



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

2024

# Lenten

**REFLECTION GUIDE**  
CARING FOR CREATION

“

*The universe as a whole, in all its manifold relationships, shows forth the inexhaustible riches of God.*

”

Pope Francis

# About this resources

In this Lenten Reflection Guide, we offer reflections, questions, prayers, and actions based on each week's Scripture readings in light of Catholic social teaching and Maryknoll mission experience. Use this guide individually or in small groups to reflect upon your life patterns, to pray more deeply, and to renew your spirit to face the realities of our world.

Quotes from Maryknoll Missioners are from the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns online Scripture Reflection series, and the Maryknoll Affiliates newsletter, Not So Far Afield, and the Maryknoll Magazine.

Cover image: Photo of Morocco sunset by Wolfgang Hasselmann via Pixabay.

Ash Wednesday: Photo of Maryknoll Affiliate Marilyn Kott in Brazil in 2017 courtesy of the author. Photo of the participants on the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers immersion trip to South Dakota courtesy of the Maryknoll Affiliates from Not So Far Afield, November-December 2023 issue.

First Sunday of Lent: Photo of a mother holding her child in the flooding in Banjir Jakarta in 2017 by Kompas/Hendra A Setyawan (HAS) of the UN World Meteorological Organization via Flickr. Photo of Sister Rebecca Nyaki, MM, courtesy of selfsame and enlarged in Photoshop.

Second Sunday of Lent: Photo of Kenyan youths from St. Martin of Tours planting trees in event described in the reflection courtesy of author and enlarged in Photoshop. Image of cover of Maryknoll Father Joe Heim's book, *What They Taught Us*, published by Orbis Books.

Third Sunday of Lent: Photo of Maryknoll Lay Missioner Peg Vamosy in the corn field, courtesy of the author and enlarged in Photoshop. Photo of Sarah Bueter holding the cross at the 2023 Sending Ceremony courtesy of the Maryknoll Lay Missioners.

Fourth Sunday of Lent: Photo of Father Joseph Thaler, MM, in a village in Nepal courtesy of the author. Photo of Father Eugene Toland, MM, courtesy of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers.

Fifth Sunday of Lent: Photo of Sister Susan Nchubiri, MM, at COP 28 in 2023 by Lisa Sullivan. Photo of Sister Arlene Trant, MM, courtesy of the Maryknoll Archives.

Palm Sunday: Photo of Maryknoll Lay Missioner Stephen Veryser's son Justin harvesting produce from the family farm courtesy of the author. Photo of Maryknoll Lay Missioner Kathleen Bond outside of Eibingen Abbey in Rhein, Germany courtesy of Kathleen Bond.

## About us

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) represents Maryknoll missioners, who are Catholic men and women serving in impoverished communities around the world. The MOGC provides analysis and advocacy on issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation that affect the countries and communities where Maryknoll missioners serve.

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# Ash Wednesday

*Behold, now is an acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation*  
2 CORINTHIANS 6:2

The authors of today's readings wake us from our mid-winter routines, calling us to return to God. Their call has an urgency—we must not delay. It has an assurance—if we return, we will be welcomed. And it has an unmistakable communality.

In the first reading, the prophet Joel begins softly, “Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart.” But then the prophet builds on this, making it clear that while we are to respond in our personal capacity, we must also proclaim to others in our community. “Blow the trumpet!” “Proclaim a fast!” “Gather the people!” The passage ends with the Lord taking pity on the people, plural.

The second reading reinforces the communal nature of reconciling with God. Saint Paul tells us that we are ambassadors of Christ, and that God is appealing through us. Further, he explains, Christ's sacrifice is so that we might become righteous.

As we begin Lent, often by quietly receiving ashes and solitarily praying for conversion, it can be easy to miss the communal aspect of this call. Much of what we do in life, and in prayer, must be done as individuals. When we are presented for baptism, and for last rites, it is our individual bodies that are anointed. When we receive the Eucharist, or go to Reconciliation, we receive the Sacraments personally.

But we can no more live alone in the spiritual world than we can in the physical world. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis teaches us that “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself.” LS, 66.

It's not possible, then, to turn our hearts to Him,

unless we also consider the rest of Creation. God's goodness isn't meant to stay wrapped up inside us, just for ourselves. We are to share it with others, to build it into our communities. In this way, we can help bring His justice and His peace to all the land.

