

**Lent Prayer Material for St. Matthew's Anglican Church  
Weeks 4-7**

**Week 4: Jesus as a Model for Our Lives – Jesus' Public Ministry**

***Grace for the Week:*** I pray this week for the grace to know Jesus more intimately so that I may conform our lives more and more to his.

**1**

There are many ways to give content to what it means to model our lives on that of Jesus. One of the best is the Beatitudes, the subject of the opening of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. As you pray today with Matthew's version of the Beatitudes, pay attention to where you might feel a bit discomforted.

*Matthew 5:1-12*

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.  
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.  
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.  
Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.  
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

*What does it mean to you to be poor in spirit?*

*What is your honest reaction to these words of Jesus? Are you attracted? Repelled? Energized? Frightened?*

*Where is the particular challenge to you to living in accordance with the Beatitudes?*

Share honestly with Jesus what moves in you as you hear his recitation of the Beatitudes.

**2**

*Matthew 6:5-8, 9-15*

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

*What goes on in me as I hear Jesus' instructions?*

*Does his description accurately characterize my prayer? Or are there times my prayer looks like the approach Jesus criticizes?*

*What one specific change can I make to my prayer practice to better align it with Jesus' instructions?*

### 3

#### *Luke 10:25-37*

Because [the scholar of the law] wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

*As you listen to Jesus tell this story, what stirs in you?*

*Who do you find it easy to pass by?*

*Do you find excuses for not reaching out to those who are not part of your circle of family, friends and acquaintances?*

*Where is Jesus inviting you to broaden your circle of compassion?*

### 4

*Mark 1:40-45*

A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said, "If you wish, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, "I do will it. Be made clean." The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. Then, warning him sternly, Jesus dismissed him at once. Then he said to him, "See that you tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them." The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter. He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere.

At the time of Jesus, leprosy was considered so contagious that those afflicted were outcasts, kept apart from the rest of the community. Anyone who touched a leper became unclean in the eyes of the community.

*What goes on in me as I watch Jesus touch the leper?*

While we are not likely to be exposed to people with Hansen's disease in our day, consider the various people in our society who are physical outcasts (such as those with AIDS or some physical disfigurement), psychological outcasts (such as those with mental illness or disabilities), spiritual or moral outcasts such as (addicts or sexual offenders), economic outcasts (such as the homeless).

*Who are the outcasts in my time that I am being called to reach out to? Who am I being called to help heal? To bring back into community?*

*What do I want to share with Jesus about my fears and hesitations in responding to that call?*

## Week 5: Learning from those Who Encountered Jesus

***Grace for the Week:*** This week I pray for the grace to deepen my own encounter with Jesus Christ through the experience of those who encountered Jesus during his human life.

This week you are invited to consider what you can learn from some of those who encountered Jesus during his public ministry. As you sit with each of the following passages, allow yourself to enter into the scene and experience it as though you were there. With respect to each scene, ask yourself these four questions:

*How did the person in question open themselves to meet Jesus?*

*What challenge did they have to overcome to do so?*

*What do I learn from this encounter about Jesus?*

*What do I learn from this encounter about my relationship with Jesus?*

### 1

Mark 10:17-31

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother.’”

He replied and said to him, “Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth.”

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, “You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at his words. So Jesus again said to them in reply, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through [the] eye of [a] needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.” Peter began to say to him, “We have given up everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come. But many that are first will be last, and [the] last will be first.”

## 2

### Luke 19:1-10

He came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town. Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house." And he came down quickly and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation<sup>e</sup> has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."

As you reflect on the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, you might also consider this reflection by Jim Marsh (Bread of Life Church):

I saw a mother breastfeeding on the train. She covered herself as the child took what she was freely giving. A sacred sharing. Her tilted downward gaze, the shape of her eyes, the curl of her lips, glowed as if transfigured. Time stopped for one eternal moment, and on that specific day, in that specific place, I saw the ancient, beautiful marriage of desire and mercy. Hunger flowing in both directions, emptying into the same great river. It was the tender gaze of belonging.

Drawn by his hunger, the little man wanted to see the young rabbi badly. And the rabbi is moved by his desire. They both want the same thing. The rabbi sees the shape of the dinner table within his home, just like he sees the shape of his heart. Zacchaeus climbed a particular tree, the same one he climbed as a boy. It was the boy inside of him who climbed high enough to see something beyond himself. Jesus could see the hunger in his gaze. He was hungry too. Zacchaeus saw his house from another angle, a widening of his lens, just as the birds who flew away could see it. And he was seen.

