

Wounded and Loved, Regathering the Scattered

LENTEN PRAYER AND REFLECTION GUIDE

Based on:

- Sunday Lenten Readings
- Bishop Bambera's Pastoral Letter



Diocesan Office for Parish Life

Diocese of Scranton

MISSION OF THE DIOCESE OF SCRANTON

We, the Catholic community of the Diocese of Scranton, are called through Baptism to imitate the servant leadership of Jesus Christ. In union with our Holy Father, the Pope, we proclaim the Gospel faithfully, celebrate the sacraments joyfully, and boldly promote life, justice and peace in northeastern and north central Pennsylvania.

GROUND RULES FOR SUCCESSFUL PRAYER AND REFLECTION GROUPS

1. Be on time for the meeting.
2. Come prepared to pray and discuss the material.
3. Participate thoughtfully in the conversations.
4. Respect all contributions to the discussion and do not interrupt others when they are speaking.
5. Be careful not to dominate or speak too much so that others may have “air time.”
6. Use “I” messages particularly when speaking about deep feelings. (Example: I feel frustrated when _____ because _____ {how it affects you}; I am upset when _____ because _____...; or I am disappointed when I hear _____ because....)
7. Use “active listening skills” or empathetic listening. (Example: I understand your sadness over...; or you seem very perplexed by...; or you seem relieved because...)
8. Express gratitude for other people’s ideas.
9. Follow up on any commitments you make to the group.
10. Recognize the Spirit’s presence—because we believe when two or three are gathered in Jesus’ name his risen Spirit is with us.

Are there other Ground Rules that you would like to suggest?

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ASH WEDNESDAY

CHECK-IN

Introduce yourself and tell about your family, work and or hobbies.

Share the reasons you decided to be part of this group and what you hope will happen in the group for it to be successful.

OPENING PRAYER

Antiphon

You are merciful to all, O God, and despise nothing that you have made. You overlook people's sins to bring them to repentance and you spare them, for you are our living God. (Wisdom 11:24, 25, 27)

Gracious God, you are calling us on this Lenten journey to see anew, to name new realities and to act with integrity and justice. Give us the courage to not only take time to reflect on your presence in our current reality, but also to share with one another our thoughts, our anxieties, our joys, our wonderings as well as our "What ifs..." On our journey help us to become servant leaders, to "think big," to reverence the earth, to be builders, not destroyers, to be conserving creators and not poisoning consumers, to proclaim hope in the face of darkness; and to be one with God who finds joy in sharing this earth with us. We ask this in the name of Christ Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

READING Joel 2:14-18 First Reading for Ash Wednesday

Blow the trumpet in Zion!
Proclaim a fast,
call an assembly;
Gather the people,
notify the congregation;
Assemble the elders,
gather the children
and the infants at the breast;
Let the bridegroom quit his room
and the bride her chamber.
Between the porch and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of God, weep,
And say, "Spare, O God, your people,
and make not your heritage a reproach,
with the nations ruling over them!
Why should they say among the peoples,

'Where is their God?' "

Then God was stirred to concern for the land
and took pity on the people.

The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING (Allow quiet time before sharing.)

1. What words particularly spoke to you today?
2. In what ways do you identify with the phrase, "Where is their God?"
Where do you see God in your life? In the life of the community?
3. What is the significance to the parish community of the "wake up call"
and the sense of urgency that the Prophet Joel presents? What will we do
during Lent to heed the call?

"We, the Catholic community of Scranton, need to return ourselves to the larger view of our communion and mission..."

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

Response: Gracious God, hear our prayer.

- For the community of the Church, that she will respond to the call of the prophet and discover God's presence in new ways this Lent, we pray...
 - For those who are homeless and hungry, that the community may feed them, we pray ...
 - For those in public office and running for public office, that they may re-discover God's presence in their lives and in the lives of those they serve, we pray ...
 - For the sick and the dying, that God's presence may be abundant to them and their families, we pray...

For what else should we pray?

Let us pray as Jesus taught us...Our Father

"...Staying open to a continual practice of giving and receiving opens the mystery of abundance that will bless us all even when things get tough."

