



*A  
Change  
of Heart*



*Lent 2024*

*Furthering the Reign of God,  
Where All Are Welcome*



CENTURY OF SERVICE

THE

MADELEINE  
PARISH & SCHOOL



*Dear Madeleine family and friends,*

*Is it time for you to consider a “Change of Heart”? As we begin this forty-day journey to the cross and the glorious gift of eternal life, I encourage you to find time each day to examine your life and your heart in the intimate and loving presence of the “Holy One.” Hopefully, the reflections written here will speak to you and help direct your thoughts. Be open to change, and accept the guidance God will give you. The focus for each week is based on the previous Sunday’s gospel.*

*Sunday meditations are meant to be shared with two or more people. The daily reflections can be shared or contemplated in private.*

*Thank you to our writers, of all ages, who have shared their faith and thoughts in these daily reflections. Thank you also to the people who mentored and encouraged them. This booklet would not happen without the many people who worked behind the scenes editing and publishing. You are all appreciated. A special thank you to Hugh Hammons, whose creative talent once again brings the Lenten theme visually alive. And last, but not least, a heartfelt thank you to Fr. Bonaventure for his spiritual leadership here at the Madeleine.*

*May your hearts be open and ready for change as you prayerfully make your way to Easter.*

*Marilyn Robb*

# Do Not Give Up Candy This Lent!

ASH WEDNESDAY—Joel 2:12, “Even now says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart.”

I’ve spent many Lents “giving up” sweets. But the Prophet Joel reminds us that God wants our whole heart. Instead of selfishness and judgmental attitudes, let’s practice making room in our heart for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to better live God’s way of love. Take the risk to commit acts of soft-heartedness toward others. This Lent, adopt the mind, thoughts, and heart of Jesus Christ. Trust God will bring calm in the midst of your storms. Practice giving praise and adopting good thoughts, especially for those we find it hard to love. Let’s together experience the best Lent ever!

*Lord Jesus, as I begin Lent, help me to have a heart like yours.  
Amen.*

—FR. JOHN MCGRANN

## Unconditional Love

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15—Luke 9:23, “Jesus said, ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.’”

Jesus confronted many crosses as he lived his humanity. Can you name some of them?

I invite us to silently name the crosses we believe that we carry. Jesus did not shun the cross. Is that what he is asking of us? Do some of our crosses arise due to our being human, not perfect, not in control? Is it our humanity that Jesus invites us to accept in the face of God’s unconditional love?

*Jesus, help me to accept my humanity in the face of God’s unconditional love. Amen.*

—THERESE FENZL

# Be Still and Listen to The Lord

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16—Psalm 51:19, “My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit, a contrite, humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn.”

At this time, in this world of darkness, you may be called to resolve the difficulties between others who are living in fear and anger. In a moment of silence you can be enlightened and use words addressing the tensions and calming the anxieties that strike at the heart of the problems between them. Be aware that Jesus is with you, and will enable you to use words, expressing confidence, to bring people together. Be patient, be helpful and persistent, and express your love until understanding is recognized. Tensions will ease, and gratitude will be evident, and you will know that God is at work.

*Lord, guide me to be a peacemaker to your people on earth. Amen.*

—BOB TURNER

## Forgiveness

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17—Psalm 86:4, “Lord, you are good and forgiving, most merciful to all who call on you.”

Has anyone ever asked you for forgiveness? Have you ever given forgiveness to someone verbally to their face? To ask someone to forgive you, you must first acknowledge to yourself that you have not acted, spoken or thought kindly to or about another.

Lent is 40 days for prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Forty days to work on ourselves to make some changes. The sacrament of Reconciliation provides us the opportunity to verbalize our sins and ask for forgiveness. God, our loving Father, is there just waiting for us! He doesn't judge us! He loves us unconditionally!

Reconciliation is like receiving a big hug from our good and loving Father! Are you in need of a big hug? Now is the time.

*I am ready to change Lord, and in need of your reconciling hug.  
Amen.*

—GAIL FLESKES

# First Sunday in Lent • February 18

*A Change of Heart...*

## *From Troubled to Strengthened*

### Introduction

The damp, dreary, and cold days of November had darkened my spirits. My once peaceful environment was daily disrupted by constant pounding, roaring compressors and screaming power saws as the repair work was completed on my condo and the condos around me. Both of my children were going through a time of crises in their lives, and I was the one with whom they shared their troubles. In the darkness of the early morning hours, sleep would evade me as I tossed and turned with negative thoughts, fear and hopelessness.

Like Jesus, alone in the desert, I was tormented by the “beasts” of chaos, worry, fear and hopelessness. They became like idols that I placed first in my life, instead of putting God first.

But, just as Jesus was not alone in the desert, I was not alone with my “beasts.” One afternoon, there appeared at my door three angels, disguised as my dearest friends, ready to minister to me with gifts of conversation, shared faith, laughter and love.

**Share:** What “wild beasts” can trouble your heart? Where do you find God’s consoling angels?

† **Scripture: Mark 1:12-15**

**Share:** What was Jesus thinking as he was tested in the desert...fear, confidence, understanding...?



## Commentary

Mark's telling of the Temptation of Jesus is my favorite. It is short and sweet. Jesus is baptized, but before his mission begins, he must undergo 40 days of testing. He is placed in the desert with wild beasts, but also God's caring angels. Could that be like entering a room to take a final exam and knowing that the answer sheet is waiting for you on your desk? It is the same for us as God's precious children. During times of testing, we must always remember that our Creator and Redeemer will never let us fail.

**Share:** How has God come to your rescue during a time of testing?

## Reflection

What troubles your heart these days? As we begin this Lenten journey, take time to think about the "beasts" that keep you from putting God first in your life. As you read the scripture verses and reflections that follow in the week ahead, you will be assured that God hears your cries for help and will deliver you from whatever it is that troubles you. Even in this 21st century, God's angels will protect you. You are God's beloved child and the "ost High" offers to be your refuge and strength.

