



Opening Prayer for Lent

Light a candle, observe a *minute of silence* then recite together:

**Loving and Merciful God,
You give us these Holy
Days of Lent for our
conversion, in order to
prepare for your
Resurrection.**

**Help us to recognize your
call each day so that we
may one day rise to new
life.**

**Keep us close to you and
each other as we share
faith, serve those in need
and worship you in Spirit
and in Truth.
-AMEN**

Seasons of Faith

April 9, 2017 ❖ Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion 📖 Isaiah 50:4-7, Philippians 2:6-11, Matthew 26:14-27:66

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"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" When I was a freshman in high school, my eldest sister and I went by bus on a shopping trip to Manila from Cavite, a small town in the Philippines. After an exciting day of shopping in the big city, my sister got on a Jeepney, a popular form of public transport in the Philippines. She thought that I was with her on the Jeepney and came all the way home without me. I did not know what happened to her and could not understand why she left me alone. I felt so abandoned, especially after I had to find my way home on my own getting rides from strangers. My eyes well up with tears when I think about how abandoned our Lord must have felt during his Passion. His disciples could not stay awake for even an hour during his agony in the garden. One of his disciples, Judas, betrayed him, and Peter, the disciple he called "rock," denied him. Jesus had to carry his heavy cross alone until Simon was pressed into service to help him because he was so weak. He had to endure the jeers and taunts of the crowd who viewed him as an outcast. Finally, he suffered crucifixion, the most humiliating and



painful form of execution devised by the Romans. Jesus knew what it was to be totally abandoned. In 2008 I felt terrible when we were forced to close our business and I could not honor a gift certificate that a customer had purchased. I was shocked, though, when she got so upset that she spat in my face. The humiliation that I felt in that incident and having to declare bankruptcy gave me a little glimpse into the humiliation that Christ must have felt. It was a turning point for me, however, as I understand now that God was pruning me for new spiritual growth. Through it all, I felt that God was by my side. He never abandoned me in my time of trouble.

How could we think that the God who humbled himself to take on flesh and knows what it is like to be abandoned, would ever abandon us? When I was lost in Manila, I felt so abandoned, but really the Lord was with me the whole time and in hindsight I am confident he was helping me to get home safely. No matter what trials I go through, I know that God will always be with me, just like Simon, helping me to bear my cross.

Questions for Sharing

1. **For Isaiah:** Isaiah tells us, "The Lord is my help, therefore I am not disgraced." Share a time when you received help from someone when you most needed it. How did you encounter Christ through them in this experience?
 2. **For Philippians:** In what ways do you "confess" that Jesus Christ is Lord to others? Share a specific response you have received when doing this.
 3. **For Matthew:** What images remain in your mind and heart when listening to the Passion Story? In the midst of all that Jesus endures, what signs of hope and love do you recognize?
- For the reflection:** During what moment of trial have you felt that God was closest to you? In what ways did you acknowledge His presence?

Walking the Talk

His Suffering Sets us Free

This Sunday we follow Jesus into His Passion. At this point, perhaps we feel like we have had enough suffering of our own. The darkness that descends around us becomes overwhelming and we cannot wait until the day we no longer suffer. These moments of darkness are when we need Jesus the most, and yet, when we look around, we see him nowhere. In the Gospel, Jesus has died in the midst of the darkness. The suffering has descended all around Him and He voices the abandonment of the soul from the cross. And now at last it is over, isn't it? This week:

- Reflect on ways you find strength through Christ's passion to bear any hardship. Take some time to write the words "The Lord God is my help and strength" on a small card. Carry this card with you. During the week when you experience moments of doubt, anger, confusion or sadness, take out this card and repeat the words a few times in silence. This will bring you peace and calmness and it might help you see more clearly how you need to respond to the situation. Do this as many times as needed.

Committed to New Life

Endless Desire to Show Mercy

"Mercy overcomes every wall, every barrier, and leads you to always seek the face of the man, of the person. And it is mercy which changes the heart and the life, which can regenerate a person and allow him or her to integrate into society in a new way. (9/10/14) ...therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads, and welcome the outcast". (Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 24). (12/12/14)

- Every day this week focus on how you can be open to other people's points of view or perspectives. Engage in conversation and practice listening before you speak.
- If you enter into a heated discussion and find yourself getting angry or upset, call a "time out". Take a walk, listen to music do whatever it takes to calm down.



Strength for the Journey

Seasonal Rituals To Celebrate Faith and Life

Welcoming with Honor

(For the prayer center include a crucifix draped with a light weight purple cloth, a bible and a candle. Prepare ahead small pieces of purple cloth for each participant. You may cut the strips of cloth from a larger piece of fabric and distribute one per participant. Also have an unlit tea light for each participant. Place them on the prayer center.)



Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week. On Palm Sunday some parishes cover or veil the crucifix with purple cloth. The veiling symbolizes the fact that Christ's Divinity was hidden at the time of His Passion and death.

All: God our Father, we gather today as we prepare to welcome Your Son as he enters the holy city of Jerusalem. We wave palms in praise and honor.

(Invite participants to come forward with their piece of purple cloth to cover or veil the cross on the prayer center and to take a tea light and light it with the larger candle. Ask them to stand in a circle as they read the prayer below.)

Reader 1: As we begin this Holy week and give Him welcome, may we bless Him as our king and give Him praise and glory, for He has shown us His everlasting love.

Reader 2: Grant us the strength to follow Him from death to the resurrection, from darkness to fullness of light.

All: It is the cross that is at the heart of our faith. The cross that leads us to the resurrection and to Jesus, who is the fullness of life. We ask this in His name. Amen.