

# Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

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Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2017

## WEEK 1

**Reader 1:** A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 4:1-11)

Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.' But he replied, 'Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'.

The devil then took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God' he said 'throw yourself down; for scripture says: He will put you in his angels' charge, and they will support you on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.' Jesus said to him, 'Scripture also says: You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'I will give you all these', he said, 'if you fall at my feet and worship me.' Then Jesus replied, 'Be off, Satan! For scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.' Then the devil left him, and angels appeared and looked after him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

**Everyone:** A Reading from the Holy Gospel ....

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

**Reader 2:** Reflection on the Gospel

Have you noticed how central the word 'if' is to Satan's questioning? In each instance he appeals through the word 'if' to a very natural desire: food when hungry, recognition, possessions, power and influence.

Did "if" feature a lot in your childhood and does it feature in your communication with yourself or with others today? 'If you do your homework ..., If you are good today ..., If you behave ...?' In short do we bargain for the outcomes we desire? I'm not suggesting that that's necessarily a bad thing. A primary teacher tells me the promise of chocolate can be a great motivator!

But let's consider briefly Christ's response to Satan's persistence with ultimately false 'if' promises. Three things for your consideration: his knowledge and application of teachings found in Sacred Scripture, his brevity (he closes the conversations down) and the fact that his engagement takes its toll .... *the angels appeared and looked after him.*

We have done a very good thing by joining a Lenten Scripture Sharing Group. May our time together inspire and encourage us to model our thinking and decision-making on the life of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

**Silence**

**Leader:** I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

**Sharing**

**Leader:** Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

*Group returns to page 18 of Lenten booklet*

# Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

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Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2017

## WEEK 2

**Reader 1:** A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 17:1-9)

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone. There in their presence he was transfigured; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,' he said 'it is wonderful for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and from the cloud there came a voice which said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him.' When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them. 'Stand up,' he said 'do not be afraid.' And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but Jesus.

As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order. 'Tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

**Everyone:** A Reading from the Holy Gospel ....

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

**Reader 2:** Reflection on the Gospel

Some years ago I volunteered for a parish-based Confirmation programme. I have many lovely memories and one child's question, shared by the group, continues to resonate: "But I thought Jesus was God?"

The children we journeyed with, like many of their generation, rarely saw the inside of the Church, only experienced prayer and sacraments through school, and apart from this programme, had no experience of parish taking an interest in them. And yet, they were very interested in God, knew Him and were open to being supported in knowing Him and each other better.

I recall their surprise on hearing that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and that all three persons want all of us to share in their blessed life, both now and for all eternity.

In this Gospel passage we see how all three persons of the Trinity, at Christ's instigation, manifested themselves to Peter, James and John, providing them with an experience that was to stand to them later. Could it be that we and others in our parish are called to follow Christ's example by creating opportunities through parish-based programmes, for our young people to grow in their awareness, knowledge and love of God?

Let's take this question into our prayer this Lent, that they too, in the power of the Holy Spirit, may hear the words 'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him.'

**Silence**

**Leader:** I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

**Sharing**

**Leader:** Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

*Group returns to page 27 of Lenten booklet*

# Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2017

## WEEK 3

**Reader 1:** A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John (Jn 4:5-42)

Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well is there and Jesus tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'give me a drink.' His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, 'What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?' - Jews, in fact, do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied:

'If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you:

Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.'

'You have no bucket, Sir,' she answered 'and the well is deep: how could you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?' Jesus replied:

'Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again;

but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again:

the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life.'

'Sir', said the woman, 'give me some of the water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water.'

Many Samaritans of the town had believed in him on the strength of the woman's testimony when she said 'He told me all I have ever done,' so, when the Samaritans came up to him, they begged him to stay with them. He stayed for two days, and when he spoke to them many more came to believe; and they said to the woman, 'Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world.' The Gospel of the Lord.

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

**Reader 2:** Reflection on the Gospel

Well, there you have it! It's more than infection that's contagious. So is faith!