In Matthew's Gospel, then, Jesus helps us to keep our motivations true. He cautions against the temptation to find ourselves at the center of our efforts, rather than God and His will. “Do not perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them” or to “win the praise of others.” While teaching us to be humble, he never forbids the blowing of the trumpet for God or gathering the people to Him. In fact, as we move through Lent, we will find Jesus carefully instructing His apostles on what they are to teach others. In Mark 16:16, we will hear the risen Christ send his disciples into the whole world, telling them to proclaim the Gospel to every creature.

So, as we begin this Lenten season, let us consider ways in which we can share God's goodness with others and with our world. And let us heed the urgency we hear of today's readings. As Saint Paul writes, “Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” ■ *- by Marilyn Kott*

## Questions for Reflection

What does it mean to be in community with God, our neighbor, and the earth itself?

What does it mean to “proclaim the Gospel to every creature”?

## Prayer

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We, who gather here today,  
give you thanks  
for opening our eyes, lives and hearts  
to people of lands beyond our horizons.

During our pilgrimages  
of encounter with people  
in lands no longer so far afield,  
some part of us has sprouted  
and seeks now to grow in the beauty of  
the garden of our hearts.

We pray that you teach us  
how to care for this seedling of solidarity  
of hope  
of healing.

We pray for good soil, rain and sunshine  
So that our seedling within  
may endure the test of time and seasons.

We who gather here today  
give you thanks  
for worldwide hearts.

*- Steve Hicken  
Maryknoll Lay Missioner*

## Readings

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Jl 2:12-18 | 2 Cor 5:20-6:2 | Mt 6:1-6, 16-18

## Fast

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Commit to buying local, in-season produce this Lent. Locally produced food grown during natural seasons is fresher and requires less energy to produce and transport.

## Action

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Air pollution in the U.S. still remains a public health issue. For 50 years, the Clean Air Act has driven dramatic improvements in air quality across the country. The law requires the federal government to place limits on harmful air pollution, including the greenhouse gases that cause climate change. Tell



Gary Cheeseman is an associate professor at the University of South Dakota and an indigenous elder. Gary invited [the Maryknoll immersion group] into his teepee and talked about the Lakota origin story. He discussed part of the Lakota creation story of rocks, plants, four-legged animals and two-legged animals and how each needs what came before to survive.

This experience changed how I think about the world in several ways. My understanding of the intimate relation of all creation expanded on the first day when Gary talked about rocks, plants, two-legged creatures and four-legged creatures, and how we all depend on what came before for survival. He called the rocks "our first ancestors." I now appreciate the natural world as my relations who love me and protect me.

*- Mary Ellen Waite  
Maryknoll Affiliate*

the EPA to close all loopholes that let the oil and gas industry get away with violating limits on toxic air pollution.

<https://mogc.info/BiologicalDiversity-AirPollution>



# First Sunday of Lent

*Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.*  
PSALM 25:6

**T**his Sunday we begin a six-week period leading up to the major feast of the Christian calendar – the feast of the Resurrection. It is a time of deep soul-searching, both individually and collectively. How have I, personally, lived up to my covenantal relationship with God? How have we, collectively, responded to the Creator God who has placed us in this world to “till the ground,” to care for the garden?

The Hebrew root underlying the English “to till,” has a wide range of meaning and can also be rendered “to serve.”

If one thinks of tilling the ground as a form of service, one is led to envision a relationship to the Earth involving service or caring for, as opposed to ruling over it. Then Lent becomes a time to evaluate our service of God’s Earth in the individual practices of our life and in our collective efforts in the realm of public policy.

In the past several decades we have become increasingly and painfully aware of how we have failed as a human race to serve and care for God’s earth. If we were not yet aware a decade ago, we have been forced to awareness in the last few years in the face of disasters of enormous proportions due to climate change.

We have witnessed extreme weather events including devastating floods, prolonged droughts, raging wildfires, violent storms, deadly heat waves.

We observe species extinction due to the effects of climate change and human activity on habitats.

We are painfully aware of our inadequate response

to the urgent need to replace fossil fuels with renewable energy sources.

Conscious of our serious failure to serve the Earth—God’s Earth—we hold hope in the covenant of today’s readings, “I will recall the covenant I have made between me and you and all living beings, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all mortal beings.”