REFLECTION ON PAGES 2 AND 3 OF THE PASTORAL -- Introduction

1. Bishop Bambera begins his pastoral with a poignant tale which points to various aspects of life such as goal setting, reaching out to others, risk taking, trust, generosity and perseverance. In what ways can you identify with the tale?
2. Jesus often used stories to get his point across. If you had to summarize in one sentence the most significant point of the story Bishop Bambera told, what would you say?
3. Bishop Bambera urges us to think beyond goals of personal holiness to Jesus' mission to bring the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth. In daily life there are many opportunities to spread good news to others so that they know they are valued and loved. As a community, how might we spread good news in a way that touches people and helps them in turn reach out to others?
4. Gratitude is a primary characteristic of a Christian. Notice the Bishop's many expressions of gratitude. Lent is a wonderful time to "count our blessings" and express gratitude. How will you express gratitude this Lent? As a community, how can we express thankfulness for our abundant blessings?
5. What is one thing I want to do or do differently or not do as a result of praying together, reading the Pastoral and this discussion? How will this decision affect others? The community?

CLOSING PRAYER

Gracious God, encourage us, support us, and be with us on our Lenten journey. We ask this in the name of Christ our brother and friend, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Antiphon

You are merciful to all, O God, and despise nothing that you have made. You overlook people's sins to bring them to repentance and you spare them, for you are our loving God. (Wisdom 11:24, 25, 27)

NOTES

Something more I want to pray about or think about...

Possible action steps that I or we could take....

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

CHECK-IN

Please state your name and tell us one thing you plan to do during Lent that will serve others well.

OPENING PRAYER

Antiphon

*When God calls on me, I will answer. I will give God glory, I will grant God length of days.
(Psalm 91:15-16)*

Gracious God, in this holy season of Lent, open our eyes to your love; open our ears to your wisdom that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects. Loving God, in this time of repentance we call out for your mercy. Keep us on the path that leads to you and to the life your Son won for us by his death on the cross. We pray this in the name of Christ our savior through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

READING Mark 1:12-15 Gospel for First Sunday of Lent

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert,
and he remained in the desert for forty days,
tempted by Satan.

He was among wild beasts,
and the angels ministered to him.

After John had been arrested,
Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God:

"This is the time of fulfillment.

The kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent, and believe in the gospel."

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING (Allow quiet time before sharing.)

1. What words in Mark's Gospel spoke to you today?
2. In this Gospel we are told that Jesus remained in the desert for forty days. Have you ever felt like you were in the desert? How? How did you experience God there? As you look back, where was there growth for you in that experience?
3. How does the phrase in this Gospel "The Kingdom of God is at Hand" relate to you and your parish community?

"God loves passionately. God showers us with gifts..."

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

Response: Gracious God, hear our prayer.

- For the Holy Church of God, in union with our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, that through our Servant Leadership of reaching out to our brothers and sisters both at home and to the ends of the earth we may be formed more truly to the likeness of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, we pray ...
- For peace in our world, that by living our baptismal call to be missionary as children of God guided by our loving Father all nations and peoples may be may be led to reconciliation, we pray ...
- For all those suffering because of natural disasters both here at home and all over the world, that we may respond generously to meet there needs, we pray ...
- For the poor, the sick, the grieving, that the hope of the Risen Christ gives them peace and the promise of a better day, we pray ...
- For all those who have died that through the mercy of our loving God they be brought to the peace and joys of Heaven, we pray ...

For what else should we pray?

Let us pray as Jesus taught us...Our Father

REFLECTION ON PAGES 4 AND 5 OF THE PASTORAL -- Wounded and Loved

“We simply cannot embrace the hope of Easter without first experiencing Good Friday and the wounds of our lives and brokenness of our

1. On page 4 of Bishop Bambera’s Pastoral Letter we read: “We are a people of hope precisely because we are not too proud to admit that we are wounded and broken and in need of a power bigger than ourselves to help us make sense of our lives. We believe such a power is rooted in our relationship with the Lord Jesus.” What kind of woundedness, loss or brokenness have you experienced or what experiences of woundedness, loss or brokenness have you known others to experience? What helped heal the wounds and deal with the losses? Sometimes a “desert experience” not unlike what Jesus experienced, is an occasion to deal with hurts and losses as well as reflect on the meaning and purpose of life. When have you experienced a “time alone and away” where you had a chance to deal with troubling situations or reflect on the deeper parts of your life? This Lenten journey may offer opportunities for such reflection.
2. Bishop Bambera quotes Pope John Paul II: “Our life is senseless, if love is not revealed to us, if we do not encounter love, if we do not experience it and make it our own, if we do not participate in it.” One factor that helps us believe that we have a loving God who cherishes each one of us is having the experience of being loved by other people. How has your experience of loving and being loved affected your belief in a loving God? In what ways is love a healing remedy for loss and brokenness?
3. Bishop Bambera reminds us: “In and through Christ, it is possible to create lively parish communities in which all are welcome and all can find meaning, purpose, and peace in their lives.” What can you do individually to create a lively community of faith where all feel welcomed, loved and have the possibility of being healed from loss or brokenness? What can you do with others to create this lively and embracing community of faith?

