



# Repent and Believe

## Journey through Lent 2012 | Year B

Art Zannoni

### First Sunday of Lent | Year B | February 26, 2012 A Time of Desert Experiences

Use this resource alone or with others. Used with others, read the reflections aloud, pausing between paragraphs. Invite each member of the group to take a turn reading, or prepare readers in advance for larger groups. Share with each other your Lenten commitments and promises, keeping within the silence of your own heart those things which belong only there.

## Opening Ritual and Prayer



**Begin with  
the Sign of the Cross**  
In the name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Light a candle. Open your Bible and set it beside the lit candle. Prepare the room for prayer, even if you are alone. Quiet music can help to settle yourself and others after a hectic day.

**Leader:** Let us bless the Lord.

**All:** Thanks be to God.

**Leader:** God, bless our journey throughout this Lent.

**All:** God, be with us as we travel.

**Leader:** May our Lenten fasting be a hunger for justice.

**All:** Our alms a making of peace.

**Leader:** Our prayer, the chant of humble and grateful hearts.

**All:** Amen.



## Find it in Scripture

Explore the Bible together

Read aloud to yourself or have various members of the group read aloud the Scripture Readings for the First Sunday of Lent (Year B): Genesis 9:8-15; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:12-15

### Here is some insight on these readings

- ▶ First Reading (Genesis 9:8-15)
  - This is the account of the covenant God entered into after the flood. It is a solemn promise from God not to allow chaos to overtake creation and humankind.
  - It should be noted that the covenant is made with all of creation and that it is multi-generational.
- ▶ Second Reading (1 Peter 3:18-22)
  - In this passage, the author sees Noah and the flood as pointing to Christ and baptism. Just as Noah saved others from the devastating waters of the flood, so Christ saved others from the ultimate destructive separation from God.
- ▶ Gospel (Mark 1:12-15)
  - Jesus is led into the desert by the Spirit where he is tempted three times by the devil. He does not succumb to the temptations and is presented by Mark as a model to be followed.



## Going a bit deeper

Exploring our Catholic faith and life

### Reflection on the Gospel Reading: A Time of Desert Experiences

In Lent, we journey into the desert to discern our future commitment to God.

Each year on the first Sunday of Lent, the Gospel reading is one of the Synoptic accounts of the temptation of Jesus in the desert by Satan. Since the story mentions Jesus spending 40 days in the desert, it is most appropriate for the first Sunday of Lent.

The Greek word translated “tempted” can also mean “to be put to the test.” Like Jesus we enter the Lenten desert to have our faith put to the test and to discern who we are called to be in relationship to God.

The Gospel of Mark makes it clear that the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert. With our own hectic pace, sometimes we need to have the Spirit drive us into the desert, where we can reflect on our lives --- spend more time by ourselves --- to confront our temptations and to turn ourselves more attentively toward God and each other. The challenge is: do we look for Jesus and the Spirit in places that are hard, lonely, and difficult in our life?

Just as Jesus was not alone in the desert, for angels ministered to him, we know we are not alone. It is in the desert that we find out if we really are believers in Jesus and, like him, rely on God to save us and strengthen us.

In the Bible, the desert is a rich symbol filled with a variety of meanings.

### **Desert: A place of Journey and Discernment.**

In the Old Testament, ancient Israel's four decades in the desert were not simply a time of aimless wandering, of pointless movement. The people were on a journey to enter into covenant with God. Two temptations against that journey occur and have to be dealt with. The first is the temptation to simply stop the journey, to settle down and to say: "That's enough! Let's stay here." The second temptation is to want to reverse the journey, to go back to where we came from, as did the Israelites who complained to Moses: "Why did you bring us out of Egypt?" (Exodus 14:11). This second temptation is nostalgia for the past, which looks more attractive than the present, more secure, safer. As well it ought! We have already been there; it holds no surprises. In nostalgia we want to exchange the present with the past in order to avoid the future. In Lent, however, we journey into the desert so as to discern our future commitments; the desert affords us an opportunity to examine how well we have aligned ourselves with God, Christ and one another.

### **Desert: A Place of Testing**

Both ancient Israel and Jesus were tempted and tested in the desert. In the Gospels, Jesus is tempted to be a different kind of Messiah: to take the path of spectacle and power rather than that of humble service. Jesus is put to the test in this wasteland by Satan. Satan in Greek is the "Hinderer." That means anything, anyone, any event or circumstance, any decision, culture or relationship that keeps us from fulfilling our promises and commitments, from being faithful to our covenant with God.

The only demon that really matters waits for all of us in the desert, on his own ground. That is why Jesus went into the desert, to confront the demons in his own life, not that his enemy was not everywhere --- but for the showdown. You have to stalk the beast in its lair. When the devil boasted that he owned the whole world, Jesus did not argue. He gave the devil his due. And it is significant

that Jesus did not overwhelm Satan the “Hinderer” with majestic splendor. He simply held his ground until the Satan went away. Neither do we have to beat the devil; we just have to survive the desert.

But if we survive the desert experience, we come out different persons. The desert is not something we do; it is something we experience. It isn't something we make for ourselves; it is something that makes us. We never know what is waiting for us in the desert or what will happen to us or how we might come out. Because of this, it is very tempting to avoid the desert experience. However, if we do not go into the desert to find God, God has been known to make our lives a desert in order to find us.

We enter the Lenten desert to confront our temptations and to turn ourselves more intentionally toward God and each other so that we can emerge on Easter as people prepared to proclaim the Gospel. The first step of our journey is to: “Repent and believe in the Gospel.”

