



**PROJECT
COMPASSION**

**UNITE
AGAINST
POVERTY**
this Lent



Weekly Reflections for Schools

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(Based on the Sunday Scripture readings throughout Lent)

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:12-18 | Ps 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14 and 17. R. v.3a | 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2 | Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Alexei Navalny, who died this week two years ago, gave his life to the cause of justice in his native Russia. He made countless sacrifices and spent years in prison. Along the way, somewhat to his own surprise, he moved from atheism to a deep Christian faith in God. The birth of his first son was the beginning of change in his life. While in jail, he observed Lent in all the ways he could. This is astonishing. Surely jail was worse than Lent and it's hard that God expected him to add to his own sufferings. But that was not the point. Navalny chose Lent. The rest of his experience was simply piled onto him by a callous system. During Lent, we are called freely to choose life. Let's allow this Lent to take us deeper in God's freedom.

In jail, Navalny wrote:

Are you a disciple of the religion whose founder sacrificed himself for others, paying the price for their sins? Do you believe in the immortality of the soul and the rest of that cool stuff? If you can honestly answer yes, what is there left for you to worry about? Don't worry about the morrow, because the morrow is perfectly capable of taking care of itself. My job is to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness and leave it to good old Jesus and the rest of his family to deal with everything else. They won't let me down and will sort out all my headaches. As they say in prison here: 'They will take my punches for me.'

Project Compassion, organised by Caritas Australia, is a great way of embracing the journey of Lent and following the same path as Jesus. Our commitment can make a huge impact on people who are treated unjustly. The rituals of Ash Wednesday have a special meaning for all of us. They call us to recognise the humanity we share with others and to return with our hearts to the God of justice. It is a time for sacrifice, a time to *Unite Against Poverty*.



Prayer

We pray for all who are trying to rise from the ashes in their lives. May their needs be met as we turn to the Lord with all our hearts and respond through our donations to Project Compassion.

Amen

First Sunday of Lent

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7 | Ps 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17. R. v.3 | Romans 5:12-19 | Matthew 4:1-11

Nelson Mandela said that education was the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world. There are plenty of people who would agree with him. One of them is Oprah Winfrey who said that education was the way to move mountains, build bridges and, yes, to change the world.

Today's readings certainly suggest the value of learning. The story from the Book of Genesis comes from pre-history. It has often been misunderstood to suggest that sin entered the world through one woman. This is not true. On the contrary, the readings tell us that the world is good. When humans try to overstretch their boundaries, trouble follows, and the experience of beauty and harmony is threatened. We need to choose our teachers. Are we going to listen to God or the serpent? In our modern world, the serpent takes many forms. There are countless threats to the harmony of the human race and the beauty of our natural environment.

Likewise, today's story of the temptations in the wilderness from Matthew's Gospel shows us that some lessons are difficult. Jesus teaches the devil. He tells the evil one that God is in charge. Jesus must decide which voices he will follow. He must learn that some ideas may not be as good as they sound. All the kingdoms of the world, Jesus learns, are no substitute for an honest and life-giving relationship with God.

Each week during Lent, Caritas Australia asks us to think about the world and learn more about our role in building God's kingdom. Today we start with an introduction to Project Compassion, which allows us to appreciate how much the Catholic community, has been able to achieve across the decades for the most marginalised people of the world. We are all still learning. Pope Leo XIV has reminded us that the vulnerable are great teachers.

In Dilexi Te he writes:

Christians must not abandon almsgiving... It is always better at least to do something rather than nothing. Whatever form it may take, almsgiving will touch and soften our hardened hearts... for our part, we need to give alms as a way of reaching out and touching the suffering flesh of the poor.

The evil spirit will always focus on the negative and convince us that change is too difficult. The spirit of grace and truth will show us what is truly possible and help us sort our priorities.



Prayer

We pray for those experiencing poverty and marginalisation, that our support for Project Compassion during Lent will be a sign to them of the love of God for all people.

Amen

Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 12:1-4 | Ps 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22. R. v.22 | 2Timothy 1:8-10 | Matthew 17:1-9

We all need a vision. Long ago, the Book of Proverbs told us that ‘where there is no vision, the people perish.’ When we look at the world around us, with so many wars, so much violence, such widespread hardship and numerous groups of people putting up walls against each other, we might wonder where the real leaders are to be found. On the world stage, Pope Leo XIV often seems like a lone voice for peace, justice and sanity. He points a direction based on his deep encounter with God.

Perhaps we find vision in the less well-known stories of ordinary people, some of whom we may know. This week, Project Compassion shares with us the story of young Sisilia who lives in a remote part of northern Tanzania. Her father died when she was young, and her family has faced enormous difficulty. ‘Life is hard,’ she says as an understatement. Your help has enabled her village to gain access to a reliable supply of safe water. What has this got to do with education? The time that Sisilia spent walking three times a day for water was having a major impact on her schooling. She now has a vision for life, one she shares with her community.