CLOSING PRAYER

Gracious God, in the Judean Desert Jesus found strength to prevail in his time of testing. In this holy season of Lent, grant that we likewise rely on your Word and your Spirit through the trials we may encounter as we build lively parish communities. Give us wisdom to meditate day by day on your divine truth that we may be strengthened as we experience your love and share it with others. We pray for the coming of your reign within us, among us, and throughout our world. We ask this in the name of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Antiphon:

One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4)

“As a Church enlivened by the very power of the Spirit of God, it is possible to move beyond the wounds we bear and to see through them to the promises given to all who open their lives to the Gospel of Jesus.”

NOTES

Something more I want to pray about or think about...

Possible action steps that I or we could take....

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

CHECK-IN

Share one surprise or happy event that happened to you this week as well as a comment about your Lenten journey.

OPENING PRAYER

Antiphon

Of you my heart has spoken: Seek God's face. It is your face, O God that I see. Hide not your face from me. (Psalm 27:8-9)

Loving God, you invite us at this moment of our Lenten journey to seek you and to be open to what it is that you are calling us to become—persons, transformed into the likeness of your Son who died and rose into glory. You call us in faith, as you called Peter, James and John, to be people who live the message of the Gospel and who share that message with others. Give us the vision to be strong in the profession of our faith. Reveal within us the power that will help us to banish all fear and anxiety. Ready our hearts to seek your face and to stand in wonder and awe in your presence. May this prayer be the transforming experience of our hearts to seek you and to one day share your glory in eternity. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

READING Mark 9:2-10 Gospel for Second Sunday of Lent

Jesus took Peter, James, and John
and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves.
And he was transfigured before them,
and his clothes became dazzling white,
such as no fuller on earth could bleach them.
Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses,
and they were conversing with Jesus.
Then Peter said to Jesus in reply,

“Rabbi, it is good that we are here!
Let us make three tents,
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”
He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified.
Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them;
from the cloud came a voice,
“This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.”

Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them.

As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant.

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you Lord, Jesus Christ

FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING (Allow quiet time before sharing.)

1. Read carefully the passage: “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone, but Jesus alone with them.” What does God’s invitation “to listen to his son” mean to you? What transforming effect does being alone with Jesus have for you? How will this transformation carry over to your dealings with family, friends, co-workers, your parish community?
2. Sometimes in our prayer we need to be alone “apart by ourselves” to allow Jesus to become one with us. How does prayer strengthen you?
3. In this Gospel, Peter says to Jesus: “Rabbi, it is good that we are here!” What importance/effect does this passage have on your parish community when you come together to pray as a group—during Mass, prayer sessions, etc.?

“By our Baptism... We are called to a servant leadership that helps us to transform our hurting world through compassion, solidarity, justice, and love.”

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

Response: Gracious God, hear our prayer.

- That the Church, its leaders, and the community of believers may respond in love and trust to the invitation of being transformed into the likeness of Jesus, we pray ...
- That as servant leaders, we may treasure God’s Word, nurture it with reverence, live it faithfully, and share it with others, we pray ...
- That our friends and neighbors who have been affected by the devastation of flooding may see in us, through our outreach programs, the compassionate presence of God, we pray ...
- That the healing presence of God be upon the sick, the lonely, the unloved and those affected by violence, we pray ...

For what else should we pray?

Let us pray as Jesus taught us...Our Father

REFLECTION ON PAGES 6 AND 7 OF THE PASTORAL LETTER -- Servant Leaders and Envisioning the Future Together

1. In this section of the Pastoral Letter, Bishop Bambera provides the heart of his message: Servant Leadership as he references the passage from John 13:3-15. What do the images of this passage say to you about service?

“My brothers and sisters, I am confident that as we all grow in our understanding of, appreciation for, and commitment to servant leadership, we will find ourselves on a faith-filled path to a future filled with hope and new life.”

