

Preface

Share in this Lenten season with Dignity members as we share reflections on the scripture in our own voices. With contributions from Dignity/Washington and individuals in other chapters across the US, we hope that in this year of physical distancing and inability to come together, you gain some connection and spiritual blessings from these truths.

In creating this book, we realized several distinct but connected truths:

1. as LGBTQ people of faith and allies, it is important to add our particular voices to the Lenten tradition;
2. as a community in the Roman Catholic tradition but living in exile from the hierarchical Church, part of our vocation is to show the unity between our faith and the faith of other Catholics, as well as the symbiosis between our faith and our sexuality;
3. and most of all, that the number of people suffering because they see their orientation and their spirituality as opposed to each other remains legion, and we have an opportunity and a responsibility to share our stories as a witness that this need not be the case.

Different members of our community shared their thoughts on Scripture, their stories, and their faith in order to make this booklet a reality. It stands as witness against those who see people as somehow less due to their non-typical sexual or gender expression. Over and over again, these writers have spoken of how their own experience of oppression and fear, when mixed with grace and with their faith, has helped them broaden their love for all of God's people and given them courage to speak up not only for the LGBTQ community, but for the dignity of all.

We dedicate this work and these reflections to everyone who has struggled with their own sexuality and faith, as well as to anyone who is struggling with the sense that their lives somehow matter less than others. We offer our stories as they intermingle with the Scriptures to raise up in faith a new generation of journey-ers, having been freed from oppression and slavery by God's Love, who are walking together in search of (and to co-create) the Promised Land for which we are all destined.

In the years ahead, We hope to complete the liturgical cycle with additional LGBTQ Catholic resources such as this, so we may continue to learn and grow from our shared stories. Projects just like this one are only possible because of the generosity of people like you, our community members, and our family and friends. Please consider a donation to Dignity/Washington to help us continue such work by visiting www.dignitywashington.org/donate. We also welcome you to join us for Mass every Sunday at 6 p.m.

February 17, 2021; Ash Wednesday

*Joel 2: 12-18, Psalms 51: 3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14 and 17,
Second Corinthians 5: 20 — 6:2, Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18*

Ash Wednesday has always been one of my favorite moments in the liturgical year. Although my father found it morbid, I've always found the moment where ashes are applied to my head with the words, "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return," to be a beautiful and useful reminder of my own mortality and fallibility. But this year, Ash Wednesday is sitting a bit differently with me.

In April of 2020, about a month into COVID-19 virus pandemic in the U.S., I received a call that my Dad, who had been battling stage 4 brain cancer, was not expected to last much longer. I quickly left work, and drove from Western Massachusetts to my parent's home in Silver Spring, MD. The specter of death was everywhere on my drive. I arrived home and was able to spend time with my father before he died early the next morning.

Given my own experience with death and the relentless death toll from COVID-19, likely to be over half a million by the time you read this, I don't need a reminder of my own mortality this year, and I suspect none of you do either. I also suspect that there are many people who have never needed a reminder of the reality of death or of human fallibility. Whether it's my LGBTQIA+ elders who lived through the early days of the HIV+/AIDS epidemic, or trans people, particularly trans women of color, who face horrific violence and even murder, or unarmed black men and women, from George Floyd to Sandra Bland, murdered by the police, there are many in our country and our world who are well aware of their own mortality and the ways in which societal injustice has hastened it.

What does Ash Wednesday mean in this context? All three lectionary readings for today focus on the theme of repentance, or a returning to God. An alternative formulation when giving ashes is, "Repent and believe in the Gospel." What does repentance entail? In the reading from Joel we are told to "Return to the Lord with all our heart" and to "sanctify a fast." And while this is all well and good, I find myself wishing Joel had been a little more specific. Part of the true repentance is a recognition of the ways we have failed in the past and a commitment to do better in the future. Some Christian denominations offer Isaiah 58:1-12 as an alternative first reading "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?" We return to the Gospel and to God through our actions on behalf of those marginalized. We return to the Gospel and to God when we work to lower disparities in death rates between people of color and white people, and between transgender people and cisgender people. And none of this is easy. We are human, profoundly fallible. But as artist, writer, and United Methodist Minister, Jan Richardson writes, "Do you not know what the Holy One can do with dust?" As we go forward into Lent, let us focus not only on our mortality and fallibility, but on allowing the transforming power of God to act in us and through us

– Sara Henchey Brosnan (*she/her/hers*)
Dignity/Boston

February 18, 2021; Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Deuteronomy 30: 15-20, Psalms 1: 1-2, 3, 4 and 6, , Luke 9: 22-25

“Oh, that peace like a river always going, but never getting. Seems like maybe it's not all that much a place as it is a way--and ways don't ever seem to want to stay too still for too long...” - Theseus, *The Oh Hellos*

How many times do we do things, not because they are fun or pleasant, but because the outcome is worth it?

I can tell you right now, I hate running, but I love the way I feel afterwards. I made choices in college for classes that were boring, but helped me in the future. I still do things now because they are the right thing to do, even if they're not pleasant. Isn't the suffering worth it, if the payoff is good?

Sometimes, we approach Lent the same way. It's something to be endured, not celebrated, and when we get through it, we have the promise of the resurrection on the other side. We fight a temporary battle, because in the end there is permanent salvation.

When Jesus approaches us in the Gospel, however, His ask isn't for a temporary stay, or a cosmetic change. Instead, He asks us for something deeper. Choose life, says LOVE through Moses. Choose life, Jesus asks us.

As we live, I don't think there is a 'right' set of steps laid out for us to take, or a series of perfect choices that will guarantee our success. The peace we are fighting for isn't just an end destination or a singular reward. At the beginning of Lent, we are instead invited to come down to the water, step into the river, and not just fight for peace, but become part of it.

If we make individual choices meant to be the 'right' ones, will we see the individual inconveniences as temporary setbacks to be endured, strung out along a lifetime? How would our lives change if, instead, we saw our work not as a series of small singular choices, but as a whole and perfect contribution to a holistic 'way' -- a way of peace, a way of justice, and a way that honors and deepens our relationship with LOVE.

That kind of shift makes things different for us. Instead of a single outcome, we are committing, over and over, with every breath, to a lifetime of a relationship.

That's what Moses asked of his people in Deuteronomy today: a commitment that doesn't end in a promise of heaven after death, because the commitment doesn't end at all. Instead of an end goal, we get a life, which is as worth living now as it will be every single day, because LOVE is with us as we walk.

This is what Jesus asks of us, too. We are not asked to commit to a fight, which, once won, will guarantee the salvation of our lives. Instead, we are asked to join the path—take up the cross, and walk—and keep walking, because the journey is our peace.

This Lent, let us find our ways to enter that river and never leave it, and commit ourselves over, and over, and over, in our whole and precious lives, so that our season is not a hurdle to be endured. Let us empty our hands so we can take up the cross and walk on the way, always.

– *Rory Hytrek (he/him/his)*
Dignity/Washington

February 19, 2021; Friday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58: 1-9a, Psalms 51: 3-4, 5-6ab, 18-19, Matthew 9: 14-15

Have you ever fasted? I know I have a few times in my life. There have been moments from high school to college and after, when I fasted, not partaking in food on Lenten Holy Days. In college, I even did the Daniel fast, a 21-day fast only eating plant-based meals and not partaking in caffeine or other substances as an act of worship to God.

Today's readings call to challenge the very practice of the style of fasting I describe above. They question both our motive in fasting and what is the real call in a call to fast.

In Isaiah, the question is asked "why do we fast and you (God) do not see it." In the Gospel, the opposite is asked of Jesus from the Disciples of John who ask "Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?" In both cases, the one asking is concerned about getting credit with God for the fasting. They do not want to go through fasting if they may not actually get credit with God, or they see that others around them are not doing it.

We often do things for credit or superiority rather than the actual good deed or deed of faith - e this in the way we worship, the way we donate to the poor, or the ways we stand up with the persecuted. We must question our own motives when doing something for the better good; and if it is for the better good, we should challenge ourselves and not wait for others to come along on the call.

But what is asked in a call to fast? In our culture and when we most often think of fasting in the bible, we believe we are being called to limit food or other items of extravagance or joy to simplify, sacrifice and get closer to God. This is the type of fasting I have participated in a number of times in my life, omitting food to live a more Christian life. Isaiah challenges this type of fasting as an act that is done in selfish pursuits, that a day of fasting does nothing to honor God. Isaiah then lists what we should be actually doing when we are called to fast:

"releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own."

Fasting is not an act of internal sacrifice, but should be approached as an act of social justice and when we partake in a moment of fast, we should be striving towards a more just world. These acts of justice shall honor God and show God's light into the world.

This Lenten season, I urge us each to fast, but not in the definition we often use in our culture of reducing consumption of food or some nice part of modern life, but in the fasting that Isaiah calls us to do. Let us each day this Lenten season and in our lives ahead, find ways to stand with and break the bonds of those in our society that are persecuted. Working towards the liberation of People of Color, the safety of Trans and non-binary individuals, welcome for the refugee and immigrant! Isaiah proclaims a challenge to us to "Cry out full-throated and unsparingly, lift up your voice like a trumpet blast." Let us cry out until we are hoarse and hold nothing back in our fasting for a better world.