As we turn to the gospel selection, we find Jesus in the wilderness, the same wilderness where the tribe of Israel entered into covenant with God, and where, like the Israelites, Jesus’ commitment was tested. “The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan.”

Unlike the Israelites in days past, Jesus passed the tests. From there, “Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: ‘This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’” ■

*- by Sr. Helen Graham, MM*

## Questions for Reflection

What’s one way perhaps you have failed to care for the earth, and are in need of reconciliation?

What’s one way you can serve the earth during Lent?

## Prayer

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### Pledge of Commitment To Protect and Heal God's Creation

We have come to renew our covenant with God and with one another in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

We have come to help protect God's creation.

We have come as followers of Jesus to commit ourselves anew to one another and to heal injustice and poverty.

We have come to stand together against all threats to life.

We have come to discover some new beauty every day in God's creation: the sunrise and sunset, birds, flowers and trees, rainbows in the sky, the stars, the many forms of life in the forest.

We have come to listen to the "music of the universe"- water flowing over rocks, the wind, trees bending in the wind, raindrops pattering the roof.

We will remember always that God speaks to us through the beauty of his creation, and we will try our best to answer God's call to reverence all that he has created.

*- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*

## Readings

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Gn 2:7-9; 3:1-7 | Rom 5:12-19 | Mt 4:1-11

## Fast

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Consider ways to phase out fossil fuels from your life. Natural gas, oil, and coal are fossil fuels used daily to provide energy. They are non-renewable energy sources and produce greenhouse gas emissions. Consider cleaner forms of transportation: Walk, ride your bike, use public transportation.

## Action

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As our communities face growing threats from climate change through rising temperatures, wildfires, smoke hazards, rising sea levels, and environmental injustice, the U.S. Congress is struggling to pass



The gift of wisdom enables us to surrender our wills and allow God's will to be done. Only by remaining faithful to God can we maintain both joy and tension in our lives.

Wisdom arises in us through difficult times. It begins with pain that we cannot rationalize or put behind us. With our disappointment we gain understanding.

This invitation shows us that we can change anything within ourselves, including rejection or disappointment, into insight. The process of transforming sadness into understanding looks like a sorting process at times. We go through everything first, then let go of the anger, blame, sense of injustice, and finally the anguish itself, until all that remains is a better appreciation for life and a stronger capacity to truly enjoy it.

- Sr. Rebecca Nyaki  
Maryknoll Sisters

a budget and fund the government. Urge your Members of Congress to fund the government, AND protect critical climate and environment funding. <https://mogc.info/IPL-climatefunding>



# Second Sunday of Lent

*To you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving, and I will call upon the name of the LORD*  
PSALM 116:17

**O**n the care of creation, Catholic Young People in Kenya are not just talking the talk; they are walking the walk. They are planting trees by the thousands. Collins Ngoma, a member of the Kenya Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community, reports:

“The youth from St. Martin of Tours Parish in Sultan Hamud in Ngong Diocese, Kenya had a seminar on the importance of caring for Mother Nature. Immediately after the session, we planted trees in the compound. I was amazed when the Pontifical Missionary Childhood Society, the facilitators, and our priest joined the initiative. Next, we went to two of Sultan Hamud Parish’s outstations—St. Antony, Emali, and St. Mary, Masimba—that received their fair share of tree seedlings.”

When it comes to climate change and global warming, the people living in Africa are very vulnerable. Kenya is on the equator. Countries in Eastern Africa are presently alternating between terrible drought and excessive flooding, resulting in mud slides.

Sacrifice is an important theme of the Lenten Season and of the scripture readings this Second Sunday in Lent. Jesus Christ makes the ultimate sacrifice of suffering and dying for humankind. In the Gospel, Jesus tells Peter, James, and John “not to relate what they had seen [in the Transfiguration] to anyone until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” In the first reading, Abraham shows his deep faith in God by being willing to sacrifice his beloved son Issac.

What sacrifices are we willing to make during this Lenten Season?

Sacrifice is essential if we are to truly care for creation and emphasize the importance of ecology and the environment. Are we willing to make sacrifices in our lifestyle and convert to simple living? Are we willing to reduce our carbon footprint by driving gasoline cars less often and flying by planes less frequently? Are we actively engaged in advocacy for moving away from fossil fuels?