**Share:** How do you address God when you are troubled...father, parent, friend, in-born spirit, "Most High"?

*Prayer: Be always near me Lord Jesus. Keep my heart strengthened by faith in you. Amen.*

*“On Good Friday in 1976,  
the Lord spoke to me from  
the cross.”*



# My Cry for Help

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19—Isaiah 58:9, “You shall call, and the Lord will answer. You shall cry for help and he will say ‘Here I am.’”

In 1969, my husband and I drifted away from our Catholic faith. We were living in San Francisco, he was a busy surgery resident and I was a nurse. I immersed myself in my job, shopping, exploring the city and spending time on the beach. All of that changed in 1973, when the military sent us to Fort Bragg, N.C. I felt like I’d been dropped into what I called a “hell hole.” The loss of life as I had known it sent me spiraling into depression. I often cried to God for help. On Good Friday in 1976, the Lord spoke to me from the cross. He had removed me from worldly pleasures and called me to a new life, saying, “Here I am.” He says this every day to us all.

*Let me never forget, that you will always reply to my cries for help by saying “Here I am.” Amen.*

—JANET MILLER

# God’s Creatures

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20—Psalm 34:5, “I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.”

I seek God, especially at night, and ask God to bless my family and keep us safe. There aren’t very many things I am afraid of, but I am a little afraid of snakes. When I remember they are God’s creatures, my fear lessens. I feel confident that God is always with me even if I feel fearful.

*Thank You God for keeping me and my family safe. Amen.*

—LULU ROBINSON, GRADE 5

# Buoyancy

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21—Psalm 119:28, “My soul is depressed; lift me up according to your word.”

Some assume that because we are children of God, the way will be easy for us. This is not so. God does not promise a luxury cruise. What he does promise, is that he will be with us in our boat. The sea of sin, despair, and eternal death will not drown us. Even if our boat capsizes, Jesus is the preserver of hope. Our faith in him is the resilience that upholds us in the stormiest of seas.

*May I always find you Lord, especially when I am tested by the storms of life. Amen.*

—AMY PITZER DE WITT

# God with Skin On

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22—Psalm 23:4, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.”

I once heard a story about a young child who woke from a bad dream. The mother assured her child that there was no reason to fear. “God is with you,” she said. The child replied, “but I want a God with skin on!”

Have you ever struggled to sense God’s presence while going through a difficult time? When I look back on such experiences in my life, I can identify who has been my God with skin on. It might have been a family member, a friend, or even a stranger who said or did just what I needed to know that God was with me. If you are reading this, you may have been someone who has walked with me through that lonely and frightening valley. God be with you!

*Thank you God for the people who wear your skin. Clothe me to serve others. Amen.*

—SANDY TURNER

# The Energy of Angels

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23—Matt. 4:6b, “He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you.”

In this verse, we are shown how, when Jesus was in the desert, he went from troubled to strengthened by angels who came and supported him.

Two years ago, I got a terrible migraine. It was during a performance with the Oregon Ballet Theater. It was so painful that I didn’t know if I could continue. My teacher gave me pain medicine and my friends came to support me. Through their support, I was strengthened and made it on stage in time for my cue. At that moment I felt that God’s energy came to me just like the angels came to Jesus.

*Thank you God for your many angels here on earth. Amen.*

—LUCY KRUG

# Hardship is Not Evil

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24—Psalm 91, “Because you have the Lord for your refuge and have made the “Most High” your stronghold, no evil shall befall you.”

It’s easy to feel betrayed by God when things go wrong. What about the “no evil shall befall you” promise? Yet, as I reflect on my life, the most significant spiritual and human growth has occurred during struggles.

While I’ve been focused on the hardship, I didn’t recognize the gift being shared. My heart—my conscience, my understanding of God, what I see and hear, my humanness and holiness—was being transformed. And that’s all that matters.

I’m beginning to welcome the troubles of life and recognize that God is in the messes. They are not evil; they are full of graces.

*Transform me Lord, through the troubles of my life. Help me to grow in you. Amen.*

—DEACON MIKE

# Second Sunday in Lent • February 25

*A Change of Heart...*

## *From Stagnant to Enlightened*

### Introduction

In the summer of 2015, I received a phone call from Dr. Maria Manzo, inviting me to join her on a journey. She had just accepted the position as choir director at The Madeleine Parish in Portland, Oregon. I had sung under Maria's direction for several years at my neighborhood church in Vancouver, Washington, but now, she was asking me to follow her on a new journey, across the river, 45 minutes away to an unknown destination.

I was not familiar with Portland and preferred to stay in Vancouver where I knew my way around. But I accepted Maria's invitation to follow her to The Madeleine, and my life has never been the same. Thanks to the wonderful people who have shared their faith, shared their love, and mentored me, my relationship with God and my joy in living has blossomed and continues to grow and change. My once, stagnant, comfortable heart has been changed to heart that is enlightened and continually open to God's new plans.

I can imagine how changed and enlightened Peter, James and John must have felt after they followed Jesus up the mountain and saw him with new eyes, as God's only Son.

**Share:** When have you followed someone, or taken their advice, and it turned out better than you expected?

† **Scripture:** Mark 9:2-10

**Share:** What do you imagine the disciples were thinking as they witnessed the transfiguration?

## Commentary

The disciples knew Jesus in his human form. He was their leader and close friend, who told interesting stories, gave meaningful advice, and could perform miracles. They had been with him long enough to take him for granted. They no longer became alarmed when he would suddenly leave them to escape into the mountains. All of that changed the day he invited Peter, James and John to join him on one of his escapes into the mountains. It was there Jesus revealed to them his complete identity, Son of Man and Son of God. They saw him with new eyes and were enlightened.

**Share:** What experiences in your life have helped you to see Jesus with “new eyes”? Did it change your faith in any way?