– *Christopher Flow (he/him/his)*
Dignity/Washington

February 22, 2021; Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, Apostle

First Peter 5: 1-4, Psalms 23: 1-3a, 4, 5, 6, Matthew 16: 13-19

So we are returning to another meaningful Lent thanks to the graces bestowed by COVID. While too many have suffered way too much, for most of us this has been a time to learn to really appreciate how lucky life has been to us. For many in the LGBTQ community, where many of us take a deep sense of meaning from being able to congregate in groups close to one another in bars, congregations, clubs, running groups, and the like, we are pushed to define our self-worth alone. Growing up where there was no road map to show us how same sex loving people could find our way in the world, these COVID days are pushing us back into the closet. But with fortitude we can operate as ourselves in the new times.

In the letter of Peter, there is instruction about how to care for those in the community who are in need with a stick, if one is not honest or a carrot when we are doing right by the flock, we will be rewarded. This is a small reading, but it really captures the spirit of the Gospel message – take care of those less fortunate than you and blessings will follow.

The Responsorial Psalm is the famous 23rd where we take on the seat of the supplicant by defining how gracious God will be to us. Not only are our wants and needs met in abundance, but we are placed so that all those who do not wish us well have to sit there and watch us enjoy all the goodies we have been given. I have always been bothered by the lack of humility shown in this song to the Lord, but it follows the line of thinking that if we accept God's blessings there will be so much more.

In the reading from the Gospel of Matthew, Peter gives Jesus the right answer to a pop quiz and receives the Keys to the Kingdom. Peter was no scholar, but having been around Jesus, he should have easily known what the right answer was. He would not receive wealth in a shared Kingdom he might have hoped for, but like Solomon, he would be required to dispense wisdom and make good judgments. Binding and loosing human frailty in Heaven would be modeled on Jesus' generosity and blessed actions in the previous readings (sins are never mentioned). To be Heaven's chief magistrate would not be the wrathful stage of dominion (the most horrible of many of the hierarchy's wilder fantasies), but one of understanding. Peter, as a reflection of Jesus, is required to be the ultimate sign of love and forgiveness. LGBTQ people are given many special graces and owe it to Jesus and those around us to reveal the sign of Christ in us. Like the servants who were given much or little we will be judged by what we do with it.

– Tom Bower (*he/him/his*)
Dignity/Washington

February 23, 2021; Tuesday of the First Week of Lent

Isaiah 55: 10-11, Psalms 34: 4-5, 6-7, 16-17, 18-19, Matthew 6: 7-15

What comes to mind from the first reading is “patience.” I just passed a milestone birthday and realized that when I was younger, I was eager to live life to the fullest, though sometimes by doing so, I missed many simple joys that were in plain sight. I wanted to see, touch, drink, and eat all of the glories of life and do so in a hurry. It’s only later when I reflected on those occasions and recognized what I did, and what “I could have done,” sometimes I regret things I missed in my haste.

After college, I moved away from my family in Kansas to pursue my journalism career in Washington, DC. I often returned home for visits, particularly on special occasions and holidays. I would spend time visiting with my family and friends and, in my mind, was a good son, brother, and friend to those I loved. Breaking that illusion was a simple comment my mother made—that I spent most of my time visiting friends and other people. I realized that she dearly missed me and wanted to spend time with her too. It was such an epiphany that allowed me to redirect my attention to my mother, which was valuable for both of us.

As time moves more swiftly than I ever imagined possible, I devote quality time with my family and friends because it matters and is important. Patience. I recognize and appreciate the changes life bestows on us, good and bad. I appreciate each season and the special blessing they give us. Sunny warm days are great but so are cozy snowy or rainy days when you can enjoy the serenity they bring. Without the rain and snow, the sowing of seeds, and the growth of plants in the spring and summer, we would miss the renewal of life and its blessings.

With the arrival of Lent, patience, and the personal sacrifices we take in observance, we are given the opportunity of anticipation. As our world endures the pandemic, our patience, and perhaps our faith, continues to be challenged over and over. When we get used to behaving in a certain manner, then the rules changed, and we are left with uncertainty.

However, we are reminded in the second reading, “I sought the Lord, and he answered me, delivered me from all my fears.” The reading tells us there will be doubt and fear though we must remember that “the Lord is close to the brokenhearted, saves those whose spirit is crushed.” Our faith and trust in those closest to us will guide us back to the daylight. Our community is special and has survived tough times and celebrated good ones. We look forward to gathering again together though until that happens, we must be patient.

The third reading gives us instructions on how we can connect with God. “The Lord’s Prayer” that we recite during each Mass and more often quietly to ourselves, provides us with strength and comfort to allow patience for the wonderful mysteries of life God promises us.

– Peter Edwards (*he/his/him*)
Dignity/Washington

February 24, 2021; Wednesday of the First Week of Lent

Jonah 3: 1-10, Psalms 51: 3-4, 12-13, 18-19, Luke 11: 29-32

In today's Gospel Jesus said to them, "This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it, except the sign of Jonah." and He refers back to the story of Jonah that's in today's first reading. In this section, Jonah goes to Nineveh and warns them of their pending destruction because of their wickedness; and ultimately their repentance saves them from destruction. Since it's Lent it would be easy to focus on the "sackcloth and ashes" aspect of this story. To me, the more striking part of this narrative is in its second chances. This reading from Jonah is the second half of his larger story. This is, in fact, the second time Jonah has been told to go to Nineveh. Earlier, Jonah had turned away from God's command to travel to Nineveh and prophesy against their wickedness. Surprisingly, given the opportunity for a thankless and potentially dangerous job, Jonah had skipped out and gotten on the first boat out of town. What's remarkable is that God hadn't given up on Jonah—God didn't move on to the next name on a list of potential minor Old Testament prophets. God doubles down on Jonah; sending him a storm—and no ordinary storm—and then a gigantic fish to swallow him—until Jonah finally accedes—and God commands the fish to expel Jonah. From there Jonah goes to and through Nineveh—presumably looking and smelling like someone who has spent three days inside a giant fish—and delivers the message. The people and the King heed his warnings. God spares the city.

But what to take away from this? What is this vague wickedness of Nineveh that could condemn a whole city to destruction? One could easily jump to an idea of licentiousness—and indeed Hollywood might portray Nineveh as a post-Bronze Age Vegas on steroids. But one might consider that Nineveh, and other wicked places, with a culture of such greed and cruelty that it neglects the poorest and neediest of its people—a sin that could pervade a city or a country from top to bottom. The comfort in this is that God didn't give up on the people of Nineveh—sending them first a reluctant prophet and then backing down from their destruction when they repent. Likewise God didn't give up on Jonah. God doesn't give up on us—not turning away at our lapses, our selfishness, our missed opportunities.

– *Tom Yates (he/him/his)*
Dignity/Washington

February 25, 2021; Thursday of the First Week of Lent

Esther 12: 14-16 and 23-25, Psalms 138: 1-2ab, 2cde-3, 7c-8, Matthew 7: 7-12

How do you advocate for your own humanity to someone who wants you dead? I think a lot of marginalized people can relate to Esther's plea to God in the first reading. Whether you're an activist fighting oppressive legislation, a protestor condemning brutality against a community, or even a closeted teenager surviving in a reactionary household, these are all situations in which we can find ourselves asking God for the right words to say, the right phrase to change the hearts and minds of others. Trusting in God can feel impossible, but He can empower us with those words, with the confidence to walk the world knowing we have the power to change it for the better.

In the Gospel, Jesus gives us the Golden Rule: "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you." Many LGBTQ people know what it's like to ask for a fish and receive a rock in return from friends, family, society. Like in the first reading, we must trust that God will help us open the doors that we knock upon and find what we seek. However, on these journeys, we cannot forget others who may find those doors slammed in their faces. Disabled people, Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, the poor—the LGBTQ community intersects with so many of these other communities, many knocking on the same doors. Let us remember to not let the opportunities we win shut out others. Let us do unto others what we would have them do to us, hold the door open so we can all come closer to the dignity and love of God.

– *Lizzie Smith (she/her)*

Dignity/Washington

February 26, 2021; Friday of the First Week of Lent

Ezekiel 18: 21-28, Psalms 130: 1-2, 3-4, 5-7a, 7bc-8, Matthew 5: 20-26

Today's readings bring us to a consideration of God's judgment for our faults. The gospel tells us we can't buy our way into God's favor with gifts and cries of "Lord! Lord!" We have to first be right with each other. "Go first and be reconciled with your brother." How often we are reminded that to love God we must love our neighbor. The second part of the gospel reading, makes clear we are talking about settling up our faults, not the other guys. Pay up what you owe, work out a settlement, repair your damage, or the case will go to court and you will be punished by the judge and still have to pay anyway. How many lawyer shows have we seen on TV where the bad guy is convinced to settle out of court because his fate will be worse if the case goes to trial. The message seems to be, don't wait and hope for God's merciful judgment of your faults, but instead work now, today, to remedy what needs fixing.

Ezekiel gives us a perspective that might be different from our usual sense of justice. We are told it is not a matter of adding up all your good things on one side and all of your bad things on the other and whichever side has the most wins. But rather, if you have been bad but turn to good, the judgment on you will be favorable. If you have been good and turn to bad, the judgment on you will be unfavorable, so keep on being good. In this case, it seems to be a matter of "what have you done for me lately?" Relying on a death-bed conversion to offset having done bad, is a very risky bet.

