



LENT

Week Four

W E E K F O U R

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give you our attention. Holy Spirit, help us to hear and see what you have for us this week. Help us to make room for you. May you grow in us a deeper understanding of your grace and your love.

SCRIPTURE***Mark 14:61-62***

But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

MEDITATION**Caution**

an excerpt from "Reliving the Passion" by Walter Wangerin Jr.

Oh, what a message comes in the timing here! And what a caution to Christians who want a hero for their Christ!

Only now, finally, does Jesus publicly claim the office of Messiah. Now! Why, any fool could choose a better time than this right? Wrong! Anyone who did would be a fool indeed, for he would pervert the character and the intention of the Christ.

Now is the best time. Now is the Christ's time, because this is the Christ: a prisoner and a failure.

From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus charged those who experienced his power to say nothing about it. Wonders and miracles, evidently, were not the central purpose of his coming. They may have been signs pointing to the Messiah; but they were not the definition of the messianic office.

And when he was at the height of his ministry (as the world assesses height, as the world assesses greatness) he demanded that no one say he was the "Christ." When he was dazzling crowds, confuting enemies, causing shepherds and lepers and kings to ask, "Who *is* this man?"; when masses were "astonished beyond measure, saying, 'He has done all things well, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak!'" ; even when Simon Peter explicitly confessed, "You are the Christ" — Jesus commanded them "to tell no one about him." Apparently none of this was the real work of the "Christ."

Even when Peter, James, and John saw his celestial glory in the transfiguration—saw Jesus revealed as the fulfillment of the whole Old Testament—he told them to shut up.

The world would have misunderstood the glory.

The world might have expected a warrior-king, someone triumphant in its own terms. A winner, you know. A number-one, against-all-odds, pride-inspiring, tear-in-my-eye, flat-out, all-round, good-guy winner! A hero.

Only when that characterization is rendered absurd and impossible does Jesus finally accept the title “Christ.”

Christian, come and look closely: it is when Jesus is humiliated, most seeming weak, bound and despised and alone and defeated that he finally answered the question, “Are you the Christ?”

Now, for the record, yes: I am.

It is only in incontrovertible powerlessness that he finally links himself with power: “And you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of power.” Because any display of messianic power is far, far in the future—in his and in ours together, on the last day. The last day of the world, not today!

This, then, is the Christ that Jesus would have us know and accept and (O Christian!) reflect:

One who came to die. One who, in the assessment of this age, failed—an embarrassment, a folly, a stumbling block. An offense! *One crucified.*

Here in the world, the Christ and his followers hang ever on a cross. The cross is foremost, because a faithless world cannot see past it to the Resurrection.

And even for the faithful the cross must always be first, because the Resurrection is only as real (both in history and in our hearts) as the death is real.

What then of our big churches, Christian? What of our bigger parking lots, our rich coffers, our present power to change laws in the land, our political clout, our glory for Christ, our triumphant and thundering glory for Christ? It is excluded! All of it. It befits no Christian, for it was rejected by Jesus.

If ever we persuade the world (or ourselves) that we have a hero in our Christ, then we have lied. Or else we are deceived, having accepted the standards of this world.

He came to die beneath the world’s iniquity. The world, therefore, can only look down on him whom it defeated—down in hatred until it repents; but then it is the world no more.

Likewise, the world will look down on us—down in contempt until it elevates the Christ it sees in us; but then it won’t be our enemy any more, will it?

REFLECTION

1. While his signs and wonders spoke loudly, Jesus was quiet and mysterious. When it came time for him to be murdered, Jesus shared his identity. What strikes you about this? What does it say about Jesus’ character?
 2. Surrendering to the way of God is not easy. Does Jesus’ surrender give you any insight about God? About God’s relationship to us? Reflect.
 3. Spend time in prayer for the “world” immediately around you (your workplace, home, family, relationships). Ask God to show you how to pray if you don’t know.
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OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give you our attention. Holy Spirit, help us to hear and see what you have for us this week. Help us to make room for you. May you grow in us a deeper understanding of your grace and your love.