World leaders have recently returned from COP28, the UN Climate Change Summit in Dubai in December, 2023. Pope Francis said to the participants: “Let us choose life. Let us choose the future. May we be attentive to the cry of the earth, may we hear the plea of the poor.”

As a takeaway, read *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter on humanity’s obligations to the environment issued in October, 2023 and act on it – both individually and in a communal way (in a synodal way).

And lastly, consider the proverb popular in Kenya: “You must treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It is loaned to you by your children.” Then teach a child the importance of the care of creation. ■

*- by Fr. Joseph Healey, MM*

## Questions for Reflection

What sacrifice do you feel called to make this Lenten season to better care for creation?

What is one way you can teach children the importance of care for creation?

## Prayer

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### Martyr's Prayer

Heavenly Father, praise be to you who have given life to all peoples through the passion of your Son and the power of your Holy Spirit. Through your miraculous providence, our ancestors themselves discovered the faith and in persecution and many trials courageously witnessed to the Truth and brightened this land with the light of salvation.

O Lord, we thank you for your great graces, and we pray that this land may be renewed with the flame of the Holy Spirit. We pray that following the example of our martyred saints, we may live deeply in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection and become one in faith and love. Joyfully proclaiming the Gospel, we beseech you that the grace of salvation may spring up and enlighten even the darkness of the north.

O Lord, help us offer our whole being to bring the Truth to this age, and with fraternal love and the evangelical spirit of poverty, to become a church in solidarity with the poor and powerless. Grant also that our martyrs bring your light to all people. Finally, make present the kingdom of the Father to the whole world. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus the Lord.

Amen.

- Gerald Hammond, MM

## Readings

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Gn 22:1-2, 9a, 10-18 | Rom 8:31b-34 | Mk 9:2-10

## Fast

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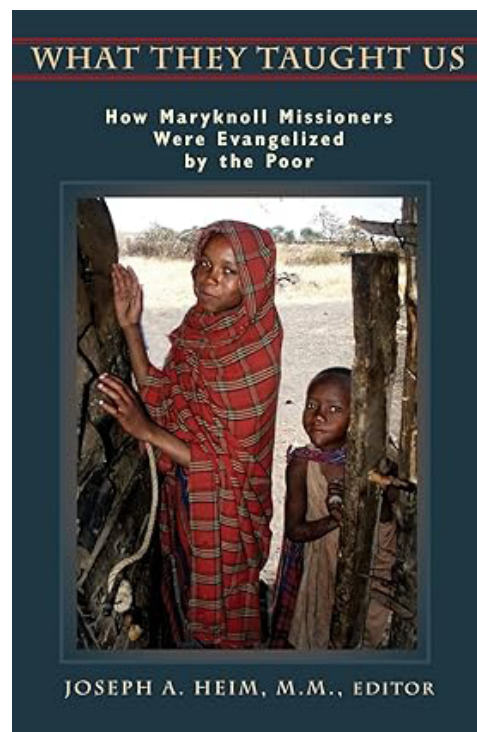
Fast from overconsumption. Refrain from shopping one day a week. Use the money and time saved to pray, read, pursue a hobby, build relationships, or support your community.

## Action

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Read *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, from Orbis Books: <https://mopc.info/LD>

Buy coffee beans, chocolate, produce, and more from a fairtrade certified company. Farming is the



Unfortunately, when we hear the word “glory” we immediately think of the movie star who has just won an Oscar, the scientist who was awarded the Nobel prize, or, of course, the billionaire relaxing in his private jet. Or perhaps winners of the World Series ring. But that glory dims like the rays of the setting sun.

Jesus was speaking of something else when he said: “give glory to your son so that your son may glorify you.” Actually, the word “glorify” simply means to make known. Jesus wants to make the Father known. By the simplicity of his life, by the generous sharing of his meager means, by his lived commitment to his community.

- Fr. Joseph Heim  
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers

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# Third Sunday of Lent

*Zeal for your house will consume me.*  
PSALM 69:9

Jesus made a point of calling out the abuses of power in his day, including by the sellers and money changers at the temple. Today we are called to recognize and act on the abuses we see whether our own or those of others.

Some of those abuses are our failings in our care for creation. Most of us are not accustomed to thinking of environmental or ecological sin, but Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* made it clear that we also need to weigh our treatment of non-human creation.

