

IN
REVERSE

Reflections

for life in lockdown

I N R E V E R S E

New Zealand is in “Lock Down”. Life as we have known it is completely changed as the nation, along with the rest of the world, wages war against an invisible but deadly enemy, Coronavirus, or COVID-19.

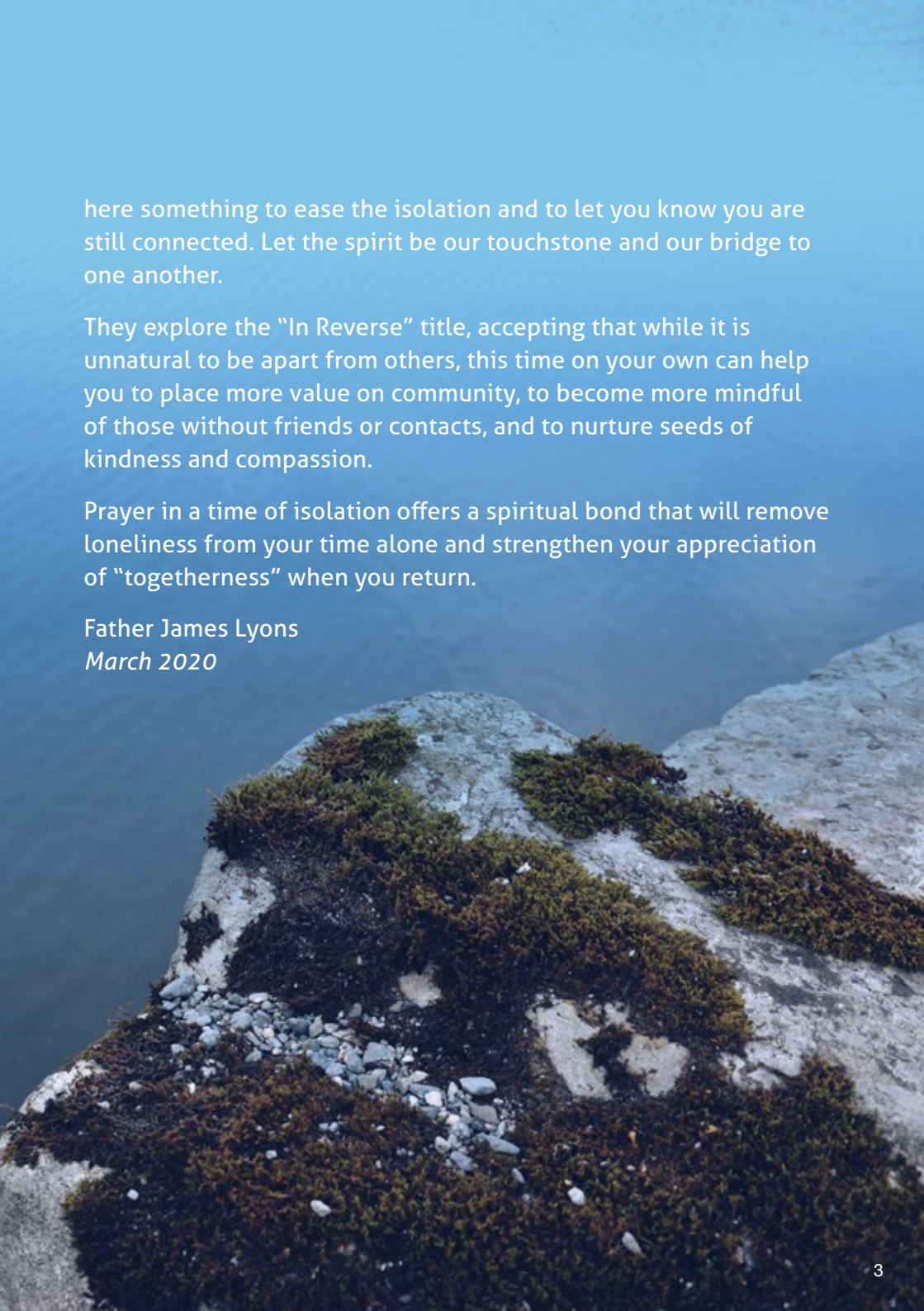
You may have already been “self-isolating”; the “Lock Down” extends that directive to nearly everyone. Only essential services remain open.

You are a person of faith. Prayer is an important part of your life. Worship normally engages you with others and with large gatherings banned, church services, along with concerts, meetings, sporting events and large social celebrations, cannot be held.

We are in a very strange and unfamiliar environment, backedpedalling to escape infection and limit the spread of a disease for which there is still no cure. This means minimal or no contact with others, no touching, no sharing, keeping our distance from one another and keeping everything clean.

It’s like we’re living “in reverse”, backing away from what we’ve regarded as normal. Indeed, as social beings, we need contact with others. Reversing what is natural and necessary is unnerving and extremely disruptive.

So here is a package of reflections to take you through this time of being locked down! Whether on your own or at home with family, I hope you will find

The background of the page is a photograph of a rocky coastline. The top half shows a clear blue sky, and the middle section shows a calm blue sea. The bottom half of the image is dominated by a large, grey rock formation covered in dark, scrubby vegetation. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

here something to ease the isolation and to let you know you are still connected. Let the spirit be our touchstone and our bridge to one another.

They explore the “In Reverse” title, accepting that while it is unnatural to be apart from others, this time on your own can help you to place more value on community, to become more mindful of those without friends or contacts, and to nurture seeds of kindness and compassion.

Prayer in a time of isolation offers a spiritual bond that will remove loneliness from your time alone and strengthen your appreciation of “togetherness” when you return.

Father James Lyons
March 2020

DAY#1

THE WATER OF LIFE

Setting

Make a prayer space in your room. Whatever else you place there, put a crucifix, a bowl of water and a lit candle. Begin your prayer with the Sign of the Cross, then...

Pray

Give thanks for this new day:

*God of life and light,
I thank you for another new beginning.
For the light shining through my window
For the trees and their colours
The birds and their songs
Though I am, for some days, alone
The beauty I see speaks your presence
And gives me confidence to live this new day.*

Reflect

Frequent hand washing plays a significant role in preventing the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19). The virus can survive on hands for up to ten minutes and in that short time can be transferred to anything touched. Cleanliness is vital in the fight against this new virus. It is appropriate, therefore, to open our special 14 prayer days with a focus on water, the first element in creation. Water: so essential for life, but with the potential to be extremely destructive.

Water sustains all forms of life, including the life of our planet. Droughts – the absence of water, prevent life and growth. Floods – the excess of water, destroy life.

Baptism is the gateway to faith for Christians. By “water and the Spirit” we are gifted new life, becoming “a new creation”, washed free of the virus of selfishness and made one with the People of God, the Church. In Baptism there is both a washing away and a washing into life.

Reflect today on your own baptism. How has your faith developed since that momentous occasion? It’s what happens after baptism that shapes the way you will experience its effects. How are you living your new life?

Consider: Baptism is the sign instituted by Jesus to unite us with his own baptism. He asked his disciples when they were seeking his favour, “Are you willing to be baptised with the baptism with which I must be baptised?” St Paul made this perfectly clear:

When we were baptised in Christ Jesus we were baptised in his death; in other words, when we were baptised we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glory, we too might live a new life. [Romans 6:3-4]

- Give yourself 5-10 minutes meditating on the above. If you no longer have your baptism candle, or have no other candle, light a table lamp or torch. Let its glow accompany you in this quiet time.
- After your mediation write about what you have experienced, what you heard in the scripture, what dying and rising with Jesus might mean for you today and in the future.

Read 

• If you have access to the song, *Christ Be Our Light* [Bernadette Farrell], play it, listening carefully to the words. What do they say to you about the consequences of your baptism? This song will also help you know that, though you are now alone, you remain linked to all the baptised. Here is the chorus:

*Christ be our light
Shine in our hearts, shine through the darkness
Christ be our light
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

Pray one (or more) of these three Rosary decades, while giving thanks for those who have shared faith with you and helped it to develop.