A tired Christ crosses the boundaries of social convention to engage a thirsting soul and in the process comes to touch the hearts and minds of an entire village. The '*living water*' he alone can offer and that can turn into '*a spring inside*' finds its way into another woman's heart and from there reaches out to the hearts and minds of all to whom she poses the invitation and question '*Come and see a man that has told me everything I have done, could he be the Christ?*'.

The fact that we have joined a Lenten Scripture Sharing Group suggests a commitment on our part to tending the "spring inside ... welling up to eternal life". For my own part, I must confess a gladness that this spring can touch unhealed memories as well as present day challenges. I am also glad that it fosters hope and trust in God going forward.

But what about my friends and neighbours? Yes, many have a great and life-giving faith ... but there are those too that are spiritually lost. How might I come alongside them? How might you, if you share my question? Would a good first step be to pray for them?

**Silence**

**Leader:** I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

**Sharing**

**Leader:** Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

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Dioceses of

Achonry, Ardagh & Clonmacnois, Armagh, Clonfert, Elphin, Kerry, Killala,  
Kilmore, Limerick, Ossory, Tuam & Waterford & Lismore.

# Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

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# Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

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Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2017

## WEEK 4

**Reader 1:** A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John (Jn 9:1-42)

As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. He spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man & said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam'. So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored. His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said, 'Yes, it is the same one.' Others said, 'No, he only looks like him.' The man himself said, 'I am the man.'

They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been the Sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, 'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.' Then some of the Pharisees said, 'This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the Sabbath.' Others said, 'how could a sinner produce signs like this?' And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, 'What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?' He is a prophet' replied the man. 'Are you trying to teach us,' they replied 'and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!' And they drove him away.

Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' 'Sir' the man replied 'tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said, 'You are looking at him; he is speaking to you'. The man said, 'Lord, I believe', and worshipped him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

### Silence

**Leader:** Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

**Reader 2:** Reflection on the Gospel

In this story Jesus reveals to a man born blind both the gift of sight and the light of faith which brings salvation. Furthermore John, great dramatist that he is, presents the story in the light of a great irony, i.e. that those who consider themselves to be living in the light of faith (the Pharisees), are actually the persons most in the dark. And what is at the heart of their darkness, according to John? A stubborn refusal to accept that Jesus comes from God, held so strongly as to justify the diminution of other people's extraordinary life experiences, including reception of sight by a man born blind.

Can you relate in any way to the man born blind? Have you ever known others to refuse to share in your joy or diminish your personal experience in a nasty or hostile way? Sadly, I think such experiences are on the rise as an aggressive form of secularism sugar-coats selfishness and denies our religious nature. It takes great strength of character today to openly profess one's faith. Even children at the latter stages of primary school are getting a subliminal message that religion is a private matter.

And where is the risen Christ in the midst of our personal present day challenges and upheavals? I dare suggest he is here with us, that he has gathered us, and puts to us the same question he put to the man who received his sight: '*Do you believe in the Son of Man?*'

### Silence

**Leader:** I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

### Sharing

**Leader:** Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

*Group returns to page 43 of Lenten booklet*

# Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2017

## WEEK 5

**Reader 1:** A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John (Jn 11:1-45)

There was a man named Lazarus who lived in the village of Bethany with two sisters, Mary and Martha, and he was ill. The sisters sent this message to Jesus, 'Lord, the man you love is ill.' On receiving the message, Jesus said, '*This sickness will end not in death but in God's glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified.*' Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that Lazarus was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, '*Let us go to Judaea.*'

On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. When Martha heard Jesus had come she went to meet him. Martha said to Jesus, 'If you had been here my brother would not have died, but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you.' '*Your brother*' said Jesus to her '*will rise again.*' Martha said, 'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said:

*'I am the resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'*

'Yes, Lord', she said 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.' When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, 'The Master is here and wants to see you.'