What all this balancing does is give us guidance for living in this world. Whatever God's judgment is, it depends greatly on how we live with our neighbor. The Psalm gives us hope that our imperfect love of one another might be assuaged by God's mercy. "For with the Lord is kindness and with him is plenteous redemption." We better hope so!

– *Bob Miailovich (he/him/his)*
Dignity/Washington

March 1, 2021; Monday of the Second Week of Lent

Daniel 9: 4b-10, Psalms 79: 8, 9, 11 and 13, Luke 6: 36-38

Today's first reading begins with the prophet Daniel praising the merciful God of Israel, who asks only for their love and their observance of God's commandments. But we immediately see that Daniel is caught in a dilemma. Israel has flagrantly disregarded their end of the covenant (not the first time), rebelling against God's commands and ignoring all the prophets. Daniel knows Israel richly deserves punishment – and recalls how disaster has befallen Israel in the past for their transgressions. But Daniel is a prophet after God's own heart, and he pleads for Israel with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. He confesses his sin and the sin of his people, asking God to turn away His wrath and show Israel mercy, forgiveness and compassion.

The theme of sorrow and regret at having lost their way, and now longing to make things right again with God, echoes in the responsorial psalm. Israel's deep sorrow for their sins is filled with hope in, and love for God, whom they dare to ask not to deal with them as they deserve: "...may your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need." As a people, Israel is realizing that though they have repeatedly turned from God, God always leads them back. God's faithfulness is enduring and Israel rejoices: "...we, your people..., will give thanks to you forever; through all generations we will declare your praise."

Jesus himself can't seem to find enough ways to impress upon the disciples that generosity, mercy and forgiveness are fundamental attributes of God: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you." Jesus sums up in one paragraph the true nature of God as revealed in the Jewish Scriptures. Could Jesus have been any clearer in telling us how God is and how we are to become?

Maybe today we can take these words to heart and consider the possibility of dropping our judgment of someone we don't understand or like. What if we just accepted them as they are without requiring them to change in order to deserve our respect? What if we just stopped condemning those we oppose politically? What if we decided to just let go of a grudge or resentment we've been holding against someone? According to Jesus, our attitudes and acts of spiritual generosity set in motion a flow of positive energy back to us – not in a little trickling stream, but in big waves that wash over us. That flow of positive energy is grace – giving life and vitality to us and everything that is. Are we ready to step into the flow of spiritual generosity and see what happens?

– *Kathleen Blank Riether (she/her)*
Dignity/Washington

March 2, 2021; Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent

Isaiah 1: 10, 16-20, Psalms 50: 8-9, 16bc-17, 21 and 23, Matthew 23: 1-12

We are directed and encouraged to listen closely to “the word of the Lord,” from wherever and whenever that word comes. Even though it usually refers to “Sacred Scripture”, we must remember that Scripture is not the only source. Furthermore we are advised: “If today you hear God’s voice, harden not your hearts”. And the way to understand what we hear comes from many sources as well, other parts of Scripture, our reason, and our own experience. Today Isaiah adds “Come now, let us set things right...”, never give up. Though your sins be like scarlet or crimson red, they will become white as snow and bleached wool. Obviously, sometimes we get things wrong and have to make a U-turn in our understanding and acting. That’s called “conversion”, which is the main opportunity and activity for Lent.

In today’s gospel, Matthew has Jesus deliver a harsh critique of the scribes and Pharisees, who claimed to be authentic interpreters of God’s word, the Law: “Do what they tell you, but do not follow their example”. He was addressing not only the religious leaders of his time but the “scribe and Pharisee” in each one of us. Do we practice what we preach? Who among us places “heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people’s shoulders, but will not lift a finger to move them”? As LGBTQ persons in church and society we have throughout the centuries, no doubt, felt the weight of those burdens and even let them seep into the marrow of our bones. Sad indeed, yet we are grateful for those who went before us and taught and modeled for us and helped us to lay down those burdens. Jesus led the way: “Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; learn of me...”. Even though we have often been told that we are excluded from that invitation, we are reminded “Come NOW, let us set things right”. We ARE included as we gratefully acknowledge those who modeled inclusion and acceptance of us and for us. And now, let us exclude no one, ourselves included.

Dear Jesus, in your conversation with Nicodemus you compare yourself to the bronze serpent Moses lifted up in the desert, declaring that all who look upon you when you are lifted up and believe in you will have eternal life, that life that is NOW; all who look and believe will not perish. Declaring yourself the Way, the Truth and the Life, you invite us to follow you. The prophet Micah has succinctly and eloquently described how that’s done: “Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God.”. Help us to stop, look, listen and come to you and love one another as you love us, helping to carry each other’s burdens as you carry ours. Amen.

– Alexei Michalenko (he/him/his)

Dignity/Washington & Dignity/Northern Virginia

March 3, 2021; Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent

Jeremiah 18: 18-20, Psalms 31: 5-6, 14, 15-16, Matthew 20: 17-28

Ah, bullies. I suspect most of us while growing up were subject to bullies. Some dismiss it as a routine rite of passage. Some live in the resulting trauma for years. So many times after I would come home to my mother complaining about what the other kids said or did in school that day I would hear, “They’re just jealous,” or “Give it up to God.” Not a lot of solace for a youngster, perhaps, but as adults, we understand that we often have to go through hardship in order to get to a greater reward or an enlightened state. “The only way out is through,” the adage goes. And we people of faith can add, “... through God.”

Our hope is in God who has the ultimate perspective. We cannot know the path before us, not really. We have faith, like the psalmist, who declares, “My trust is in you, O Lord... in your hands is my destiny.” It can be so hard at times to see that there is light – truly wonderful, life-giving light – at the end of our dark tunnels. It can be so difficult to trust that God will deliver us when we keep hearing whispers all around us and even in our own heads that we should doubt what is in our hearts. We know that God, who is Love, made us with love, and has a plan for us.

Jesus, while admonishing his disciples about how to become great, gives us insight into that plan. He sets our priority for us: serve one another. If we are to follow the path of Christ, then we must be the servant of all. This, again, challenges my perspective – how can I stay true to myself and yet put others’ needs ahead of my own. This is a false dichotomy, of course. We know that in order to be useful to anyone else we must first make sure our basic needs are met. How can we be an effective servant if we ourselves are in turmoil? Flight attendants remind us to put our own masks on before assisting others; so it is in life. Jesus was true to himself, yet served all of us. We can follow his path. We have faith that if we do, we will be saved and find ourselves in that marvelous light.

And what of the bullies? God takes care of them too. We trust that God has the best perspective to know how to do that – we can leave it in God’s hands.

– *Christopher J Hinkle (he/him)*
Dignity/Washington

March 4, 2021; Thursday of the Second Week of Lent

Jeremiah 17: 5-10, Psalms 1: 1-2, 3, 4 and 6, , Luke 16: 19-31

“More tortuous than all else is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17: 5-10)

How many times have we heard, “It’s what’s in my heart that counts,” usually attributed to a kind of goodness that may not have been apparent to someone we’ve offended or was somehow lost in translation to the world. Conversely, we sometimes try to hide the jealousy, bias, or some other unkindness that may exist in our heart, but it ends up exposing itself in our actions - to which we may be inclined to exclaim that what was in our heart was actually a good intention, attempting to hide our own hearts from even ourselves.

The human heart ... who can understand it?

It sits in our chests only intending to sustain us by pumping life-giving oxygen to the farthest reaches of our limbs, until it suddenly falls in love, or worse, falls out of love, or worst of all, simply stops caring, which may be the hardest thing of all to understand about the human heart. When our hearts grow cold, our only joy obtained by our own personal success, blood continues to flow through our veins, but love no longer flows from our beings. When we turn a blind eye to injustices or walk by a homeless person, such as Lazarus, and decide even our scraps are too good to share, we shut ourselves off from the true breadth of our humanity.

By allowing ourselves to experience the full depths of our heart, feeling all of the joy, accepting the hurt, identifying and exploring our biases so that we can learn and grow and, in time, eliminate them, we allow ourselves to be vulnerable, which is a very hard thing for the human heart, but we need that vulnerability to allow ourselves to grow in faith and love.

– *Mary DeLia (she/her)*

Dignity/Washington

March 5, 2021; Friday of the Second Week of Lent

*Genesis 37: 3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a, Psalms 105: 16-17, 18-19, 20-21,
Matthew 21: 33-43, 45-46*

I remember this parable well from my years of teaching CCD to kindergarteners. When I was initially training with my mentor I remember saying to her “What a horrible lesson to present to a group of 6 year olds. People getting beaten up or killed for delivering a message to their masters’ workers. Those people getting just paybacks for their actions. God taking back an eternal reward.” It all seemed a lot to try to pass on to those kids.

As she occasionally needed to do when we reviewed the lesson plans, she would gently say “You are looking at it all wrong.”

In this particular instance, she told me to focus in on the fact that God loves us so much that he keeps forgiving us and giving us multiple do-overs. The land owner didn’t only send one message about the harvest but he sent several up to and including one with his son. Translated, that was God sending the prophets and ultimately His Son to guide us to Him.