- The Baptism of Jesus – 2nd Mystery of Light
- The Crucifixion of Jesus – 5th Sorrowful Mystery
- The Resurrection of Jesus – 1st Glorious Mystery

Pray

Awaken Me

*Risen One,
come to meet me
in the garden of my life.
Lure me into elation.
Revive my silent hope.
Coax my dormant dreams.
Raise up my neglected gratitude.
Entice my tired enthusiasm.
Give life to my faltering relationships.
Roll back the stone of my indifference.
Unwrap the deadness of my spiritual life
Impart heartiness in my work.*

*Risen One,
send me forth as a disciple of your unwavering love,
a messenger of your unlimited joy.*

*Resurrected One,
may I become ever more convinced
that your presence lives on,
and on, and on,
and on.*

*Awaken me!
Awaken me!*

*-Joyce Rupp, Out of the Ordinary, 2002.
Used with permission, Ave Maria Press*



DAY #2

NO TOUCHING

Setting

With the crucifix, place photos of family, friends, places you've visited. Some flowers perhaps, or images of nature/creation.

Pray

Give thanks for this new day:

Creator, Life-giver.

*You love the world so much that,
in Jesus, you promise to be with us
till the end of time.*

*I am grateful that your presence continues
for we are in a time of trouble, as an out-of-control
virus threatens your world and its people.*

*Thank you for being with us during another day
of social distancing and uncertainty.*

Guide our minds and hearts as a remedy is sought.

May the successful outcome bring us

Closer to one another and to you.

Reflect

One of the warnings given in efforts to stop the spreading of coronavirus is to avoid unnecessary touching. The virus survives in the afterglow of our touch, making the washing hands and the wiping of doorknob, bannister, laptop, lift button, important weapons in the fight. How terrible to be told not to touch, to hug, to kiss, and to "socially distance" yourself by standing at least a metre from another person.

As water is essential for life, touching is essential for life to thrive. Touching connects not only bodies but also hearts. *I was very touched by your words*, we say. And, *please keep in touch*. So many of Jesus' miracles came through his touch, and the woman who merely *touched the hem of his garment* found herself cured.

Today's prayer time invites reflection on the gift of touch. At a time when we are cautioned against touching, giving ourselves space to take a deeper look at how and why we need contact with one another, can bring fresh insights and new purpose to the way we communicate.

The Gospel according to John records six significant gifts coming from the public ministry of Jesus: the gift of **Wine** at Cana (ch.2), the gift of **Living Water** to the woman he met at the well (ch.4), the gift of **Healing** to the disabled man who had no one else to help him (ch.5), the gift of **Food** to the crowd (ch.6), the gift of **Sight** to the man born blind (ch.8), the gift of **Life** to his friend, Lazarus (ch.11). Each gift involves an encounter with others. While they each relate to one or more of our five senses (smell, taste, touch, sight and hearing), they all relate to touch of one kind or another.

- Read and re-read one of the above chapters. Observe the connections between Jesus and the person/people involved, especially his non-physical touching.
- Look at the photos in your prayer space. In this time of prayer, "touch" the people and places, using your heart and mind. "Embrace" them in your prayer.

Without touch there is no real physical connection. The other five senses can be stimulated from a distance, but touch requires closeness, intimacy,

and is never a one-way communication. This is what is missing from our personal lives during the coronavirus crisis. The tragedy is that not being able to touch another person, I can find my life – as the writer Joy Cowley puts it – *restricted to a small world of one.*

Pray

Pray this Aotearoa Psalm: The Human Race

*Who was it who said that competition was a good idea?
Who reckoned it was important to be first, best,
biggest, richest,
fastest, brightest, top of the class?*

Not Jesus, that's for sure.

Oh, he had his chance in the desert.

*All the temptations given him were a push
for self-promotion.*

He turned them down flat.

He knew that the secret of happiness

lay in making others happy,

in cooperation rather than competition,

in helping another unwrap her gift,

in listening to a brother's song.

*Pursuit of excellence is part of growth and important
in our lives,*

but that has got nothing to do

with standing on others to increase our stature,

or leaving others behind in order to get out front.

*Isn't it better to share the pleasures of all those around us
than to be restricted*

to a small world on one?

Because that's the trouble with winning:

it leaves us standing on our own.

In fact, winning can be so lonely,

that often it feels like losing.

[Joy Cowley, Aotearoa Psalms, 1989, Psalm 29]

Scripture Meditation: *As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.* [Colossians 3:12-15]

- Stay with this reading for 5-10 minutes
- The Aotearoa Psalm warns against selfishness and greed. Now that you are isolated from others, even perhaps from those you greatly love, consider the way your touch affects others. Is it in any way selfish or controlling? How does it stack up against St Paul's wardrobe of compassion, kindness, etc.
- What do you find in the scripture passage that you would like to develop / strengthen in your personal relationships when you re-enter society?

Close this prayer time with personal praise and thanks for the gift of touch.

DAY#3

IN ISOLATION



Setting

Alongside your crucifix and lighted candle (or lamp), place a world atlas. If you do not have an atlas, write the name of as many countries you can recall and lay the list in the centre of your sacred space.

Pray

Give thanks for this new day:

God of the universe.

All life comes from you

and all nations are held in your loving embrace.

The pandemic that now holds us hostage

threatens the wellbeing and stability

of the whole world.

With the dawning of this new day

we place our trust in you.

Gather us under your protecting wings

that we might encourage one another

and work together to bring health, safety and peace

Reflect

Self-isolation signals a cut-off from many usual and normal contacts. Social distancing affects every community – family, school, church, town, city, the entire nation, and internationally as well. This is a terrible global phenomenon. But perhaps it will bring blessings, as we all come to realise what makes life so precious and the aspects of living we have taken for granted or never really appreciated.

To begin, use some of this prayer time, and some of this day, to reflect on the tragedy of isolation – not simply your own, but the many ways in which people experience isolation: the imprisoned, refugees, social outcasts, the elderly abandoned by family, solo parents, the sick kept in isolation, a person or persons nobody wants anything to do with...

Here are some characters Jesus encountered who knew the pain of isolation: a Leper (Lk 5:12-16), the Gerasene Demoniac (Lk 8:26-39), Lazarus – at the gate of the rich man, (Lk 16:19-31), Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10). There are many more, including Jesus himself; Peter and the other disciples, as a consequence of their abandoning Jesus (Matthew 26:56; Lk 22:54-62; Matthew 27:46).

- Pray these episodes – each of them at different times during the day. Note the ways in which these people were isolated. You may like to look for other examples in the gospel narratives. Note, too, the concern of Jesus to restore people to the community or to help the community to be more accepting of the isolated one. Luke's gospel is particularly concerned with the healing ministry of Jesus and the greatest healing happens when people are at peace with one another.
- Using your atlas or list of countries, locate those most affected by Coronavirus. Consider the amount of isolation affecting the people of these lands and the enormous changes occurring in lifestyle, commerce, transport, and day-to-day living. Pray the following psalm with hope in your heart for healing, for increase in faith and for the strengthening of love between people, isolated or not.

PSALM 91

*You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shade of the Almighty,
will say to the Lord, My refuge and my fortress;
my God in whom I trust.*

*For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge...*

*You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,
or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday...*

*For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone...*

*Those who love me I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.
When they call to me I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble.
I will rescue them and honour them...*

Rosary Prayer: Pray the 5th Joyful Mystery –
the Finding of the Child Jesus.

Jesus becomes “isolated” from the Nazareth “caravan” and is feared lost in Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph search for him through a number of days. Offer this Decade for all who are isolated or lost, and for those desperate to find them and to be reunited.

- Keep contact with people you know to be isolated at this time through phone, email or other social media.

The Church has always regarded the “media” as gifts of God. Well used, they can be life-savers and health-givers. Be aware of how much you are now valuing the calls of those concerned for *your* welfare.

Wonderful Counsellor.