## Reflection

What exactly is a stagnant heart? It is a heart that is satisfied with things just as they are. Why do we avoid “change” if we can? What does it mean to be enlightened? Could it be a change for the better, or taking a chance and just being open to God’s plan for your life? As you read the reflections and scripture verses this week, hopefully, you will learn that enlightenment happens when you persevere in your faith, live with hope, and are willing to open your eyes to the new adventure God has planned for you.

**Share:** What is your definition of a “stagnant” heart? What is your definition of an “enlightened” heart?

*Prayer: When you see my heart growing stagnant, Lord, open my eyes to see you. Amen.*

*“We are surrounded by  
the saints, all of whom are  
cheering us on.”*

# Transfiguration: The Day After

MONDAY FEBRUARY 26—Ephesians 1:18,, “May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call.”

Remember when you felt great joy, yes, unspeakable joy? Maybe it was when you found your first love, or when you experienced the birth of a child, when someone dear to you returned from far away. You may have found it in the rising of the sun after a long night’s darkness, or when reaching a crest in the hill after a grueling upward climb.

Terrified as they were, Peter, James and John would one day understand the unspeakable joy of that transfiguration experience.

We are all called to that light flooding our hearts and the hope to which Jesus brings.

*Lord, keep my eyes open always to your light and joy. Amen.*

—DAVE ALBERTINE

## Surrounded by Saints

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27—Hebrews 12:1b-2a, “We, persevere in running the race that is before us by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith.”

We are urged to pull ourselves away from our screens and distractions that only weigh us down. We are invited to keep looking at the Lord, even when it’s hard to turn away from other “comforts.”

We are not alone. We are surrounded by the saints, all of whom are cheering us on. As we run our race, shedding burdens, God helps us open the “door to our hearts” (Rev. 3:20). He comes in and shows us the way.

Left to our own devices we atrophy. Moving towards him, we stay on course!

*Lord, Help me to stay on the course you set before me. Amen.*

—BILL HUNTER



# Smooth Landings

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28—Psalm 31:15, “I trust in you, Lord; I say you are my God.”

I have lots of experience trusting in God. Life is full of surprises. One time I was skiing and having a fun time. All of a sudden, I realized I was on a side trail and was headed straight for a huge jump. My heart was beating fast. I prayed and asked God to help me. I took a deep breath, jumped and made a smooth landing. Thank You, God.

*Lord, may I always trust in you to get me through the surprises in life. Amen.*

—OLIN MACRI, GRADE 5

## Presented to the Lord

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29—Jeremiah 17:10, “I, the Lord, explore the mind and test the heart, giving to all their ways, according to the fruit of their deeds.”

On February 2nd, the Church celebrated the Feast of the Transfiguration. Here we are at the end of the month and we’re reminded that this past Sunday, the Second Sunday of Lent, our gospel reading recalled the same event, the Lord’s Transfiguration.

On a personal note, the Feast of the Transfiguration carries a deep significance. Five years ago, on February 2nd, I presided at the funeral Mass for my sister at Our Lady of the Lake. Among remembrances at the Mass was the image of the Lord’s Presentation in the Temple, opening my eyes, allowing me to see Jesus through the witness of her life as risen. It’s the prophet Jeremiah who reminds us: “I, the Lord, explore the mind and test the heart, giving to all their way, according to the fruit of their deeds.” May each day provide opportunities for our being “presented to the Lord.”

*Help me Lord, to daily present myself to you, just as I am. Amen.*

—MSGR. TIM MURPHY

# Always Faithful

FRIDAY, MARCH 1—Jeremiah 29:13, “When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with your whole heart.”

God’s words, through Jeremiah, are directed to the Israelites exiled to Babylon for not heeding his commands. But God remains faithful, promising them a return to their home...in 70 years when they “see” who he really is.

Forty years ago, I was hospitalized. In my illness, despite personal prayer, I wondered where God was. I was losing my faith and trust that he was there or cared. I was being very self-centered, and not “seeing” that “He was always there,” slowly healing me through the love, care and prayers of my wife, family, friends and doctors.

*Dear Lord, help me, never forget to “see” your eternal and unconditional faithfulness to us through all of life’s journey. Amen.*

—DARRELL MILLER

## See Jesus With New Eyes

SATURDAY, MARCH 2—Psalm 103:2, “Bless the Lord, my soul, and do not forget all of his gifts.”

In the season of Lent, as we reflect on the transformative journey from stagnant hearts to enlightened souls, the Sunday gospel about the Transfiguration becomes a poignant guide. The disciples, witnesses to this divine manifestation, experienced a profound change of heart as they saw Jesus with new eyes. In our own spiritual journey, how can we too, see Jesus with new eyes?

The psalmist beckons us to “Bless the Lord, my soul, and do not forget all of his gifts.” This call to remembrance invites us to acknowledge and appreciate the multitude of blessings bestowed upon us by the Divine. Just as the disciples had their perception of Jesus altered during the Transfiguration, so too can our perspective be transfigured through a mindful recognition of God’s gifts.

*Keep my eyes open Lord, to the many gifts you are constantly giving me. Amen.*

—TRESA RAST

# Third Sunday of Lent • March 3

*A Change of Heart...*

## *From Cluttered to Clean*

### Introduction

Maizie is a lovely older woman who lives in my neighborhood. I see her out walking her dog several times a day. She always has a smile on her face and is eager to stop and visit for a while. Maizie has a problem. She is a “hoarder.” Last winter she lived in her condo with no heat. Her furnace had quit running and needed to be fixed, but the repairman could not get into her garage to fix it. Every space in her garage is taken, from floor to ceiling, with storage boxes and tubs of stuff. Her refrigerator quit working back in May. Instead of clearing a path for someone to come in and fix it or get a new one, she would drive to a local deli or restaurant each day and get fresh food for a meal.

Most of us do not hoard our possessions like Maizie, but we all have earthly possessions that fill our lives and often take priority over our relationship with God. It may not be the possessions themselves, but the time we spend giving them our attention, keeping them polished, or just thinking about them or talking about them. What is it that fills your heart so God can't find a path in to make the repairs in your life?

**Share:** If you had to vacate your home quickly, name five possessions you would take with you (things...not people, pets or documents).