Fast forward to today. I try on my own to do the next right thing, to love one another as He loved us, to be - not just in words, but also in action - the best representation of my faith. However, sometimes acting with no direction, I can get lost if I am not willing to be receptive to the messages and examples given to me by my family, friends and associates. These are God’s do-overs to me. Lessons to be learned and keep me on track.

These voices are just one of the many gifts that God gives me.

– *Kevin Townsend (he/him)*
Dignity/Washington

March 8, 2021; Monday of the Third Week of Lent

Second Kings 5: 1-15b, Psalms 42: 2, 3; 43: 3, 4, Luke 4: 24-30

When we are praying to God for help, do we sometimes think that it will take a special intervention – some grand miracle? In the first reading from Kings, Naaman, a Syrian general who has been a valiant warrior, is told to go to Israel to be cured of his debilitating disease -- leprosy. Perhaps because of his status in society, he thinks he will need to have a spectacular miracle to rid him of this disease – perhaps with much flourish or the waving of hands. Instead the prophet Elisha tells him to simply bathe in the River Jordan. At first, Naaman is angry and plans not to follow through with the bathing, but eventually he is talked into it. He is cured and returns home praising the one true God of Israel.

No prophet is accepted in his own land. That is one of the takeaways from today's gospel from St. Luke. The people of Nazareth hear Jesus in the synagogue reading and interpreting scripture and are amazed at how their former neighbor has developed. They had already heard that Jesus had performed miracles elsewhere and were thus hoping that He would do so in Nazareth. In addressing their wants, he reminds them of the story of Naaman. There were many lepers in Israel who were never healed, but Elisha cures Naaman the foreign warrior. So too, Jesus does not perform miracles in Nazareth. His kinsmen are so furious. In the end, Jesus leaves town to continue His ministry.

I want to extrapolate a little farther than the standard view of today's gospel. Perhaps the people of Nazareth came expecting to hear Jesus say what they wanted Him to say. He was from their land after all. They thought they knew Him well. Sometimes we put ourselves in a silo, a cocoon of comfort because it is easy. We too may seek out those who will tell us what we know. But in the end, is that how we should be? Shouldn't we open ourselves to other ways of thinking and be stretched to think in new ways? Shouldn't we be made to feel uncomfortable enough to broaden our scope and see life from other vantage points? During this Lenten season, let's take time to break out of our cocoons of comfort and open our hearts to new possibilities.

... in peace and health,

– *Jake Hudson (he/him)*
Dignity/Washington

March 9, 2021; Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent

Daniel 3: 25, 34-43, Psalms 25: 4-5ab, 6 and 7bc, 8 and 9, Matthew 18: 21-35

As a queer Catholic, Lent is a challenging season. I grew up believing it was an urgent time to get my libido perfectly under control before Easter, and I always failed. Lent's focus on penitence, purification, selflessness, and abnegation can be the perfect shame storm for queer and trans Catholics repressing their sexuality or gender expression. If we followed Church teaching to its end, our whole lives would be a long Lent. As in today's first reading, I felt "brought low because of my sins". As a young man in the fires of "lust" and shame, like Azariah prayed to God: "I fear You. Do not take away Your mercy from me. With contrite heart, receive my sacrifices as I follow You with my whole heart." My sacrifices were my body and my capacity to love and be loved.

But unlike Azariah, who said "those who trust in God cannot be put to shame", trusting in God's spokesmen and following them filled me with guilt. They taught me that if I acted on who I am, "in anger my master will hand me over to the torturers", as Jesus phrases it in today's gospel. But once I saw that the fruits of their theology and their demands on me were guilt, shame, low self-esteem, fear, isolation, self-harm, addiction, in myself and so many other LGBTQ people I see suffering – then I realized that they themselves were the torturers, keeping me imprisoned until I could pay a debt of perfection I could never pay. How grateful am I that by God's kindness and mercy I didn't stay in that prison forever, and in Dignity finally found "prophets, leaders, a place to offer first fruits, to find favor with God." But after finding refuge, I am called to forgive them. Not just 7 times. Not just 70 times. But every time I feel the urge to hate and blame them personally for religious trauma. Mercy, forgiveness, healing is the sacrifice God wants. Now I pray for deliverance from resentment, not from my own body and soul. I see that I can be "brought low everywhere" unless I forgive unreservedly from the heart.

– *Kenneth Dowling*

Dignity/Washington & Dignity Young Adult Caucus

March 10, 2021; Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

Deuteronomy 4: 1, 5-9, Psalms 147: 12-13, 15-16, 19-20, Matthew 5: 17-19

In Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the Israelites that in their laws and customs, they have a treasure of “wisdom and understanding.” But these passages also call attention to the loving intimacy between God and the people among whom God lives.

In today’s Gospel reading from Matthew, Jesus reveals his purpose during his Sermon on the Mount: he is not here to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them. Jesus seems to be confirming the substance of the various laws and commandments of the Hebrew Scriptures, but with a caveat. In Matthew 22 Jesus is asked by the Pharisees about what commandment is the greatest. Jesus replies, “You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all our mind and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Then, Jesus makes an important connection to what we read in today’s verses from Matthew 5: “...the whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

How do you express your faith? By keeping the catechism of the Catholic Church? There are those who firmly believe the measure of one’s Catholicity is the extent to which these tenets of Catholicism are followed. But, focusing on the rubrics alone without also focusing on Jesus’s commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” leads to a faith which remains one dimensional, and we lose out on the relationships so critical to who we are as Christians. We must be careful, because it is too easy to weaponize the rubrics of our Catholic faith to further marginalize others who are also in need of Christ’s enduring love.

May today’s readings confirm not only the importance of the tenets of our faith, but also the most pivotal of commandments—to love God, to love others as we love ourselves. I pray you and I continue to be challenged during this season of renewal in living our faith in service to others and to ourselves, so we can bring forth justice, truth, and the City of God.

– *Rev. Ann Penick (she/her/hers)*
Dignity/Washington

March 11, 2021; Thursday of the Third Week of Lent

Jeremiah 7: 23-28, Psalms 95: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9, Luke 11: 14-23

Today's readings share the theme of challenging authorities in the name of what is right. In the first reading, God speaks to Their people, revealing to them that their fathers disobeyed God and chose to do evil things. God then tells them to call their fathers out and explain to them that what they're doing is wrong, even if they refuse to listen. A similar message is found in today's Gospel reading. Religious leaders witness Jesus driving a demon out of a mute man and giving him the ability to speak again. They are shocked and believe Jesus has performed this miracle by the power of "Beelzebul," the devil. Jesus rejects this belief by saying Satan would never send one of his own followers to undo his work. He then argues that the religious leaders themselves have done exorcisms too and asks them "by whom do your own people drive [demons] out?" In other words, Jesus says he is more like them than they originally thought.

This idea of challenging authorities is quite familiar to the LGBTQ+ community. To this day, leaders of the Catholic Church still look down on us as "sinful," just like the religious leaders of Jesus's time viewed him as a follower of Satan. We may not be literally driving out demons, but we do many holy things that are instantly demonized, e.g. getting married, worshiping together as a community, and simply loving and accepting people for who they are. Just as in Jesus's time, religious leaders criticize us for doing the exact same things they do.

God's beloved people have been looked down on by biased religious leaders since the very beginning, but God still calls us to live our truths and speak out about what is right. As God commanded Their people to stand up to their fathers, God is calling us to speak out against injustice and hatred directed at us. We may not be listened to or understood, but we shouldn't be afraid. God will always be on our side.

– *Emi DeLia (they/them)*
Dignity/Washington

March 12, 2021; Friday of the Third Week of Lent

Hosea 14: 2-10, Psalms 81: 6c-8a, 8bc-9, 10-11ab, 14 and 17, Mark 12: 28-34

As a young child in religion class, the Sister who taught our class told us all about heaven. The description sounded pretty awesome, my second-grade self found the idea of endless candy, bicycles, and tons of time to hang out with friends to be a goal worth striving for!! Sadly, my notion of the image of heaven, the Kingdom of God, never really evolved in any meaningful way (with the exception of candy becoming baked goods and bicycles becoming jeeps). I lived with the second-grade view that I was supposed to be “good” and I would “earn” a spot in God’s eternal Kingdom. I sincerely believed that if I could only conform to an externalized, pre-ordained set of rules found in a catechism or theology text then I would be awarded an everlasting home. The really sad thing, is that I convinced myself that doubting things the way I did, thinking what I really thought, and even being who I really am would never win me this heavenly prize.

One day I shared my lament about my second-grade world view with a wise person who basically told me I was full of it. I learned that the Kingdom of God is not a prize to be earned but a gift to be unwrapped and savored. Heaven is dawning right here and now, in and around us. Jesus brought God’s kingdom to us through the gift of himself, his teaching and his loving. The Kingdom of peace, justice, love and grace is here for us to discover. As we love one another, as we forgive others trespasses, as we strive for peace, we make God’s Kingdom alive here in our own time!

Jesus speaks to the crowds in today’s Gospel passage of love, a love for God and love for people...it is that love that brings us closer to the realization of God’s Kingdom around us. Thus, Jesus points out to the scribe how close the Kingdom is due to his embracing of the commandment to love.