2. Bishop Bambera reminds us that to be true disciples we are “called to lead lives deeply rooted in service—to our God, neighbor, self, and creation.” How can we be true servant leaders in each of these areas? How can we fortify ourselves for this mission?

3. A striking point made by Bishop Bambera is the distinction he makes between a *leader who serves* and a *servant who leads*. What prompts us to be *servants who lead*? What are some ways in which members of a parish community are *servant leaders*, especially during this Lenten season?

4. In his summary on page 6, Bishop Bambera refers to the future of our Diocese as one “filled with hope and new life,” and in Section III, he sets forth his vision for our Diocese. Which of these impresses you the most and why? How can we and all parishioners participate in supporting the Bishop’s hopes and dreams for the future of the Diocese?

CLOSING PRAYER

God, all loving, lead us to see with the eyes of faith what you are calling us to accomplish in our own lives and in the life of our parish community. Bless what we have already begun; sanctify our dreams and hopes for the future; stifle our fears and anxieties; and transform our hearts into the likeness of Jesus, a model of perfect servant leadership. We ask this in Jesus’ name through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Antiphon

Of you my heart has spoken; Seek God’s face. It is your face, O God, that I seek. Hide not your face from me. (Psalm 27:8-9)

NOTES

Something more I want to pray about or think about...

Possible action steps that I or we could take....

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

CHECK-IN

Share a Lenten experience with the group and a favorite place you go for peace and reflection.

OPENING PRAYER

Antiphon

My eyes are always on my God, for God rescues my feet from the snare. Turn to me and have mercy on me, for I am alone and poor. (Psalm 25:15-16)

Good and gracious God, allow us to draw closer to you each week of this Lenten season. Through our practice of fasting, prayer and almsgiving, show us your mercy. Strengthen us and help us to keep your commandments. Open our hearts to your compassion and deepen our sense of justice toward others. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

READING John 2:13–25 Gospel for Third Sunday of Lent

Since the Passover of the Jews was near,
Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves,
as well as the money changers seated there.

He made a whip out of cords

and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen,
and spilled the coins of the money changers

and overturned their tables,

and to those who sold doves he said,

"Take these out of here,

and stop making my Father's house a marketplace."

His disciples recalled the words of Scripture,

Zeal for your house will consume me.

At this the Jews answered and said to him,

"What sign can you show us for doing this?"

Jesus answered and said to them,

"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

The Jews said,

"This temple has been under construction for forty-six years,

and you will raise it up in three days?"
But he was speaking about the temple of his body.
Therefore, when he was raised from the dead,
his disciples remembered that he had said this,
and they came to believe the Scripture
and the word Jesus had spoken.

While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover,
many began to believe in his name
when they saw the signs he was doing.
But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all,
and did not need anyone to testify about human nature.
He himself understood it well."

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING (Allow quiet time before sharing.)

1. What words particularly spoke to you today?
2. The moneychangers in the Temple were making a living. We, who have bodies that are Temples of the Holy Spirit, also make a living in the world. What does this Gospel tell us about being children of God who live and work in the world?
3. Jesus "did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well." Realizing that Jesus knows us this well, what sacrifice will you make in the remaining weeks of Lent?

"No parish is truly a Christian community without these links to the local neighborhood, the diocese, the universal Church and the world."

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

Response: Gracious God, hear our prayer.

- For the Church, that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ will strengthen her in holiness and bring the scattered back into the fold, we pray ...
- For those who feel they have no one to pray for them, and for those who have asked for our prayers, we pray ...
- For civil authorities, that they will use their power and influence to protect the poor and the marginalized, we pray ...
- For those who will die today, that God will comfort them with mercy, we pray ...

For what else should we pray?

Let us pray as Jesus taught us...Our Father

REFLECTION ON PAGES 8 AND 9 OF THE PASTORAL LETTER -- Mission and Ministry of the Word

1. Bishop Bambera speaks of an experience he had at a parish in which he was celebrating the sacrament of Confirmation. He describes how a candidate with special needs was helped by her fellow candidates sitting to her right and left. He said, “their lives gave testimony to the power of the Spirit and to the faith that had been nurtured within them.” How does your faith and the power of the Spirit stir you to reach out to others in need?
2. “I call us to be servant leaders who are people of the WORD...” On page 9, the Bishop offers some practical considerations. Study these and reflect on which ones you might be involved with and which ones you feel should be top priorities. Share your thoughts.
3. Read the Mission Statement of the Diocese of Scranton aloud. What words or phrases strike you? How do they touch you? What significance do they have for you, your parish community and the Diocese of Scranton?
4. Bishop Bambera speaks about “the call of the parish to evangelize in the name of Jesus.” What are some words and phrases in the Pastoral Letter which describe Catholic evangelization?