To see and be seen is the heart of all belonging, which grows, intertwined, with our hunger for food. We only need to be reminded, with just a hush of a whisper, that we belong to her. With a breast full of milk, a nest full of eggs, and a heart full of mercy, our Mother longs to feed us all. It is right here, right now, in this particular place, at this particular time, that god invites herself to *see* us.

## 3

### John 4:4-39

[Jesus] came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon. A woman of Samaria 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, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.). Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." [The woman] said to him, "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the well is deep; where then can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go call your husband and come back." The woman answered and said to him, "I do not have a husband." Jesus answered her, "You are right in saying, 'I do not have a husband.' For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true."

The woman said to him, "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain;\* but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth."

The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Anointed; when he comes, he will tell us everything." Jesus said to her, "I am he,\* the one who is speaking with you."

At that moment his disciples returned, and were amazed that he was talking with a woman, but still no one said, "What are you looking for?" or "Why are you talking with her?" The woman left her water jar and went into the town and said to the people, "Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Messiah?"

They went out of the town and came to him. Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat." But he said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." So the disciples said to one another, "Could someone have brought him something to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, 'In four monthsthe harvest will be here'? I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest. The reaper is already\* receiving his payment and gathering crops for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together. For here the saying is verified that 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap what you have not worked for; others have done the work, and you are sharing the fruits of their work." Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me everything I have done."

## Matthew 15:21-28

Then Jesus went from that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not say a word in answer to her. His disciples came and asked him, "Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us." He said in reply, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But the woman came and did him homage, saying, "Lord, help me." He said in reply, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." Then Jesus said to her in reply, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed from that hour.

\*

### Reminder of Ignatian Contemplation Method of Scriptural Prayer

- Step 1:** I settle into a comfortable, alert posture and become conscious of the loving presence of God through the Holy Spirit.
- Step 2:** I ask for the grace that I desire from this period of prayer.
- Step 3:** I read the passage of Scripture once, then again, to be familiar with the details.
- Step 4:** Once I have become familiar with the text, I put the Bible aside and begin to imagine the story in detail.
- Step 4:** I compose the place...setting the scene and the characters in my imagination. I imagine the scenery, the landscape, the environment. I note what time of day it is. I am aware of what else is part of the setting (e.g. animals, plants, etc.) I see the people...who they are, what they look like. I imagine what has been happening in their lives.
- Step 5:** I enter the scene as a participant to watch, listen, notice, and interact.
- Step 6:** If I haven't been in colloquy with Jesus during my participation in the scene, I spend time in colloquy with him.
- Step 7:** I close prayer with an expression of gratitude to God for this experience of intimacy with Jesus.

## Week 6: Jesus Turns His Face Toward Jerusalem

**Grace for the Week:** I pray this week for the strength and courage to remain faithful and close to Jesus as he begins to move to the end of his human life.

### 1

*Matthew 16:21-28*

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, “God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.” He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father’s glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct. Amen, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

Put yourself in the scene with the disciples as they listen to this first prediction of his passion.

*What is your reaction when you hear Peter rebuke Jesus? When you hear Jesus’ response?*

*What do you want to say to Jesus when he looks you in the eyes and tells you that if you wish to follow him you must deny yourself and take up your cross?*

*What does it mean to you to take up your cross?*

### 2

*Matthew 21:12-17*

*Luke 19:45-48*

Then Jesus entered the temple area and proceeded to drive out those who were selling things, saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.’” And every day he was teaching in the temple area. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people, meanwhile, were seeking to put him to death, but they could find no way to accomplish their purpose because all the people were hanging on his words.

In Jesus' time, people traveled for long periods, sometimes days, over miles of rough road, walking or riding donkeys, to get to the temple. Important to their worship was offering animal sacrifices in the temple. The animals sacrificed had to be unblemished, something impossible if the animals were driven or carried for days over miles of rough road. So as a practical matter, people had to buy their sacrificial animals from people selling at the temple. This is a reality that Jesus was well aware of, meaning he couldn't have simply meant, when he drove everyone out of the temple and criticized them for making his Father's house a marketplace, that people should stop doing what they were doing but also to continue to worship as usual. Worship as usual would have been impossible without the buying and selling that took place at the temple.

*Since Jesus is not proposing a change in how business as usual is conducted, what is going on here?*

*What was disturbing Jesus? What is he trying to convey by driving out the sellers?*

*Is there anything that might trouble Jesus about our how we worship today? More broadly, what do I learn from his act that affects my own life and practice?*

### 3

#### *Matthew 26:6-10*

Now when Jesus was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster jar of costly perfumed oil, and poured it on his head while he was reclining at table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant and said, "Why this waste? It could have been sold for much, and the money given to the poor." Since Jesus knew this, he said to them, "Why do you make trouble for the woman? She has done a good thing for me. The poor you will always have with you; but you will not always have me. In pouring this perfumed oil upon my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Amen, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be spoken of, in memory of her."

