Was there ever a time when you said “Lord, it is good for us to be here!” Perhaps you too have experienced a transfiguration moment, an intimation of God’s glory in your own earthly life, some brief encounter or other transitory moment that ultimately encouraged and strengthened you in embracing the crosses, humiliations and agonies that challenge your calling to Christian love?

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Intercessions: Maybe the group might like to offer some prayers of intercession at this time.

Leader: Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

Concluding Prayer

Leader: Protect our family, Lord,

Trained as it is by the constant exercise of good works.

Strengthen us with your consoling presence,

And lead us to the joys of heaven.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Everyone: Amen.

Conclusion of the Hour

Leader: The Lord bless us, and keep us from evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

Everyone: Amen.

(See week 1 for concluding blessing when a priest or deacon has presided)

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WEEK 3

Reader 1: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John (Jn 4:5-42)

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

'If you only knew what God is offering
and who it is that is saying to you:
Give me a drink,
you would have been the one to ask,
and he would have given you living water.'

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

'Whoever drinks this water
will get thirsty again;
but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give
will never be thirsty again:
the water that I shall give
will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life.'

'Sir', said the woman, 'give me some of the water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water.'

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

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

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Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

Today's Gospel gives a wonderful example of Jesus at work. Recognising the spiritual thirst of a first century Samaritan woman, he proceeds to offer her the living water that can turn into "a spring inside her, welling up to eternal life". What moves him to do so? Perhaps the joyful prospect of seeing another person join him in worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth.

Could this also be true of how the risen Jesus, in the Holy Spirit, operates today in your life and mine?

Before you answer please ponder the opening paragraph of the Catechism of the Catholic Church :

"God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son as Redeemer and Saviour. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life".

Is this your experience?

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Intercessions: Maybe the group might like to offer some prayers of intercession at this time.

Leader: Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

Concluding Prayer

Leader: Schooled by our Lenten observance, Lord,

And nourished on your word,

May we give you whole-hearted service through our self-denial,

And through our prayer become one in heart and mind.

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We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

God, for ever and ever.

Everyone: Amen.

Conclusion of the Hour

Leader: The Lord bless us, and keep us from evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

Everyone: Amen.

(See week 1 for concluding blessing when a priest or deacon has presided)

Week 3

Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

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WEEK 4

Reader 1: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John (Jn 9:1-42)

As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. He spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man and said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam'. So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored.

His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said, 'Yes, it is the same one.' Others said, 'No, he only looks like him.' The man himself said, 'I am the man.'

They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been the sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, 'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.' Then some of the Pharisees said, 'This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the Sabbath.' Others said, 'how could a sinner produce signs like this?' And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, 'What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?' He is a prophet' replied the man. 'Are you trying to teach us,' they replied 'and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!' And they drove him away.

Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' 'Sir' the man replied 'tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said, 'You are looking at him; he is speaking to you'. The man said, 'Lord, I believe', and worshipped him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

Following an encounter with Jesus a man born blind can see. Everyone knows he has received the gift of sight but few rejoice. There are even those who will not accept what has happened.

The Chinese have a saying: "Ninety per cent of what we see is behind the eye!" John's characterisation of the Pharisees and Jews concurs. Beheld by spiritual blindness they not only reject Christ and the salvation he offers but they also seek to intimidate all who dare to be his disciples. How right St. Thomas Aquinas was when he wrote "Blindness, is, so to speak, a prerequisite for sin".

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On May 28th last year Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican's Permanent Representative with the United Nations, deplored the fact, that according to credible estimates, more than 100,000 Christians around the world are killed each year because of their faith. Many others are subjected to rape, displacement, destruction of their places of worship, and the abduction of their leaders.

Tertullian, the second-century Church Father wrote: "the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church" implying that the martyrs' willing sacrifice of their lives leads to the conversion of others. Whether you agree or disagree, one thing is certain. Every martyr has placed their whole lives to the last word spoken by the man born blind: "Lord, I believe".

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Intercessions: Maybe the group might like to offer some prayers of intercession at this time.

Leader: Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

Concluding Prayer

Leader: Lord God, you crown the merits of the saints

And pardon sinners when they repent.

Forgive us our sins, now that we come before you,

Humbly confessing our guilt.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, you Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy spirit,

God, for ever and ever.

Everyone: Amen

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Conclusion of the Hour

Leader: The Lord bless us, and keep us from evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

Everyone: Amen.

(See week 1 for concluding blessing when a priest or deacon has presided)

Week 4

Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

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WEEK 5

Reader 1: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John (Jn 11:1-45)

There was a man named Lazarus who lived in the village of Bethany with two sisters, Mary and Martha, and he was ill. The sisters sent this message to Jesus, 'Lord, the man you love is ill.' On receiving the message, Jesus said, 'This sickness will end not in death but in God's glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified.'