† **Scripture: John 2:13-25**

**Share:** Describe the Jesus we read about in this scripture. What do you think his disciples and followers were thinking as they witnessed his behavior?

## Commentary

In John 2:25 we read, “Jesus did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well.” It was “party time” in the temple. Pilgrims were arriving from all over to celebrate Passover. Not only was it a place to purchase sacrificial offerings, but I imagine there were booths selling souvenirs, food and beverages. There were probably entertainers, musicians, dancers and jugglers. Jesus was sent to live among us so he could understand human nature, but he was also God’s Son. This was the temple, a place where people came to worship God, his Father, not a party venue!

**Share:** Have you ever visited a “holy place” and been distracted by the commercialism?

## Reflection

Could you say, as Jesus did, that you understand human nature well? Do you even understand yourself well? What are the things of the world that clutter your heart? Think about these things during this third week of Lent. What in your life takes priority over your relationship with God? Like my “hoarding” neighbor’s cluttered home, is there room in your heart for our loving God to enter and repair whatever is broken in your life? Hopefully, the scripture passages and reflections this week will help you do some “heart cleaning” as you prepare for our risen Savior at Easter.

**Share:** What things of this world can clutter a heart?

*Prayer: Create in me a clean heart, O Lord...and help me keep it clean. Amen*

*“The path I followed reminded me to walk towards God, and I will always be welcomed.”*

# Cleanse Us, Open Our Eyes

MONDAY, MARCH 4—Psalm 51:12, “A clean heart create for me, God;  
renew within me a steadfast spirit.”

There is so much tension in our country these days...nay, the world in general...which gives us cause for great concern, often negatively influencing our opinions and our actions. Sometimes it is easy to allow frustration or anger to cast shadows in our minds, darkening our thoughts and consequently our hearts as well. Lord, we ask that you cleanse us of all damaging notions, open our eyes to the preciousness of life and the beauty of your creation. Dispel any pessimism so we may live our lives in joyfulness, and hence, pass that spirit on to those we encounter each day.

*Lord, increase the joy in my life, and help me to pass it onto others.  
Amen*

—GRETCHEN STEVENSON

## Mind Clutter

TUESDAY, MARCH 5—Psalm 25:7, “Remember no more the sins of  
my youth; remember me according to your mercy, because of your  
goodness, Lord.”

How much time do we waste obsessing over our mistakes, holding on to the past, and feeling guilty? Everyone has things in their past they would do differently if given the chance. Living with our past can leave us stressed, anxious, depressed and affect our relationships with each other and with God. This past fall, I was fortunate to walk The Camino Portugues from Lisbon to Santiago, nearly 400 miles. This journey gave me plenty of time to think, reflect and clear my mind. I was able to be free of everything I struggle with and be present to the experience. I believe this was a gift to me from God. The path I followed reminded me to walk towards God and I will always be welcomed with love and mercy. Amen.

*Lord, as we journey through life, may we not look back, but walk towards you. Amen.*

—JANEEN REILLY

# A Pure Heart

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6—Matt. 5:8, “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.”

In the Old Testament, Moses desired to see God’s glory, but God said, “You cannot see my face and live” (Exodus 33:18-23). God’s glory symbolizes his majestic presence, and God rejected Moses. To see God, one must die—both physically and to earthly desires. A pure heart and fervent spirit are prerequisites for seeking God in prayer. Only those with a pure heart can find him. A pure heart lacks desires, envy, and hatred. Removing these from the heart is the first step toward approaching the countenance of God.

*Lord, help me to keep my heart pure so that I may always see your face. Amen.*

—MY SCHONING

# From Cluttered to Clean

THURSDAY, MARCH 7—Ephesians 4:22, 24, “Put away the old self... and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth.”

I lived in the same house in Kentucky for 27 years. As time passed, I collected so much stuff. Eventually, the closets, basement, attic and garage were filled to overflowing. Eight years ago, my move to Portland required me to look into all those spaces and get rid of the clutter. Paul tells me to look into my heart and get rid of all the old corrupt, deceitful stuff that is filling it. Instead I should fill my heart with Christ’s truth.

*Look into my heart, Lord Jesus, and help me prepare it for you. Amen.*

—JENNY HUNTER



# A Special Presence

FRIDAY, MARCH 8—Mark 12:30, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.”

This is a verse that I have heard over and over again. I know God has blessed me with my family and all creation. I feel God’s love in a special way in the presence of my dog, Sully. Thank you God for my family and for Sully.

*Help me love you Lord, and all that you give me. Amen.*

—ROSIE RYAN, GRADE 5

# Cleansing Through Spiritual Practices

SATURDAY, MARCH 9—Psalm 51:4, “Thoroughly wash away my guilt and from my sin cleanse me.”

This is the prayer of one, who sinned against God and humanity. Sin is an offense against God, whether by a spirit of self-willed rebellion or by failure to love our fellow human beings, as God requires. Guilt would refer to the fact that one has committed the sin. It would also refer to the feeling of worry or unhappiness that one has, because she/he has done something wrong. In this Lenten season, everyone needs to admit sinfulness/imperfection and strive hard to be free from sin by prayer, fasting and acts of charity.

*Help me to free myself from sin during this season of Lent. Amen.*

—FR. AMAL RAYAPPAN

# Fourth Sunday of Lent • March 10

## *A Change of Heart...* *From Empty to Full*

### Introduction

A few days before Christmas, I received this text from my longtime friend, Joe: “Marilyn have a great Christmas. I am always impressed, how even though you have been single, like me, for so many years, your life is so rich and fulfilling, and I feel so alone, and my life is so empty.”

Joe and I met when we were teenagers. He would ride his bike over to my house and we would sit on my front porch steps and talk for hours about everything. Often our conversations would revolve around our faith and our relationship with God. Joe was raised in an Italian family, attended Mass regularly and had a Catholic education. We remained close through our college years then lost track of each other until our children were grown and our spouses had died. Most of Joe’s career was spent at a prestigious Catholic university. He admits that he is a “fallen away” Catholic. Somewhere through the years he quit feeding his heart with all that God has to offer and now his heart is empty.