Jesus emerges from the desert to proclaim the good news. Only by following the way of Jesus through the Gospel, hearing his word and adopting his values, can a person understand more deeply the mystery of God’s reign. The beginning of this journey through the Gospel and through Lent calls for what in Greek is known as *metanoia* – a change of direction, an about-face, a second look at life and belief, an act of trust in God who guides the unfolding journey.



## Talk it over

Share what’s on your mind

## Reflection Questions

- ▶ How do I feel called into the desert by the Spirit?
- ▶ What or who do I expect to encounter in the desert?
- ▶ Who or what hinders me from encountering God and Jesus?
- ▶ Who will minister to me in the desert?



## Do something about it!

Put your hands to work on what your heart believes.

## Activities for the First Week of Lent

### For Youth & Adults

Decide on the foods you will abstain and fast from eating this week, and then estimate what they would cost. Using that money, purchase non-perishable foodstuffs to donate to a food shelf or pantry.

### For Children

Lead your family members in prayer this week, either before meals or in the morning or at bed time.

### For Families

Prepare together a meal of rice and beans. It is one of the easiest and simplest meals to make, and it can place you in solidarity with many of the poor of the world. Pray during the preparation of the meal, thanking God for the beans and the rice. Pray, while eating the meal, for the hungry and poor of the world.

### For Parish Groups

Organize a group of parishioners to visit the sick or shut-ins of the parish. Take along some food or baked goods to share.

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** God of the universe, send your angels to minister to us this Lent the way you sent them to minister to Jesus in the desert.

**All:** Michael from the East to make us strong.

**Leader:** Gabriel from the West to make us wise.

**All:** Raphael from the south to make us warm, loving and caring.

**Leader:** A guardian angel from the North to protect each of us.

**All:** Amen

Exchange a greeting of peace with all who are present.



# Repent and Believe

## Journey through Lent 2012 | Year B

Art Zannoni

### Second Sunday of Lent | Year B | March 4, 2012 A Time to Listen

Use this resource alone or with others. Used with others, read the reflections aloud, pausing between paragraphs. Invite each member of the group to take a turn reading, or prepare readers in advance for larger groups. Share with each other your Lenten commitments and promises, keeping within the silence of your own heart those things which belong only there.

## Opening Ritual and Prayer



### Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Light a candle. Open your Bible and set it beside the lit candle. Prepare the room for prayer, even if you are alone. Quiet music can help to settle yourself and others after a hectic day.

**Leader:** O God, come to my assistance

**All:** O Lord, make haste to help me.

**Leader:** God, help us to listen to you and to your son Jesus.

**All:** May we keep our eyes, ears, minds, and hearts open to hear your voice

**Leader:** God, transfigure us as you did your son Jesus

**All:** Amen.



### Find it in Scripture

Explore the Bible together

Read aloud to yourself or have various members of the group read aloud the Scripture Readings for the Second Sunday of Lent (Year B): Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Romans 8:31b-34; Mark 9:2-10.

## Here is some insight on these readings

- ▶ First Reading (Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18)
  - This is the story of the testing of Abraham, who passes the test. His devotion to God is beyond reproach.
- ▶ Second Reading (Romans 8:31b-34)
  - This passage is best known for its adage born of faith: “If God is for us, who can be against us?”
- ▶ Gospel (Mark 9:2-10)
  - This is the story of the transfiguration of Jesus.



### Going a bit deeper

Exploring our Catholic faith and life

## Reflection on the Gospel Reading: A Time to Listen

In Lent we learn how to listen to God and Jesus.

The Gospel reading for the second Sunday of Lent always presents one of the accounts of the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain top before Peter, James, and John. They go up a high mountain and get a glimpse of the resurrection. The story is dense with imagery borrowed from the book of Daniel (see Daniel chapter 7). In Daniel, the Son of Man comes in glory with white robes, angels, and light to judge the nations. He is a very human person that reveals the Spirit. For the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is the Son of Man appearing with Moses and Elijah; the liberator and lawgiver of Israel, and the prophet of expectation and future hope of the Messiah are with Jesus in conversation. This is an encapsulated history of an entire people standing with Jesus.

Peter, impetuous as usual, and seemingly oblivious to the power of the moment, wants to capture it by erecting shrines for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Peter likes the “special effects” on the mountain top and does not want to lose it. Why? Because once he descends from the mountain, he, like all the disciples, will set their face toward Jerusalem and the embracing of the cross. Yet to really experience Jesus transfigured, Peter (and all would-be disciples of Jesus) must also embrace the cross, for on it Jesus was transfigured through death to new life in the resurrection. Like Peter, we all think it is good to be here on the mountain top away from the hustle and bustle, pain and violence of the world below.

### Listen!

Suddenly a booming voice is heard from the cloud saying: “This is my Son, my beloved. Listen to him.” Jesus is identified as the beloved Son, reminiscent of Isaac, who was also a beloved son (see Gen 22:2). *Listen!* This is how we are to

make it through Lent to the fullness of God's vision. The way to Easter is by *listening* to the beloved Son, the child of God, the suffering servant, the prophet, the judge of the nations, the word of God: Jesus.

In our lives, whose voice are we *listening* to each day? How do we *listen* to Jesus? What encourages us to *listen*? What areas of the Gospel do we not heed? Who in our life can help us *listen* to Jesus more clearly? To whom can we talk to about what it means to *listen* to Jesus? How does *listening* to Jesus, and his teachings, and life style help us to become beloved sons and daughters of God?