Mary went to Jesus, and as soon as she saw him she threw herself at his feet, saying, 'Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' At the sight of her tears, and those of the Jews who followed her, Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, '*Where have you put him?*' They said, 'Lord come and see.' Jesus wept; and the Jews said, 'See how much he loved him!' But there were some who remarked, 'He opened the eyes of the blind man, he could not have prevented this man's death?' Still sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, '*Take the stone away.*' Martha said to him 'Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day.' Jesus replied '*Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?*' So they took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said: '*Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer. I knew indeed that you always hear me. But I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me, so that they may believe it was you who sent me.*'

When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, '*Lazarus, here! Come out!*' The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, '*Unbind him, let him go free.*' Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what he did believed in him. The Gospel of the Lord.

### Silence

**Leader:** Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

**Reader 2:** Reflection on the Gospel

*Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, 'Where have you put him?' They said, 'Lord come and see.'*

A death in a family or close-knit community always brings a time of grief and transition. While most of us deeply appreciate the willingness of extended family and community to weave a mantle of care around us, we also know our need of moments to ourselves and moments with God.

# Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

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Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2017

Is Christ distressed by death in the way we are? I do not know. But I have come to see that he hates to see people in distress and that his question 'Where have you put him (or her)?' remains his word to many grieving people today. And is there a 'Lazarus' event in your story or mine, the lingering impact of a deep sorrow, the curtailment of life, an inability to move on?

Sacred Scripture, Church Tradition and sometimes our own experiences confirm that no one is ever dead to God (Mt 22:32). ... But might we also need to say "Lord come and see"? Is there a crevice in our hearts that could benefit from the healing touch of 'the Resurrection and the life'? Might we benefit from being unbound? Today I pray that each of us will share the confidence of Martha when she said, 'but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you.'

## Silence

**Leader:** I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

## Sharing

**Leader:** Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

*Group returns to page 52 of Lenten booklet*

*Week 5*

# Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Lent 2017

## HOLY WEEK

**Reader 1:** A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 21:1-11)

When they were near Jerusalem and had come in sight of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village facing you, and you will immediately find a tethered donkey and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you are to say, 'The Master needs them and will send them back directly.' This took place to fulfil the prophecy:

*Say to the daughter of Zion: Look, your king comes to you;*

*He is humble, he rides on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of the beast of burden.*

So the disciples went out and did as Jesus had told them. They brought the donkey and the colt, then they laid their cloaks on their backs and he sat on them. Great crowds of people spread their cloaks on the road, while others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in his path. The crowds who went in front of him and those who followed were all shouting:

*'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord!*

*Hosanna in the highest heavens!'*

And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil. 'Who is this?' people asked, and the crowds answered, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

**Everyone:** A Reading from the Holy Gospel ....

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

**Reader 2:** Reflection on the Gospel

Next time we hear this passage it will be Palm Sunday, we are likely to be at Mass with people from our parish, and we shall have prayed Psalm 118 together, accompanied by its joyful refrain "O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!"

Has the Church got it wrong, inviting us to pray such a lovely sentiment before we recall the days and hours leading up to and including Christ's crucifixion?

By way of response I invite you to ponder this Gospel passage in the light of a few other lines of the same psalm: '*The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes*' and '*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD.*'

It is good to know, albeit it very difficult to comprehend, that the suffering endured by Christ was foreseen and engaged in freely by him, even to the point of borrowing a donkey. And why? Clearly for a great purpose, one that necessitated a laying down of his life for his friends (Jn 15:13), even in the face of rejection and brutality.

Do we share in this mystery of self-giving? If we do, let's bring that to the altar on Sunday. If we don't, let's remember those that do ... *for the blood of martyrs remains the seed of the Church* (Tertullian).

**Silence**

**Leader:** I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

**Sharing**

**Leader:** Let us return to our Lenten Prayer.

*Group returns to page 60 of Lenten booklet*