



# LENT 2021

*Volunteer Reflections On  
Spirituality Social Justice Community Simple Living*

Catholic  Volunteer Network



**Catholic Apostolate Center**  
Reviving Faith • Rekindling Charity • Forming Apostles



# WELCOME!

What would it take to believe in the Resurrection and be transformed?

Lent is the time to practice how we live into the belief that life overcomes death. Let us remember that the opposite of death is birth and that life is all of this... the entire cycle. Death leads to birth. Jesus's death on the cross leads to a birth of a new order, a new reality where, for those who believe, God's reign overcomes the viciousness of death.

So, instead of blaming ourselves for not being perfect or not being perfect in our relationship with God, let us do something simply different this Lent. Let us be relentless in our faith in one another and in our service to God. Let us be determined to remove every barrier that gets in the way of us being transformed into a new being, a new child of God, a new friend, a new neighbor. Let us be unyielding in our pursuit for justice and peace.

Being relentless this Season may also be understood as being re-**LENT**-less. Let us do again and again those practices of Lent (praying, fasting, almsgiving). It's simple. Let us pray so we're not tempted to believe we are in this alone. Let us fast from the dependencies we have grown accustomed to that perhaps get in the way of us feeling God's presence in the quiet moments. Let us gift to others from the very gifts that have been given to us. We all know we can do it: give money to the people in your community, especially to those most vulnerable in this moment.

Let us adopt the mantra of "less is more," especially during these historically rigorous, challenging, and divisive times. Let us not overthink how we are not measuring up, or how one faithful practice will save our souls. Instead, let us allow ourselves the space to receive God's expansive grace at the very margins of our lives. This may be uncomfortable or unsettling, but trust that God is working new things in and around you.

So, let us strengthen our resolve to begin with Ash Wednesday's humiliating AND humbling reminder, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Or let us continually pray for the courage to "Repent (or turn away from sin), and believe in the Gospel."

Let this Lent be a time to deepen our imagination, belief, and conviction that an all-powerful and merciful God entered into our world in the form of a newborn baby, walked and talked with friends, ministered with those seen as outcasts in society, debated with local church and community leaders, and transformed before our very eyes when he extended his criminal arms on the empire's cross we now elevate. Let his death-defying act, his arms outstretched, continue to invite all of us to a radical practice of openness where we are simultaneously comfortable and exposed, courageously vulnerable, and vulnerably courageous. Because that is exactly when God's love, healing, justice, and reign breaks us open to be shared with others.

Re-**LENT**-lessly in Solidarity with you,

**Catholic Volunteer Network** and  
**Catholic Apostolate Center**

## LOOKING FOR MORE?

Looking for more inspiration? Catholic Apostolate Center hosts an extensive library of Lenten resources on their website: [www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/lent](http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/lent)

## REFLECTION

By **Kate Fowler**, Catholic Apostolate Center and Former CVN Volunteer

# LENT 2021

*First Sunday*

*"Repent and believe in the Gospel." (Mark 1:15)*

Such a small collection of words above that sum up the entire Lenten season—they form a microcosm of the spiritual life itself. We have just embarked on our Lenten journey, which started a few days ago on Ash Wednesday. How are we entering into this season? Are we already fatigued from an emotionally draining 2020? Are we burnt out from stress, fear, or navigating the unknown? Are we ready for rest, renewal, resurrection?

In the First Reading, we are reminded of God's covenant with Noah. It is a covenant of hope and restoration. He speaks the same words to us: "See, I am now establishing my covenant with you." As baptized sons and daughters of God, we are His beloved children living in a covenantal relationship with our Heavenly Father. God stands ready to renew and restore.

This relationship is made possible as a result of Christ's sacrifice. Peter tells us in Sunday's second reading, "Christ suffered for sins once...that he might lead you to God." He models the way for us even now: "Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the Spirit." This is what our Lenten journey is all about: dying to self, to our desires, addictions, or sins in order to live out true freedom—life in the Spirit. While Christ died literally for our sins, this Lent we are called to imitate this death by putting aside all that does not lead us to Christ. It is for this reason that many of us choose to "give something up" or to incorporate a spiritual practice (such as Scripture reading, Liturgy of the Hours, or the Rosary) into our prayer lives during Lent.