I wish we could, once again, return to the front porch steps of my childhood home and rekindle that fire of faith he once had. Who knows what God has planned?

**Share:** How has the “ebb and flow” of your faith been during your lifetime? Were there special people who influenced you one way or the other?

† **Scripture: John 3:14-21**

**Share:** What part of this scripture speaks to you?

## Commentary

We really need to read the whole story about Nicodemus and his encounter with Jesus to fully understand this conversation. Nicodemus is an educated leader among the Jews (just as my friend Joe was an educated leader in a Catholic university), yet he knows that there must be more. He senses the emptiness in his heart and wonders if Jesus, the great teacher, knows how to fill that void. He comes to Jesus with his empty heart in the darkness of the night. Jesus tells him the truth and Nicodemus leaves in the light of the day with a full and understanding heart.

**Share:** What is your definition of an empty heart? Give some examples.

## Reflection

What is the condition of your heart as we enter this fourth week of Lent? Has it changed at all? Have you been able to clean out the “worldly clutter” and make room for the “Holy One” to move in and fill you with light, hope, peace and love? Just as Nicodemus came to Jesus in the dark of the night, God is always waiting for us in the darkest moments of our lives. God is waiting to reinforce our faith, give us fresh ideas and send us forth in a new “light-filled” direction.

**Share:** How does it feel when God fills your heart? How can that change your life?

*Prayer: Come into my heart Lord Jesus, and fill me with light, hope, peace and love. Amen*

*“God’s gift of a new heart let  
me hear him; listening transformed  
my spirit.”*

# The Joy of Forgiveness

MONDAY, MARCH 11—Psalm 30:12, “You changed my mourning into dancing and clothed me with joy.”

When I was a sophomore in college, I had an experience that led me to question everything I knew about forgiveness. Did my actions alienate me from God forever? How could I be forgiven? It was during Mass later that week, sitting alone and mourning my actions, when I heard it—a voice that reminded me that Jesus became man for exactly this reason—to understand human error and take on the burden of mistakes. The clarity of that moment stays with me to this day, joyous that Jesus understands humans like me.

*Thank you Jesus, for the joy of knowing that you always understand us. Amen.*

—ERIN COUCH

# Healing Waters

TUESDAY, MARCH 12—Psalm 46:2, “God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in distress. Therefore, we do not fear.”

Today’s readings are awash in water images. In Ezekiel, a stream gradually becomes a rushing river. In John’s Gospel, a pool suddenly ripples. Divine refreshment and healing abound for those who enter the waters.

How to access the healing waters is the question. The man, sick for 38 years, whines his distress and is then able to act. He jumps up at Jesus’ words, picks up his mat and walks. Admitting powerlessness, and trusting in the Power of the God of Jesus is his way and ours.

*God, may we always see you as our refuge and our strength. Amen.*

—JOAN SPIERING

# The Greatness and Goodness of God

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13—Psalm 145:18, “The Lord is near to all who call upon him in truth.”

Psalm 145 is filled with beautiful reminders of God’s glory, splendor, and might. Each passage holds a specific message of hope and reason for our praise and thanksgiving. How wondrous and comforting to know (and truly believe) the Lord is near in all of life’s ebbs and flows. As the parish’s Funeral Coordinator, the nearness of the Lord is profoundly evident in death. In serving grieving families, I have witnessed how memories become a powerful balm for understanding the mystery of death and the promise of eternal life. Rejoice, for the Lord is near at all times!

*Lord, let us never forget that you remain near to us at all times.  
Amen.*

—DARLENE MAURER

## Lord Jesus, I Trust in You

THURSDAY, MARCH 14—Ezekiel 36:26, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.”

Hearing the voice of God is hard in a noisy world. We start out crying to be heard. Our parents teach us their ways. I was raised by atheists. I knew no father, so had no concept of fatherly love; it did not exist, neither did God. To survive the cruel world, I hardened my heart, learned to trust no one.

For some reason, I began to believe, to search, and to pray “Lord Jesus I trust in you.” God’s gift of a new heart let me hear him; listening transformed my spirit. A path was laid out before me to a beautiful and loving world.

*Lord, may I always trust in you to renew my heart and spirit.  
Amen.*

—TRUDIE CAVEY

# The Power of Prayer

FRIDAY, MARCH 15—15 Psalm 34:19, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.”

To live a meaningful spiritual life in our broken world calls for so much courage and fortitude and many moments of quiet introspection and prayer. During that silence, I can humbly entrust the Lord with my sadness, pain or worries.

I can go about my days as usual, even fully accepting painful experiences, but convinced that God is at my side. What can happen when I seek to lead that prayerful life?

I feel heard and thus able and ready to wipe away another’s tears in the Lord’s name, growing closer to him as he has asked me to do.

*Lord, wipe away my tears, so that I may wipe away the tears of others. Amen.*

—STEPHANIE FERNANDEZ

# The Transformative Power of Christ in our Hearts

SATURDAY, MARCH 16—Ephesians 3:17, “May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith.”

While Christmas may be a time of giving and joy, Lent is a somber time of giving-up or suffering and penance. Just as fire can purify gold and pressure can transform a dark piece of coal into a brilliant shining diamond, we can transform suffering, pain, and death in this world into joy and everlasting life. “Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author of our faith...In view of the joy set before him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God’s throne” (Heb. 12:2). Through our endurance in this world in imitation of Jesus we can attain Christ in heaven.

*Christ Jesus, dwell in my heart until I dwell with you in heaven. Amen.*

—JOSH JUSTICE, RCIA



# Fifth Sunday in Lent • March 17

*A Change of Heart...*

## *From Lost to Found*

### Introduction

I think I can truthfully say that my daughter has always followed and served her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, but recently the path she had been taking was challenged by her pastor and the leaders of her church.