People in the rural parish in El Salvador where I work as a Maryknoll lay missionary were stunned the first time our pastor said in a Sunday homily that those spraying chemical herbicide on their land needed to go to confession for their sin against the Earth. Those I work with raising environmental awareness and promoting sustainable food production were, of course, thrilled with his affirmation of our efforts.

The ten commandments are a good starting point for an examination of conscience, including our care of creation. “You shall have no other gods besides me.” How about the god of the market and consumerism? Are we driven by the notion that bigger is better, that production and profit must continually increase, that we need the latest model of car, technological device or even apparel?

“You shall not kill” the forests, the coral reefs, the insects that pollinate. “You shall not steal” the minerals of the Earth to stockpile as gold bars, the pure waters of springs to sell in bottles, the endangered species to claim as hunting trophies. “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house”: the mangrove coastline to build

resorts, the wetlands to build more factories or theme parks, the indigenous people’s land to build roads or to dump toxic waste.

Pope Francis, while pleading for structural change and multilateral cooperation among governments, also insists that “efforts by households to reduce pollution and waste, and to consume with prudence, are creating a new culture. The mere fact that personal, family and community habits are changing is contributing to greater concern about the unfulfilled responsibilities of the political sectors and indignation at the lack of interest shown by the powerful.” (*Laudate Deum*, 71)

Like our efforts in El Salvador to reduce, reuse and recycle, to work together as a community to manage our watersheds, and to recover sustainable production practices, individual lifestyle changes and communities working together all across the globe can confront the climate crisis.

If only we could follow Pope Francis’ example and could all earnestly say, “Zeal for our common home consumes us.” ■

*- by Peg Vamosy*

## Questions for Reflection

Thinking of the Commandments, what is one way perhaps you have sinned against creation?

What is one way you, your family, and your community can create a new culture by reducing pollution and waste, or consuming with prudence?

## Prayer

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Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures,  
especially Sir Brother Sun,  
Who is the day through whom You give us light.  
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour,  
Of You Most High, he bears the likeness.  
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the  
stars,  
In the heavens you have made them bright, precious and  
fair.  
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and  
Air,  
And fair and stormy, all weather's moods,  
by which You cherish all that You have made.  
Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,  
So useful, humble, precious and pure.  
Praised be You my Lord through our Sister, Mother  
Earth who sustains and governs us, producing varied  
fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.  
Praise be You my Lord through those who grant pardon  
for love of You and bear sickness and trial.  
Blessed are those who endure in peace,  
By You Most High, they will be crowned.

- St. Francis of Assisi

## Readings

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Ex 20:1-17 | 1 Cor 1:22-25 | Jn 2:13-25

## Fast

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Consider making a fast from plastic. Plastics are made from fossil fuels – four percent of the world's annual petroleum production is converted directly into making plastics, and another four percent gets burned to fuel the process. Only approximately seven percent of plastics are recycled. Many municipalities in the United States have stopped recycling plastic bags because they are difficult to process and have little to no resale value. Plastic disposable bags clog our shorelines and suffocate birds and marine life.

## Action

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Learn about the benefits of agroecology and other farming methods that prioritize sustainability and the needs of communities over scale and profit:  
<http://bit.ly/agroecologyCIDSE>



I have always been drawn to beautiful things, and practicing justice and peace is beautiful. (My mission vocation) is a desire to seek God; joining Maryknoll is just a response of wonder and awe to God's own movement to be in close proximity to the margins, ... to be close to God's creation.

“(Mission work is) an extension of God's solidarity with creation, which is ultimately an expression of hope and justice, not of pity. That God chose to become enfleshed in a particular way in the margins is a sign of great hope and tenderness.

- Sarah Bueter  
Maryknoll Lay Missioners

Sign up for the action alerts of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition to raise your voice in support of sustainable farming:  
<http://bit.ly/sustainableAG>



# Fourth Sunday of Lent

*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so everyone who believes in him might have eternal life.*

JOHN 3:16

**D**espite what we experience in the world today, the readings challenge us not to despair. The Psalms encourage us to believe that better days are ahead as we move from darkness to light. These experiences can transform us into believers.

In this process of personal transformation, it is helpful to realize how wonderful God's love is, knowing that God was willing to give his only Son so that we might have eternal life. The unfathomable depth of God's love is awesome to consider. God sends us his Son to illumine our path in the darkness, especially when we have no sense of direction. I wonder if we can mirror this care for one another and for our world.