SCRIPTURE**1 Timothy 1:12-17**

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

MEDITATION**Truth to Tell**

by Barbara Brown Taylor

We say we want to forget the world, but in the depths of our hearts we do not want to be forgotten by it. — Francois Fenelon

There are many ways to tell the story of what happened on Good Friday. According to John, it involved a collusion between religion and politics. While Pilate and the chief priests conspired to solve their mutual problem while managing to remain enemies, Jesus stood at the center of the stage like a mirror in which all those around him saw themselves clearly for who they were. One way we Christians have avoided seeing our own reflections in the mirror is to pretend that this is a story about Romans and Jews. As long as they remain the villains, then we are off the hook—or so we think. Unfortunately, this is not a story that happened long ago in a land far away.

Sons and daughters of God are killed in every generation. They have been killed in holy wars and inquisitions, concentration camps and prison cells. They have been killed in Cape Town, Memphis, El Salvador and Alabama. The charges against them have run the gamut, but treason and blasphemy have headed the list, just as they did for Jesus. He upset those in charge at the courthouse and the temple. He suggested they were

they not doing their jobs. He offered himself as a mirror they could see themselves in, and they were so appalled by what they saw that they smashed it. They smashed him every way they could. He offered himself as a mirror they could see themselves in, and they were so appalled by what they saw that they smashed it. They smashed him every way they could.

One of the many things this story tells us is that Jesus was not brought down by atheism and anarchy. He was brought down by law and order allied with religion, which is always a deadly mix. Beware those who claim to know the mind of God and who are prepared to use force, if necessary, to make others conform. Beware those who cannot tell God's will from their own. Temple police are always a bad sign. When chaplains start wearing guns and hanging out at the sheriff's office, watch out. Someone is about to have no king but Caesar.

This is a story that can happen anywhere at any time, and we are as likely to be the perpetrators as the victims. I doubt that many of us will end up playing Annas, Caiaphas or Pilate, however. They may have been the ones who gave Jesus the death sentence, but a large part of him had already died before they ever got to him—the part Judas killed off, then Peter, then all those who fled. Those are the roles with our names on them—not the enemies but the friends.

Whenever someone famous gets in trouble, that is one of the first things the press focuses on. What do his friends do? Do they support him or do they tell reporters that, unfortunately, they had seen trouble coming for some time? One of the worst things a friend can say is what Peter said. *We weren't friends, exactly. Acquaintances might be a better word. Actually, we just worked together. For the same company, I mean. Not together, just near each other. My desk was near his. I really don't know him at all.*

No one knows what Judas said. In John's Gospel he does not say a word, but where he stands says it all. After he has led some 200 Roman soldiers and the temple police to the secret garden where Jesus is praying, Judas stands with the militia. Even when Jesus comes forward to identify himself, Judas does not budge. He is on the side with the weapons and the handcuffs, and he intends to stay there.

Or maybe it was not his own safety that motivated him. Maybe he just fell out of love with Jesus. That happens sometimes. One day you think someone is wonderful and the next day he says or does something that makes you think twice. He reminds you of the difference between the two of you and you start hating him for that—for the difference—enough to begin thinking of some way to hurt him back.

I remember being at a retreat once where the leader asked us to think of someone who represented Christ in our lives. When it came time to share our answers, one woman stood up and said, "I had to think hard about that one. I kept thinking, Who is it who told me the truth about myself so clearly that I wanted to kill him for it?" According to John, Jesus died because he told the truth to everyone he met. He was the truth, a perfect mirror in which people saw themselves in God's own light.

What happened then goes on happening now. In the presence of his integrity, our own pretense is exposed. In the presence of his consistency, our cowardice is brought to light. In the presence of his fierce love for God and for us, our hardness of heart is revealed. Take him out of the room and all those things become relative. I am not that much worse than you are nor you than I, but leave him in the room and there is no room to hide. He is the light of the world. In his presence, people either fall down to worship him or do everything they can to extinguish his light.

A cross and nails are not always necessary. There are a thousand ways to kill him, some of them as obvious as choosing where you will stand when the showdown between the weak and the strong comes along, others of them as subtle as kneeling your mouth shut when someone asks you if you know him.