We are called today in this season of Lent to *listen*, to obey and submit to Jesus. In doing so, others will see through us the glory of God just as the disciples saw it through Jesus. God didn't spare Jesus from the ravages and risks of being human, and God doesn't spare us either. We must learn in this season of Lent to see the glory of God and the presence of Jesus transfigured in those who suffer unjustly and those who live risking everything to save others from despair, death and sin.

### **We are called to transfigure ourselves so others can see God.**

The transfiguration story is not a piece of meaningless ancient literature. It is a way of life that we are called to imitate. We are meant to transfigure ourselves, our relationships, our earth and our church so that others can see God through us. The Sacred Scriptures provide us with the skills needed to transfigure all of creation. In the first reading, Abraham stands as a model of what it means to *listen* to God: "Here I am," he answered whenever God called. If Abraham had not continued *listening*, he would not have heard God say, "Do not harm your son Isaac." In the Gospel reading, God's voice commands us to *listen* to his "beloved son." Like Abraham, we do not know in advance what this *listening* might entail of us or how our perception of God's beloved son might change. Only attentive *listening* to our God of surprises leads us to a transfigured life.



### **Talk it over**

Share what's on your mind

## **Reflection Questions**

- ▶ Am I an attentive listener to God and Jesus?
- ▶ When I listen to the Gospels, am I a selective listener who listens only to the part of the story I like and will accept, rather than the whole Gospel?
- ▶ Who are the people who help me listen to God and Jesus?
- ▶ Who or what gets in the way of my listening to God's Beloved Son?



## Do something about it!

Put your hands to work on what your heart believes.

## Activities for the Second Week of Lent

### For Individuals, Families and Parishes

As your Lenten practice this week, attempt to be an attentive listener at work, at home and at any meeting in which you might participate. At the family dinner table provide time for each person to feel truly listened to by everyone gathered for the meal. By sharing positive feedback, ask each other if you have felt heard.

### For Children

This week complete the following phrases:

At school I listen to my teacher(s) when....

At school I feel listened to by....

At home I listen to....

At home I feel listened to by....

I listen to God when I....

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** For our time together today

**All:** God's holy name be blessed and praised

**Leader:** For all the blessings we have received from God

**All:** God's holy name be blessed and praised

**Leader:** For this season of Lent, may it be a time of spiritual growth for all of us

**All:** Amen

Exchange a greeting of peace with all who are present.



# Repent and Believe

## Journey through Lent 2012 | Year B

Art Zannoni

### Third Sunday of Lent | Year B | March 11, 2012

#### A Time For Zeal For God

Use this resource alone or with others. Used with others, read the reflections aloud, pausing between paragraphs. Invite each member of the group to take a turn reading, or prepare readers in advance for larger groups. Share with each other your Lenten commitments and promises, keeping within the silence of your own heart those things which belong only there.

## Opening Ritual and Prayer



### Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Light a candle. Open your Bible and set it beside the lit candle. Prepare the room for prayer, even if you are alone. Quiet music can help to settle yourself and others after a hectic day.

**Leader:** Christ, be our light.

**All:** Shine in the darkness.

**Leader:** Christ, be our light.

**All:** Shine in the world.

**Leader:** Christ, be our light.

**All:** Shine in our lives each day.



### Find it in Scripture

Explore the Bible together

Read aloud to yourself or have various members of the group read aloud the Scripture Readings for the Third Sunday of Lent (Year B): Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25; John 2:13-25

## Here is some insight on these readings

- ▶ First Reading (Exodus 20:1-17).
  - The Ten Commandments are presented as the basic conditions for covenant membership with God and the people.
  - The commandments are presented as absolute, with God as the authority behind them. They are ethical forms of behavior binding those who are members of the covenant community.
- ▶ Second Reading (1 Corinthians 1:22-25)
  - Paul tells the Corinthians and us that to proclaim Christ crucified is the real wisdom of God.
- ▶ Gospel (John 2:13-25)
  - This is the story of how Jesus drove the merchants and money changers out of the Temple.



### Going a bit deeper

Exploring our Catholic faith and life

## Reflection on the Gospel Reading: A Time For Zeal For God

We often image Jesus as meek and humble of heart. We believe he was non-violent. After all, he told his disciples to turn the other cheek. In the Gospel reading for this Third Sunday of Lent, we are startled. It is confrontative, not comforting. Jesus comes across as Indiana Jones with whip in hand. Jesus is downright angry.

### Jesus and Anger

Jesus lunges through the Temple with a whip in his hand, driving out animals, turning over the moneychangers' tables, spilling thousands of coins all over the place, and yelling at the top of his lungs: Get out of here! You are turning my Father's house into a shopping mall, not a place of prayer. Jesus knew what it means to be angry, but not the anger that takes the next step toward violence. Violence is a sin, and Jesus would never tolerate it.

But there is another kind of anger. It is that natural human emotion that boils up in our veins whenever we meet injustice and hypocrisy. This kind of anger is natural and keeps us from despair. Such anger can be the doorway to hope, for it responds to what must not be and cannot be.

This is the kind of anger Jesus felt that day in the Temple. After all, he went to the Temple to pray, not to shop. The money changers were in the Temple because people had to pay the Temple tax for sacrifices carried out here each day. But pious Jews who came to the Temple had coins in their wallets minted with

Roman images of the emperor or a deity. They therefore had to exchange their coins for Jewish coins, the only ones acceptable in the Temple. This religious practice turned into a lucrative business, since the money changers charged the people an exchange fee.