This Lenten season, I am reminded of many changes taking place in Nepal and other parts of the world. On my arrival in Nepal in 1977, when it was easy to view the snow-covered Himalayan mountains and drink from the mountain waters that flowed from the north to the south. But that is no longer possible.

The fertile fields around the Kathmandu Valley have been taken over by brick factories and homes and streets and shops are ubiquitous. A valley, once self-supporting, is now dependent on hundreds of trucks that snake the landscape each day, transporting supplies to feed its ever-growing appetite.

Once-fertile village fields that harvested the food for surrounding villages have been washed away and the village population can no longer exist on the meager yields. Due to climate, social, and political instability, many extended families and traditional ways of living are being quickly disbanded and destroyed. Families become internally displaced, and then, with no other

option, move out of Nepal. These newly created refugees begin a journey that could take them any place in the world to survive. But we know that many do not survive.

I have witnessed the weeping and sorrows of those who leave and those left behind. But I have also seen a resilience: a will to continue with the hardships, forged by a desire to experience a better way of life—a life that is lived not only for self, but above all, for another. This is the flame that burns and excites and drives and will not be extinguished.

The Epistle today reminds us of the great love God has for us and how this has saved us. God created us for good works and to love and care for one another as God has loved and cared for us. The readings ask us to share this great gift of God's love and care with one another and make it our way of living also. So, how do we care for one another and for all of creation? In a suffering and broken world, what am I willing to offer for the sake of another? God so loved the world that he gave us his only the Son. What am I willing to give? ■

*- by Fr. Joseph Thaler, MM*

## Questions for Reflection

What is one way you can care for creation by caring for another person?

How might care for nature help another person in your life to experience a better way of life?

## Prayer

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Beloved God,  
This little moment we would spend with Thee  
in gratitude for a lifetime of little moments.

I would thank Thee for Thy Spirit  
breathing in me, directing me  
Stained Glassto follow the flow of Freedom.

I would thank Thee for Thy Promise,  
fulfilled in me, assuring me  
of Thine abiding Presence.

I would thank Thee for Thy faithfulness  
strengthening me, upholding me  
in Compassion's trustworthy arms,

I would thank Thee for Thy Providence  
sheltering me, reminding me  
of Thine eternal Abundance made available to me.

I would thank Thee for Thy Life,  
extended in me,  
extended in all Thy children,  
each Thine own original creation.

- Sister Joan Metzner, MM

## Readings

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2 Chr 36:14-16, 19-23 | Eph 2:4-10 | Jn 3:14-21

## Fast

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Consider the ways in which you can conserve the precious resource of water in your daily life. Best practices for conserving water can be found here: <https://mogc.info/conservewater>

## Action

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The U.S. has one of the highest plastic consumption rates in the world. Single-use plastics (straws, plastic bottles, utensils, etc.) are discarded too easily, carelessly ending up in the streets and natural spaces where they break down into microplastics and pose a toxic threat to ecosystems, wildlife, and humans. Currently, the U.S. has not placed a single-



Drawing strength from our faith in God's continual love-energy at work in our world is as subtle yet effective as how a mustard seed grows and yeast expands. We can take small steps to act wherever we are.

We can act with what resources we have, and with whom we are near, to enhance, support, and encourage sprouts of God's rule of justice, solidarity, and community.

- Fr. Gene Toland, MM  
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers

use plastic ban on a federal level, but this responsibility has been taken up by states and cities.

Looking to the future, the U.S. Interior Department has stated that by 2032, single-use plastic products will be phased out of national parks and some public lands. Around 480 million acres of federal land will be under this new legislation. This is predicted to reduce around 14 million tons of plastic that ends up in our oceans.

Though it may be some time before plastic bans will be implemented on a federal level, the current focus should be on what can be done on a local scale, such as in cities and counties. Since one of the main impediments is compliance, check to see if your city or state has bans already in place and follow the guidelines. <https://mogc.info/PlasticsBans>



# Fifth Sunday of Lent

Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, there also will my servant be.  
JOHN 12:26

Today's scriptures speak of God making a new covenant: "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts." Covenants center around relationships. A covenantal relationship is all-encompassing.

One might wonder what a covenant has to do with the care of creation. The covenant has everything to do with creation care because our covenant is between God, humans, and all that is. We enter into a relationship that is both a gift and a responsibility, to love and care for everything God loves and cares for.