Today, while he dies, do not turn away. Make yourself look in the mirror. Today no one gets away without being shamed by his beauty. Today no one flees without being laid bare by his light.

REFLECTION

1. What do you see when you look in the mirror today?
 2. Jesus told the truth. What truth are you longing to hear from Jesus today? Are there lies that are in the way of you hearing and seeing that truth? Name them.
 3. Spend time in confession today identifying who you see in the mirror. Take a moment to confess your surrender to Christ's love and grace, displayed on the cross for you. Allow the love of Jesus to bring to you healing, clarity, and hope.
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OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give you our attention. Holy Spirit, help us to hear and see what you have for us this week. Help us to make room for you. May you grow in us a deeper understanding of your grace and your love.

SCRIPTURE***John 20:25***

So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

MEDITATION**Believing is Seeing**

by Romano Guardini

Thomas appears to have been realist-reserved, cool, perhaps a little obstinate.

The days went by, and the disciples went on living under this considerable tension.

Another week, and they were together again in the house, and this time Thomas was with them. The same thing repeated itself. Jesus passed through closed doors, stepped into their midst, and spoke: "Peace be upon you!" Then he called the man who was struggling against faith: "Let me have thy finger; see, here are my hands. Let me have thy hand; put it into my side. Cease thy doubting, and believe!" At this point Thomas was overwhelmed. The truth of it all come home to him: this man standing before him, so moving, arousing such deep feelings within him, this man so full of mystery, so different from all other men—He is the very same One they used to be together with, who was put to death a short time ago. And Thomas surrendered: "Thou art my Lord and my God!" Thomas believed.

Then we come upon the strange words: "And Jesus said to him, 'Thou hast learned to believe, Thomas, because thou hast seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have learned to believe!'"

Such words as these are really extraordinary! Thomas believed because he saw. But our Lord did not call him blessed. He had been allowed to "see," to see the hands and the side, and to touch the blessed wounds, yet he was not blessed!

Perhaps Thomas had a narrow escape from a great danger. He wanted proofs, wanted to see and touch; but then, too, it might have been rebellion deep within him, the vain

glory of an intelligence that would not surrender, a sluggishness and coldness of heart. He got what he asked for: a look and a touch. But it must have been a concession he deplored having received, when he thought on it afterwards. He could have believed and been saved, not because he got what he demanded; he could have believed because God's mercy had touched his heart and given him the grace of interior vision, the gift of the opening of the heart, and of its surrender.

God could also have let him stay with the words he had spoken: in that state of unbelief which cuts itself off from everything, that insists on human evidence to become convinced. In that case he would have remained an unbeliever and gone on his way. In that state, external seeing and touching would not have helped him at all, he simply would have called it delusion. Nothing that comes from God, even the greatest miracle, can be proven like $2 \times 2 = 4$. It touches one; it is only seen and grasped when the heart is open and the spirit purged of self. Then it awakens faith. But when these conditions are not present there are always reasons to be found to say solemnly and impressively that it is all delusion, or that such-and-such is so because some other thing is so. Or, the excuse that always is handy: We cannot explain it yet...the future will enlighten us about it!

Thomas was standing a hairsbreadth away from obduracy and perdition. He was not at all blessed.

Blessed indeed are "those who have not seen, and yet have learned to believe!" Those who ask for no miracles, demand nothing out of the ordinary, but who find God's message in everyday life. Those who require no compelling proofs, but who know that everything coming from God must remain in a certain ultimate suspense, so that faith may never cease to require daring. Those who know that the heart is not overcome by faith, that there is no force or violence there, compelling belief by rigid certitudes. What comes from God touches gently, comes quietly; does not disturb freedom; leads to quiet, profound, peaceful resolve within the heart.

And those are called blessed who make the effort to remain open-hearted. Who seek to cleanse their hearts of all self-righteousness, obstinacy, presumption, inclination to "know better." Who are quick to hear, humble, free-spirited. Who are able to find God's message in the gospel for the day, or even from the sermons of preachers with no message in particular, or in phrases from the Law they have heard a thousand times, phrases with no quality of charismatic power about them, or in the happenings of everyday life which always end up the same way: work and rest, anxiety—and then again some kind of success, some joy, and encounter, and a sorrow

Blessed are those who can see the Lord in all these things!