As I read this passage, I am encouraged to reflect again on my journey through this life so far. To be honest, I still wrestle with the second-grade notion of compliance to an external canon being the path to heaven. But in reading today’s passage I am reminded that love of God, love of friends and enemies and even love of myself is going to bring me ever closer to the Kingdom. During this Lenten season, we can challenge ourselves to know that we “are not far from the Kingdom of God” as experienced through the kindness, charity and love of those around us.

– R S (*he/him/his*)

Dignity/Washington

March 15, 2021; Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Isaiah 65: 17-21, Psalms 30: 2 and 4, 5-6, 11-12a and 13b, John 4: 43-54

I was six years old when my father died suddenly and unexpectedly from a heart attack. My father was a teacher at a local Catholic school, and a leader in his union and our neighborhood. In the days leading up to his funeral, our home filled with countless bouquets of flowers. I took one of those bouquets and “planted” the flowers by the statue of Mary under the tree in our back yard; the flowers bloomed for months.

Today’s Gospel also speaks of miracles. Have you ever noticed that every miracle is preceded by a crisis? The bride and groom ran out of wine at their wedding feast; Jesus turned water into wine and the crisis was averted; while preaching, Jesus multiplies fish and loaves so no one is hungry. In today’s Gospel, we see the deep crisis of a parent. In this story, a father travels to see Jesus in Galilee because his son is sick and at the point of death.

We have all experienced crises in our lives; some of us have experienced the death of parents and loved ones; others may have struggled with their career or finding purpose in their lives. We may have lost jobs, gone through difficult break-ups or experienced a serious illness. As LGBTQI Catholics, many of us also experienced a crisis of faith when we began to come out to ourselves, family, and friends. I had been questioning my sexuality for years, but as a theology major discerning a call to ministry, I questioned how my identity could fit into my understanding of who God is and God’s call for me

Crisis brings the opportunity for faith and miracles. In the Gospel, Jesus proclaims that the child will live and the father believes him, later learning that the fever broke at the hour that Jesus spoke. Faith is the invitation to go beyond what we have seen and heard and to trust. How do we as LGBTQI Catholics respond to our crisis? At Dignity, we proclaim the wholeness and holiness of LGBTQI people; we believe that God has created us exactly as we are, in God’s own image and with dignity. In the first reading we hear God say, “there shall always be rejoicing and happiness in what I create; for I create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight.” We are a delight to God; and there is rejoicing and happiness in our creation.

Today, I invite you to reflect on these questions: What crises have given way to miracles in your life? How does God delight in you today?

– *Meli Barber (she/her)*
Dignity/Indianapolis

March 16, 2021; Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Ezekiel 47: 1-9, 12, Psalms 46: 2-3, 5-6, 8-9, John 5: 1-16

What is a healing? And how do we know we are healed? This man in this story experienced healing in all the wrong ways. He was in the wrong place (not close enough to the pool), was healed on the wrong day and was challenged by the institutional leaders. Healing happens in odd places and often breaks rules, for a greater truth to emerge.

In 2017, my husband and I visited the town of Lourdes, France to see the Shrine and Grotto of the Immaculate Conception. Many friends had warned us about the commercialization of Lourdes, facetiously calling it the “Las Vegas” of France. We did not experience this; in fact, found Lourdes to be a naturally beautiful place, much like a small-town set in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia or Kentucky.

Upon arrival, we had a small dinner and noticed a steady stream of people carrying candles, walking to the grotto. As we joined the group, I could feel my heart beating fast, in anticipation of something supernatural. We entered this dark avenue of high, large trees leading to the grotto where people processed, reciting the rosary in many languages.

At the conclusion of the prayers, the crowd moved towards the grotto. The Church has chosen to top this humble site with a huge gothic basilica on the original town dump for the city of Lourdes.

What has always struck me about St. Bernadette is this: a young girl was given a message that this place, this stream is a place for healing. Water is holy by its very nature, as my beloved says, but here The Divine Feminine (Mary) chose a young girl to deliver the message of healing to the Patriarchy, which doubted, chastised, and condemned her, until people were healed.

Much like man at the Bethesda pool, the authorities questioned Bernadette’s claims that divine action was received in this, the town dump, clearly the wrong place for such a message, until the people were healed. The man at the Bethesda pool did as he was told. Bernadette did what she was told, while again, people were healed.

What struck me in reflection, is that this is a story of breaking rules, trusting divine voices, and healing. Is this not also the story of Dignity and LGBTQ people?

Fifty years ago, people gathered and heard messages of healing and hope in unlikely places like living rooms. Ridiculed by church authorities for seeking to integrate our LGBT lives and Catholic faith, we created places and invited people to come and find healing in the wrong places.

And like Jesus healing on the sabbath and St. Bernadette, Dignity breaks rules for a greater truth to emerge. We listen to the Divine within and allow the truth to emerge. The man at Bethesda pool was part of a greater ministry of Jesus, breaking rules, and healing people. St Bernadette’s encounter with Mary broke rules, and the healing of Lourdes continues to this day, even with members of the Wounded Warriors gathering with Iraqi soldiers to meet, talk and heal.

And our work with Dignity, challenging unjust rules, continues to offer healing.

DignityUSA, and with its communities and ministries, offers places of healing to all our LGBTQ and Ally members. We meet in unlikely places (now ZOOM) and continue to be places of healing and give messages of hope. We are criticized and oppressed by the Patriarchy, and yes, the people continue being healed. We all have many friends (whether lifelong members or one-time visitors) who leave Dignity made more whole by our work.

– Bob Butts (*he/him/his*)

Dignity/Dayton Living Beatitudes Community

March 17, 2021; Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent (Feast of St. Patrick)

Isaiah 49: 8-15, Psalms 145: 8-9, 13cd-14, 17-18, John 5: 17-30

“They tried all the more to kill [Jesus], because . . . he also called God his own father, making himself equal to God” (John 5:17).

Why on earth would “they” want to kill Jesus simply because he thought himself a child of God? I realize there are cultural and historical reasons why some in Jesus’ day may have heard that as blasphemy, but why did they care so much? That’s a lot of energy to give a small-town, self-aggrandizing rabbi. Why didn’t they just ignore him?

We could ask that question many times down through history. Why did some heterosexuals get so vehemently angry that same sex couples might share their nuptial legal protections? Why did some Southern whites turn to violence at the “threat” that people of color might share their schools, their pools, and the restaurants? Perhaps a more pointed question, why can some people get so angry when they realize that a supporter of former President Trump is in their midst? There is an extensive laundry list of things supporters of the former President have done wrong, but people in past examples would have also proclaimed the righteousness of their indignation. My question here is not one of political preference but one of anger’s energy.

I’m not defending his supporters, nor am I suggesting that all moral or political positions are equal. But I do wonder why I find myself – like the “they” in the gospel – angry because someone has a different understanding of America, or race, or love, or God than I do? Evolution undoubtedly plays a role in why we revert to our primitive “flight-or-fight” brain systems when encountering someone from “outside” our groups. Beyond our evolutionary hard-wiring though, perhaps we get so angry precisely because we do not trust that with God as Divine Parent, one already “has eternal life” and “has passed from death to life” (5:24). Isaiah says as much in today’s first reading, “Even should [a mother] forget [her child], I will never forget you” (49:15). This trans-testamental proclamation reminds us that we have nothing to fear from those who see the world differently. We (and perhaps . . . no, definitely . . . they, too) already have what we most need – God’s Spirit alive in us. We are already in possession of the love that we need, or better, that Love has already taken possession of us and our world. We can have the courage and wisdom to defy our evolutionary call to violence against the outsider, and trust Jesus’ call to see in them that same divine presence which we are called to see in ourselves. Given the current state of global crises, might I suggest that transcending our evolutionary urge to dehumanize the Different has never been more urgent.

In saying this, I do not suggest that we stop working to bring this Divine Love to even greater fulfillment in ourselves, our families, our communities, and our world. To the contrary, these times call for more commitment than ever to seeing and calling forth God’s love in our midst. But this mission to which we are all called requires that we do so without demeaning those with whom we disagree; that we who have been “given as a covenant to the people” (Is 49:8), make the covenant tangible without diminishing those who see that covenant differently. These readings challenge us to continue working until our world shares its bounty as equally as God would have it, and also to share the divine kindness as lavishly as Jesus did – with Pharisees, with Zealots, tax collectors, women, lepers, Samaritans, and all of their modern-day counterparts.

By the way, St. Patrick, whose memorial we celebrate today, offered just that example. He preached forgiveness and formed communities with the very people who had enslaved him. Somehow, he realized their differing beliefs did not make them less worthy of love. He realized that if their mothers could not forget them, then neither could he, and that, in some way, they too were already ensconced in the same Love that had already poured eternal life into him. Today, may we realize just that same truth about those with whom we differ . . . and treat them accordingly.

– Jeff Vomund (he/him/his)
Dignity/Washington

March 18, 2021; Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Exodus 32: 7-14, Psalms 106: 19-20, 21-22, 23, John 5: 31-47

Today's reading from Exodus really stood out for me. It depicts a version of God that has always troubled me, the God who brings terrible wrath upon entire communities. I wonder if everyone there was really participating in the depravity that offended God. Were some tricked or just afraid to speak out against what was happening? Did the instigators even know what they were doing? Moses asks for reconsideration and mercy and God gives it. It makes me wonder if God can reconsider His wrath in the face of people actually doing something wrong, can the Church reconsider its official views on full recognition of LGBTQ individuals. Moses suggests that God might appear hypocritical to the Egyptians from whom he delivered the Israelites from slavery. How must it look to the outside world when the Church perpetuates its history of LGBTQ marginalization and exclusion in light of Christ's message of universal love and inclusion?