Jesus' anger that day brought to fruition the prophecies of Zechariah and Jeremiah, who maintained that in the days of the Messiah, all will be holy in Jerusalem and no merchant will be found in the Temple. That's why Jesus' opponents were so upset with Jesus and demanded a sign or proof that he was indeed the Messiah. Jesus' response seems absurd to his opponents. "Destroy this temple [Jesus' body] and in three days I will raise it up." His listeners are thinking pragmatically, devoid of faith: it took forty-six years to build the Temple building, and he is going to destroy it and build it up in three days? Jesus' answer is laden with resurrection clues and images which his disciples and believers will remember after Jesus' death and resurrection. They will put the pieces together then. What happens to Jesus' body happens to the body of Christ, the temple of God now--- in us, individually and collectively. Thus, Jesus' driving out the merchants and money changers from the Temple is an action that displays for us what ought to be our priority: a worshiping relationship to God and just relationship with each other.

## **Zeal For God**

Jesus was zealous in defending God's house as a place of prayer. For what or whom are we zealous? Are we zealous for God's house, for the public worship of God, and for God's honor and glory? Can we, like Jesus, quote the words of Psalm 69: "Zeal for your house consumes me"? What really consumes us---time, work, money, worries, sports, children, acquiring things, marriage, health? Jesus spoke of the Temple as his body. How do we treat the Temple of our body, the Temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us? How do we treat the bodies of others: spouses, the elderly, the sick, the homeless, our enemies?

## **Embracing our Baptism**

We have been raised from the dead in baptism. Through baptism our own bodies have been made temples of God. By the ritual washing and anointing, we are plunged into a pattern of dying and rising, which identifies us with Christ. We have been anointed and incorporated into the priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry of Christ Jesus. Jesus declared that the place of God's presence among people was no longer a building but the "temple of his body." The same is true of us.

Lent is a time to embrace the twofold challenge from the Gospel reading. First, we need to pay attention to the anger that lurks in us, and not let it fester like a sore or let it explode into violence. Second, we are to practice the virtue of zeal for God so that it can consume us as it did Jesus.



## Talk it over

Share what's on your mind

## Reflection Questions

- ▶ Do I need to examine the way I deal with anger?
- ▶ What strengthens my zeal?
- ▶ What weakens my zeal?
- ▶ How is my zeal for God manifested?
- ▶ How zealous am I in the way I worship?



## Do something about it!

Put your hands to work on what your heart believes.

## Activities for the Third Week of Lent

### For Youth & Adults

This week seek forgiveness from someone with whom you have been angry. Even if you already apologized to that person, seek forgiveness again.

### For Families

We all seek to maintain good physical and spiritual health. Our bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit. As a family this week, plan and cook healthy meals to nurture your physical bodies, and spend time praying together to nurture your spiritual bodies.

### For Parish Groups

Have volunteers at the parish help with spring cleaning in and around the parish's physical plant. One group could wash windows. Another could dust the furniture, etc.

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Lord, help us to be zealous in our love for you.

**All:** By loving one another as you loved us.

**Leader:** Lord, help us to be zealous in the care of our bodies.

**All:** By eating healthy foods and regular exercise.

**Leader:** Lord, help us to be zealous in developing our faith and in practicing it.

**All:** By observing our Lenten practices of fasting, praying and almsgiving.

**All:** Amen.

Exchange a greeting of peace with all who are present.



# Repent and Believe

Journey through Lent 2012 | Year B

Art Zannoni

## Fourth Sunday of Lent | Year B | March 18, 2012

A Time to be Taught By Jesus

Use this resource alone or with others. Used with others, read the reflections aloud, pausing between paragraphs. Invite each member of the group to take a turn reading, or prepare readers in advance for larger groups. Share with each other your Lenten commitments and promises, keeping within the silence of your own heart those things which belong only there.

## Opening Ritual and Prayer



### Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Light a candle. Open your Bible and set it beside the lit candle. Prepare the room for prayer, even if you are alone. Quiet music can help to settle yourself and others after a hectic day.

**Leader:** God of light, be our beacon in the darkness.

**All:** Enlighten us, O God.

**Leader:** Jesus, you who are the light of the world, help us to walk in your light.

**All:** Enlighten us, O Lord.

**Leader:** May we all live as sons and daughters of the light.

**All:** Amen.



### Find it in Scripture

Explore the Bible together

Read aloud yourself or have various members of the group read aloud the Scripture readings for the Fourth Sunday of Lent (Year B): 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21

## Here is some insight on these readings

- ▶ First Reading (2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23)
  - The reading affirms the universality of God's jurisdiction.
  - God can issue a command even in a foreign land and even to a non-Israelite (Cyrus) whom God can use to deliver Israel.
- ▶ Second Reading (Ephesians 2:4-10)
  - The reading affirms that we are saved through faith, and it also makes it clear that this faith is itself a gift of God.
- ▶ Gospel (John 3:14-21)
  - The Gospel reading is the story of the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus, the learned Pharisee. The two of them seem to be talking about the meaning of a biblical passage.



### Going a bit deeper

Exploring our Catholic faith and life

## Reflection on the Gospel Reading: A Time to be Taught by Jesus.

Encountering this Sunday's Gospel is like trying to take a drink from a fire hose. It is filled with a variety of images that come at us with the power of the water pressure in the hydrant. This is typical of John's Gospel. The Gospel reading for the Fourth Sunday of Lent consists of a powerful flow of symbols: a serpent that is held up, eternal life, believing and light. This is a lot to swallow all at once.

### Jesus and Nicodemus

We begin with the character Nicodemus, a learned Pharisee. He belonged to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious supreme court of the time. He leaves his house one night under the veil of darkness to covertly meet and talk with a rural carpenter/rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth from Galilee. This is astonishing. It would be like a justice of the United States Supreme Court surreptitiously slipping out at night to talk to a street corner preacher in Washington, D.C.