“The future of the diocese lies in the renewal of parish life, and our hope lies in the generous servant leadership of priests, religious, and laity who, wounded but loved, freely give themselves to Christ’s good news mission of gathering those scattered from the love of God and the Church.”

5. How is your concept of a parish community developing as a result of reading and studying the Pastoral Letter? “No parish is truly a Christian community without these links to the local neighborhood, the diocese, the universal Church and the world.” How do you, as a member of a parish, “a people called together by God,” connect with the local community, the diocese, the universal Church and the world?

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, allow your Word to penetrate our hearts and minds. May we always desire to live your Word in our daily lives. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Antiphon

*The sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for her young:
by your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.
Blessed are they who dwell in your house,
forever singing your praise.
(Psalm 43:1-2)*

“The mystery of parish life lies in the generous self-giving, or servant leadership, in the way of Jesus.”

NOTES

Something more I want to pray about or think about...

Possible action steps that I or we could take....

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

CHECK-IN

Share one way you have been a light to others during Lent.

OPENING PRAYER

Antiphon

Rejoice Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast. (Isaiah 66:10-11)

O God, who through your word, reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way. Grant we pray, that with prompt devotion and eager faith, the Christian people may hasten toward the solemn celebrations to come. Compassionate God of all goodness, fill us with hope and lead us through a Lent of repentance to the beauty of Easter Joy. We ask this in the name of Christ our savior through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

READING John 3:14-21 Gospel for Fourth Sunday of Lent

Jesus said to Nicodemus:
"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,
so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him might not perish
but might have eternal life.
For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved through him.
Whoever believes in him will not be condemned,
but whoever does not believe has already been condemned,
because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
And this is the verdict,
that the light came into the world,
but people preferred darkness to light,
because their works were evil.
For everyone who does wicked things hates the light
and does not come toward the light,

so that his works might not be exposed.
But whoever lives the truth comes to the light,
so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.”

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING (Allow quiet time before sharing.)

1. What words in John’s Gospel spoke to you today?
2. “For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him...might have eternal life.” How does this speak to your sense of your own death? How does this help us accept the death of a loved one, while still grieving the loss?
3. How does the phrase in this Gospel “The light came into the world” relate to you and your parish community? How are you and the parish community light to the world?

“Community life is our great strength for the future.”

GENERAL INTERCESSION

Response: Gracious God, hear our prayer.

- For the holy Church of God, in union with Pope Benedict XVI, that through our Servant Leadership we may bring the Light of the Kingdom of God to the darkness of hunger, injustice and oppression, we pray ...
- For peace in our world, for those who defend peace and for those in difficult circumstances, that the Light of Christ shine in the darkness, we pray ...
- For the people of this land and of all nations, that they may live united in the truth and love of Christ, we pray ...
- For the poor, the sick, the suffering both here at home and all over the world, that we may serve Christ by serving them and love one another as He loves us, we pray ...
- For all those who have died, that through the mercy of our loving God they be brought to the peace and joys of heaven, we pray ...

“Basic to the faith life of the local parish community is its great act of worship, the liturgy.”

For what else should we pray...

Let us pray as Jesus taught us...Our Father

REFLECTION ON PAGES 10 AND 11 OF THE PASTORAL -- Call To Worship and Community

1. Bishop Bambera quotes Pope Benedict XVI on the Eucharist as a visible process of gathering. “In each locality, as well as beyond all localities, it involves entering into communion with the living God, who inwardly draws people together. The Church comes into being from Eucharist. She receives her unity and her mission from the Eucharist.” Which images or phrases in the quotation inspire you? Which are most challenging?
2. Study Bishop Bambera’s comments on the Paschal Mystery on p. 10. Through baptism we enter into Christ’s dying and rising. How do our own daily “dying and rising” experiences connect to Christ’s Paschal Mystery? What is the value of seeing this connection? How can our parish be a light to others, especially in times of “darkness?”
3. Study the six practical considerations the Bishop gives us on p. 10 regarding worship. What are steps we can take to implement these?
4. Bishop Bambera quotes the Constitution on the Church from the Second Vatican Council and reminds us that God has willed to make people holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge God and serve God in Holiness (Chapter 2, paragraph 9). How does this passage resonate with your experience? To what extent do you see the need to build community in your parish? What would be the advantage to that?
5. Study the Bishop’s practical considerations on page 11 regarding building community and discuss how they might be implemented.