The Psalm transitions from the transgressions of the Israelites in the desert to all of us today. It says "Remember us, O Lord, as you favor your people." The "us" refers to people in the present day and we ask that God grant favor to us, even when we have transgressed against God as our ancestors ("fathers" in the patriarchal phrasing) did in the past. (And our posterity certainly will in the future.) Lent is a good time to reflect on these transgressions. I have long felt the Church was mistaken in its exclusion of LGBTQ people. But for many years, I acted like a spectator watching the building of the golden calf, perhaps shaking my head disapprovingly, but then leaving it at that. Things changed greatly for me and my family when our child Emi came out as gay and later as non-binary. Being a disapproving bystander was no longer enough and the Church's actions no longer seemed like just a mistake. They were shaking the faith of my family to the core. Finding Dignity gave all of us the chance to become more active and involved. This activity became a blessing not just for Emi but for my wife Mary and me as well. As we seek acceptance of LGBTQ people, we must be mindful of our own transgressions within and outside of our communities. Who have we excluded? Do we have golden calves (e.g., careers, hobbies, comforts) that we are prioritizing over our faith and our calling to reach out to others? Do we forget the "great deeds" God has done for us, especially when things are not going well? When others are faced with harsh, disproportionate punishment, even if they have truly done something wrong, do we seek mercy for them as Moses did? Or do we focus our concern only on those who are like us and our loved ones, turning the rest of our attention to the distractions of the golden calves in our lives?

– *Derek DeLia (he/him)*
Dignity/Washington

March 19, 2021; Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary

*Second Samuel 7: 4-5a, 12-14a, 16, Psalms 89: 2-3, 4-5, 27 and 29,
Romans 4: 13, 16-18, 22, Luke 2: 41-51a*

This past December, Pope Francis proclaimed a “Year of Saint Joseph” from December 8, 2020 to December 8, 2021. In his Apostolic Letter entitled *Patris corde* (“With a Father’s Heart”), Pope Francis describes Saint Joseph as a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, and accepting father; a father who is creatively courageous, a working father, a father in the shadow.

On this day, we celebrate the Solemnity of Saint Joseph and his role in salvation history. The scriptures reveal little personal information about him. What we do know about Joseph is that God called him to be the father of Jesus. In the Gospel passage chosen for this day, we never hear Joseph speak, and yet we are aware of his presence. As Pope Francis proclaims – a father in the shadow.

At the beginning of this scripture passage, we encounter Mary, Joseph and Jesus traveling to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. Jesus becomes separated from his parents; they assumed he was with friends and acquaintances in the caravan traveling home from Jerusalem. Upon arriving at their home, Mary and Joseph realize that Jesus was missing. Like most parents, they are filled with anxiety and immediately return to Jerusalem. After a three-day search, they find Jesus in the temple. He was amid the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. When his parents ask Jesus “why have you done this to us?”, he simply says “did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house.” Mary and Joseph did not understand what he said to them.

For me, Jesus’ statement to his parents is a proclamation of who he is and what he must do with his life. As the Son of God, Jesus knew why he must be with the teachers in the Temple. The amazing thing is that at only twelve years old, he possessed a certitude, confidence and self-acceptance, which naturally confused Mary and Joseph.

As a person of faith and gay, accepting my sexual orientation took a long time to understand. It also took a while to arrive at a place within myself to proclaim out loud who I am with certitude and confidence, as Jesus demonstrated in our Gospel today. I now know that God wants me to be the person God created me to be. May we all have the certitude, confidence and courage to be ourselves and to know that God loves us just as we are.

– *Denis Pringle (he/him/his)*
Dignity/Washington

March 22, 2021; Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Hosea 14: 2-10; Psalms 81: 6c-8a, 8bc-9, 10-11ab, 14, 17; Mark 12: 28-34

"The Lord is My Shepherd, I shall not want"

These words sum up one of the most comforting passages in scripture. This comfort is always present even when we may be caught up in our busy schedules.

God's comforting presence is with us even during the trying times of a pandemic and political strife. God is with us always through every single moment.

Tribulations, traumas and trials can give way to inner peace amidst the seeming storms of life.

For the Psalm goes on to say: "Even though I walk through the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me. Your rod and your staff comfort me".

The Psalm has an eschatological thrust as it reminds us that death has no hold over us, but rather, death will never be a thing to fear with Christ's comfort.

Indeed, it is comforting to know that human beings will have reunion with Christ and all the saints in heaven.

John 8:1-11:

"Let anyone of you who is without sin cast the first stone"

In this reading, we are reminded once again of the well-known story of the woman who was caught in adultery, The Pharisees are very legalistic and full of outrage about this, but Jesus sees their hypocrisy and says: "Let anyone of you who is without sin cast the first stone".

The message of this reading seems to say that we should not judge even though we are tempted to do so by many divisive forces. When we are upset by people ---do not cast a stone at them. Rather, be tolerant and not reactionary,

In this reading from John, we can realize the truth of the Gospel message. One cannot attack others, if one is imperfect oneself. We are all fallible human beings and marked by Original Sin. Therefore, we cannot be perfect.

It is hard to embrace radical authentic spirituality and inner growth when we are continually surrounded by soundbites, tweets, commercialism and divisive voices. John is reminding us to not condemn others when we need to heal ourselves first.

A contemporary application of this would be ---not to give in to vengeful accusations whether it be in a condo board dispute, a school situation, or an argument with a co-worker or, even, our immediate family.

We must not be like modern day Pharisees, but rather, we should strive to be better Christians ourselves.

John has given us this striking example of a woman being accused too harshly to show us that we must not be hypocritical and judgmental, as we are all sinners ourselves.

It is all too easy to give in to reactionary hypocritical judgments and fears in our world today, but we must not give in to these impulses. The spirit of Christ will help us grow in forgiveness and reconciliation with others.

– *David Friscic (he/him/his)*
Dignity/Washington

March 23, 2021; Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Numbers 21: 4-9, Psalms 102: 2-3, 16-18, 19-21, John 8: 21-30

Starting with the Ten Commandments we learn God likes to assert who He/She is and that when it comes to a power struggle remember who is numero uno and it isn't anyone else. In the reading from the Book of Numbers the hard walk to the Promised Land is falling victim to the challenges of travel. So to get the flock moving, God sends snakes to put speed to steps. Moses appeals to God who creates a visual vaccine that will save those who see it. Order is restored and the people realize God is God and a loving one, but who also does not appreciate kvetching herds. While the LGBTQ community has been abused, we do have an increasingly loving God.

In the Responsorial Psalm, the second voice from the people we hear in Psalm 102, "Oh Lord, hear my prayer and let my cry come to you" seems like it comes from the Numbers reading. Again, the people appeal to God for some comfort for the hard life they endure and want it lifted from them. The call reveals that if they very humbly ask God to ease their burden, which God will do, they first must acknowledge the great power of God.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus takes us back to using the name God used when first speaking with Moses - I AM. Jesus is making the Pharisees see that the Son of God is part of God and speaks with God's voice. Simply put "I AM" presents God as all that is. When I AM spoke to Moses as a voice from a burning bush, in the human form of Jesus I AM is transformed to Jesus as a co-equal with God, in fact the same being I AM. There is nothing but I AM who is one with the Father. It states that those who accepted this all encompassing being came to believe from Jesus' testimony, just as they had from the Father.

– *Tom Bower (he/him/his)*
Dignity/Washington

March 24, 2021; Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Daniel 3: 14-20, 91-92, 95, Daniel 3: 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, , John 8: 31-42

In today's readings, I see a lesson in handling anger and frustration with others.

King Nebuchadnezzar -- a prominent villain of the Old Testament -- deals with his adversaries with violence and death threats. The king threatens that anyone who won't worship his golden statue "god," will be "instantly cast into the white-hot furnace."

In the gospel passage from John, Jesus has to repeatedly explain to his followers who he is, why he has come, and their role in loving and following Jesus. Towards the end of this passage, Jesus seems to get worked up and a little agitated at their misunderstanding. I imagine Jesus ultimately keeping his cool, leaning into their questions, and explaining the way he sees the world (I'm reading between the lines here, of course).

For Nebuchadnezzar and for Jesus, each is met with opposition or confusion from others about their own worldviews. But the way they react is entirely different: One with violence, the other with compassion.

In our increasingly entrenched society, I find a lesson for us to not respond to those in opposing camps with hostility or violence, but with curiosity and grace. Even if you may get a bit testy, I see Jesus's handling of his followers' incessant questions and misunderstandings as a model to engage with humility and not let his frustration devolve to violence.

My mind immediately goes toward interacting with folks with different political views, but I think this can also apply to anyone we are having trouble connecting with -- whether it be in a moment of conversation with a loved one, or a friend you've had a falling out with, or a coworker you struggle to work with.

As an important caveat, there are limitations to engaging with those with "opposing" views. Many of us LGBTQ folks have been harmed by others who have rejected us for simply being who we are. Please, take the space you need to have healthy boundaries for yourself.

