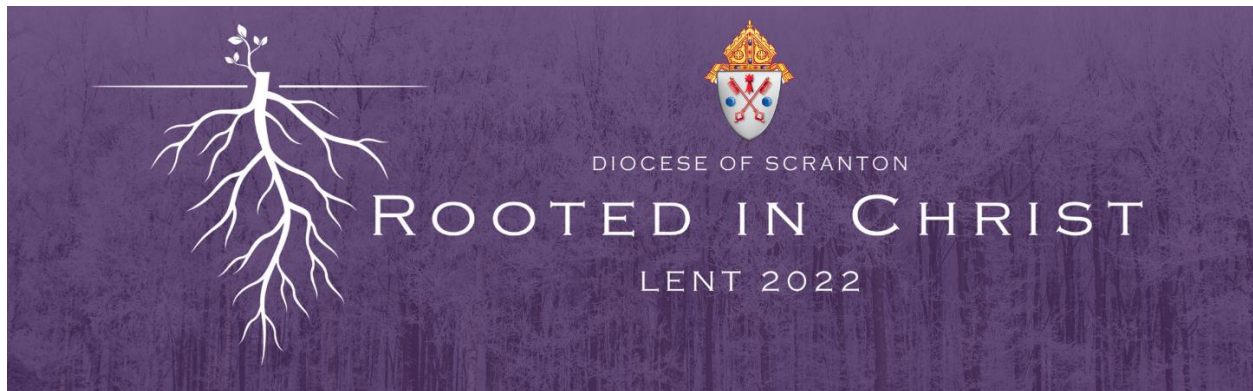


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*In our lives we will experience seasons of consolation and desolation, good times and bad. When we are **Rooted in Christ**, the liturgical seasons of Lent and Easter can help us to understand and align those seasons of our lives with Christ's death and resurrection.*

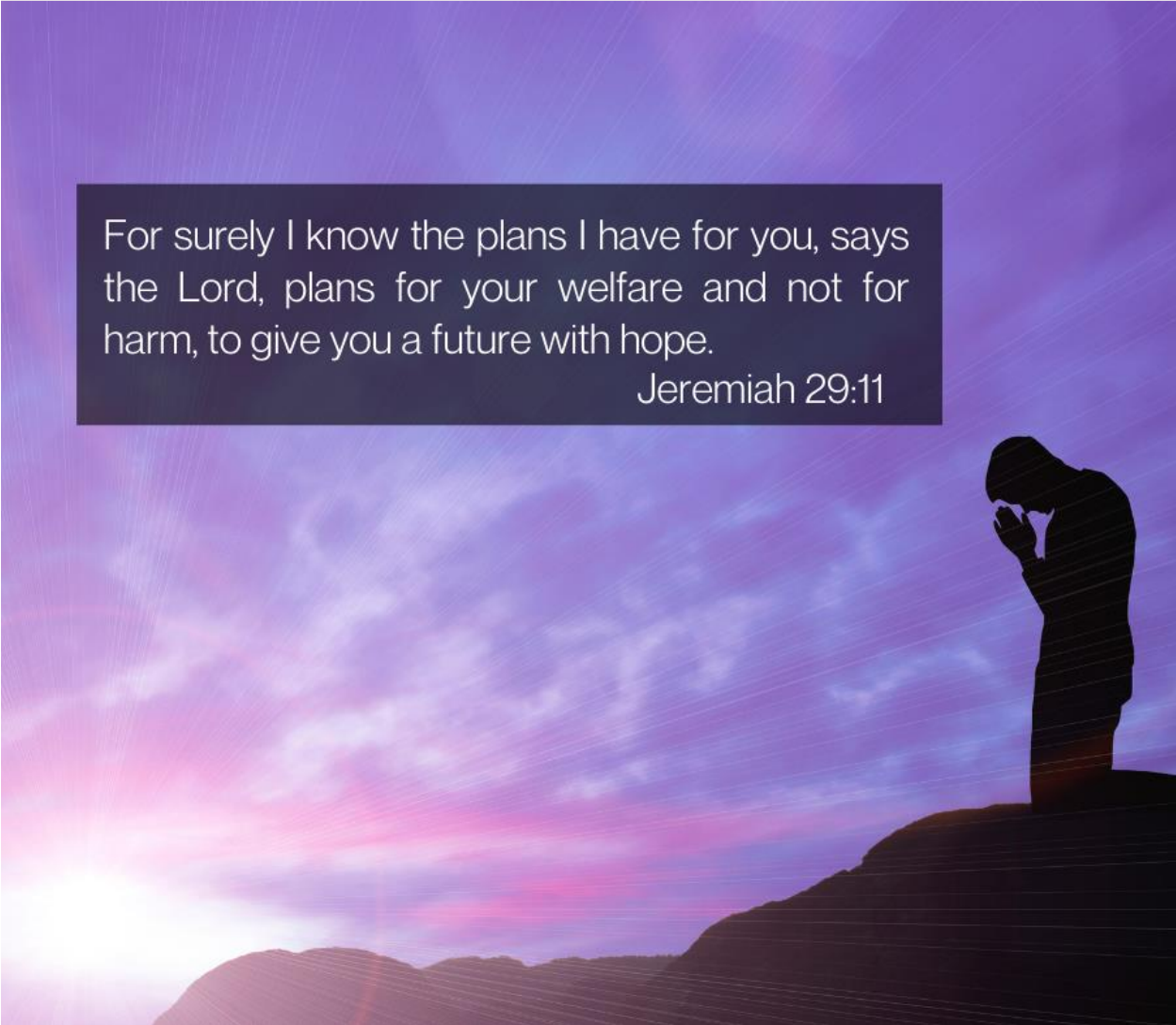
The Lenten reflections for "Stick with it Saturday" remind us that it can be challenging to persevere through tough times, but that when we do, great consolation and beautiful fruit will follow. Below is just such a reminder.