In today’s readings, we hear about vision. In the book of Genesis, Abram leaves his country, his family and his father’s house. He may not know quite what will happen, but he puts his faith in a call that will lead to life and abundance. He does not have a map, but he does have a vision.

We hear in the Gospel that Jesus took his closest friends to the top of a high mountain. His face shone like the sun and became ‘as white as the light.’ A voice from heaven said, ‘this is my beloved son; listen to him.’ Peter said how wonderful it was to be there, and he wanted to build a tent so they could stay. But vision is always on the move and Jesus knew that he and his friends had a hard road ahead. The transfiguration may have only lasted a few minutes, but it was clear that Jesus’ friends never forgot it. Every year, we hear this story near the start of Lent because we, too, need to be inspired.

During Lent, we are also called to transfigure the world, to make a difference by uniting against poverty.



Prayer

We pray for all people who lack access to safe and reliable water, that they will be able to receive this basic necessity of life as a result of generous support for the Project Compassion campaign.

Amen

Third Sunday of Lent

Exodus 17:3-7 | Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9. R. v.8 | Romans 5:1-2, 5-8 | John 4:5-42

Every summer seems to get a little longer and a little hotter. We have all become conscious of issues surrounding water. Either there seems to be too much, as when we see summer floods or rising sea levels in the Pacific. Other times, there seems to be too little water as when the rivers in our country run low or members of God's family around the world experience drought. Caritas Australia, through Project Compassion, has been responding to the dire needs of water justice in a range of vulnerable countries.

Today's readings may well cause us to reflect on the current state of God's creation. In the book of Exodus, we hear that people are complaining to Moses because they are dying of thirst. In the Gospel, Jesus meets a woman in a Samaritan town. She has come to draw water from the well in the hottest part of the day. In both cases, access to water is precarious. Yet God responds not only to a thirst for water but to a deeper thirst as well. Moses' people are thirsty for direction, leadership and hope. The woman in John's Gospel has a thirst for love and acceptance which, Jesus tells her, will come from within if she is able to accept him and his message of life. As the story unfolds, we learn of her loneliness and see her reconnecting with her community.

In reflecting on this story in Listening Together, Cardinal Radcliffe reminds us that Jesus' first words are abrupt. 'Give me a drink.' He considers the times in John's Gospel when Jesus expresses thirst, including when he is on the cross. Radcliffe concludes that Jesus is thirsty on our behalf. He longs for our freedom.

Thirst is a great spiritual metaphor, one which Pope Leo XIV has used. But let's not forget the millions of people for whom physical water is a real challenge. This week, Project Compassion shares with us the story of Monoranjon, a farmer in Bangladesh whose family has been deeply impacted by environmental damage, specifically salination of soil and water. This beautiful story reminds us of the importance of meeting people, as Jesus did, at their place of greatest need.

Our thirst for freedom and justice enables us to *Unite Against Poverty*.



Prayer

We pray for vulnerable communities who thirst for justice and security, that our support for Project Compassion will be a sign to them of the love of God for all people.

Amen

Fourth Sunday of Lent

1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13 | Ps 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6. R. v.1 | Ephesians 5:8-14 | John 9:1-41

There are many occasions when we ask the question why and can't find the answer for which we are looking. Why did we miss out on a job? Why did someone we love get cancer? Why can't we find a place to live that we can afford? Why do some days seem so difficult?

It is good to sit with our confusion and even grief. It is good to share it with the Lord who loves us so tenderly. But sometimes we have to step aside from the question why did this happen? It may be better to start with where can I go from here? What small steps will enable me to face the future in a positive spirit?

Today's readings touch upon these issues. In the Gospel, Jesus encounters a person who was born blind. The bystanders want to know why this happened. They think it must be because either he or his parents did something wrong. They are looking backwards. Jesus prefers to look forwards. He says, 'he was born blind so that the works of God may be displayed in him.' In other words, his blindness presents opportunities for growth, not a pretext for blame. The letter to the Ephesians similarly reminds us that we are on a journey from darkness to light. The whole of Lent could be described in those words. The letter says, 'try to discover what the Lord wants of you.' It asks us in terms of possibilities! The same thing happens when Samuel anoints David. It doesn't matter that David is a young shepherd. He has a big future, as anyone familiar with the Bible well knows.

This week, Caritas Australia, through Project Compassion, draws us into the story of Manaini, a 44-year-old mother and subsistence farmer in remote northern Fiji. She has transformed her family's life through food processing and organic farming, thanks to a Caritas-supported project. Once reliant on more store-bought food and prone to food waste, she now produces homemade flours, dried foods, and sells produce and baked goods from local crops. Her passion for learning has made her a key player in her community, working with others to embrace more sustainable, empowering ways of living. Thanks to the generosity of the Australian Catholic community, hundreds of thousands of people such as Manaini are finding an answer to the question, 'where can we go from here.'