But in the right situations and with the right people, I take this lesson from today's reading as a challenge to myself as much as to others. Let's lean into one another's humanity, sharing our own humanity, and going from there. Let's leave behind Old Testament violence of throwing people into the furnace (modern-day translation, perhaps: badmouthing them to others, calling them out on social media), and embrace Jesus's model of curiosity and compassion with each other.

– *Martin Witchger (he/him/his)*
Dignity/Washington

March 25, 2021; The Feast of the Annunciation

Isaiah 7: 10-14; 8: 10, Psalms 40: 7-8a, 8b-9, 10, 11, Hebrews 10: 4-10, Luke 1: 26-38

The Annunciation story of the only incidence of God's direct interference in the evolution of his entire creation. What I find so spectacularly and particularly appealing about the narrative is that it is so personal rather than theological and theoretical. Mary, a young Jewish girl in a backwater middle East village is presented with a very real, very personal and very serious conundrum. She makes a choice and freely accepts the burdens and lifelong consequences of that choice. Her trust in God is total and astonishing. The narrative, however, is incomplete without recounting the ensuing declaration she makes to her cousin Elizabeth. We know Mary's words as her "Magnificat":

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for He has looked with favor on His humble servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed,
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His Name.
He has mercy on those who fear Him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm,
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich He has sent away empty.
He has come to the help of His servant Israel
for He has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise He made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children for ever.*

—James Sweeney (He/Him)
Dignity/Washington

March 26, 2021; Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Jeremiah 20: 10-13; Psalms 18: 2-3a, 3bc-4, 5-6, 7; John 10: 31-42

Today's Gospel needs some context: this exchange between Jesus and the authorities, wishing to stone him to death for blasphemy, takes place in the temple during the Feast of Dedication. The Feast of Dedication is basically Hanukkah – a celebration recalling the reconsecration of the Jewish temple after it had been defiled by the Greeks some 200 years earlier.

It's these two words, *temple* and *consecration*, that I'd like to reflect on. Jesus is in the temple for a celebration remembering that temple's consecration. "Consecration" is an incredibly ... "churchy word" ... as a friend once said to me. What does it mean? Simply enough it just means "to set aside for holy purposes". We use the word often enough in Catholic vocabulary that it probably sounds familiar: we *consecrate* churches – we set aside certain buildings for worship and community; people who enter religious life are said to be living *consecrated* lives – their lives are set aside from the outside world and dedicated to solitude and prayer; and most importantly, we *consecrate* bread and wine – we say very specific prayers and then set these elements aside and worship them as the Body and Blood of Christ.

And so here's Jesus in a temple, which has been consecrated (or set aside) for worship and prayer. And in that very temple, the authorities want to put Jesus to death because he says that he and the Father are one. His defense? He's been consecrated by the Father – he's been set aside for holy purposes. In other words, back off!

So what do we do with this?

Have you ever thought that *you* have been consecrated or set aside for holy purposes? The truth is ... we have. We have been *consecrated*. We have been *set aside* for holy purposes. Even St. Paul says our bodies are *temples* of the Holy Spirit. All of us. Yes, you and me! It's overwhelming if you think about it! And so on one level, we push that notion aside and think to ourselves, "Who, me? Noooooo!"

But on another level, we all know it's true. And Lent is the time when we let ourselves embrace it, at least for 40 days. Lent is a time in which we somehow *consecrate* or *set aside* some part of our lives and make them holy ... or at least holier than their current state: some people *fast* or give something up; some people give *alms* or perform charitable works in a way they wouldn't normally do; some people set aside time for *prayer* or meditation. All who attempt these practices know full well they may not continue the practice for the rest of the year. But that's what these actions are: these acts of self-denial, these acts of charity, and these acts of prayer are all ways in which we *consecrate* ourselves and set *ourselves aside* and say, "Yes. It's true. I am holy. I am good. I have been set aside."

Lent is that time in which we can think about these actions and say, "I am consecrated. I may not be perfect, but somehow, I have been set aside for holiness. I may fail as the year goes on, but at least for now, during these 40 days, I am going to say, 'yes, I am holy'".

– Mike O (He/Him/His)
Dignity/Washington

March 29, 2021; Monday of Holy Week

Isaiah 42: 1-7; Psalms 27: 1, 2, 3, 13-14; John 12: 1-11

The Lenten season is nearing its end, and with Jesus we head to Jerusalem for the final act of his dramatic life. With the ongoing pandemic it feels as though Lent has endured a whole year with COVID-19 acting as The Grim Reaper, each one of us hit by it one way or another. Through this desolation we look for hope and search our Scripture, our experience to bolster our faith and love.

Let's look at Isaiah today for that word of hope as we observe his prediction fulfilled in Jesus: "a bruised reed he shall not break; a smoldering wick he shall not quench". Unlike the Baptist, Jesus works quietly, gently, not shouting and wielding an axe. We LGBTQ followers of Jesus often (are made to) feel like that bruised reed and smoldering wick and even like Lazarus, wrapped in a shroud and stuck in a tomb/closet. But Jesus calls us forth and tells the bystanders "unbind him, and let him go/set him free". He calls Zacchaeus the hated Publican out of his tree and invites himself to his home. And in today's gospel we see that unbound and free Lazarus reclining at table with Jesus, while Martha serves the meal and Mary lavishes Jesus with attention, as they also do in Luke's gospel. Jesus feels free with everybody and we can identify with them. "Come to me ALL who are weary and feel burdened and I will give you rest". And it doesn't stop there. We are invited to share his yoke and learn from him to be gentle and humble of heart, that is, to carry on his mission to bring peace, and liberty and justice for all into our aching world. Jesus is the vaccine we need in the pandemic of hate, division and chaos that ravages our lives. He offers the "truth that sets us free", if we allow it. Jimi Hendrix expressed it beautifully: "When the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will know peace". May we come to the table to partake of his body and blood which he offers us to enjoy LIFE to the fullest.

Dear Jesus, may we know your freedom, your peace, and graciously accept and generously share your love with one another and all as you have shown us. Make our hearts like yours and may we keep trusting you. For you are gracious and full of love for humankind, and to you we render glory, now and forever. Amen.

– Alexei Michalenko (he/him/his)

Dignity/Washington & Dignity/Northern Virginia

March 30, 2021; Tuesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 49: 1-6; Psalms 71: 1-2, 3-4a, 5ab-6ab, 15 and 17; John 13: 21-33, 36-38

As LGBTQ Catholics, we have a special relationship with feeling left out. Growing up, there were many times my sexual identity was squashed by my faith, causing a deep feeling of isolation and sadness for the future.

In Middle and High School, as friends talked about crushes and dating, I had to skirt through such discussions, knowing that I was gay but unable to proclaim that without fear. Sure, I could have dated a girl at the school, but that always felt to be something selfish and wrong to her. Through college, as siblings were married and I attended more and more events where I was single around families, I felt a sadness in the future. Even after coming out at 21, I did not think that meant I would ever have a spouse or family but be destined to a life of abstinence and isolation.

As a world and country, we have made major advances towards equality for LGBTQ individuals, and fewer and fewer children growing up in our world feel this crushing isolation. To those of us that felt or continue to feel this isolation, we are being spoken to by Isaiah as he calls out to the islands and distant peoples, assuring all us in isolation that we are not toiling in vain.

Dignity has been a group in isolation, villainized, and pushed out of the Apostolic Catholic Church we long to be a part of One Body. To us, Isaiah announces that we will be raised up and made to be the light of the nations to reach the ends of the earth. As LGBTQ Catholics, we could easily feel isolated, but we must hold onto these words that we are working for the salvation of God and a Catholic Church of acceptance and love. Though it may seem hard and that little progress has been made in the 50 years since Dignity's beginnings, we hold faith that our God formed us as servants. We will continue to strive and ensure LGBTQ Catholics worldwide are shed of feelings of isolation and feel the loving embrace of our God.

– *Christopher Flow (he/him/his)*
Dignity/Washington

March 31, 2021; Wednesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 50: 4-9a; Psalms 69: 8-10, 21-22, 31 and 33-34; Matthew 26: 14-25

Could today's readings fit any more perfectly into the plight of LGBTQ-identifying Catholics? In a religious institution that has often vehemently opposed our dignity, we have not rebelled from our love for God. Ironically, it is within our own rebellion (exile) from the greater Church that we have not rebelled from our commitment to its traditions and to our God. As we look at our history as the LGBTQ+ community, do we not face the same torments, whether literally or figuratively, as those described in the first reading? Have we not been beaten, buffeted, and spat upon? Have we not given ourselves emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually to our cause - to our dignity?

As we read through today's first reading, we must be thankful for the allies who helped to found our organization; those who have presided for us and allowed us to use their spaces in which to gather; and/or those who continuously join us in worship, as they have consistently shown their willingness to "uphold our right" and "appear together." We have recently been blessed - though at their own pace - by a Pope and a Cardinal who have begun to join that upholding. May those who continue to dispute our dignity grow weary in that confrontation but grow strong from the example set by those upholding our right.