God writes this covenant into our hearts. Though we often walk away from our covenant, God relentlessly pursues us. God remains faithful. God's new covenant is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. "And when I am lifted up from the Earth, I will draw everyone to myself."

In African anthropology, relationships are not only between humans, but also between humans and God, and humans and nature. Everything is connected—therefore, everyone and everything requires reverence and care. Most African communities believe that humans are from nature and, therefore, must keep a very close and reverent relationship with nature. Moreover, it is imperative to protect and nurture nature.

A few years ago, after roads had been flooded in Kenya, I overheard some elders lamenting how the younger generation had become detached and disrespectful of nature and that nature was upset with us. The elders planned to perform cleansing rituals because the flood waters had brought down branches of ancient trees.

One branch landed as if planted in the middle of a road, blocking traffic. The elders saw it as a message from the forest to perform reconciliation rituals, but the young people hurriedly cleared the road. The same week, more rainfall and a similar scenario happened at precisely the same spot.

As a child in Kenya, I heard stories that our ancestors would never cut down trees, till the land, or plant, or harvest crops without first asking for permission from the Great One. They believed that the land and forest belonged to the Creator. Unfortunately, the younger generations have lost the belief that God speaks through nature.

But when Jesus asked God for a sign, God answered, and the crowd heard the voice in the sound of thunder. The crowd exclaims, "An angel has spoken to him."

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis impresses on us our responsibility to care for our common home and for the poor—our covenant between God, humans, and all that is. Additionally, in *Laudate Deum*, he says, "How can we not admire this tenderness of Jesus for all the beings that accompany us along the way!" ■

-by Sr. Susan Nchubiri, MM

## Questions for Reflection

What elements in your life help you to feel most deeply your own relationship with nature?

How can you nurture that connection?

## Prayer

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Oh, Great Spirit,  
whose voice I hear in the winds  
and whose breath gives life to all the world, hear  
me.

I am small and weak.

I need your strength and wisdom.

Let me walk in beauty and make my eyes  
ever behold the red and purple sunset.

Make my hands respect the things you have made  
and my ears sharp to hear your voice.

Make me wise so that I may understand  
the things you have taught my people.

Let me learn the lessons you have hidden  
in every leaf and rock.

I seek strength, not to be superior to my brother,  
but to fight my greatest enemy - myself.

Make me always ready to come to you  
with clean hands and straight eyes,  
so when life fades, as the fading sunset,  
my spirit will come to you  
without shame.

- Chief Yellow Lark, Lakota, 1887



“Caring for creation is a rewarding mission for all. I’m beginning to see with new eyes that the birds, butterflies, and bees are not just lovely in themselves, they are essential workers in re-creating our world. Now [the Maryknoll property in Monrovia, CA] itself has become part of our missionary vocation of being good stewards. Not such a crazy idea!”

- Sr. Arlene Trant  
Maryknoll Sisters

## Readings

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Jer 31:31-34 | Heb 5:7-9 | Jn 12:20-33

## Fast

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Consider eating less meat and fewer dairy products. Meat and dairy products are a major driver of climate change due to carbon and methane emissions through their production and distribution chains, according to data from United Nations agencies.

## Action

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The climate crisis is here. Fossil fuels are a massive threat to life on Earth, harming everything from wildlife and natural ecosystems to the health of our cities and communities. As leader of the world’s number one oil and gas producer, President Biden has more power than any elected official to stop fossil fuels and lead a just transition to renewable energy. He can stop approvals for oil and gas projects, phase out production on federal lands and waters, and declare a

climate emergency.

Sign a petition urging President Biden to put an end to the expansion of fossil fuels projects. <https://mogc.info/BiologicalDiversity-EEFF>

Poorer countries have contributed least to climate change, yet are most impacted by it. Wealthier countries must finance low-emission and climate resilient development in poorer countries. The United Nations created a mechanism for this called the Green Climate Fund. Ask Congress to support the U.S. contribution to the Green Climate Fund: <https://mogc.info/PCUSA-GCF>

In 2023, the Catholic Climate Covenant collected thousands of signatures on a letter to U.S. leaders, telling them forgiveness of debt and the restructuring of debt must be included on the U.S. agenda for international climate action. Join their “Encounter for Our Common Home Campaign” to get inspired and mobilize with fellow Catholics:

<https://mogc.info/CCC-advocacy>



# Palm Sunday

*She poured the alabaster jar of perfumed oil on his head.*

MATTHEW 26:7

Where I grew up in Michigan, the Lenten and Easter time of year aligned with the end of winter and first rains and new life of spring. Where I live now in Tanzania, just south of the equator, Lent and Easter do not align with the spring season the way they align in the northern hemisphere.