As you sit with this scene, notice the tenderness, love and extravagance of the woman. Notice Jesus' response and the response of the others present.

*What does she see that the others fail to see?*

*What do you see when you look at Jesus and at his being anointed?*

*What is your response?*

Stay with whatever part of this event you are attracted to, remembering that it is happening now. And be sure to share with Jesus what is on your heart.

*John 11:1-44*

Now a man was ill, Lazarus from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with perfumed oil and dried his feet with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was ill. So the sisters sent word to him, saying, "Master, the one you love is ill." When Jesus heard this he said, "This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was. Then after this he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you, and you want to go back there?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If one walks during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks at night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." He said this, and then told them, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him." So the disciples said to him, "Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved." But Jesus was talking about his death, while they thought that he meant ordinary sleep. So then Jesus said to them clearly, "Lazarus has died. And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe. Let us go to him." So Thomas, called Didymus,\* said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go to die with him." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles away. And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. [But] even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise." Martha said to him, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world." When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying, "The teacher is here and is asking for you." As soon as she heard this, she rose quickly and went to him. For Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still where Martha had met him. So when the Jews who were with her in the house comforting her saw Mary get up quickly and go out, they followed her, presuming that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Sir, come and see." And Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him." But some of them said, "Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?" So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, "Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you

that if you believe you will see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me.” And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, “Untie him and let him go.”

Enter into this event, seeing, listening, touching, entering into the feelings and thoughts of those present. Be especially sensitive to Jesus’ feelings. Let God draw you into this special moment, which can’t help but call to mind Jesus’ own death and resurrection.

There are many ways you might go in your contemplation of this scene. Here are some possible points to consider.

Linger with Jesus’ deep love for Martha, Mary and Lazarus, for you, for others. How do you feel as you absorb Jesus’ love? Especially at this moment, what do you feel for him?

Be with Martha and her sadness about her brother’s death...and her disappointment in Jesus for not coming sooner. Are there experiences in your life that allow you to relate to her feelings?

Listen to Martha’s profession of faith in Jesus when he asks if she believes? What does her profession mean to her...and to Jesus?

## 5

### *John 12: 23-32*

Jesus [said to] them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me. “I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it and will glorify it again.” The crowd there heard it and said it was thunder; but others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered and said, “This voice did not come for my sake but for yours. Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.”

This was the Gospel reading for the Mass during which Oscar Romero was assassinated. Shortly before he was killed, he said in his homily that this reading tells us that:

one must not love oneself so much as to avoid getting involved in the risks of life which history demands of us, that those who would avoid the danger will lose their

life, while those who out of love for Christ give themselves to the service of others will live, like the grain of wheat that dies, but only apparently. If it did not die, it would remain alone. The harvest comes about because it dies, allows itself to be sacrificed in the earth and destroyed. Only by destroying itself does it produce the harvest.

*How do you understand Jesus' words?*

*What is the grace you need to have Jesus' single-minded commitment to the purpose for which he has been sent?*

## Week 7: Entering the Triduum and Jesus' Passion and Death

**Grace for these days:** As I prepare to enter into the Triduum, I pray for the grace to know that Jesus willingly suffers for my sake.

The Triduum scripture readings doubtless provide more than sufficient prayer material for these days. However, following is some other prayer material suitable for Maundy Thursday (1 and 2), Good Friday (3 and 4) and Holy Saturday– that space between Jesus' death and resurrection (5).

### 1

#### *John 13:1-17*

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end. The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over. So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well." Jesus said to him, "Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all." For he knew who would betray him; for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean."

So when he had washed their feet [and] put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. 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. Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it.

As you pray with this scene, be attentive to what you notice about Jesus and about the disciples.

*Why does Jesus wash their feet?*

*When Jesus says his disciples should do as he has done, what does he mean as a practical matter? What does it mean for you to wash the feet of others?*

*What are your hesitations in following the example of Jesus?*

*What is one thing you can do this week to follow this example of humble service?*

## 2

In *Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter Week*, Ron Rolheiser writes this about the Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane:

We tend to misunderstand “the passion of Jesus.” Spontaneously we think of it as the pain of the physical suffering he endured on the road to his death. Partly that misses the point. Jesus' passion should be understood as *passio*, passivity, a certain submissive helplessness he had to undergo in counter-distinction to his power and activity. His passion begins in the Garden of Gethsemane, immediately after he has celebrated the last supper. The scriptures tell us that he went out into the garden with his disciples to pray for the strength he needed to face the ordeal that was now imminent.