My daughter was a cheerleader in high school and college. That part of her personality has stayed with her as she teaches “Zumba” classes at the “Y” and leads senior fitness classes. But she is also a serious scholar of the Bible, as she spends time each day in prayer and studying scripture. For the past ten years she has led a very popular Bible study at her church. She dreams of some day writing and publishing her own material.

A few months ago, she was approached by her pastor and the woman who chairs the Bible Study committee. They said my daughter’s personality was not fitting for a woman who teaches scripture. She needed to become more subdued and mature. They even paid for her to get counseling to help her change. At first, she was lost, as she felt her whole identity being threatened. But thanks to her deep relationship with God and wise guidance from close friends, she has remained the person God created her to be. She continues to attend the Bible study she once led, and remains close to the women in the group, as she waits patiently for God to lead her into a new future.

**Share:** Have you ever questioned if you are living the life God created you to live?

† **Scripture: John 12:20-33**

**Share:** How do you think Jesus lived with his dual personalities of “Son of Man” and “Son of God”? Do you think he ever faced times of confusion?

## Commentary

Jesus had just experienced his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It had to be one of the high points of his humanity. As humans, we love to be honored and accepted by everyone. For a day, Jesus had enjoyed being honored as the “Son of Man.” But now, the next day, he finds himself faced with the reality of also being the “Son of God,” when Phillip and Andrew tell him that two Greeks are eager to meet him. Once lost, Jesus is found by his Father, and reminded that it is time to come home. His mission on earth is complete. Now the whole world is ready to learn about him, but that work will be done by others, not by Jesus. Perhaps for a short time, Jesus felt lost in his humanity, but his Father immediately appears, and he knows he is found.

**Share:** How does God assure you that you are doing what God wants you to do?

## Reflection

How well do you know yourself? Are you the person God handmade and created you to be, or are you lost in the person your parents wanted you to be...or the world expects you to be? My daughter was being asked to change from the person God created her to be to the person her church leaders thought she should be. But God stayed close to her and reassured her that she was doing God’s will with the personality she had been given and God would be with her as she moves forward.

**Share:** “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be.” Explain that verse in your own words.

*Prayer: May I always follow you and be true to the person you created me to be. Amen.*

“ ... if we sometimes wander  
down a side street, he will  
always lead us home.”

## Finding the Way

MONDAY, MARCH 18—Psalm 23:3, “He restores my soul and guides me  
along right paths.”

One icy day there was a knock on our door, and an elderly man stood there...lost. Out of all the doors in the neighborhood, he came to ours. My partner is a former nurses’ aide who cared for dementia patients. She called 911 and kept him calm until the sheriff arrived. He was led on the “right path” to our door!

*God, remind me to pray when I need guidance, and help me to be  
a guide for others. Amen.*

—FRODO OKULAM

# The Feast of Saint Joseph

TUESDAY, MARCH 19—Psalm 40:9, “I delight to do your will, my God.”

Joseph shared the wood’s delight, bright-edged tools  
Unlimbering what the wood offered, the plane  
Guided true to the square edge, the iron cutting  
Ever closer to the line. I think about Christ

Apprenticed to trade, hands working as his Father’s  
Own, holding firm the supplicant plank, immersed  
In resinous light, listening to the rhythmic snick,  
Snick of the plane, watching the aromatic shavings

Curl and fall, curl and fall, dropping to the floor  
Sonorously, like notes of forgotten music. A song  
Of mercies. A love song: the carpenter calls  
And the wood tenders its response, their music

A blessing and a prayer. The omnipotence  
Of selfless and forgiving hands. God and man,  
the young Jesus says to himself. God and Man.  
Joseph rests the plane, brushes away dust

Lingering on the polished sole and smiles,  
the plank perfect. God’s will, my boy, he says,  
finding perfection. He rests a calloused hand  
on the boy’s shoulder. Yes, he says, God’s will.

—DAN O’BRIEN

# A Change of Heart from Lost to Found

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20—John 8:31-32, “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciple, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”

The journey from lost to found in one’s relationship with God requires a shift of heart. A change of heart involves commitment to understanding and living by the truths leading to a sense of belonging in the heart of God. Having a relationship with God, through prayer and reading his Word, brings us up into tight fellowships so that we never have to wonder if we are walking alone.

The journey rests on a foundation of faith. Committing to daily prayer for guidance, maybe The Lord’s Prayer, maybe through daily devotions, helping those around you, or participating in the sacraments may help us feel closer to God.

To feel where I belong in my relationship with God, I must remain, abide, and obey his word. God is true to his word and his word brings true freedom.

*Lord, may I continue to seek you each day. Stay near me. Amen.*

—MAUREEN BAKER

## He Prayed for ME

THURSDAY, MARCH 21—Psalm 105:4-5, “Seek out the Lord and his might; constantly seek his face. Recall the wondrous deeds he has done.”

When I read these verses, I was immediately reminded of the last time I saw my father. It was January 11, 2023, and he was dying from a brain tumor. I had gone to North Carolina to say goodbye. When it came time for me to leave, dad prayed for me. He lay dying and yet he prayed for ME. Then he told me, “Son, you and Maria take care of each other, and always stay close to the Lord and seek his will. He is so good!” What an amazing blessing from both my earthly father and my heavenly Father.

*Lord, guide me to always seek your will. Amen.*

—MICHAEL KISSINGER

# The Lord is My Rock

FRIDAY, MARCH 22—Psalm 18:2, “I love you, O Lord, my strength, O Lord my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.”

When I read Psalm 18, I envision Dubrovnik, Croatia. Once a medieval fortress, the city is completely encircled in stone. For centuries, these walls have protected its faithful inhabitants from war and natural disasters. Once inside, the well-worn limestone of the Stradun (Main Street), is flanked with a labyrinth of narrow, side streets. It is impossible to get lost, as all roads eventually lead back to the Stradun. To me, this image captures how God always surrounds us with his love, protecting us from evil, and if we sometimes wander down a “side street,” he will always lead us home.