In our psalm today, words such as, "shame," "insult," and "outcast" hit a bit too close to home. For those who have literally been treated as an outcast and a stranger by their families, we hope and pray that our community has become a safe haven and that we have become a chosen family to welcome them into a new home of restoration and respite. While we may serve as the metaphorical "poor" and bonded, as it pertains to our relationship with the Church, let us recognize the ways that we may also be seen as the privileged - whether through our race, gender identity, educational background, etc. - and how we may uphold "the right" and the dignity of those perhaps considered "poorer" than us in those areas.

Finally, today's Gospel brings up a familiar cautionary tale in Judas Iscariot. For most, this tale warns of treachery and betrayal; for others, it personifies the old adage, "keep your friends close but your enemies closer." Perhaps for our community and our greater organization, it asks us to reflect on our own place within the Church - are we the ones who have been betrayed? In unkind words: is the Church playing the role of Judas Iscariot in our metaphorical Feast? And if so, at what point and by what means do we show forgiveness?

- *Vin Testa (he/him/his)*
Dignity/Washington

April 1, 2021; Holy Thursday

Exodus 12: 1-8, 11-14; Psalms 116: 12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18;

First Corinthians 11: 23-26; John 13: 1-15

“Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.” – John 13:16

In John’s Gospel lesson for Holy Thursday, we hear the familiar story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. In the first century, it was common practice to have your feet washed, often by a slave, prior to a communal meal. So, it was understandable to hear of the disciple’s shock when Jesus began to wash their feet. They were bewildered and dumbfounded that the Son of God was willing to do that. Some of the disciples said that they should be washing His feet. But in this simple act, Jesus is demonstrating to us the true sense of our personhood in Christ; to serve one another. Jesus tells his disciples “So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.”

In our Dignity community, there are many ways in which we can be a servant to one another. Perhaps you serve others in our community by volunteering to lector, acolyte, preside or cantor. Or perhaps you prefer quieter ways to serve by reaching out to others in our community who may be struggling with health issues. Maybe it’s by reaching out and helping the homeless LGBTQ+ youth or our aged population.

In my own life, I find that when I am feeling lonely and depressed, a focus and a direction toward serving another takes my mind off my own issues and the simple act of serving gives me peace that can overcome my loneliness and depression.

As a musician, I find inspiration not only in music but in the words of some of our greatest hymns. This hymn by Richard Gillard speaks directly about Jesus’ call to be servants to others:

*Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant, too.
We are pilgrims on a journey; we’re together on this road.
We are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.*

– Christopher Schroeder (he/him/his)
Dignity/Washington

April 2, 2021; Good Friday

Isaiah 52: 13 — 53: 12; Psalms 31: 2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25;

Hebrews 4: 14-16; 5: 7-9; John 18: 1 — 19: 42

Good Friday is a day to think about suffering. This is the day when we foreground Jesus' passion and death, and we talk about the gift of Jesus' suffering for us. Unfortunately, that has often led Christians to an unhealthy romanticization of suffering. We are, after, all the people who have made the instrument of Jesus' brutal execution into jewelry, and who made a habit of telling the people we were oppressing that their suffering made them special to God.

Jesus did suffer and die, but he spent his life alleviating the suffering and alienation of others. Somehow our Good Friday theology of the cross has to encompass both those truths. Suffering can be a path to greater compassion and kindness, but it is the alleviation of suffering that ought to be our focus of followers of Jesus.

For years I heard the story of Jesus' passion and I asked, "How can my suffering lead to healing and new life?" That's not a bad question, but given that same story, neither is, "How am I using my power to inflict suffering on others?" It seems notable that the Church has taught us so consistently to ask the former question, but so seldom the latter.

We in the LGBTQ+ community have experienced this in our own way. For the few decades it has acknowledged the presence of queer identities other than by calling us names, the Church has suggested that being in a sexual minority was simply our cross to bear. We had to carry it meekly and as asexually as possible in order that God might not look upon our damaged selves with disgust. Thus, the Church helped create the suffering that it in turn asked us to patiently and politely endure.

Today, I wonder how often I do that to others? To my partner? To my family and loved ones? Too often, I have given myself the role of sufferer. We as a Church have said that we are Jesus and the disciples in this story of passion. Perhaps, on this Good Friday, we might ask ourselves how we are the soldiers in the story.

And so my questions for myself today: What can I do today to end or acknowledge the pain of another? How can I humbly admit the pain for which I may have been a partial cause? Can this Friday be truly good because I take responsibility for the pain I cause and have the courage to make changes, and to make amends. It is so tempting to give ourselves a starring role in today's passion, but perhaps on this Good Friday we might ask not about the sufferings we endure so much as about the sufferings we cause.

— *Jeff Vomund (he/him/his)*
Dignity/Washington

April 3, 2021; Holy Saturday

Did you have a good Lent?

Lent is my favorite season, and every year I look forward to it. I know it's not an easy time. There're lots of days that I look at the promises that I made on Ash Wednesday and think "...do I have to?"

The things we do to honor God during the Lenten season are often inconvenient to our lifestyles, and cause us to think about the choices that we regularly make. They can be uncomfortable and frustrating.

In the end, though, our individual suffering isn't the reason for Lent. LOVE doesn't want us to be miserable. LOVE has never asked that of us. Instead, LOVE has asked us: make choices to Be Closer to Me.

When Jesus was tempted in the desert, He made choices, too, choices that resulted in discomfort, in lost chances, in hurt pride. But the moral of that story isn't that LOVE wanted Jesus to be miserable, is it? LOVE just wanted Jesus to choose LOVE, and that is a positive action, not a negative one.

This year during Lent, I've done my best. You all have too. Sometimes we made mistakes and forgot our promises. But we went in with the full faith of wanting to do the right thing to honor LOVE—not to deny ourselves in some attempt at personal self-flagellation, but to do something good in order to deepen our relationship with LOVE.

The faithful gravekeepers—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome—also come with the sad and painful duty to honor Jesus, even though it is hard. In Genesis, Abraham does his best as well, making hard choices to do what he thinks will honor LOVE.

But LOVE did not ask them for their suffering, only for their faith. And in both of these stories, LOVE intervened and reminded them of this.

The Lenten season reminds us again and again that the purpose of our lives is not to hurt ourselves in the name of LOVE, but instead to make the positive steps to be closer to LOVE. Perhaps that means that, along the way, you lose things that are very painful indeed to lose. You may cut out things that you miss, in order to be closer to LOVE.

But so too, in the beginning, there was nothing—only an absence, a darkness. And LOVE intervened.

"Let there be light," we hear at Easter Vigil, and the dark nave brightens. We have spent forty days making choices every day that bring us closer and closer to this light. And LOVE intervenes!

"He has been raised. He is not here. He is going before you to Galilee, as He has told you." And LOVE reminds us that our sadness is temporary; our deprivation is not the end of the story. In our darkness, LOVE will intervene.

He is Risen. Let there be light.

– Rory Hytrek (*he/him/his*)
Dignity/Washington

April 4, 2021; Easter Sunday

Acts 10: 34a, 37-43; Psalms 118: 1-2, 16-17, 22-23; First Corinthians 5: 6b-8; John 20: 1-9

There is an intriguing painting by Sister Helen Brancato depicting the crucifixion, and across the top you see the words “It was the women who stayed.”

The gospel stories about the passion and resurrection feature women prominently. Jesus’ female disciples are shown to have amazing staying power. The details vary among the accounts, but all four gospels tell us about the women who stayed.

Now, why would all four evangelists, in a brutally patriarchal culture, mention women as the first witnesses to the resurrection and the first bearers of the news to the other disciples? Why, if they really wanted to sell the resurrection to their readers – if they really wanted to convince them of the Good News – why would they cast women in these extremely important roles – women, who were severely devalued in that place and time? The one woman common to all four gospel accounts was Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus “had cast out seven demons,” meaning she may have been thought to be off her rocker. One would think that the best way to make more followers for the Risen Christ, would be to compose the story, not with women that some thought were crazy or demon-possessed, but with MEN in the lead. Why would they not do that? The most logical answer is that it must have been true. It must have been hard to deny that the stars of this show were women. And it must have been true that these were women of tremendous loyalty and courage.

I mention courage, because the notoriously cruel Romans did not hesitate to crucify women and children as well as men. And hanging around the heavily guarded tomb of someone denounced as a troublemaker could have gotten them branded the same. They were engaging in a dangerous business. Of course, there were no news cameras to record the event, and we have no way of knowing what details are historically accurate and what are not. The gospel writers were not news reporters. They were not composing history books; they were giving us their theology. After all, they wrote decades after Jesus’ death. But it must have been an inescapable fact that the women truly were there for Jesus in a way that the men could not be. “It was the women who stayed.” Being there to witness new life – from non-existence to birth and from death to resurrection – women seem to do that remarkably well.

Now, I don’t mean to sentimentalize women. We all know that some are not very good at staying, at being there at the great transitions of life. Some lack the fortitude to sit with the suffering through the toughest of times, to be present at the cross. Not all of the female disciples could have done what Mary Magdalene did. And I don’t mean to suggest that men cannot be good at staying. But the ones in the gospel passion stories don’t come across as particularly strong.

So we give thanks on this Easter Sunday for men AND women who modeled courage and loyalty to the Christ. May we do the same.

– Richard Young (*he/him/his*)

Dignity/Dayton Living Beatitudes Community