The most spring-like season in Tanzania is when the dry season ends with the first rains of the year, usually in late October. The first rain here, after a hot dusty three to four-month dry season, are a relief. Water falling from the sky is a wonder of nature and gift from the heavens. After the rains begin, the landscape quickly changes from dusty brown to a lush green.

Artisans who make fragrance oils agree that the smell of fresh rain is the best smell in the world. Many have tried to duplicate the scent of fresh rain (it could be lucrative for perfumes, especially if added to detergents and household cleaners) but none have ever succeeded in replicating it. The reason they often give for their failure is the complexity of the smell.

The smell of fresh rain, known by its technical name *petrichor*, combines so many elements. Water droplets create fine aerosols on impact, lifting oils and organic compounds exuded by plants and soil into the air. Some of the component smells are seemingly undesirable—spilled oil on a blacktop road, for example. In short, artisans say the smell of fresh rain is too complex to reproduce or capture in a bottle.

Though we read it every year, the story of Christ's Passion and Resurrection comes as a fresh relief, like the first rain of the season. And like the smell of fresh rain, life is a mixture of many elements, some of them

undesirable. Without suffering, would I recognize joy? Without sin, would I know my need for salvation?

In today's gospel reading, we hear about the woman who anointed Jesus with expensive perfume, infuriating some men who argued that she could have helped poor people by selling it for profit. But Jesus said "She has done a good thing for me. The poor you will always have with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them, but you will not always have me. She has done what she could. She has anticipated anointing my body for burial. Amen, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

We all can relate to the woman's impulsive idea. There is research about our thoughts that theorizes that we do not have much control over the many things that "pop into our heads." Maybe grace raining down onto that mixture of thoughts in our minds can mix them into something beautiful. We don't need to suppress them—just let God's love rain on them. ■

- by Stephen Veryser

## Questions for Reflection

Are there areas of your life, or in the natural world around you, in which undesirable elements coexist with the more pleasant ones?

Can you imagine God's grace transforming them together into something beautiful?

## Prayer

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Refrain: Praise be to you!

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.  
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;  
they are yours, filled with your presence and your  
tender love. ☩

Son of God, Jesus,  
through you all things were made.  
You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother,  
you became part of this earth,  
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.  
Today you are alive in every creature  
in your risen glory. ☩

Holy Spirit, by your light  
you guide this world towards the Father's love  
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.  
You also dwell in our hearts  
and you inspire us to do what is good. ☩

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,  
teach us to contemplate you  
in the beauty of the universe,  
for all things speak of you.

Awaken our praise and thankfulness  
for every being that you have made.  
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined  
to everything that is. ☩

God of love, show us our place in this world  
as channels of your love  
for all the creatures of this earth,  
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.

Enlighten those who possess power and money  
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,  
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,  
and care for this world in which we live.

The poor and the earth are crying out.  
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,  
help us to protect all life,  
to prepare for a better future,  
for the coming of your Kingdom  
of justice, peace, love and beauty. ☩

Amen.

*- Prayer in Unison with Creation, Laudato Si'*



In the Ecology retreats that I facilitate in the northeast of Brazil with my partner and fellow Maryknoll Lay Missioner Flavio Jose Rocha, I have found that helping people reconnect with nature is also a path to reconnecting with self, others and the universe. I see these spaces as our small contribution to Hildegard's garden of "greening power."

- Kathleen Bond  
Maryknoll Lay Missioner

## Readings

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Mk 11:1-10 | Is 50:4-7 | Phil 2:6-11 | Mk 14:1-15:47

## Fast

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Fast from technology. Turn off your cell phone, computer, television. Use that time to care for your relationship with God, the earth, yourself, and others. Go for a walk, explore nature, seek out conversation with neighbors, especially those who are lonely.

## Action

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March 22 is World Water Day. Learn about the sacred role of water for all life:  
<http://bit.ly/MaryknollWater>