Prayer

We pray for all who lack the necessities of life, especially food security, that support for Project Compassion this Lent will enable Caritas to become a source of hope for them and for all those who hunger and thirst.

Amen

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Ezekiel 37:12-14 | Ps 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8. R. v.7 | Romans 8:8-11 | John 11:1-45

It must be difficult for somebody who has never experienced love to understand the Gospels. They are so full of different emotions, many of them tender. Just think of the beautiful reconciliation between Jesus and Peter after the resurrection. Jesus allows Peter to say that he loves him on no less than three occasions. Thankfully, most of us can write down a long list of people we have loved and who have loved us. Many names would appear on both lists! We keep a special place in our hearts and prayers for the people we know who have died. Even after a long time, their memory will still bring a tear to our eyes. That sorrow comes from a place of deep gratitude. God changes the world one heart at a time.

When we encounter today's Gospel, the story of the raising of Lazarus, we are in a world of emotion. Martha and Mary are grieving for their brother. Jesus loves these two women. Thomas, the twin, is full of bravado and bluster, just as he was later when he wanted proof of the resurrection. Both Martha and Mary are disappointed, even angry, that Jesus has not come sooner. Jesus weeps at the grave of his friend. The mourners who have come to comfort the family must also have been sensitive to the situation. When Jesus says, 'I am the resurrection and the life', he is not explaining an idea. He is responding to the deepest longings of our hearts, as he always does. Today's Psalm reminds us, 'My soul is longing for the Lord more than the watcher for daybreak.'

Over the last few weeks, we have shared some of the stories presented to us by Caritas Australia to make us more aware of the inspirational work we can support through Project Compassion. They call us to *Unite Against Poverty*.

This week Project Compassion asks us to learn more about the work of Caritas Australia in humanitarian emergencies. There are so many situations around the world that require a timely response. Caritas is active in the aftermath of earthquakes, floods, storms, plagues, drought and failed harvests. Of course, there will be time to enquire about the causes and to ask if climate change may have been a factor or if poor building standards caused problems. But first, people and communities need to survive, and Caritas has a lot of experience in this area. Your generosity to Project Compassion makes a wonderful difference to people in need. Thank you for helping to bring light to dark places. Jesus says about Lazarus, 'unbind him, let him go free.' We too can set people free.



Prayer

We pray for those coping with humanitarian emergencies in many countries around the world, that our donations to Project Compassion this Lent make a positive difference to people in need.

Amen

Palm Sunday

Isaiah 50: 4–7 | Ps 22: 8–9, 17–18, 19–20, 23–24 | Philippians 2: 6-11 | Matthew 26:14-27:66

It is only once in every three years that we publicly share together Matthew's full account of the arrest, trial and death of Jesus. Today is that day. Matthew's passion is rich in every sense of the word. It is the longest account of what Jesus endured, and it also has the most diverse cast of characters. Only Matthew devotes attention, not only to the tragic fate of Judas who was filled with remorse, but also to the thirty pieces of silver which were used to buy a cemetery for foreigners called the Field of Blood. Only Matthew tells us about the dream of Pilate's wife which leads her to send a message to her husband that he should have nothing to do with Jesus. Matthew's Gospel features several dreams. Joseph is told in a dream to take Mary as his wife, to flee with his family to Egypt and later to return from Egypt. Dreams are one of the many links between Matthew's Gospel and the Hebrew scriptures.

This is by no means to say that Matthew's Gospel is merely an interesting piece of literature. It is only to suggest that, in Holy Week, Matthew's Passion is a wonderful encounter to enter slowly as we spend time with the Lord, allowing the mystery of the cross to deepen within us. One commitment we might make is to take a section each day this week and stay with it for ten minutes:

Monday Mt 26: 14-35

Tuesday Mt 26: 36-56

Wed Mt 26: 57-75

Thursday Mt 27: 1-26

Friday Mt 27: 27-56

Saturday: Mt 27: 57-66

The trial and death of Jesus reminds us of the tragedy of injustice that continues to this day in so many places around the world. Throughout Lent, Caritas Australia, through Project Compassion, has attempted to draw our attention to many important issues in our world. We have been invited to take up the cross and follow Jesus in our own time as we *Unite Against Poverty*. We can pray, with Jesus, 'Let it be as you, not I, would have it.' God's desire is for peace, healing and unity in the face of all the challenges facing humanity. Let us help Jesus carry the cross in our time.



Prayer

We pray for all who suffer injustice as Jesus did and for those who take up the cross to follow Jesus. May our work to end injustice bring peace, healing and unity in the face of all the challenges facing humanity.

Amen

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Unite Against Poverty this Lent



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