It's significant that this agony takes place in a garden. In archetypal literature (and Scripture, among other things, is this kind of literature), a garden is not a place to pick cucumbers and onions. It is the place of delight, the place of love, the place to drink wine, the place where lovers meet in the moonlight, the place of intimacy. It's Jesus, the lover, the one who calls us to intimacy and delight with him, who sweats blood in the garden.

Jesus' agony is that of the lover who's been misunderstood and rejected in a way that is mortal and humiliating. It's his entry into the dark hole of human existence, the black hole of bitter rejection, aloneness, humiliation, and helplessness.

Be with Jesus in the garden. Allow yourself to enter fully into the range of suffering he is facing – particularly the psychological and emotional pain of being rejected and of being abandoned by his friends.

*What does Jesus need from you in this moment?*

*What does it mean for you to stay awake with him during this agony he is undergoing?*

## 3

John 11:16-17

So they took Jesus, and carrying the cross himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha.

In the *Stations of the Cross of Nonviolent Love*, Rev. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy says this about Jesus bearing his cross:

The cross is the symbol and the reality of nonviolent love, of suffering love, of voluntary postponement of gratification on behalf of others, of hurt endured in order to serve, to forgive – to be merciful.

The bearing of the physical cross is just the final moment in an existence that has chosen to serve others rather than indulge itself. The cross of nonviolent love is not an isolated instant. It is a free choice of a radically different verbal pattern, thought pattern, emotional pattern, behavior pattern. That is, it is the free choice of a radically different orientation and self-understanding. When we sign ourselves with the sign of the cross, we are symbolically saying to ourselves, to the world and to God that we choose to pick up Christ's cross and follow his way, that we choose, as he did, to bear the cross of nonviolent love unto death.

Jesus bore an enormous cross. In our eyes, the crosses we bear often seem to us to be equally enormous.

*How accurately do I evaluate the size of my own crosses? How does that affect how I deal with them?*

*In a slightly different vein: How willing am I to carry Christ's cross – the cross of nonviolent love...the cross of love unto death?*

*In what way do I minimize the crosses others bear? Whose real problems do I reduce to unimportance by how I do or do not respond?*

#### 4

Luke 23:44-47

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent."

The late William Barry, S.J., writes:

In Jesus, God saves us by becoming so vulnerable that we are able to kill him in a vile and humiliating way. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus assure us that God's offer of friendship will never be withdrawn, no matter what we do. If the cross did not result in a withdrawal of the offer, then nothing we do will lead to a change of God's heart. We can, however, refuse the offer. Friendship is a mutual relationship, and a person has to accept the offer; he or she cannot be coerced or tricked into it. And any human being's final refusal of God's friendship breaks God's heart. Still, God does not turn away from such a person in anger and rage. God lives eternally with a broken heart. That's how

vulnerable God wants to be.

Stand before Jesus in the moments before he breathes his last.

*What do you want to say to him?*

*What does it mean to know that even after this, he looks at you – at all of us – with love?*

## 5

As part of the Apostles' Creed, Christians express belief that after Jesus died, he "descended into hell." What do we understand that to mean? Here is an expression of how it might have been understood at the time the Creed was formulated; the words are excerpted from an ancient homily on Holy Saturday:

What is happening? Today there is a great silence over the earth, a great silence, and stillness, a great silence because the King sleeps; the earth was in terror and was still, because God slept in the flesh and raised up those who were sleeping from the ages. God has died in the flesh, and the underworld has trembled.

Truly he goes to seek out our first parent like a lost sheep; he wishes to visit those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. He goes to free the prisoner Adam and his fellow-prisoner Eve from their pains, he who is God, and Adam's son.

The Lord goes into them holding his victorious weapon, his cross. When Adam, the first created man, sees him, he strikes his breast in terror and calls out to all: 'My Lord be with you all.' And Christ in reply says to Adam: 'And with your spirit.' And grasping his hand he raises him up, saying: 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.

'I am your God, who for your sake became your son, who for you and your descendants now speak and command with authority those in prison: Come forth, and those in darkness: Have light, and those who sleep: Rise.

'I command you: Awake, sleeper, I have not made you to be held a prisoner in the underworld. Arise from the dead; I am the life of the dead. Arise, O man, work of my hands, arise, you who were fashioned in my image. Rise, let us go hence; for you in me and I in you, together we are one undivided person.

*What does it mean to you to say that Jesus descended into hell?*

*How might we understand those words today?*