REFLECTION

1. Are there things about Thomas that you admire? Name a few.
 2. How do you respond to Jesus blessing those who can not see or touch him? Are you encouraged? Disappointed? Are there places of struggle in your life - places you are waiting for proof and evidence to believe and surrender? Name them.
 3. God is with you in your struggle, doubt, and fear. Spend a moment or two in silence, listening for the Holy Spirit to highlight a doubt, fear, or struggle that he wants to interrupt today. What is the Spirit saying?
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20 THURSDAY

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give you our attention. Holy Spirit, help us to hear and see what you have for us this week. Help us to make room for you. May you grow in us a deeper understanding of your grace and your love.

SCRIPTURE: *Lamentations 1:20-22*

"See, Lord, how distressed I am! I am in torment within, and in my heart I am disturbed, for I have been most rebellious. Outside, the sword bereaves; inside, there is only death.

"People have heard my groaning, but there is no one to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my distress; they rejoice at what you have done. May you bring the day you have announced so they may become like me.

"Let all their wickedness come before you; deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my sins. My groans are many and my heart is faint."

MEDITATION: The Doubter's Prayer

by Anne Brontë (*English, 1820-1849*)

*While faith is with me, I am blest;
It turns my darkest night to day;
But, while I clasp it to my breast,
I often feel it slide away...*

*What shall I do if all my love,
My hopes, my toil, are cast away?
And if there be no God above
To hear and bless me when I pray?*

*Oh, help me, God! For thou alone
Canst my distracted soul relieve.
Forsake it not: it is thine own,
Though weak, yet longing to believe.*

REFLECTION

Take a moment to sit in silence (perhaps set a timer for 5-10 minutes). Let your thoughts come and go. Use grounding prayer phrases like "Lord, have mercy," or "Jesus, I surrender," or, "Here I am, God," if those are helpful. Spend time listening to the spirit. End with a time of journaling about what God brought to the surface for you and how you feel invited to respond.

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give you our attention. Holy Spirit, help us to hear and see what you have for us this week. Help us to make room for you. May you grow in us a deeper understanding of your grace and your love.

SCRIPTURE***Matthew 14:22-33***

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

MEDITATION**The Rescue**

by N. T. Wright

Forty years ago I sat in my college room with a friend and we read this passage together. He had come to a living faith in Jesus just a week before. He was still wide-eyed with delight at the sense of Jesus' personal presence with him, and at the changes he could feel happening in his heart and head. But he was also anxious. Is this just a fad? Can I keep it up? Will this just one of those things that is very exciting for a few weeks, and then will fade, leaving me a bit sad and cynical?

This passage might have been written for someone in that frame of mind. Peter is one of the few characters in the gospels, other than Jesus himself, whom we really get to

know. This story is typical of the man we see all through — loyal, impetuous, wanting to do the right thing, then getting it embarrassingly wrong and having to be³ rescued once more. Many of us can indemnify with him only too easily.

But before we even get to Peter's bit, notice what has happened. Jesus has just fed five thousand people with what started out as next to nothing. As we know from the other gospels, the crowds were, not unnaturally, very excited at this. Jesus as always was anxious that things shouldn't get out of hand (John tells us that the crowd wanted to seize him and hail him as king then and there, which would have been disastrous). So he quickly sent the disciples away and disappeared up the mountain.

Then it happened. Some time after midnight, as they were still tugging at the oars and getting nowhere, he came to them. Walking on the water.

This is such a strange story that many have sneered at it, but Matthew and the other writers knew perfectly well how strange it was and told it anyway. We have been learning, bit by bit, to see that Jesus seems to have possessed a kind of sovereignty over creation itself. Though our minds boggle at the thought of what that might mean, the story fits this pattern. The disciples, not unnaturally, are scared out of their minds: it must be a ghost! But no; Jesus tells them it's all right. They are not to be afraid. ('Don't be afraid,' by the way, is the most frequently repeated command in the whole Bible—something we all need to remind ourselves in our worrying and frantic world.)