Nicodemus came to Jesus under the cover of darkness because he didn't want to be known publicly as a follower of Jesus. He was still uncommitted. Sometimes we act the same way---hiding in the shadows, hiding our doubts and weak faith from others. But we are called to live in the light and let others see our deeds so that God's glory is revealed in our lives. We are called to be courageous about our faith, to be more public about our commitment to it.

## Jesus being lifted up

In the Gospel passage, Jesus, the itinerant Galilean rabbi, is teaching the learned Nicodemus about what Moses did. The author of the Gospel of John is making use of a favorite technique here, that of double meaning. It is found in the expression “lifted up.” It has the obvious physical meaning of placing something up high, as a crane lifts objects at a skyscraper construction site. It also has the meaning that something or someone is highly elevated so as to be seen by people, like a child on his father’s shoulders or a flag in a parade. Jesus reminds Nicodemus that Moses lifted a bronze serpent up high (Numbers 21). Every Israelite that looked at it was saved from the bite of poisonous snakes. In the Gospel of John, Jesus will be lifted up high on the cross to be seen by all. All who look upon the crucified Jesus and believe in him will be saved. Ironically, two instruments of death, a snake and a cross, are presented here as a means of remaining alive. In the case of the cross, it is a means to eternal life.

## The Son of Man

Jesus goes on to talk about the “Son of Man.” It is a Semitic idiom that refers to a symbolic figure who will inaugurate the last days. The way the thought is developed here in the Gospel of John, one is led to conclude that the “Son of Man” is also the only-begotten Son of God. For the Gospel writer, both the “Son of Man” and the “Son of God” are agents of eternal life for all.

## God So Loved the World

Jesus continues to teach Nicodemus and in so doing also teaches us. He tells him that “...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” (John 3:16). Many of us have seen signs held by fans in sporting arenas and stadiums with the words “John 3:16.” For some unexplained reason, television cameras seem to zoom in on these signs. Yet how many of the fans know the deep meaning of this text, which Martin Luther called “the Gospel in miniature”? The real meaning of the text revolves around “believing,” a verb that appears five times in the passage.

What then are we supposed to believe? We are called to believe that God did not just love *part* of the world but the *whole* world. Even though we suffer, even though we hurt, even though the world is loused up and innocent people die, God did not condemn the world. God loved it. God loved and continues to love it the very same way a parent loves a child. God shared his Son with everyone, and this love knows no bounds.

The two words “believe” and “light” occur five times in this Gospel passage. The two words are related. God sends the light of his life to us. The light who is Jesus extinguishes the darkness and enables us to see; in John’s Gospel,

seeing is believing. Our coming to the light to see and believe is expressed in the final sentence of the Gospel reading: “But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.” God’s work done in us is this: to die to self so that we can be raised to new life. Our good works—doing our daily tasks with love and care and acting justly and charitably—are our way of being “lifted up.” Finally, the gateway to eternal life is the embracing of our own cross daily so that all who see us raised up will have revealed to them Christ, the light of the world.



### Talk it over

Share what’s on your mind

## Reflection Questions

- ▶ When have I experienced God’s great love for me?
- ▶ Do I understand that God’s love is universal? What actions can I perform and what relationships can I develop to share God’s universal love?
- ▶ While holding a crucifix, the symbol of Christ being lifted up, ask yourself what you believe about Jesus.



### Do something about it!

Put your hands to work on what your heart believes.

## Activities for the Fourth Week of Lent

### For Individuals and All Family Members

Go outside at night when there is a cloudless sky, and look up at the stars. Ponder how these tiny points of light witness to the light of God all night long. If you are in a group, share with one another how God lights up your life.

### For Children

At dinner time each day this week, trace a cross on the forehead of your parents, and have them trace one on your forehead. When this is completed, go around the table and ask each person to share what this action meant to them.

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** O Lord, dispel the darkness of our minds and be the light that shines in the hearts of your people. Let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Leader:** God, lead us to Christ, the Light of the world. Let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Leader:** God, heal us and preserve us from the skepticism of this world. Let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Leader:** Jesus, you who take away the sins of the world, free us from the contagious power of evil. Let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Leader:** By the example of our lives, God, may we become in Christ the light of the world. Let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, hear our prayer.

Exchange a greeting of peace with all who are present.



# Repent and Believe

Journey through Lent 2012 | Year B

Art Zannoni

## Fifth Sunday of Lent | Year B | March 25, 2012 Encountering Jesus Through Other People

Use this resource alone or with others. Used with others, read the reflections aloud, pausing between paragraphs. Invite each member of the group to take a turn reading, or prepare readers in advance for larger groups. Share with each other your Lenten commitments and promises, keeping within the silence of your own heart those things which belong only there.

### Opening Ritual and Prayer



#### Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Light a candle. Open your Bible and set it beside the lit candle. Prepare the room for prayer, even if you are alone. Quiet music can help to settle yourself and others after a hectic day.

**Leader:** Jesus, you are a light of revelation to the whole world.

**All:** Help us to reveal you to the world.

**Leader:** Jesus, you have died to self and are raised to God.

**All:** Help us to die to ourselves so that one day we may also be raised to God.

**Leader:** Jesus, help us to pray even if we are troubled.

**All:** Amen



#### Find it in Scripture

Explore the Bible together

Read aloud to yourself or have various members of the group read aloud the Scripture Readings for the Fifth Sunday of Lent (Year B): Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-33

## Here is some insight on these readings

- ▶ First Reading (Jeremiah 31: 31-34)
  - This is the oracle of Jeremiah promising to the people of Israel a new covenant that will not be written on stone tablets but rather on their hearts.
  - What is most notable about this passage is that the promise on the part of God is made to a sinful people. No repentance is asked for. It speaks only of the generosity of God.
- ▶ Second Reading (Hebrews 5: 7-9)
  - Each verse of this short three-verse reading offers a slightly different view of Jesus' suffering. The first refers to the depth of his suffering; the second, to suffering as embracing God's will in the circumstances of life; the third, to the intercessory role Jesus gained by that suffering. He offered prayers and supplications and was heard.
- ▶ Gospel (John 12:20-33)
  - In this passage people seek access to Jesus. Jesus prays and God responds to his prayer.