*When I feel lost, Lord, surround me with your love and lead me back to you. Amen.*

—MARIA MANZO

## A Clear Vision

SATURDAY, MARCH 23—Jeremiah 20:11, “The Lord is with me like a mighty champion.”

Poor Jeremiah!

He is facing a situation very similar to Jesus at Easter. Similar to Jesus, Jeremiah has been tasked with telling the people to turn from sin and follow God’s word. Similar to Jesus, he is rejected. He has been beaten and thrown into the stocks. To say Jeremiah is unhappy is an understatement! Jeremiah regrets that he was ever born and wishes he did not have to preach God’s word. Yet in the midst of all this, Jeremiah has a clear vision of the Lord as his champion and he follows God’s word.

*Lord please help me to embrace the example of Jeremiah. When faced with adversity and doubt, please help me to do your will. Amen.*

—CHARLIE ALFIERI

Palm Sunday • March 24

*A Change of Heart...*

# *From Willing to Joy-Filled*

## Introduction

Before the stars formed constellations in the sky and water carved streams out of the wilderness, God was. In the beginning, God created everything that is...and on the planet earth, God designed and made a beautiful garden with trees for shade, and flowers for fragrance and color, and flowing water to sooth and heal. From the soil of that garden God created man...male and female God created them. They were to be God's companions and keep God company in the beautiful garden. But Man failed God. Man disobeyed God and was banished from the beautiful garden...leaving God alone...leaving God feeling sad and lonely...always waiting for man to return. When God's beloved Son, Jesus, walked on this planet earth, he always knew where to find his Father. God would wait in the garden and God's only Son would leave his friends and come to sit and visit for a while...so it seems only right, that during his final night on planet earth, Jesus went to a garden to talk with his Father.

Still today, God is waiting for you in the garden, just to sit and talk.

**Share:** In what beautiful place or places do you find God? Where do you find it easy to have a conversation with God?

† **Scripture: Mark 14:1-15:47**

**Share:** "Not what I will, but what you will." Have you ever prayed those words with surrender and sincerity? How did things turn out?

## Commentary

We accompany Jesus to Gethsemane and witness this most intimate moment with his Father. It is the “Son of Man,” Jesus in his full humanity, that begs God, one last time, to help him escape the pain and suffering that he is soon to endure. This is the Jesus who has come to be one of us and feel life as we feel it. He tries, but finally surrenders to God’s will, his Father’s will. It is that surrender that opens the door for the suffering and pain that leads to his conquering of death for us. His willing heart fills our hearts with unending Joy.

**Share:** If Jesus was God’s Son, why would he have to go through this time of pleading with his Father?

## Reflection

How is your heart doing as you prepare to accompany Jesus through his suffering, death and resurrection? Has it changed at all? Is it strengthened by the angels God sends into your life? Are you seeing things differently through enlightened eyes? Is it less cluttered with the things of this world and free from sin? Is the emptiness you once felt replaced with the light, hope, peace and love that comes with the presence of the Holy One? Have you found your true self and are you ready and willing to follow Christ?

*Prayer: I surrender to your will, my God. Lead me to the joy of your gift of eternal life. Amen.*



“...today I wonder if the  
greater challenge is to follow in  
the footsteps of Jesus...?”

# Walking without Fear

MONDAY, MARCH 25—Psalm 27:1, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?”

It’s a short walk to my house in the dark. The way to walk it is with confidence, with a firm tread, as if to say—I don’t walk alone. Yes there may be strangers lurking—even a prowling coyote—but when they hear me coming they think—let’s not mess with HER! She’s not an easy target—something or someone makes her bold—she has a protector! We can’t see him but he must be there! She’s not afraid!

Let’s be inspired by this psalm and walk in the light—even on a dark and rainy night—and step forward with confidence.

*Lord, protect us, be our light, and take away all of our fear. Amen.*

—SANDRA LAUBENTHAL

## How Can Jesus Be Troubled?

TUESDAY, MARCH 26—John 3:21, “Jesus was deeply troubled.”

It may seem a bit out of character to see that Jesus is “deeply troubled” during the Passover Feast when 17 verses later he gives us these beautifully reassuring words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith.” But Jesus is both human and divine and because he’s human he knows his crucifixion soon awaits and he is afraid. But because of his faith and divinity he knows he must follow his Father’s plan not his own. With his faith he can open his heart and be filled with joy as he submits to God’s will. Can we?

*Lord, restore our faith daily, especially during times of trouble. Amen.*

—DONNA MASON

# Navigating Life's Appointed Moments with Courage

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27—Matt 26:18b, “My appointed time draws near.”

In Matthew 26:18b, “My appointed time draws near,” reflects a profound sense of destiny and purpose. This verse captures the tension before Jesus’ crucifixion, emphasizing his awareness of the divine plan unfolding. In our lives, we often grapple with the anticipation of pivotal moments, facing challenges or decisions that shape our paths. Like Jesus, acknowledging the proximity of our appointed times invites introspection. It encourages us to confront our fears, find strength in purpose, and embrace the transformative nature of significant moments. This verse resonates universally, reminding us to approach life’s defining moments with courage, faith, and a recognition of divine timing.

*Lord, help us to approach life’s defining moments as your divine timing. Amen.*

—FR. ANTHONY

## Beloved of God

HOLY THURSDAY, MARCH 28—John 13:15, “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.”

There was a time when I wanted to follow in the footsteps of women like Beryl Markham famous for her record-breaking transatlantic flight. While I will never reject the offer of a grand adventure, today I wonder if the greater challenge is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, washing the feet of those I encounter as I wander through my day, feet that are clean and sweet smelling or feet that are dirty, smelly, and gnarled. I wonder if I can listen with my heart to their needs and desires, and learn to see them as Jesus sees them, the beloved of God.

*Jesus, help us to see and follow in your footsteps. Amen.*

—CHRISTI BOHMBACH

# Path to Peace

GOOD FRIDAY, MARCH 29—Isaiah 53:5b, “He bore the punishment that makes us whole, by his wounds we were healed.”