Then it's Peter's turn. Triumph, disaster and rescue. Peter the fisherman knows perfectly well you can't walk on water. But, as we saw in chapter 10, Jesus gave the Twelve power to do the things he'd been doing...so maybe with this as well? And, amazingly, it happens. Peter walks towards Jesus. That is the walk of faith which we all take when we hear Jesus' voice and begin to follow him. We know perfectly well the world isn't like this; that money, sex and power are what matters; that we can't possibly give up our bad habits or keep up a life of prayer and holiness...but perhaps we just might, if Jesus himself called us to do it? Yes, he says, I am calling you; and off we set.

But then it all goes wrong. The wind had been there all along, but now Peter noticed it as if for the first time: what am I doing? I must be mad! I can't possibly...and he starts to sink. That's how it is for us, too. But the crucial moment is the next one. 'Lord, rescue me!' The simplest of prayers, and one which Jesus loves to answer. That's what he's come for, he said on another occasion, to look for people in need and rescue them. He may then smilingly remind us that we shouldn't have doubted. That's the lesson we need to learn, and it will take time. But he comes into the boat with us; the wind stops; and the result, of course, is worship. I doubt if the disciples quite knew what they meant by 'Son of God' at this point. But there wasn't much else they could say.

I lost touch with my friend after we left college. But just the other day I met someone who attends the same church. He is still going on, trusting Jesus, walking with him, helping others in their own faith. No doubt there have been times when, like Peter, like you and me, he's been tempted to doubt, and has started to sink. But Jesus loves rescuing people. That's what he's come to do.

REFLECTION

1. Close your eyes, if you're comfortable, and imagine yourself in the scene described above with Peter and Jesus. Where are you in the story? What character do you relate with the most? How do you react to the events?
 2. "Lord, rescue me" - is there something you are longing to be rescued from? Bring this before the Lord in prayer.
 3. Jesus is near, and he says, "do not be afraid." Is there something Jesus brings to mind today in your current circumstance that He wants to comfort or encourage you about? Spend time in a moment of gratitude before the Lord.
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OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give you our attention. Holy Spirit, help us to hear and see what you have for us this week. Help us to make room for you. May you grow in us a deeper understanding of your grace and your love.

SCRIPTURE**1 Corinthians 11:27-33**

So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.

So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together.

James 5:16

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

MEDITATION**Rituals of Lent: Confession**

by Esau McCaulley

But who can detect their errors?

Clear me from hidden faults. (Psalm 19:12 NRSV)

If there was one thing I mocked Roman Catholics about for years (as far I thought about them at all), it was the practice of confession. Why go to a priest when you could go directly to God and receive forgiveness? I told myself there was only one mediator between God and man: Jesus Christ.

I have no desire to relitigate the controversies of the Reformation. But I will speak about how I changed my mind on confession and how it relates to the season of Lent.

The best explanation I can offer comes from Thomas Cranmer's exhortation that precedes the Communion service in the Book of Common Prayer. He begins by drawing on Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 11:27-33 that we take seriously the Lord's Supper lest we incur judgment. He encourages the Christian to "examine your life and conduct by the rule of God's commandments, and in whatsoever ye shall

perceive yourselves to have offended, either by will, word, or deed, there to bewail your own sinfulness, and to confess yourselves to almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life." This seems pretty straightforward. Confess your sins to God. Then he says, "If there be any of you who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience... let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned minister of God's word, and open his grief." According to Cranmer, the Christian does this for the "quieting of his conscience and removing of all scruple and doubtfulness."

Yes, we should confess our sins to God, but Cranmer points to the benefits of confessing to clergy: it satisfies our conscience and removes all doubt. There is a world of difference between knowing intellectually that we are forgiven by God and experiencing the spiritual and emotional freedom that comes alongside the intellectual acknowledgment.