*I give thanks for the many ways
you guide the skills of people to improve and
assist the ways we communicate with one another.*

*In this time of isolation
when physical contact needs to be avoided
we are blessed with electronic media to
enable support to be given
news to be known and
love to be shared.*

*May my gratitude continue
beyond this emergency
so that I never misuse any of your gifts.*

**If you have access to music, conclude by listening
to a quiet, reflective piece.**

A person is sitting on a large rock in a desert landscape at sunset. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, and the person is silhouetted against the light. The text 'DAY #4' is overlaid on the image in a large, white, sans-serif font.

DAY #4

NO FEAR

Setting

Light several candles near the crucifix and scatter bright coloured cloths, paintings or drawings around your prayer space.

Pray

Prayer in praise of this new day:

*Daylight takes care of the darkness of night
and the fear darkness often brings.*

*I thank and praise you, loving God, for your gift
of Jesus, the light of the world,
the One in whom there is no darkness,
who comes to light our way home.*

Watch over us in the time of uncertainty.

Strengthen our faith, our hope and our love.

*Grant us peace of mind and heart as our
isolation continues.*

Reflect

News of the spreading Coronavirus sparked panic buying and rumours sending great alarm through the population. Such behaviour sparks fear, fear only made worse when people are isolated from one another. Fear is a natural response to danger, whether real or perceived. It takes a leap of faith to prevent the paralysing effect of uncontrolled fear. No doubt that is why the Hebrew/Christian scriptures are filled with assurances not to be afraid.

The first female Anglican bishop in the UK, Libby Lane, met considerable opposition to her appointment and found her situation potentially isolating and fearful. But, in a later interview she said her faith had given her a deep sense of belonging and reassurance, and concluded by sharing her *most valuable piece of advice*:

“It is a constant refrain in scripture: ‘Do not be afraid’ – don’t live out of fear. Of course, it is natural that we all sometimes feel afraid. We’re afraid of being alone, of failing, of not coping. But if we live our lives from a place of fear, it is damaging to us, to our relationships, to our communities. One needs to find something that gives a sense of safety, of security, of home. And that comes with accepting we are all known by God and loved by God. If you allow that truth in, it enables you to find freedom from fear. So you can live out not of fear but of hope and gratitude.”

[If I could tell you just one thing..., Richard Reed, Canongate Books, 2018, p290-1]

Scripture Reflection

Read

The first two chapters of Luke’s gospel cover the conception, birth and early years of both John the Baptist, and Jesus. All associated with these events needed much reassurance to overcome their hesitation and fear. Zechariah, Mary, and the shepherds at Bethlehem are urged, *Do not be afraid*. Chapter one of Matthew’s account introduces a very troubled Joseph who is told, *do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife*. [Mt 1:20]

Often during his ministry Jesus encourages the disciples not to be afraid, and guides them on a journey *to trust in God and trust also in me*. John, chapter 14,

is part of Jesus' final words instruction to the disciples and it is rich with reassurance and the promise of his continued presence, especially in the gift of the Spirit (*I will not leave you orphans – vs 18*). Chapter 15 follows with the "Vine and Branch" teaching – also very reassuring.

Give yourself 5-10 minutes with one of these sections.

Consider:

- Why was there such a need for Jesus to reassure those closest to him?
- When have you felt most afraid?
- How and by whom or what have you found reassurance, courage?
- What fears have you noticed, or are noticing, during this isolation?
- How is your faith helping during this experience?
- How is your faith growing, or likely to grow, because of this time?

Pray

Prayer of Intercession – For those who live in fear

For those afraid for tomorrow after what happened to them today –

[R] Gentle Saviour, grant them peace.

For those concerned for loved ones in a time of uncertainty – [R]

For those whose hearts are heavy with grief and sadness – [R]

For those fearing redundancy for they know many jobs will be cut – [R]

For those fearful for their safety in difficult relationships – [R]

For those afraid of dying; may they know the comfort of being loved – [R]

Gentle Saviour, accept these prayers, offered with the trust of knowing that you are with us. Just as fear is part of our nature, so is our desire to love and to be loved. With faith in you we can live balanced and good lives and rest in your peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*By the tender mercy of our God
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness,
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

[Canticle of Zechariah, Luke 1:78-9]

Horizons

*Morning star
let there be light.*

*Between the leaves
let there be light.*

*Children's faces
let there be light.*

*On the horizon
let there be light.*

*Arc of rainbow
let there be light.*

*Candle at window
let there be light.*

[Firesong, Anne Powell, 1999, p52]

To conclude: pray your own personal prayer, thanking God for the reassurance the gift of faith brings to your life, and for the people who bring you peace.

Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

[Matthew 28:20]

DAY #5

SHOCK, LOSS, CONFUSION

Setting

The crucifix, in the centre of your prayer space, should be the only object displayed during this session.

Pray

Prayer in praise of another day:

Glory and praise to you, O God.

You gift me with a new day to discover more about myself and to ponder the mystery of your love.

As this time of isolation continues,

I am feeling the loss of my independence and am confused by my inability to live a normal life.

Yet, my desire to praise you rises strongly in my heart.

For I trust your goodness and believe that, as the Good Shepherd, you will guide us to fresh and green pastures.

Glory and praise to you, O God.

Reflect

Shock, loss, confusion are words used by Daniel O’Leary in the introduction to his final book, *Dancing to My Death* (2019). He used them to describe “a routine that is suddenly up-ended and knocked entirely off track.” This Irish born priest, teacher and bestselling author was referring to his 2018 cancer diagnosis and his book invites the reader into an emotional and extremely “raw” conversation as the tumour progressed to take his life in January 2019.

With COVID-19, taking hold a year after his death, the “routine” of the whole world has been “suddenly up-ended and knocked entirely off track”. Individuals know this especially in their time of isolation, unable to live life normally, visit friends, shop, or even work. Today’s prayer draws from the experiences described by Daniel O’Leary. His journey through shock, loss and confusion, while echoing the feelings, frustrations and fears of those in isolation and communities in lockdown, also offers life-lines for anyone willing to listen, to reflect and be open to discover goodness and peace even in the worst of times.

1. What I am trying to do... is to make my wound into a sacred wound; to make the stones of darkness into welcome stepping stones of light across the turbulent river. [p.22]

Jesus, you are God’s gift of light for all the nations. In you we live and move and have our being. Help me to make this connection; to fill it with meaning; to enter more deeply into your life; to know in my heart as well as in my mind that my life is intimately bonded with yours, that my wounds and your wounds, and yours are mine.

2. There’s a gift hidden in your new condition, I’m told. [p.29]

I am not suffering a terminal illness, but this coronavirus, a plague in our midst, is sapping my energy and my faith – even as it threatens life throughout the world. Can such a threat carry a gift? Hold me close, loving God, that I may not lose faith in your goodness, nor hope that, within the cloud of sickness, isolation and even death, there is treasure to be found. Perhaps a kinder way of being, a better way of living.

3. I need to feel the rhythm of the heart of Mother Universe, Mother Evolution, Mother of Humanity, Mother of all Creation. May God forever deepen in me, clarify for me, the aching glimpses of an impossibly enchanting love. [p.65]

Help me, O God, in this distressing time, not to think only of myself and my situation. Remind me that I am part of something huge and splendid and unfinished. I know the words from Paul, *Love never ends* [1Cor.13:8]. Stir them into my life that I might make them my own and reach out to all.

4. ...when God eases us out of God's heart onto this planet, God searches for a place that is most like paradise, and this is the mother's gaze, she transparently sacramentalises God's infinite gaze, looking into the eyes of the infant. And when the infant looks into her eyes it is looking into God's eyes... [p.177-8]

Thank you, Creator God, for your great love, holding us forever in your gaze. Help me to always appreciate the wonderful intimacy of your love for me and all creation, and to play my part more resolutely to honour your presence in everything that is.