### Going a bit deeper

Exploring our Catholic faith and life

## Reflection On the Gospel Reading: Encountering Jesus Through Other People

The Gospel is the conclusion of John's presentation of Jesus' public ministry and expands its goal beyond just Jews. The passage follows John's account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, when the Pharisees complain to one another that "the whole world has gone after him" (John 12:19). This observation is confirmed when some Greeks, hoping to see Jesus, come to the house where he is staying. Recall that John was writing for a predominantly Greek Gentile audience. The Gospel author's purpose was to show that Jesus' mission extended beyond the Jews to the Gentile world. Therefore, it would have been logical for him to portray Gentiles (Greeks) inquiring to see Jesus.

The Greeks approach Philip, who has already been told earlier in the Gospel by Jesus that he who sees Jesus sees the Father who sent him. The Greeks make a request of Philip: "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." (Recall that in the Gospel of John, "seeing" Jesus is the path to salvation.) Philip goes to Andrew, and Andrew goes to Jesus, and Jesus goes to the Greeks who are seeking him. Access to Jesus comes through others. Further, seeing Jesus is often manifested

through the behavior of others. Even today, Jesus comes to us through others, through the lifelines we have with other members of the community.

## **The grain of wheat**

The image used to describe Jesus' own destiny, as well as ours, is the grain of wheat that must be buried in the earth and die. Otherwise, it remains simply a grain of wheat. But if it dies, if it is buried in the soil, watered by time, weathered and nurtured by the hard work of humankind and God, it produces much fruit. Jesus is talking about his own death on the cross and burial. Contrary to appearances, his death is life for all.

This reading is also about our own baptisms, when we died to all else but the power of God. Jesus is talking about the process of denying our very selves and picking up our crosses daily and bearing our share of the burden of the good news so that others may have life. In the Gospel of John, following Jesus to the cross includes foot washing, a form of humble service, and it is there that Jesus is found.

## **Jesus praying**

Notice that Jesus begins to pray aloud: "Father, save me from this hour." It was for this hour that Jesus was born. It is the time for Jesus to embrace his destiny. We, too, are confronted daily with the hours of our lives. What was our worst or hardest hour? How did we get through it? What was the best hour? Who or what made it so great?

Jesus continues to pray with more intensity: "Father, glorify your name!" In Jesus' life and death and our lives and deaths, we discover the glorification and the true honoring of God. Our lives glorify God when we willingly give our lives for the sake of others as Jesus did. Suddenly, a voice is heard from the sky, as in Jesus' baptism, reassuring Jesus that God is with him. The crowd hears the voice as thunder. How do we hear the voice of God? Do we pay attention to it, or do we dismiss it as just thunder?

Jesus prays aloud: "I am troubled." When Jesus is troubled, he turns to his Father and prays. He doesn't demand that God save him from trouble. Instead, he asks that all that he does will glorify God and focus the eyes of others on God. When we struggle with dying to self, we are in good company: Jesus himself was "troubled" by this. We should be troubled by the same things that Jesus is troubled about: injustice; deceit; greed; violence; lack of food, housing, medical care, clean water, and hope for people. We should be troubled about rampant nationalism, racism, sexism. We should be troubled about human trafficking, gang initiations, drive-by shootings. Being troubled as Jesus is troubled is part of our Lenten journey.

We are journeying in the company of Jesus, and there are others trying to get to see Jesus through us, just as the Greeks came to Philip and then through Andrew to Jesus. By baptism we have a lifeline to Jesus. By our baptism we have a new covenantal relationship with God written upon our hearts. This empowers us to bring others to Jesus. Who in our own lives needs to hold onto us so as to see Jesus? Who needs our service now---an elderly woman in a nursing home; a homeless man at a person soup kitchen; a single parent at your child's school; a single mother with young children who would rejoice in a day off or even a few hours; a teenager who needs an adult tutor or mentor? Lent is a time for all of us to help others see Jesus.



### Talk it over

Share what's on your mind

## Reflection Questions

- ▶ What makes me want to see Jesus?
- ▶ How do I see Jesus in the ways others live?
- ▶ How do others see Jesus in my manner of living?



### Do something about it!

Put your hands to work on what your heart believes.

## Activities for the Fifth Week of Lent

### For Youth & Adults

Lent is a good time to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Plan this week to take advantage of this sacrament at your parish. Acknowledging our sinfulness and seeking God's forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is an integral part of our Lenten journey.

## **For Children**

If you have made your First Reconciliation and First Communion, you may want to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation as part of your Lenten practice. You may want to invite your parents to go to church with you and to pray for you while you are with the priest and receiving the sacrament.

## **For Parishes**

Assemble a group of volunteers to be lifelines to the people most in need. Have them visit or contact these people, and in addition to being good listeners, determine what assistance the parish can provide. Then follow through and provide it.

## **Closing Prayer**

**Leader:** Jesus, you make all things new.

**All:** Allow a new spring-time to bud forth in us.

**Leader:** Jesus, we want to see you more clearly.

**All:** Help us see you in ourselves and others.

**All:** Amen

Exchange a greeting of peace with all who are present.