Clergy are not God. We do not have the power to forgive sins. But we have been given the task of preaching, teaching, leading, and discipling the churches we lead. Most churches examine clearly before they ordain them, making sure they have the character and spiritual maturity to do that work. Clergy remain human, and we fall and sin like everyone else. In healthy systems, clergy are held accountable for their misdeeds. Nonetheless, churches have discerned a calling for the clergy to serve God's people by leading them. Therefore, when clergy say to people, "God forgives you," we speak on behalf of the church that has called us to this work.

It is true that James tells us to confess our sins to one another, and he doesn't say it has to be clergy (James 5:16). That is good and well. But there is also value in bringing the things that concern us to those whose judgment has been assessed by the wider church. These truths can sit alongside one another. They don't have to be in competition. We confess to God, one another, and to clergy. Sometimes we need someone with spiritual authority to remind us of God's grace when our consciences are in trouble.

The diocese in which I was ordained require future clergy to do a life confession before their ordination. I was terrified that if the priest knew about the foolishness of my youth or the dumb decisions I had made, I wouldn't be forgiven. I realized that anxiety and a troubled conscience had been with me for years. I was encouraged to write these things down so I wouldn't forget anything.

Surprisingly, it didn't take much space to write down my sins. It became clear as I reflected on my life that I often did the same things over and over, with a variation of time and circumstance. I came into the office with my sins written on yellow notebook paper. I sat facing the priest and we talked it through. The confession part went much more quickly than I expected. The priest then gave me some advice on ways I could pressure God more faithfully. It was like going to a spiritual doctor, listing my symptoms, and receiving the medicine.

One thing that sticks with me from that day is what the priest did with that yellow sheet of paper. He pulled up a metal basket next to us. He then took the paper that held my sins and lit it on fire, dropping the flaming paper into the bucket. He said, "The Lord has put away all your sins." I felt more free in that moment than I had for years. Since then, confession has become a gift.

It is the custom in many Christian traditions to give a confession during the season of Lent. If this season is about renewing our spiritual lives, then it makes sense to take advantage of the sacrament of confession.

Confession is helpful because it involves examining our spiritual life in an intentional manner. Many serious Christians, realizing they are stuck in sin, will confess it to themselves or others and try to change. But there is also a host of sins of which we are unaware. Part of the preparation for confession is an in-depth self-examination. There are multiple ways to go about this, but one of the most common approaches is to use Scripture. We go through the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount and ask ourselves if we are in violation of the principles contained in these Scriptures in thought, word, or deed.

The old devotional books also have lists of vices for us to consider. For example, regarding snobbery, the Saint Augustine's Prayer Book wonders, "Have you been prideful over race, family, position, personality, education, skill, achievements, or possessions?" This is not a question I often put to myself. It is good for me to reflect on such things—not so I can feel wicked, but so I might be healed.

Confession isn't about going to the priest to obtain a forgiveness not otherwise available. It is about God working through clergy to help us understand the forgiveness he offers and to discern together the best way to live our lives before God. We cannot be healed of what we refuse to acknowledge. So we examine ourselves in light of God's word for the sake of our healing and restoration.

REFLECTION

1. We can not be healed of what we refuse to acknowledge. Are there areas of our life that need acknowledgment? This week, God has been revealing spaces of our lives and hearts that need light and care. If you have not written or journaled already about some of these spaces and things, you're invited to do so today.
2. What do you think about the practice of confession? What feelings rise to the surface? Have you ever practiced confession? After reading today's meditation, do you wonder if you might grow from incorporating this practice? Reflect.
3. Take a step in the direction of confession by, perhaps, confessing a sin to God in prayer. Take it a step further - practice confession with someone, as you feel led.
4. Take a moment to express gratitude to Jesus for his saving, cleansing, forgiving work on the cross. As you feel led, maybe express gratitude to God for those around you that have/will shape you in this practice.

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for all you have done to remove the stain of sin from us. Thank you for your obedience on the cross. Thank you for bearing the wounds to save us. Thank you for your death and resurrection. *Help us, O Lord, to become more like you.* Have mercy. Cleanse us. Forgive us. Purify us. *Help us, O Lord, to become more like you.*