“(Worship) challenges and celebrates our relationship with God, one another, and the world.”

CLOSING PRAYER

God of heaven and earth, your word, Jesus Christ, spoke peace to a sinful world and brought the gift of reconciliation. Teach us, the people who bear his name, to follow the example he gave us: May our faith, hope and charity turn hatred to love, conflict to peace, death to eternal life. We ask this in the name of Christ our reconciler through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Antiphon

The Lord anointed my eyes; I went, I washed, I saw and I believed in God. (John 9:11, 38)

NOTES

Something more I want to pray about or think about...

Possible action steps that I or we could take....

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

CHECK-IN

Share a time when you were appalled by an injustice or share a time when you saw an injustice rectified.

OPENING PRAYER

Antiphon

*Give me justice, O God, and plead my cause against a nation that is faithless.
From the deceitful and cunning rescue me; for you, O God, are my strength. (Psalm 43:1-2)*

God of Miriam and Moses, you led your chosen people from slavery into freedom. You guided them through the desert, and were faithful to your promise, you sealed them with a covenant of love. Despite their unfaithfulness, you remained faithful. Guide us on our journey, O God of Mercy and Mystery. Lead us in faithful service to you and to your Church. Keep us from anxiety and fear. Steady our sometimes broken hearts and keep us mindful that you are God and we are your people. We walk the journey of our lives in faithfulness and trust. Especially during this Lenten season, be with us in our practices of prayer, charity and conversion. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen

READING Jeremiah 31:31-34 First Reading for Fifth Sunday of Lent

The days are coming, says the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel
and the house of Judah.
It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers
the day I took them by the hand
to lead them forth from the land of Egypt;
for they broke my covenant,
and I had to show myself their master, says the Lord.
But this is the covenant that I will make
with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord.
I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts;
I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
No longer will they have need to teach their friends and relatives
how to know the Lord.
All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord,
for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.”

The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING (Allow quiet time before sharing.)

1. Name a word or phrase in the reading that speaks to your heart. What meaning does it have for you?
2. God speaks of the unfaithfulness of the Israelites even after they left Egypt. Now, in the new covenant, God says: "I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people." What is God promising to us in this passage?
3. How can we as a parish community be faithful servant leaders during this Lenten season and bring others to heed the Lord's message that "all shall know me."
4. How do I/we see in the suffering and in those in need the suffering face of Jesus?

"The more people realize that service is a constitutive dimension of the gospel, the more they will see their outreach as being the living presence of the risen Christ today."

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

Response: God, be with us on our journey.

- For God's people, that we may be faithful to our baptismal covenant in fulfilling our Lenten practices of prayer, charity and conversion, we pray ...
- For those who are discouraged, for those alienated from their families, and for those who are lonely, may they experience the solace of knowing that God is in the midst of their pain, we pray ...
- For young people who may be discerning a call to the priesthood or consecrated life, that they may respond in sincerity of heart to God's invitation, we pray ...
- For those who are sick and for those who are suffering any act of violence, that they may join their sufferings to those of Jesus the Crucified, we pray ...

For what else shall we pray?

Let us pray as Jesus taught us...Our Father

REFLECTION ON PAGES 11 AND 12 OF THE PASTORAL LETTER -- Social Justice and Stewardship

“As God’s people, we participate in the social mission of the Church primarily in the marketplace. It is within the context of everyday life in the home and workplace that men and women of faith live out their call to ministry and work for a just society.”

1. In the section that focuses on the Christian dimension of service, Bishop Bambera reminds us that “Service to the poor and those in need abounds and the mission of the Church is not only acknowledged in words but thrives due to faithful and generous hearts committed to living out the Gospel of Jesus.” In this season of Lent, how especially do these words challenge us both individually and in our parishes to live out the mission of service?

2. How can parishes in other regions/deaneries work together in promoting service to those in need? How will this strengthen the unity of parishes working together? Jesus himself gives us an example of service when he proclaims that he came to bring the good news to the suffering and those in need of consolation. What can you do as an individual in your family, neighborhood or workplace to imitate Jesus as servant leader?