As we begin the Lenten season, I invite you to remember that the rainbow God promised Noah can only show forth as a result of the rain and clouds. If you feel like you walk in darkness or that you are tired of the storm, God is with you and promises you His grace, love, and presence.

## FOCUS: SIMPLE LIVING

After a hard year with the pandemic, it can be easy to focus on all that has changed or is outside of our control. As human beings created in the image and likeness of God, we are also made for communion. Throughout this Lenten season, let us find ways to creatively engage with, serve, and love others—be it virtually or safely in person. Let us also find a few moments each day to give thanks for the blessings, both hidden and apparent, that we have in our lives. By reaching out to others in charity and spending moments each day expressing gratitude, we can be renewed and recharged throughout our Lenten journey.

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, many of us begin this Lenten season tired, hopeless, or saddened. We may feel we do not have much to give. We ask you now to renew us and strengthen us so that we might encounter you throughout our Lenten journey more deeply. May we give all of our frustration, stress, anxiety, or fear, trusting that you lead us always to your Son. Your ways, oh Lord, are love and truth.*

## SERVICE SUGGESTION

When we express gratitude, it can change our hearts and the hearts of those around us. Throughout the Lenten season, I invite you to express gratitude for different people in your life: postal workers, cashiers at stores, those who deliver food or packages, neighbors, or friends. Let them know why you are grateful for them or if they've helped you in some way. You'll likely make someone's day and come to see God's work and blessings in different ways throughout your life.

## REFLECTION

By **Amanda Haluga**, The Haitian Project Director of Charism and Missionary Program

**LENT 2021**

*Second Sunday*

*“This is my Beloved Son. Listen to Him.”* (Mark 9:7)

Though few in number, God’s words spoken in today’s Gospel are clear: “This is my Beloved Son. Listen to Him.” He gave us His Son, the Word Made Flesh, to fulfill the law and the prophets and lay down His very life for us. As we enter into this Lenten season, are we attentive to Jesus? Are we distracted or pulled away from truly listening to Him?

The first reading shows us the sacrifice Abraham was willing to make of his own beloved son for God. The second reading reminds us of God’s same sacrifice for us, not sparing His own Son but “handing him over for us all,” and that Jesus, now raised and at the Father’s right hand, “indeed intercedes for us.”

The Gospel, too, demonstrates the love of the Father for the Son. Having journeyed up the mountain, Peter, James, and John watched as Jesus was transfigured—His divinity shining in His earthly form—and then spoke with Moses and Elijah. After hearing the voice of God from the cloud, they were again alone with Jesus.

Jesus also remains with us. He speaks to us. We listen to Him in our personal prayer, in the silence of the heart. We listen to Him in Scripture and worship. And we listen to Him in our brothers and sisters. As we journey through this season of Lent, let us see and hear Jesus in those around us, that we may learn from Him and grow in love for our neighbor and for Him.

## FOCUS: COMMUNITY

Following God’s command, we can seek to listen to Jesus by listening to the voices of others in our own community. In our missions, vocations, and daily lives, we are called to serve Jesus in our brothers and sisters, in the least among us, and in those in need. As we work through this time of challenge, grief, isolation, and division, let us commit to first recognizing Jesus in those we live with, work with, serve, and meet. Only then can we listen to others with greater patience and love, and better work to bring about justice, peace, and the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth.

## PRAYER

*Speak, Lord, your servant is listening. Help me to remain attentive to your voice. Help me to truly see and hear you in those around me, that I may grow closer to them and to you. Grant me patience when I feel that I cannot hear your voice. Grant me humility to listen with an open heart. Be with me as I walk with you these forty days of Lent and every day.*

## SERVICE SUGGESTION

It is easy to let the desire to share our thoughts or change someone’s mind prevent us from listening. While others speak, we may prepare a reply or story of our own. Relationships suffer when individuals feel unheard or misunderstood. This Lent, let us take time to set ourselves aside and truly listen. Mindfully work to hear and understand. Ask someone “How was your day?” and listen to the answer. Ask questions. See and hear the person you are with. By approaching conversations—simple or complicated—selflessly and patiently, we can connect rather than divide and love as God loves us.

## REFLECTION

By **Karen Bortvedt Estrada**, Former Volunteer, Maryknoll Lay Missioners and Border Servant Corps

*“Take these out of here, and stop making my Father’s house a marketplace.”* (John 2:16)



Jesus flipped the table and chased the money changers out of the temple. It was because of these signs that people came to believe. Not because of the comments he made on a social media account. Not because of the arguments he won. The way Jesus led his life led to the transformation of hearts.

While serving overseas in Cambodia and stateside in El Paso, Texas, I met many individuals who had faced life-threatening challenges time and time again to make a better life for themselves and their families. They spoke up against structures and systems that were largely just accepted as the status quo, but still contributed to their suffering. They demonstrated a resiliency that was beyond anything I had previously seen growing up in a safe and privileged environment. For me, when I read Gospel stories like the one today, I see their faces superimposed over Christ's.

Especially in this increasingly challenging moment in history, I think about this example of how Jesus engaged suffering, stood up to injustice, and brought about transformation. May we all strive to use our God-given creativity to flip the status quo and help others come to believe in a more just and compassionate world.

## FOCUS: SOCIAL JUSTICE

As Christians, we are called to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. For most of us, the first is easy. Being the comforter keeps us in a position of power, a position of comfort ourselves. How much harder is it for us to embrace the second part of this social justice call and afflict the comfortable? To afflict means to trouble or affect. It is our moment to “make good trouble” as the great John Lewis said. If we stand for social justice, we must also be ready to affect and engage the status quo.

## PRAYER

*Loving God, help me to see today where I need to stand up against the status quo. Holy Spirit, help me to find the words to express where change needs to happen in our world. Give me faith to believe that transformation of our broken world is possible. Give me hope to believe that our society can undergo a conversion to equity, love, and respect for all—including our beloved earth. Give me the patience to hone hope every day—even when it is hard, and I am ridiculed for being naive. Help others to believe in hope and the future that can be, not only because of what I say, but also because of how I live my life.*

## SERVICE SUGGESTION

Take some time this week to reflect on injustices in the world that you would like to see change. We read about how Jesus saw injustice and did not just speak, but also did something about it. We read about how others came to believe because of his signs and actions. This week, take action on a specific injustice that disturbs or troubles you. Together, our individual small actions will transform our world. May others come to believe because of what they have seen.

## REFLECTION

By **Mike McCormick**, St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth and Families, former Augustinian Volunteer

**LENT 2021**

*Fourth Sunday*

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16)*

I'm always skeptical when I hear others describe instances of suffering as "blessings in disguise." Can you imagine breaking your arm and having a friend say, "That's a blessing in disguise!" — while you're still sitting in the ER? Sure, they might be right eventually; but in that moment you would be in too much pain for their words to be helpful. You might even consider deleting that friend's phone number.

The events of the last year have made it even harder to recognize such hidden blessings. Amidst universal confusion, we are thirsting for straightforwardness. Maybe that's why today's Gospel reading is hitting me differently.

In this passage, we receive a clear and radiant report of Jesus' person and ministry: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."

In these words, we find Jesus directly offering Himself and extending His invitation to each one of us: believe and trust me. He is unmasked, undisguised. Now, will Jesus' straightforwardness give me the courage this Lent to step out from behind my own disguises?

## FOCUS: SOCIAL JUSTICE

Today's Gospel suggests that darkness is part of the human experience. When I reflect on the world, the United States, and even my city of Washington, D.C., there is surely darkness preventing us from achieving equality and equity for all. This darkness is within me too, in the moments when I doubt change is possible.

God acknowledges this darkness by sending his light and messengers into the world. Their examples help guide us and strengthen us. Is there a particular messenger who inspires your own prayers and actions this Lent?