# Repent and Believe

## Journey through Lent 2012 | Year B

Art Zannoni

### Sixth Week of Lent: Palm Sunday | Year B | April 1, 2012 A Time To Be Standing At The Cross

Use this resource alone or with others. Used with others, read the reflections aloud, pausing between paragraphs. Invite each member of the group to take a turn reading, or prepare readers in advance for larger groups. Share with each other your Lenten commitments and promises, keeping within the silence of your own heart those things which belong only there.

## Opening Ritual and Prayer



**Begin with  
the Sign of the Cross**  
In the name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Light a candle. Open your Bible and set it beside the lit candle. Prepare the room for prayer, even if you are alone. Quiet music can help to settle yourself and others after a hectic day.

**Leader:** As we gather today, we remember how Jesus died for us.

**All:** Praise God for sending us his Son.

**Leader:** Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.

**All:** All praise and glory are yours, Lord Jesus Christ.

**Leader:** Abba, Father, we entrust ourselves to your loving care today.

**All:** Amen



### Find it in Scripture

Explore the Bible together

Read aloud to yourself or have various members of the group read aloud the Scripture readings for the Sixth Sunday of Lent: Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Mark 14:1-15:47

## Here is some insight on these readings

- ▶ First Reading (Isaiah 50:4-7)
  - The speaker in this passage is a prophet, one who hears God's word and proclaims it.
  - God has both appointed the speaker to a particular ministry and provided him with what is essential if the ministry is to be effective: ears to hear God's word and a well-trained tongue to speak that word to others.
- ▶ Second Reading (Philippians 2:6-11)
  - This passage is a reflection on the nature and mission of Jesus. He did not cling to the identity that was rightfully his but rather emptied himself and took on the human condition.
  - In turn, God has exalted him, and all will praise Christ, whose exaltation gives glory to God.
- ▶ Gospel (Mark 14:1-15:47)
  - This is the passion according to Mark, with its key elements of the anointing at Bethany, the last supper, the agony in the garden, the trials of Jesus before Jewish and Roman authorities, his crucifixion and death.



### Going a bit deeper

Exploring our Catholic faith and life

## Reflection on the Gospel Reading: A Time to be Standing at The Cross

This Sunday we read and hear the Passion story from the Gospel of Mark. It is the shortest in length, the first one written and at times quite stark. Nonetheless, we always need to ask ourselves when reading a Passion narrative from the Gospels just how we would have acted in relation to the agony in the garden, arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus. With which character in the story would we most identify? Could we have been among the disciples who fled from danger, abandoning Jesus? Are there not moments in our own lives when we play the role of Peter, denying Jesus, or even Judas, betraying him? Have we not found ourselves at times like Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross of Jesus or like Pontius Pilate in John's Gospel, trying to avoid making a decision and washing our hands of the whole affair? Could we have stood among the religious leaders who condemned Jesus or the soldiers who mocked him? Or are there times when we are sheepish about our commitment to Jesus, like Joseph of Arimathea, and need courage to witness to Jesus? In sum, while reading or hearing the Passion

narrative, we are constantly asked the question of the hymn: “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

## **The Passion Story in Mark and Jewish Festivals**

The Passion story in the Gospel of Mark begins during two Jewish festivals: Passover and Unleavened Bread. Passover commemorated the Israelites’ deliverance by God from slavery in Egypt. Egypt symbolized the dominant culture. The feast of Unleavened Bread served as an offering of thanks and praise to God for all God had done in the past and will do in the future.

By placing Jesus’ own sacrifice during the festival of Passover, Mark links the meaning of Jesus’ death to the liberation by God of the exiled Israelites in Egypt. Jesus is the new Passover lamb who is innocently sacrificed so that his people might go free. Were you there when Jesus set us free from the choke hold of the dominant culture, of sin and of no meaning after death?

## **The Anointing at Bethany**

We move now to Bethany and the house of Simon the leper and a banquet. In Jesus’ time banquets were only for men. The unnamed woman who anoints Jesus must have had great courage to violate the male-dominated meal. Her perfumed oil was worth about a year’s wages, showing that her action was both extravagant and generous. In Jesus’ time it was a common act of hospitality for male hosts to anoint the heads of their guests, a gesture of welcome. Simon did not do this to Jesus his guest. Jesus defends the woman’s actions, and this attests that she both welcomes him and is correct in recognizing who he is, namely the anointed one of God. Because of her actions, the woman will be remembered wherever and whenever the Gospel is proclaimed. Will we also be remembered for the actions we perform as disciples of Jesus?

When Mark shows Jesus saying, “She has anointed my body beforehand for its burial” (14:8b), we are forced to consider the different meanings of “anointing.” Jesus speaks of anointing here in the context of consecrating the body for death. At the same time, Mark’s readers would have been aware that Jesus was referred to as “messiah,” a Hebrew word that means “the anointed one.” The ancients believed that just as the olive oil used in anointing penetrated the skin of the one being anointed, so did God’s Spirit enter into the person being anointed. In the Bible and other Jewish writings of the time, the term “messiah” generally referred to someone who was sent to do God’s work, and so it was a title associated with glory. Earlier in his Gospel, Mark shows Jesus rebuking Peter for making that association (8:29-33). Mark shows Jesus consistently teaching that God’s anointed one should be associated with suffering and even death. In this episode in chapter 14, Mark dramatizes that meaning. Jesus becomes “the anointed one” in the context of death because of the action of this unnamed woman in anointing his body in preparation for burial.