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

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

Jesus said:

'I am the resurrection and the life.

If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live,
and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

Do you believe this?'

'Yes, Lord', she said 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.' When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, 'The Master is here and wants to see you.'

Mary went to Jesus, and as soon as she saw him she threw herself at his feet, saying, 'Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' At the sight of her tears, and those of the Jews who followed her, Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, 'Where have you put him?' They said, 'Lord come and see.' Jesus wept; and the Jews said, 'See how much he loved him!' But there were some who remarked, 'He opened the eyes of the blind man, he could not have prevented this man's death?' Still sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, 'Take the stone away.' Martha said to him 'Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day.' Jesus replied 'Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said:

'Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer.

I knew indeed that you always hear me.

But I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me,
so that they may believe it was you who sent me.'

When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, here! Come out!'

The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face.

Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, let him go free.'

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

The Gospel of the Lord.

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Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

Tell this story to a child who has never heard it and you get a great sense of its power. Be careful though! It also begs the question: what was so threatening about Jesus' compassion that people wanted to kill him?

Perhaps this is a good time to remember that Jesus, through this act of resuscitation, was also in teaching mode. For Jesus death was and is an enemy, something our Heavenly Father never intended for us, something that wrenches soul from body, something that rips loved ones from each other. While God permits it, he certainly did not plan it. Rather it entered the world through the envy of the devil (Gen 3:5).

In the course of the story Jesus asks "Where have you put him?" and death is deprived of its power. It is not given the upper hand when it comes to Jesus' relationship with his friends. He saves, even from the grave.

In a short time we shall recall Jesus' own death, his willingness to experience the horrible torture of crucifixion, the bitter wrenching of body from soul and friend from friend, at the bequest of those who rejected his compassion. Why did he allow this? Because by means of it, he knew he would accomplish more for us than he did for Lazarus – a victory over death that would last forever.

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Intercessions: Maybe the group might like to offer some prayers of intercession at this time.

Leader: Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

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Concluding Prayer

Leader: God of mercy, shed your light on hearts that have been purified by penance,

And in your goodness give us a favourable hearing

When you move us to pray.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

God, for ever and ever.

Everyone Amen.

Conclusion of the Hour

Leader: The Lord bless us, and keep us from evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

Everyone: Amen.

(See week 1 for concluding blessing when a priest or deacon has presided)

Week 5

Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

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WEEK 6

Reader 1: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 21:1-11)

When they were near Jerusalem and had come in sight of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village facing you, and you will immediately find a tethered donkey and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you are to say, 'The Master needs them and will send them back directly.' This took place to fulfil the prophecy:

Say to the daughter of Zion:

Look, your king comes to you;

He is humble, he rides on a donkey

and on a colt, the foal of the beast of burden.

So the disciples went out and did as Jesus had told them. They brought the donkey and the colt, then they laid their cloaks on their backs and he sat on them. Great crowds of people spread their cloaks on the road, while others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in his path. The crowds who went in front of him and those who followed were all shouting:

'Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heavens!'

And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil. 'Who is this?' people asked, and the crowds answered, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

In Jewish tradition spreading clothing before a dignitary was a symbol of submission and palm branches engaged as tokens of victory. Some First Century Jewish coins also had palm leaf engravings with the inscription, "The Redemption of Zion", giving expression to the long-held hope that the Jewish people would be led to victory over Rome.

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In this context Jesus' selection of a donkey was by no means incidental. Throughout the Old Testament the donkey is presented as the appropriate mount of those who come on a mission of peace, e.g. Sameul, Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi.

Here Christ leaves us with a striking image. The Kingdom of God will not be advanced through military force, strategic power plays or bloody conquests. Earthly glory and worldly greatness has no place in this kingdom. Rather simplicity of life and a trusting in God's providence is called for.

And what of us as we enter Holy Week? Will we joyfully or begrudgingly reaffirm our submission to Christ? Will we proclaim his victory to those around us or keep it to ourselves? How would we feel if, like the donkey owners, Christ asked us to place some resource at His disposal? In short, how shall we profess our faith in Christ this Holy week?

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Intercessions: Maybe the group might like to offer some prayers of intercession at this time.

Leader: Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

Concluding Prayer

Leader: By your will, Lord God,
Your son underwent the agony of the cross
To break the power of Satan over man.
Give your people grace to rise again with Christ,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Everyone: Amen.

Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

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Conclusion of the Hour

Leader: The Lord bless us, and keep us from evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

Everyone: Amen.

(See week 1 for concluding blessing when a priest or deacon has presided)

Week 6