## PRAYER

*God, thank you for this life and journey. Please help me along the way. When the world seems dark, please help me remember the hope and humor you've placed in my heart. When my own darkness attacks me from within, please help me to reach out beyond myself to others. You have placed good friends in my life — help me to remember they are there for me! Please help me to be a friend and helper in return. Amen.*

## SERVICE SUGGESTION

This Lent, reach out and call or Zoom each week with someone in your life who you haven't seen or heard from in a while. You may help to reduce the isolation that person may be feeling during this lengthy pandemic.

## REFLECTION

By **Bridget Higginbotham**, Franciscan Mission Service

*“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.”*

(John 12:24)

**LENT 2021**

*Fifth Sunday*

It is easy, unfortunately, to fall into the mindset that mission and faith-filled service is “bringing” God to other people. For certain, we rightly pray to be the hands and feet of Christ. But there is nowhere we could go where God is not already present. There is no one we could meet who is not lovingly made in the image of God. We go to the places of physical poverty and suffering because we follow God there as God’s servants. And if we’re lucky, while we’re there, God will bear fruit not because of us but in spite of us.

This fruit is not just what we do for others, but what we ourselves become through the process. When we go outside of our comfort zone, when we open our hearts, when we die to our preconceived notions or selfishness or ego, we walk away changed. During my volunteer year, I spent many hours with an elderly nursing home resident who wanted help tidying her room. Some might describe her as difficult, but really she was lonely and anxious in many ways. It took so much patience and strength for me to return willingly to her each week, to work slowly through the room with her instead of just zipping through it as I would have liked. Rather than respond to her out of my frustration, I had to stop and remind myself why she reacted the way she did; I had to remind both of us that the cleaning wasn’t as important as her knowing that she was loved, seen, and valued. In the end, she got a clean room and hopefully, some comfort; I left softer and more compassionate.

## FOCUS: COMMUNITY

Living with other people is a beautiful opportunity to die to self in order to produce fruit. While family, roommates, community members, or even neighbors may give us joy and support, they are just as likely to exhaust or annoy us. Clashes of personalities or preferences can be frustrating, but they are also invitations to self-reflection and sacrificial giving. In those moments, what do you need to let go of, and how are you being invited to grow? How is God asking you to show and sow love?

## PRAYER

*Loving God, in our desire to see Jesus, keep open our eyes and hearts. Help us follow you to the peripheries and find the face of your Son in both the unlikely stranger and those closest to us. May we always strive to decrease so that you might increase.*

## SERVICE SUGGESTION

Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, “If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other... If we truly want peace in the world, let us begin by loving one another in our own families.” Sometimes we are more inclined to serve strangers in a soup kitchen rather than those closest to us. Take time to find a way to serve and show love intentionally to a family member or two, especially those for whom you find it challenging to do so.



## REFLECTION

By **Monica Thom Konschnik**, Catholic Apostolate Center, Catholic Volunteer Network Board of Directors, former Jesuit Volunteer

*"She has done a good thing for me."* (Mark 14:6)

As I reflected on the Passion of Jesus Christ, I found that there are endless aspects of the Gospel reading that I could focus on. A common thread that rang true to me throughout the Gospel was the example of caring and compassionate actions that various people performed. There is the woman with the jar of perfumed oil who anointed Jesus' head. There is Simon the Cyrenian who helped Jesus by carrying his cross for a stretch on the road to Calvary. There is Joseph of Arimathea who asked Pilate for Jesus' body after his death so it could be properly taken care of prior to burial.

In other renditions of the Passion, we hear of Veronica who wiped the sweaty, bloody face of Jesus on the road to Calvary, and we hear of the apostle John who stayed with the Blessed Virgin as she watched her son die. There could also be countless other acts of care that were never documented and are lost to the annals of time. The key point, though, is that even amidst the sorrow and devastation of those days, there were moments of kindness and compassion that provide an example for us as Christians.

As we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic again in this season of Lent and as we begin Holy Week, we find that there is a need in our world for small acts of kindness to those around us: to those we are closest to and those we may not even know. It is also important for us to recognize when someone else has done an act of kindness for us. It can be hard in our busy lives to see that happen, but noticing the act and taking the time to appreciate it makes its beauty even more special.