The fall of 2020 marked a turning point in my faith journey. The pandemic amplified an already stressful job I held at a local university and my restlessness from wanting to advance my career. Additionally, I experienced a lengthy flare of an autoimmune disease, ulcerative colitis, which was only exacerbated by my stress and frustration. I lost considerable weight, experienced troubling side effects from the cocktail of medications I was taking and had never felt unhealthier. Meanwhile, my relationship with God felt nonexistent, or superficial at best.

In December 2020, I recall speaking with a friend about his weekend plans, and he mentioned church. I couldn't even remember the last time I had attended church on a Sunday, but the slightest reference to it was enough to motivate me to do the same. I returned to church that weekend, almost as an act of desperation, and it marked a turning point in my life and in my relationship with God.

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

Jeremiah 29:11

A silhouette of a person in prayer, standing on a hill against a sunset sky with purple and pink clouds. The person is on the right side of the image, with their hands clasped in prayer and their head bowed. The background is a vibrant sunset with a mix of purple, pink, and blue hues, and a bright sun on the left side.

When I reflect on times I've attended church and it never quite "stuck," one consistency emerged: believing that a relationship with God was transactional. I'd attend church, pray for a solution to whatever problem or challenge I had, only to be frustrated and lose patience when I wasn't

getting what I wanted. Rather than having faith in God's plan (not my own), and being grateful for the blessings I did have, I focused more on what I didn't, fueling disappointment, doubt, and resentment.

While this was an immature and misguided view of what attending Mass and prayer is all about, I don't think it's entirely uncommon, especially among young people in the initial stages of their faith journey. Through persistence and gratitude, I've cultivated a connection to God that runs far deeper than it ever has before, and I've never felt more capable of facing turbulent times, knowing He is with me.

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It's been 15 months since that Sunday I returned to church. Since then, my condition is now in remission, and while I know it won't last forever, I still praise God for my health daily. I left a job that I held for eight years, moved nearly two hours away from my family, friends, my home, and started a new chapter in my career and life. The past months have not been easy nor smooth, and there are times I question my decision-making, but I haven't questioned my faith. Rather, it's brought me closer than ever to the church, to God, and living a life of gratitude – and I'm still sticking with it.



David Schweitzer attends St. Pius X (Clifford) and St. Joseph the Worker (Williamsport) as he splits his time between northeastern and central Pennsylvania. He is the Director of Student Conduct at Lycoming College. He finds this work deeply rewarding and considers it a privilege to support students through their challenges and mistakes, to ultimately help them become better versions of themselves. He holds a Ph.D. in Human Development from Marywood University.

FOR REFLECTION

- 1. Think about times when you may have drifted from the church, or even from the Lord, Himself. What underlying consistencies or themes might exist as to why you found yourself "drifting"?**
- 2. What is your "why?" behind attending Mass? As you reflect on various phases of your life, how has that "why?" changed or evolved, if at all?**
- 3. How might you be able to make space and time for God through the rigors of daily life?**

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