5. We must evolve the energy of love, learn it and spread it... – openly within our communities and hiddenly in our hearts – advancing, enhancing and completing the work of Creation, of Evolution, of the Kingdom of God. [p.190]

O God, I want to understand more about how I can use your gift of love to partner you in your creative work. I want to serve others more than myself. Place me where you need love to flourish that I might truly share my love for you and with you.

[Dancing to My Death, Daniel O'Leary, Garratt Publishing, 2019. Available from Pleroma Christian Supplies, Otane, Hawkes Bay]

Scripture Reflection: Choose a favourite gospel passage and spend 5-10 minutes in meditation. In what way(s) might it direct you to the theme of today's prayer session?

Scripture references you may like to consider:

Luke, chapter 15 – losing and finding

Mark 6:1-6 – the shock of rejection

Matthew 5:1-11 – the Beatitudes

John, chapter 11 – the raising of Lazarus

Shock, Loss, Confusion

*In a world turned upside down
when the ordinary is no more
and isolation is the norm
I must not forget the we
or you or us
I must not allow
shock to horrify
loss to paralyse
confusion to terrify
hold on to sanity
let love be our sanctuary.*

The way it is

*There is a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen: people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.*

*[William Stafford, Ask Me: 100 Essential Poems, Graywolf Press, 1977,
p.42, Quoted by Daniel O'Leary]*



DAY #6

THE NAME OF GOD IS MERCY

Setting

Crucifix and candles with some violet or purple cloth, palms or other greenery.

Pray

Prayer in praise of this day:

*A new day signals freshness
and the chance to make a new start.
I want so much to leave behind the fear, the anger,
the upsets and unloving thoughts I have allowed
to enter this time of isolation. Cleanse me, merciful God.
Flood me with your calming Spirit.
Free me from any sense of isolation
that I may feel and know your presence and
the embrace of your mercy.*

Reflect

In a conversation that became a book in 2016, *The Name of God is Mercy*, Pope Francis told journalist, Andrea Torielli, that he thought of the Church as *a field hospital, where treatment is given to those most wounded*. He pointed out that Jesus declared himself as having come, *not for the healthy who do not need the doctor, but for the sick*. [Mark 2:17]

Mercy is a key ingredient for the Christian faith. It is not about letting people off the wrong they have done or the harm they have caused; it is about understanding the guilt they feel, the trap they have got themselves

into, the choices they shouldn't have made, and about providing the opportunity to heal. It is also about knowing my own mistakes, deliberate or otherwise, and the overwhelming feeling that there's no way out.

A word that has sprung into life with the coronavirus crisis is KINDNESS. *Be kind* is the first piece of advice health officials give. Look out for one another. Kindness is closely related to mercy, as it is to love.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. [1Cor.13:4-8]

Using this well know quote from St Paul, make a personal examination of conscience. The following quotes, psalm and prayers may help bring you peace.

The more conscious we are of our wretchedness and our sins, the more we experience the love and infinite mercy of God among us, and the more capable we are of looking upon the many "wounded" we meet along the way with acceptance and mercy. So we must avoid the attitude of someone who judges and condemns from the lofty heights of their own certainty...

[The Name of God... p.67]

Psalm 51. Verses 1-2; 10-12; 15

Read 

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out all my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

*Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.*

Pray

Prayers

Create a clean heart in me, God. Dust off the unmindful activity that constantly collects there. De-clutter my heart from harsh judgements and negativity. Wash away my resistance to working through difficult relationships. Rinse off my un-loving so the beauty of my generous and kind heart can shine forth. Remove whatever keeps me from following in your compassionate footsteps.

[Joyce Rupp, Out of the Ordinary, 2000, p.116]

Holy and merciful God: Your loving kindness breaks the hardness of my pride and heals my reluctance to see the good in others or even to accept their sorrow. I open myself to your mercy that, knowing your forgiveness, I might open my heart to share your life-giving gift of pardon and peace.

God, ever patient, ever hopeful, abounding in kindness:

You stand at the door and knock, prepared to keep knocking. You watch the road for any sign of your returning child. You pray through the night that those you love might be safe in the storm. Help me feel your longing, and the warmth of your love and open myself to your welcome.

"At the foot of the Cross, Mary, together with John, the disciple of love, witnessed the words of forgiveness spoken by Jesus. This supreme expression of mercy towards those who crucified him show us the point to which the mercy of God can reach. Mary attests that the mercy of the Son of God knows no bounds and extends to everyone, without exception. Let us address her in the words of the *Salve Regina*, a prayer ever ancient and ever new, so that she may never tire of turning her merciful eyes upon us, and make us worthy to contemplate the face of mercy, her Son, Jesus."

[The Name of God... p147-8]

Hail Holy Queen

*Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
Hail our life, our sweetness and our hope.
To you we cry, poor banished children of Eve.
To you we send up our sighs,
Mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.
Turn then, Most Gracious Advocate,
your eyes of mercy towards us
and after this, our exile,
show us the blessed fruit of your womb.
Jesus.*

*O Clement, O Loving, O Sweet Virgin Mary.
Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God
Make us worthy of the promises of Christ.*

Our "In Reverse" theme points to how different things have become in society even in the space of a few months. Self-isolation, shut-down and avoiding contact with others are not community habits. The quieter streets, job losses and economic hardship for all levels of society push us further back from where

we were and from what we were used to and expected. Panic buying for fear of supply shortage has brought out the worst in some, illustrating just how quickly behaviour patterns can change.

Metanoia, the word that is used in the call of Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry, normally translates as *Repent*. But the challenge in being repentant is to do more than say “sorry”. It means reversing and turning around and re-orienting ourselves to the direction we’re meant to be travelling

We are quite literally out of our “comfort zone” in the face of COVID-19. We have a new appreciation of what it means to be “in need”, “vulnerable”, “helpless”. We can use this unexpected and unprecedented opportunity to focus the gift of faith in the context of daily life, and to make Mercy a priority.

The Name of God is mercy – Jesus is the Face of God.



DAY#7

JOY TO THE WORLD

Setting

Decorate your prayer space with images and colours to create a joyful atmosphere. Perhaps drape a white cloth over the crucifix to show the link between suffering and joy.

Pray

Prayer in praise of a new day:

*Praise and glory to you, Christ Jesus.
Your coming among us was
news of great joy for all the world
and your continuing presence
is a constant source of joy even in difficult times.
Though containing the Virus means
limiting personal contacts and choices,
I give praise for this new day.
Help all of us to see you present
in this challenging moment.
Keep our hearts joyful.*

Reflect

Two spiritual giants and Nobel Prize Laureates, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu spent a week together, in 2015, at the Dalai Lama's home in Dharamsala, India. They had arranged the visit to coincide with the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday and to spend the time discussing and exploring the question: *how do we find joy in the face of life's inevitable suffering?*

The resulting book, *The Book of Joy* was published a year later. For this prayer day, I am offering some of the insights and comments offered by these Buddhist and Christian ambassadors. Their theme is so appropriate for this time of uncertainty as the Corona virus threatens untold suffering across all nations. A joyful heart has no space for negativity, no room for despair.

Archbishop Tutu: “We don’t really get close to others if our relationship is made up of unending hunky-dory-ness. It is the hard time, the painful times, the sadness and the grief that knit us more closely together.”

Read: Acts of the Apostles, chapter 1. It was only after the death and resurrection of Jesus that his disciples came together as a united group. Contrast their behaviour and outlook in “Acts” with their attitude in Matthew 20:17-24, and elsewhere. Prestige, power held their focus, certainly not joy.

Read 

Dalai Lama: “Our whole society has a materialistic culture. In the materialistic way of life, there is no concept of friendship, no concept of love, just work, twenty-four hours a day, like a machine. So in modern society we eventually also become part of that large moving machine.”

Will the experience of lockdown cause us to see the community in a new light? Can being in a situation where you are not allowed to be with people help you to be more open to contact, more ready to notice and relate to others when the lockdown is over? You can be joyful when you are alone, but not when you are lonely. Loneliness wipes out joy. There are people all around us, in every town and place; but too many of them are lonely.

Archbishop Tutu: “If you are filled with negative judgement and anger, then you will feel separate from other people. You will feel lonely. But if you have an open heart and are filled with trust and friendship, even if you are physically alone, even living a hermit’s life, you will never feel lonely.”

Dalai Lama: “The only thing that will bring happiness is affection and warmheartedness. This really brings inner strength and self-confidence, reduces fear, develops trust and trust brings friendship. We are social animals and cooperation is necessary for our survival, but cooperation is entirely based on trust... If you feel fear and distrust, then other people will distance themselves. They will also feel cautious, suspicious and distrustful. Then comes the feeling of loneliness.”

Both have experienced great personal suffering and persecution. They agree that joy is reached through suffering and adversity.

Dalai Lama: “You see, if there are no difficulties and you are always relaxed, then you complain more... We can experience more joy in the face of great adversity than when life is seemingly easy and uneventful.”

The joy of giving

- Research indicates that people find greater joy in giving to others than in buying something for themselves. Reflect on your own experience of giving a present, paying for someone’s meal, giving service...
- Archbishop Tutu offers a powerful example from the Dead Sea: “It receives beautiful water from the rivers, and the water goes dank. I mean, it just goes bad. And that’s why it is the Dead Sea. It receives and does not give.” Consider: Joy comes as a gift through giving.

- When we learn not to take ourselves too seriously and can joke about ourselves, humour becomes part of our makeup. Joy is very comfortable with humour. Don't miss the light-hearted moments in this lockdown time. Make some of your own. Look for them in the scriptures.

This is an ideal time to read what you may have wanted to read but "never had the time"! For instance, Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium, The Joy of the Gospel, 2013*. It can be found on GOOGLE. Just to read a section of it will be uplifting and a way of updating your understanding of faith. The Pope concludes his writing with a prayer to Mary for guidance and encouragement. Such prayer has special relevance for our present situation.

Prayer:

Pray 

*Mary, Virgin and Mother,
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,
welcomed the Word of Life
in the depth of your humble faith:
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,
help us to say our own "Yes" to the urgent call,
as pressing as ever,
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.*

*Filled with Christ's presence,
you brought joy to John the Baptist,
making him exult in the womb of his mother.
Brimming over with joy,
you sang of the great things done by God.
Standing at the foot of the cross with unyielding faith,
you received the joyful comfort of the resurrection,
and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit
so that the evangelising Church might be born.*

*Obtain for us now a new ardour born of the resurrection,
that we may bring to all the Gospel of life which
triumphs over death.*

*Give us a holy courage to seek new paths that the gift
of unfading beauty may reach every man and woman.*

*Virgin of listening and contemplation, Mother of love,
Bride of the eternal wedding feast, pray for the Church,
whose pure icon you are, that she may never be closed
in on herself or lose her passion for establishing
God's kingdom.*

*Star of the new evangelisation,
help us to bear radiant witness
to communion, service, ardent and generous faith,
justice and love of the poor, that the joy of the Gospel
may reach to the end of the earth
illuminating even the fringes of our world.
Mother of the living Gospel,
wellspring of happiness for little ones, pray for us.
Amen. Alleluia.*



DAY #8

A NEW NORMAL

Pray

Prayer in praise of this day:

Jesus, Saviour and Brother

*You came to call us to life and to open our eyes
that we might see anew the gifts that surround us
and bind us together as parts of one body.*

Another day of isolation and separation dawns.

*May we accept it as yet a further gift to
strengthen our resolve to put aside differences,
to remove the barriers of greed and prejudice,
to value our togetherness*

*and to live life as
one people.*

Reflect

The prayer form today is woven round the readings for the Fifth Sunday of Lent. Regardless of which day you make this prayer, the theme is apt for this critical time. The national LOCKDOWN makes us look at life from the point of view of isolation, being alone, without social contact. Some recognise this extreme way of living as an enlarged image of how we have been living for several decades: as though other people weren't important enough to hold my attention; that life was about me and my success! So many of us have been living in an invisible bubble; isolated without knowing or acknowledging the fact. Hardly normal, as we're now

finding out. The LOCKDOWN is an opportunity to create a new normal.

Anne Powell of the Cenacle Sisters provides this meditation and challenge:

Being the Body of Christ in this time of Corona Virus

While the Eucharist is one of the most significant places to encounter Christ, it is not the only one. We also receive nourishment from the Word of God. In this time of lockdown when we aren't able to gather together for Eucharist, we have the opportunity to encounter Christ in the Word. We can transform the world through the collective energy of our love.

Sunday readings - Fifth Sunday of Lent [A]

Read 

1 Ezekiel 37:12-14

Romans 8:8-11

John 11:1-45

Lazarus was dead. Yet through an encounter with Jesus comes an experience of hope when all seems impossible.

Now that Aotearoa NZ is in Level 4 Lockdown, we might gradually begin to see things we want to lock up - conflicts, pollution, greedy consumerism, the hectic pace of life...

During this time, we can dream of new ways of being and doing.

• **Listen** as Martha speaks her heartfelt sorrow at the death of her brother, Lazarus; but it's tinged with regret or blame: *"Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died."*

• What losses related to the COVID-19 Lockdown are you aware of now?

Even when Jesus tells Martha, "*I am the one who raises the dead to life!*" she finds it hard to believe he means now, with her dead brother.

Perhaps you doubt that out of this time of restrictions and loss new realities can emerge.

Jesus stands before the tomb weeping, vulnerable. He places no barriers to his feelings about this loss. What's it like for you to be with him there?

- Imagine that you are standing in front of the "tomb" of your life as it is now with all its restrictions, isolation, fears, dreams and hopes.
- Tell Jesus your feelings, your vulnerability, your desires.
- Gradually, you hear Jesus call your name. This is Jesus who stirs up hope within you, hope during this impossible time. You hear him speak the words to you: "*Be freed!*"
- Allow Jesus to gift you in some way- a gaze, a touch, a symbol, a word, a blessing.
- As you receive this gift, let hope and love fill you. Open yourself to this new time in your life.

Breathe in the gifts you've received.

Notice your breathing. Become aware of where you are and give thanks for the gift of this time of prayer.

Anne Powell
Cenacle Sisters

Jesus Mafa art - Raising of Lazarus



What image of a New Normal will you take from this prayer?

What part might you play in helping the image become real?



DAY #9

THE UNEXPECTED

Setting

Create a party atmosphere with a few decorations. Wrap up some “gifts” or “presents”. Recall the surprise of opening gifts, of meeting the unexpected.

Pray

Prayer to begin:

*So much in life is unexpected and
I suspect, dear God, that you planned it so.
You are, after all, a God of surprises,
revealing yourself in countless ways,
in colours and shapes, in light and shade,
in people and places and in life's situations.
Even in this troubled time that no one could foresee,
I know you will guide us along a new path,
to a new and fuller way of living.
Ready me during this unexpected time to
love better, serve better, live better.*

Reflect

William Shakespeare, in *Cymbeline*, wrote,

Fortune brings in some boats that are not steered.

Covid-19 arrived on our shores unannounced and uninvited and is certainly not regarded as a guest. Given that the virus had already infected several countries we might have expected it to make its way to us, but we did not expect to have the nation so quickly

shut down with virtually everyone told to stay at home!
We did not expect the situation to become so serious.

The unexpected always catches us by surprise.
Not a nice feeling because we like to know what's going on, what's in the pipeline. We like to be in control.

Almost everything about Jesus ran contrary to what was expected:

Read 

- Mary and Joseph were not expecting to hear prophetic words about Jesus when they presented him in the temple – Luke 1:28-33
- Mary and Joseph expected him to be in the group of travellers returning from Jerusalem – Luke 2:41-51
- The disciples woke Jesus and wanted his help as they struggled with the storm at sea; they did not expect Jesus to calm the storm – Luke 8:22-25
- The disciples expected Jesus would send the crowd away; they did not expect to be told, *You give them something to eat!* – Luke 9:12-17
- Martha and Mary were disappointed Jesus did not come when he got - their message that their brother, Lazarus, *the one you love, is ill*. They did not expect Jesus would bring him back to life – John, chapter 11.
- Peter did not expect Jesus to take the road to Jerusalem – Matt. 16:21-3

Look for more examples in the Gospel, of “Jesus, the unexpected”. Select one for a time of meditation; then ask: *What are my expectations of Jesus?*

- What do I expect of Jesus? Are there examples in your own life when Jesus “turned the table” on the way you expected something to go and showed you a new way?

- What does Jesus expect of me? At this moment? In this time of uncertainty for our whole society?
- What might Jesus expect of our parish, of the whole Church and, indeed, of our world, in the aftermath of this pandemic?
- How much am I prepared to change? What am I prepared to give?

Read

Acts of the Apostles 9:1-19; Galatians 1:11-24

Ananias did not expect to be told to help the feared persecutor, Paul of Tarsus and Paul's conversion was the most unexpected gift for the first Christian communities. How could they expect someone who had a warrant to arrest and kill the followers of Jesus, and who had earlier watched and approved the stoning of the deacon, Stephen [Acts 7:55-8:1], to be accepted as a friend?

These first Christians had to overcome quite justifiable fear, suspicion, even perhaps hatred, in order to embrace Paul. How different our story would have been had they not done so! Consider these scripture passages and return to them during the day.

- Are there groups or individuals in your own life that you avoid or find difficult in any way?
- Do you ever find yourself saying or thinking, *How could I be expected to forgive such a person/insult/rejection/abuse....?*
- How prepared are you to expect the unexpected?

Music for reflection

Are you familiar with Chris Skinner's music? If you have any of his albums there will be song(s) relating to a change of heart, forgiveness, generosity, trust... His website is **chrisskinner.org.nz** and you will find great material for prayer, meditation and relaxation. Google may also help you out to locate this and other music. Now is the time to listen to some music before proceeding.

TRUST

Trust

Trust in me, trust the image, trust your tears

Trust

Trust in me, the gift of silence calm your fears

Be still and know, I speak to your heart

Be still and know, I am here.

Chris Skinner

Unexpected change

The tourist, hospitality and travel industries – illustrated graphically in the virtual collapse of international airlines – are among the most at-risk groups struggling to avoid loss of livelihoods in the face of this worldwide health crisis. Many fear they may never be able to reopen for business.

This more than suggests that vast numbers of people have been living in the future, planning ahead, making advanced bookings, expecting nothing to get in the way of what they intend doing, where they intend going. There are, of course, practical reasons for such preparation, but maybe we have been taking too much for granted, convinced we are the ones in control!

In the concluding part of this prayer time, pray for those:

- whose livelihoods are threatened by the pandemic
- who have never had to worry about filling time
- who have planned holidays or business trips in the next few months
- who have taken life and tomorrow for granted
- who find change difficult
- who like to be sure and to be in control

This unexpected time

*This unexpected time
when silence comes to stay
not only in the night but all through the day
footsteps can't be heard
for there are no feet about
no engine noise to irritate
or annoying human shout
the lockdown shuts away all else
but the silence from the sounds we make
from dawn to dusk without a break
then on into the night
yet in this silence now we hear
sounds of nature crystal clear
bird song gifting endless celebration
wind and trees in loving conversation
let ears refresh with rediscovered sound
and welcome it within our own surround
and be less concerned with yours and mine
when we exit this most unexpected time*



DAY #10

SPIRIT FRUITS

Setting

Write each of the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, kindness, patience, goodness, gentleness, trustfulness, self-control) on separate cards. Scatter them among several lit candles in your prayer space.

Pray

Prayer of praise:

Wonder-Counsellor,

Mighty-God,

*You fill each day with your
gift of light, freeing those living
in a land of deep shadow.*

You make their gladness greater

You make their joy increase.

I praise and thank you for your great goodness.

[see Isaiah 9:1-7]

Reflect

This prayer reflection centres on the nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit. Like all fruit, they are food for health and well-being, to be savoured and enjoyed. Take time to identify and enjoy the taste of each. Some will quickly suit your palate; others will take more time to appreciate. You are invited to take them in any order. You could perhaps spread this prayer throughout the day, sampling and exploring one fruit at a time. Over-eating is not a problem with these fruits; you can never have enough as most of them take a lifetime to mature.

Cardinal John Dew referred to these “Fruits” in his recent newsletter. He measures his progress in prayerfulness and Christian charity, he tells us, by the way he notices the presence of the Fruits of the Holy Spirit in his life. In this time of “closeness” with ourselves, we can each try the same kind of measuring.

Scripture: Galatians 5:13-25

Read 

Read the fruits of the Spirit in the context of Paul’s instruction to the Church in Galatia – newly converted to the way of Jesus. He makes clear the consequences of ignoring or adhering to the “single command” to *Love your neighbour as yourself*.

For this new community of believers, following Jesus meant radical changes to a way of life that was the product of many generations. It was not an easy process. We are experiencing changes in our way of living as we battle Covid-19. Perhaps we are already sensing further and more permanent change to the way we relate to one another when the crisis passes. Meditate on this passage with the present pandemic in mind. Journal your findings.

The Fruits of the Holy Spirit

Consider these nine special “Fruits”. Like all fruit they start as seeds and contain seeds to ensure their lineage continues. Growth is not overnight, nor assured. In what ways are these fruits already seen in your life? How might they develop and be put at the service of those living through and coping with the effects of the present pandemic?

Love

You know you’re in love when you can’t fall asleep because reality is finally better than your dreams.

[Dr Seuss]

Joy

If the sight of the blue skies fills you with joy,
if the simple things of nature have a message that
you understand, rejoice, for your soul is alive.
[Eleonora Duse]

Peace

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called
the children of God. [Matthew 5:9]

Patience

Patience is the calm acceptance that things can
happen in a different order than the one you have
in your mind. [David G. Allen]

Kindness

Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear
and the blind can see. [Mark Twain]

Goodness

Every act of goodness is born of our desire to be
happy. [Udai Yadla]

Gentleness

There is nothing so strong as gentleness; and nothing
so gentle as real strength. [St Francis de Sales]

Trustfulness

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still,
and trust in me. [John:14-1]

Self-control

You have power over your mind – not outside events.
Realise this and you will find strength.
[Marcus Aurelius, Meditations]

A New Day

*With eyes acquainted with the dark
may the first light of morning awaken within you
a beautiful quest
one that unlocks doors
bolted by yesterday's grief
and the harsh and unforgiving words
you have spoken to yourself.*

*May the sun spill light
into the cracks where the residue of darkness hides
inviting you to walk without fear of what lies within.
On these virgin sands of time coming to you as pure gift
May you be embraced by a concept of grace
That sets you free to begin again.*

*Untie the string around your finger
as you remember forgotten dreams,
like a song that has been waiting to be sung
listen for the long note played by the most gentle touch
of the bow.
May it resonate with the one true note within that is you
and dance your dream into this day.*

[Andrew Norton – through Sylvia Purdie (Christchurch)]

Aotearoa Litany

Green of fern	refresh us
Feathers of kereru	warm us
Rocks of Moeraki	encircle us
Waters of Taupo	bathe us
Dive of gannet	focus us
Arc of rainbow	protect us
Stars of Southern Cross	guide us

[Anne Powell]

**Gather the fruits of this day as evening falls and
celebrate the goodness of life.**

DAY#11

SPACE BUBBLE

Setting

Create a small enclosure, placing the cross in the centre. Let this represent your “bubble”, the space you inhabit during this lockdown period.

Pray

Prayer of Praise:

*My heart is ready, God
to sing and play and thank you.
Your steadfast love is higher than the heavens
and your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.
Let your glory be over the earth
to bring rescue to those you love.
Help us in this hour of crisis
for we can do nothing without you.
[verses from Psalm 108]*

Reflect

Astronauts live socially isolated. Orbiting the earth, they are locked in space, far away from loved ones and their usual activities. At this time, New Zealand and many other countries are in a lockdown situation, with people told to stay in their homes. Treating home as a bubble, illustrates the seriousness of the Covid-19 pandemic. Keeping yourself isolated lessens the chance of contracting or passing on the disease. The message is clear: stay bubbled-up in this locked-down world of ours!

Around the world people are uniting in prayer. Spiritual energy is being harnessed and the desire to engage in praying for those suffering from the virus, for medical professionals and caregivers, and for scientists seeking a cure, is bonding people like never before. While physical contact is avoided, linking spiritually is a strong and valid means of staying united, in touch and caring for one another.

This prayer theme offers a meditation on *space*, and the positives that can be learned from being apart.

A gravestone that got me thinking held a brief inscription a woman had chosen. It read, **THANKS FOR THE SPACE**. What was it saying? Thanks for the space, here, this grave? Thanks for the space that has been my life? Thanks for the space I filled in life – and for the space around me in which others lived?

THANKS FOR THE SPACE also acknowledges space as a gift. We do not create our own space. And thanks for all the space around me – the outer space that protects and shelters and holds our world in place.

Consider your own SPACE, and the space referred to in these days as your BUBBLE. In this context, space restricts you. There are boundaries you didn't have before. Yet, this isolation is now your protection. Can you give thanks for this space?

THANKS FOR THE SPACE

Thank you, loving God, for your gift of space.

*

Thank you for the space that gives me room to move and to be; to get to know myself as distinct from others; to get to be comfortable with myself.

*

Thank you for the space that surrounds me; that tells me of other spaces; that honours my uniqueness while showing me I'm not alone in space.

*

Thank you for the space that both separates and unites; is both personal and public; delights in my presence yet wants me to know mine is not the only space.

*

Thank you for the space that enters my space; that draws me to others, to celebrate their space; to appreciate our togetherness; to understand that my space cannot be lived in isolation.

*

Thank you for the space between each person that gives meaning to our own space, as links in a necklace highlight the beauty of each pearl.

*

Thank you for the different kind of space being experienced today. The space being called our BUBBLE, keeping us safe from harmful infection and from passing infection to others. Though strange and unnatural, these separate spaces are for the good of all. – and for this we give you thanks.

*

Thank you for the space that is my bubble. It will help me appreciate other spaces when we are once again able to mix and mingle. May I value every space as a precious gift to be respected and highly valued, honoured and protected, and may I be always grateful.

*

Thank you for the space that opens out to reveal the wonder of your eternal space and the glory of creation.

*

Thank you, loving God, for your gift of space.

*

Scripture: Matthew 15:21-28

Read

Follow this story closely and consider its relation to "space":

- Jesus' personal space being "invaded"
- The disciples uncomfortable at the intrusion into their "space"
- The "space" of ministry being challenged
- Growing awareness of the need to move into new and uncomfortable "space"
- The way Jesus gifts "space" to the woman

How does this story speak to you about your awareness of "space" during this pandemic crisis?

Reflection on INNER SPACE

Reflect

Your *inner space* is your most private room, the space that accompanies you through all your *outer space*. Jesus speak about your *inner room* when he reminds us that the most important prayer is the one we pray there – not on the street corner or in church (Matt.6:6). When we open our hearts to anyone we invite them into our most personal space. In this space there can be no pretence, no avoiding or side-tracking issues.

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt within the heart. [Helen Keller]

Prayer of St Patrick

May the strength of God pilot us.

May the power of God preserve us.

May the wisdom of God instruct us.

May the hand of God protect us.

May the way of God direct us.

May the shield of God defend us.

May the host of God guard us.

May Christ be with us, above us, in us and before us.

May your salvation, O Lord, be always ours, today and for evermore. Amen.

DAY #12

HOLY WEEK - PART 1

Setting

Highlight the cross, together with some stones and greenery.

Pray

Prayer in awe of this sacred time:

*In this treasured week, O God,
when we witness the extent of your love for us
I close my eyes in humble thanksgiving.
The cries of Jesus, isolated and fearing he has
been abandoned, pierces my ears and my heart.
I offer my own isolation in this pandemic moment
for all in pain and without support,
for those alone and lonely,
for those lost and afraid.
I praise your love, mysterious and awesome.*

Reflect

There is no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends – see John 15:13

This description of love came just after Jesus had given his “new commandment” to *love one another as I have loved you*. [Jn 15:12] Within a few hours of speaking, Jesus would live that commandment to the full. To truly follow Jesus, I have to be prepared to give of myself, just as he did, for the good of others. During this uncertain time, living with the threat of Covid-19, this is exactly what everyone is being asked to do: to put the good of others ahead of my own.

Holy Week is ideal for reflecting on the meaning and practice of the “new commandment” in our personal lives. While this present health crisis provides specific opportunities, it is important to map out some strategy for the time when things return to normal. The following scripture passages should help the planning. Be still in their company and let them speak of possible actions and attitudes.

Isaiah 42:1-7

He does not break the crushed reed – a person of strong faith and deep compassion, concerned for justice and with a sense of being missioned to help those weakened by sickness or adversity, the troubled in mind or body.

Apocalypse 1:5-8

I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord – mention the apocalypse and people usually think you’re referring to the end of the world, as indeed have some interpreted Covid-19. But God is the beginning (Alpha) and the end (Omega) – the A & the Z - of all things and within those brackets there is nothing to fear; we have only to place ourselves in the service of the One who is, who was and is still to come.

John 4:16-21

This text is being fulfilled today – Jesus identified his mission as one of healing, of setting things right, and making people feel good about themselves so that they could do good for others. Is there a similar “healing ministry” for you in this time of social isolation. Calling people, especially those who are on their own or in small/cramped living conditions, and family members? Joining a prayer chain? Teaming up with someone or several others for an on-line game?

The needs people have are many and varied;
healing takes many forms.

Read

PSALM 70

*In you, O Lord, I take refuge
let me never be put to shame.
In your justice rescue me, free me;
pay heed to me and save me.*

*Be a rock where I can take refuge,
a mighty stronghold to save me;
for you are my rock, my stronghold.*

*It is you, Lord, who are my hope,
my trust, O Lord, since my youth.
On you have I leaned from my birth,
from my mother's womb you have been my help.*

*My lips will tell of your justice
and day by day of your help
(though I can never tell it all).
O God, you have taught me from my youth
and I proclaim your wonders still.*

Pray

Time now to pray for others:

*For those caught in the grip of loss
For those frozen with fear
For those anchored in self
For those struggling to cope
For those just holding on
For those who feel they have nothing to live for
For those with nothing to die for*

***Be merciful to me, O God... In the shadow of your wings
I find protection until the raging storms are over.***

[Psalm 57:1]



DAY#13

HOLY WEEK - PART 2

Setting

Darker colours - purple, scarlet... Pieces of greenery.
A lit candle near the cross.

Pray

Opening Prayer:

*I know the plans I have in mind for you –
plans for peace, not disaster, reserving
a future full of hope for you. [Jer.29:11]*

*Loving God, unfold your plans for us as we
struggle through this time of unknowing.
Strengthen our hope through our doubts and our fears.
As we follow the path of Jesus with his cross of isolation
may we never lose sight of the empty tomb
beyond Calvary
and the peace and joy that shines from it.
Let this be our consolation, bringing trust and calm.*

*O God, who willed your Son to
submit for our sake
to the yoke of the Cross,
so that you might drive from us
the power of the enemy,
grant us, your servants, to attain
the grace of the resurrection.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.
[Prayer of Holy Week Mass]*

Scripture – Paul to the Philippians 2:6-11

His state was divine, yet Christ Jesus did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as people are, and being as all people are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross.

But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names, so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus, and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Recall the words of Micah about what Gods wants of us – to live justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God. [Micah 6:8]

Scripture - John 13:1-15

Read this passage twice, slowly, thoughtfully, in the style of Lectio Divina pattern. Spend time holding the words or phrases that leap out to you. What personal message do they have for you? What action or attitude does this passage suggest that might help you in this time of isolation and beyond it?

John's gospel narrative does not relate the "institution of the Eucharist" at the Last Supper. In its place, but with the same authority and impact, we find the "Washing of feet". The *Do this in memory of me* command of Jesus to the disciples, after sharing the bread and wine, is echoed in his admonition after washing their feet: *If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet.* It is this imitation of Jesus that today's theme calls you to dwell on as the lockdown period deepens and new challenges arise.

Washing

Dealing with the threat of Covid-19 requires a lot of washing, especially hand washing. The washing of feet symbolised **service** (at the time of Jesus it was the task of a slave or house servant). It also symbolised **welcome**. The roads were dusty and footwear either non-existent or very primitive. And walking, the most common way of getting around, was very tiring. To have your feet washed on arrival would be very refreshing and a great welcome gesture.

Because hands touch every part of the body, particularly the face, and also touch other bodies, places and objects, they can be carriers of disease. Because we are at present medically defenceless against Covid-19, the frequent washing of hands is a weapon we can't afford to ignore.

Pilate also washed his hands [Matthew 27:24], not to escape a virus, but to signify he was not taking responsibility for the death of Jesus. We use the term today when we want to escape responsibility or disapprove of something - *I'm washing my hands of this!* we say.

Meditate quietly on Pilate's action and your own "hand washing".

- Are you always as eager to avoid being a carrier of disease as you are at this time of national crisis?
- What about the diseases of ill-temper, gossip, pride, misjudgement, prejudice... what sort of "hand washing" might help avoid these?
- When might have you "hand-washed" your way out of some responsibility that really was yours to own? Any resolve for the future?

The Rosary – The Mysteries of Light

Pope John Paul II named and inserted the Mysteries of Light into the Rosary in order to complete the life-cycle of Jesus. They provide contemplation on the public life of Jesus, from his baptism by John to the Last Supper.

The 5th Mystery of Light: The Institution of the Eucharist

It is appropriate to conclude this time of prayer with this particular decade which draws us to contemplate the tremendous love of Jesus for us, displayed just hours before his agony in the garden and arrest.

The Eucharist is gifted in the midst of uncertainty.

The disciples were suspicious of one another as Jesus told them of a betrayer among them. They were overwhelmed and confused as they tried to absorb the lesson of the Jesus washing their feet. What he was sharing with them and telling them, including the instruction to *Do this in memory of me* would not have made sense till much later.

The Eucharist is the “light” of Christians, the meeting point of the faithful in communion with God and with one another. In contemplating this Mystery over a decade of prayer, the focus could be on **thanksgiving** – for the gift of Jesus, the gift of faith, of life, of each other – thanksgiving for everything and everyone that is part of creation and to which every individual is connected.

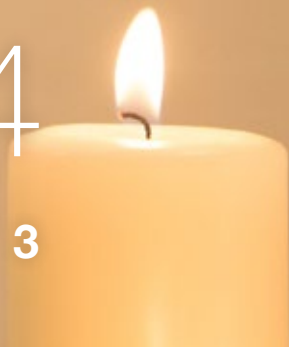
In this time of social isolation, itself a time a uncertainty, with churches closed and public Masses not being celebrated, many feel the lack of nourishment which the Eucharist brings, and thanksgiving may not come easily. But it can, if you see this time as one of appreciating the Eucharist anew, and preparing yourself for its return with hearts more grateful than ever.

 *Pray*

Pray the decade of the Rosary in thanksgiving for this time apart, gifting you with time to know what you're missing and to love all more dearly. This will also help you see other ways in which Jesus is showing his presence and his love. Ponder his promise, ***I will be with you always.***

DAY #14

HOLY WEEK - PART 3



Setting

The Cross, with two lit candles.

Pray

Prayer at the foot of the Cross:

*There's a barrier between us, dear Jesus.
Everyone's being kept at a distance
I cannot draw near to touch,
to hold, or to comfort.
I hear you forgive those who nail and spear you
I sense your peace and I wonder at your
courage and the strength of your love.
A virus has brought suffering to our world
and we seek someone to blame.
But standing here, our suffering seems
such a small wound.
Help us walk the path of forgiveness that
we might return to one another
healed and at peace.*

This is the final of three reflections centred on Holy Week. Their themes are not confined to this particular week so can be used at any time. However, they may have special relevance for you in this lockdown phase of our struggle with Covid-19.

Scripture Reading – Isaiah 52:13-53:12

This beautiful, powerful and haunting reading from the Good Friday liturgy is proposed for today's meditation. It is a long reading [Isaiah 52:13-53:12] containing many images relating not only to the Passion of Jesus but also to the present and any difficult situation:

- When you have to watch someone suffering (a terminal illness) and are powerless to help
- When you feel you are *witnessing something never heard before* (as in this pandemic) and cannot tell where it will lead
- When you sense someone being misjudged or deliberately misunderstood
- When you are aware of any kind of prejudice
- When you see heroism or strong, courageous leadership
- When you come across self-sacrificing service

Pray Psalm 30

- For yourself, your loved ones and for the world's population caught up in the Covid-19 crisis:

*In you, O Lord, I take refuge.
Let me never be put to shame.
In your justice set me free.
Into your hands I commend my spirit.
It is you who will redeem me, Lord.*

*In the face of all my foes I am a reproach,
an object of scorn to my neighbours
and of fear to my friends.*

*Those who see me in the street run far from me.
I am like someone dead, forgotten,
like a thing thrown away.*

*But as for me, I trust in you, Lord.
I say, "You are my God."
My life is in your hands, deliver me...*

*Let your face shine on your servant.
Save me in your love.
Be strong, let your heart take courage,
all who hope in the Lord.*

- Pray this response as a mantra through the day:

- Father, I put my life in your hands

Reflect

The Crucifixion

*...Standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother,
and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas,
and Mary Magdalene. [John 19:25]*

To relive the death of Jesus, to stand with Mary at the foot of his cross, to feel the terror in the hearts of the Apostles, to see the bewilderment of many in the crowd and the open hatred and anger of others – is to enter into a dialogue with the two-fold mystery of love and suffering. It is to ponder anew the parting gift of Jesus: *Peace I leave you, my peace I give you. Let not your hearts be troubled, nor afraid.* [John 14:27]

In a book-length poetic narrative, *A Woman Wrapped in Silence*, John W Lynch vividly captures the agony of Mary as she embraces the agony of her Son:

*Her palms curled inward, seeking for the nails
That might not be in them, and asking pain
She might not hold, and on her feet, a plea
For thrust iron ached and spread within
A wholeness that was yearning unrelieved.
Her arms cried out for bracketing along*

*The wood that strained Him. She would take this pain,
This brace, this agony, she'd be His heart.*

[John W Lynch, 1941, p.231]

The cry of Jesus, *Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?* [Matthew 27:46] would have been the moment the point of the sword predicted by Simeon reached Mary's heart; the final thrust that stabbed her trust and threatened her very soul. Compassion personified, as she identified completely with Jesus and felt her words to Gabriel echo with new and troubled meaning: *How can this be?*

But then, Luke recalls the final words of Jesus – the prayer of a Jewish child before sleep: *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.* [Luke 24:46]. What comfort those words would bring to a grief-stricken mother. Her trust, all but destroyed, renewed by the memory of a night-time prayer that always carried hope that a new day would dawn.

We accompany Mary whenever we stand by the cross of another; when we enter the agony of another person, support and gentle someone else's pain.

Consider: how might the Covid-19 crisis be crucifying someone, testing trust, making life resemble *a wavering flame or a broken reed?* Can you stand beneath their cross?

- If you are familiar with the tradition of the Rosary, pray the 5th Sorrowful Mystery, the Crucifixion, focussing on the part you might be able to play (however small) in relieving the suffering or anxiety of another at this time.