## Jesus at Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane

The story continues with Jesus predicting Judas' betrayal, the last supper scene, and then the scene of Jesus at prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus takes with him Peter, James, and John, those who were with him at the raising of Jairus' daughter and the transfiguration. The only thing Jesus asks of his disciples is to sit and wait and keep watch while he prays. An anguish-ridden Jesus prays: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me." Jesus' faith in God and his love for all of us are such powerful forces within him that he concludes his prayer by submitting his will to God's: "yet not what I want but what you want." In our own prayer life, do we pray for what God wants of us as Jesus did?

Three times Jesus discovers the disciples sleeping. Even Peter, who said he would die with Jesus if he had to, was sleeping. Through prayer, Jesus is now prepared to face betrayal, arrest, suffering and death. The disciples, on the other hand, who failed to keep vigil and presumably did not pray, will flee in fear and abandon Jesus.

Mark's Jesus is abused and completely abandoned during his passion. From the moment in Gethsemane when he resigns himself to arrest, his abandonment grows more complete. The betrayal of Judas, his arrest, and the disciples abandoning him are all part of the symphony of sadness that only Jesus hears.

Then there is Peter, Jesus' closest associate who had earlier in the Gospel of Mark proclaimed: "You are the Messiah!" (Mark 8:29). Hours before, Peter had boasted: "Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you." Now, when questioned by a servant girl, Peter denies any knowledge of Jesus. "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about."

Jesus faces his accusers all alone: the chief priests and the Sanhedrin at night, Pilate and the soldiers by day. Nowhere to be seen are those who once followed him. When Pilate brings Jesus and Barabbas before the crowd, the people choose for release the rebel-murderer. Ironically, the name Barabbas means "son of the father," and the people fail to see the real Son of the Father who is Jesus. Only Simon of Cyrene, a passerby, gives a helping hand, and he is coerced into doing it.

## The Crucifixion of Jesus

On the cross, Jesus is mocked by an entire entourage. First by people passing by, then by priests and scribes, and finally by others who are being crucified with him. Beneath this experience is Jesus' numbing sense of total abandonment by God. Now we meet the moment of Jesus' greatest anguish as Mark's Jesus speaks only once from the cross. It is a final piercing cry and a last breath: "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" ("My God, my God, why have you

abandoned me?”). The death of Jesus, abandoned and alone, is a horrifying death, a terrible end.

Yet within this story of abandonment runs another story line about abuse: the abuse of power. In Mark’s passion account we see the power of both religion and state perverted. Jesus is subjected to religious authorities in a trial that is a farce, laced with false witnesses and fraudulent accusations. The religious leaders and their minions spit on him, blindfold him and strike him. Then there is Pontius Pilate. He represented an empire that prided itself on its alleged system of impartial justice, but here he betrays that ideal beyond question. Knowing Jesus to be innocent, Pilate caves in to a rabid, rabble-rousing crowd whose preference for a rebel (Barabbas) leads him to hand off Jesus to a brutal scourging. Then he surrenders Jesus to a style of death so terrible that Rome would not allow its own citizens to die in this manner.

In Mark’s Gospel no one gets off the hook: betrayers, disciples, deniers, religious leaders, political leaders, the crowds. All alike fail to protect the innocent one. Such abandonment of the innocent and abuse of the powerless continues today. The question for the modern reader or listener to the passion is: What are we doing to protect the abandoned, the abused, the innocent, and the powerless?

Jesus totally entered into this powerlessness and abandonment. We are to do likewise. In Jesus’ passion we are reminded that no matter how black the darkness, or how strong the forces of death, or how desperate are our cries, or even if death seems to have won out, there is a power stronger than death.

Even in this profoundly sad story of the passion we see signs of hope. Hope springs up in a veil being torn in two from top to bottom, that veil in the Temple that restricted access to God. And who was the first to step through that opening? A Roman centurion, an outsider, a Gentile was the one who spoke the first true words to all who would listen: “Truly this man was the Son of God.” This is the ultimate profession of our Lenten faith.



## Talk it over

Share what's on your mind

## Reflection Questions

- ▶ Were you there when Jesus was crucified?
- ▶ Have you ever betrayed, denied, or abandoned Jesus?
- ▶ With which character(s) in the passion narrative do you most identify? Why?
- ▶ Do you believe Jesus was the son of God?



## Do something about it!

Put your hands to work on what your heart believes.

## Activities for the Sixth Week of Lent

### For Youth & Adults

Holding a crucifix in your hands, look at it and reflect on how you have helped Christ carry his cross and on how the risen Jesus has helped you carry your cross. (This activity can also be done at the dinner table by having each person hold the crucifix, share their reflections, and then pass it on to the next person.)

Since this is Holy Week, make every effort to celebrate the Sacred Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday at your parish. If your schedule does not permit this, then meditate on Holy Thursday as to the meaning of the Eucharist for you, on Good Friday on the meaning of Jesus' death for you, on Holy Saturday on the meaning of the resurrection for you.

### For Children

With Easter just around the corner, rather than just color Easter eggs, think of all the people and things that you are thankful for in your life. Write a prayer of thanksgiving to God, and pray it out loud in the presence of your family on Easter Sunday morning before you hunt for Easter eggs.

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Were you there when they crucified the Lord?

**All:** Yes, we were.

**Leader:** Did you help him carry the cross?

**All:** Yes, we did freely.

**Leader:** Are you willing to take up your own cross daily and follow Jesus?

**All:** Yes, we are.

As a closing gesture, trace the sign of the cross on your own forehead and on the foreheads of others who are present, then exchange a gesture of peace with everyone.