## FOCUS: SPIRITUALITY

St. Therese of Lisieux encourages us to "Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love." As we enter into Holy Week, we can take inspiration from St. Therese and begin this week with a sense of the simplicity of our spirituality. We have the beautiful ritual of the washing of the feet and the commemoration of the first Mass on Holy Thursday, which can be an opportunity for us to refocus on what is most important. We also have the opportunity to gaze upon the crucified Christ in a special way this week, knowing that in a few short days, he will be resurrected.

## PRAYER

*Lord, as we recount the horrific last hours of your life on earth, we look in gratitude to your sacrifice for our salvation. We pray for the courage to be like the woman with the oil, Simon the Cyrenian, and Joseph of Arimathea who put themselves at risk of danger to provide support to you when you needed it. We pray for the wisdom to know when to act in support of those around us. We pray for the guidance to figure out ways in which we can care for those around us. Amen.*

## SERVICE SUGGESTION

Do a small act of kindness for someone whom you find challenging this week. It is easy to show kindness to those we love easily, but it is harder to do so for someone whom we find challenging to love. The act can be a simple prayer for that person, a call or text to say hello, or an anonymous act to brighten his or her day.

**LENT 2021**

*Palm Sunday*



## REFLECTION

By **Michael O'Smith**, former Jesuit Volunteer

*"The one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed."* (John 20:8)

The Beloved Disciple is clearly the model of Easter faith in this Sunday's Gospel, but I am challenged and inspired by the examples of Mary and Peter as well. Mary rushes to judge the facts of a scene that shocks her. Her heart is set on finding Jesus' dead body, but the rolled-away stone rolls away her plans. Often, I have been so attached to a plan or an idea that I react to a crisis rashly. **I want to immediately share with others my story or my outrage.** So, I love how Mary's response is so rash and passionate because it reflects her passionate grief and love! Her testimony, though not wholly accurate, leads others to investigate further. Peter is a seeker. He needs more details than what Mary can give him. Maybe he doesn't fully trust the messenger's testimony, or maybe the news is so astounding that it suspends his belief. Either way, Peter wants to see for himself. When he eventually enters the tomb and sees the burial cloths, I imagine him standing there, numb with shock. I've been numbed by many things I've seen this past year as well. It's hard to believe, or to serve, when you are numb. But then the beloved disciple joins Peter and also notices the neatly rolled up head cloth. He connects the dots and takes the leap of faith, amazing though the implication is, that Jesus has risen by his own power, and that death and chaos have been defeated. In my life and service, may I love like Mary, seek like Peter, and believe like the Beloved Disciple.

**EASTER 2021**

*He is Risen!*

## FOCUS: COMMUNITY

A healthy community needs, activates, recognizes, and celebrates each person's gifts. We also receive, interpret, and respond to meaningful news in a community. Each of the three disciples who were there on Easter morning had a role in testifying to an aspect of the truth: **the stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty, and God's work was at hand.** They shared what they had seen and believed with others in a community. Then, they began to celebrate. It's in just those kind of moments in my immediate community, usually over a meal or beverage, that I experience hope and joy, even in the midst of unsettling news.

## PRAYER

*Almighty God,  
Yours is the victory over death,  
and You rise up for us.  
Yours is the love that never dies,  
and You reach out to us.  
Yours is the life that sustains all life,  
and You breathe it into us.  
By Your grace, may we serve with passionate  
love, seek with humility, and dare to believe  
with the hope that Your Resurrection brings.  
May we testify to the good news we have  
seen, and may our communities thrive in the  
sharing of faith, hope, and love.  
In the name of Jesus Christ, crucified and  
risen, we pray.*

**AMEN.**

## SERVICE SUGGESTION

This Easter season, you might find a way to become an active witness of good news in the unsettling times we live in. Identify a person, community, or cause that you are passionate about. "Hang out" with or study that person, community, or cause, and truly listen and observe. Humbly seek out more information. Pray on it. Where is God at work in this person, community, or cause? Discern with care what the good news story is that would build up others in your community, and how you might share it appropriately and discretely (i.e. a conversation, a letter to the editor, etc). Then become a bearer of that good news.