This is challenging scripture. I have never understood it! How does Jesus’ suffering help us? I have come to believe that it is not the external events; the betrayal, the torture, that define Jesus. After all, we all suffer in small and large ways, and we all die. Instead, Jesus shows us the path to peace by opening our hearts to the internal connection to God that we all share as the body of Christ. We see that it is his love and compassion that make him transcendent and he invites us to follow his example. Our reality on this Earth from birth to death changes daily, but his love, of which we are a part, endures forever.

*God, help us to find peace, by recognizing our internal connection with you. Amen.*

—TERESA NIPPOLT

# Let Us Live, Now

EASTER EVE, SATURDAY, MARCH 30—Psalm 117:17, “I shall not die, but live and declare the deeds of the Lord.”

These words lend meaning to the surprising truth of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and our own share in it. The one who unexpectedly died, unexpectedly lives, but he lives a new life granted to him by the Father. His life was never his own, but even more obviously now. Perhaps the whole meaning of these 40 days is not in the sacrifices we made in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, but the deeper awareness that we live, truly live, to bear witness to the deeds of the Lord.

*Risen Lord, may I live each day as a witness to all you have done for me. Amen.*

—FR. BONAVENTURE



# *A Change Of Heart*

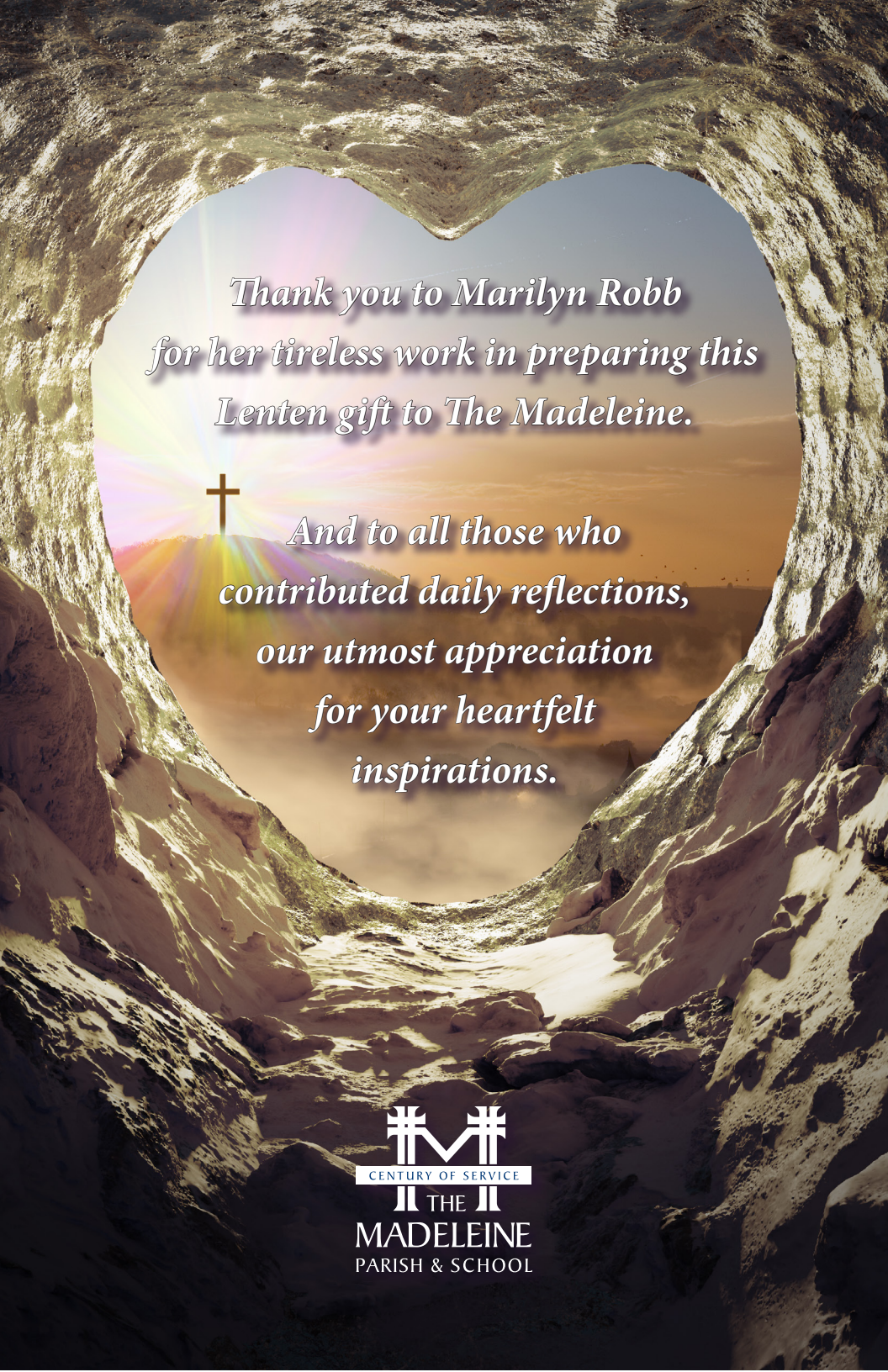
2024 LENTEN THEME • WORDS MARILYN ROBB  
TO THE TUNE “CREATOR OF THE STARS OF NIGHT”

A change of heart, create in me.  
Renew my Spirit, set me free.  
In troubled times, be thou my guide  
And send your angels to my side.


A change of heart, create in me.  
Renew my Spirit, set me free.  
O lead me to that Holy place  
Where I can see you face to face.

A change of heart, create in me.  
Renew my Spirit, set me free.  
From worldly clutter, deep within,  
Release me Lord, forgive my sin.

A change of heart, create in me.  
Renew my Spirit, set me free.  
With understanding, light my way,  
And from your love I'll never stray.



*Thank you to Marilyn Robb  
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our utmost appreciation  
for your heartfelt  
inspirations.*