3. Service to those in need does not only mean being part of or creating a program, but it also suggests giving of oneself in often quiet, unobtrusive ways. Can you think of some instances in which you can be a welcoming, compassionate presence to others?

4. Study the Bishop’s challenges on p. 12. How and when can we begin to address these?

CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God, your promise to be with us always gives us strength for our journey. May your abiding presence embrace us as we strive to bring the good news to those we encounter, especially those who are in need—the poor, the suffering, the lonely, and those who endure the abuses of our society. Help us to live in the freedom of a loving and compassionate God. May we ever keep in our minds and hearts the consolation that you are God and we are your people. Keep us faithful to our covenant with you. We ask this in the name of Christ our brother and savior, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Antiphon

*Give me justice, O God, and plead my cause against a nation that is faithless.
From the deceit and cunning rescue me; for you, O God, are my strength. (Psalm 43:1-2)*

NOTES

Something more I want to pray about or think about...

Possible action steps that I or we could take....

PALM SUNDAY -- PASSION OF THE LORD

CHECK-IN

Share one benefit you have received from participating in these sessions.

OPENING PRAYER

“Walk humbly with your God.”

Antiphon

Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the king of Israel. Hosanna in the Highest. (Matthew 21:9)

Good and gracious God, we are grateful for this time we have had together for prayer, reflection and fellowship. Bless our parishioners, especially those who have taken part in this group, as we enter into the mysteries of Holy Week. Fill us with your spirit of renewal, so that we, as baptized children of God, can answer the call to be co-responsible in the life of our parish and for your reign on earth. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

READING Philippians 2:6-11 Second Reading for Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.
Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
which is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING *(Allow quiet time before sharing.)*

1. What words particularly spoke to you today?
2. Jesus took on our human nature and “humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death...” What lesson in humility and obedience does this give to us?
3. What message does this reading have for us as we enter into the final days of Holy Week?

“Parish leadership challenges all parishioners to recognize and accept responsibility as members of the evangelizing community.”

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

Response: Gracious God, hear our prayer.

- For the Church, that the humility of Jesus Christ will be a model for those called to Servant Leadership, we pray ...
- For the poor and the hungry, that God will inspire us to comfort them, we pray ...
- For those in public office, that they will respond to those in need and legislate with justice, we pray ...
- For the sick, sorrowing and dying, we pray to the Lord...

For what else shall we pray?

Let us pray as Jesus taught us...Our Father

REFLECTION ON PAGES 13 AND 14 OF THE PASTORAL LETTER

1. After reading Bishop Bambera's vision for Servant Leadership, who do you see as Servant Leaders in your parish? In what ways are you a Servant Leader?
2. The bishops of the United States issued a document entitled *Go and Make Disciples* in 2002. In it they present "three evangelization goals: to live our faith fully, to share it freely with others and to transform the world in Christ." How do you and those in your parish community live these three goals?
3. Bishop Bambera writes that the Church is "a communion in heart and mind in a common mission and in sharing the common life of God." What challenges and opportunities do you see in this call to be "co-responsible for this wonderful mission called evangelization?" How can you deepen your efforts at evangelization?
4. Bishop Bambera chose "Walk Humbly with Your God" as his Episcopal motto. Read Micah 6:6-8 as quoted in the Pastoral Letter. Lent is a time for reconciliation and conversion. How can you live the call to "do the right and to love goodness" as the Lenten season ends and the Easter season approaches?
5. We are called to profound spiritual renewal. How will we continue to pray for Bishop Bambera, the Diocese of Scranton, your parish and parishioners, that each of us will accept the co-responsibility in "growing, life-giving and vibrant parishes" of the future?

"I challenge all of the faithful to embrace their call to vocation as the Baptized. In particular, as a Church centered on the Eucharist, I ask that special care be given to nurturing vocations to the priesthood of Jesus Christ."

CLOSING PRAYER

Good and gracious God, we thank you for bringing us together to pray and reflect on your Holy Word and on Bishop Bambera's Pastoral Letter. We pray that these reflections will enrich us and kindle a profound spiritual renewal in our lives and in our parish. We ask this through Christ our Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Antiphon

Father, if this chalice cannot pass without my drinking it, your will be done. (Matthew 26:42)

NOTES

Something more I want to pray about or think about...

Based on our prayer, reflection, study and discussion I or we will do the following: