

*The Journal of the Lay Cistercians of
Gethsemani Abbey*

Season of Easter 2024



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The Journal of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey

INTRODUCTION

The stability of the monastic enclosure, combined with centuries of tradition, provides a structure and model for growth that offers support and guidance, as well as rich resources for contemplation.

Non-cloistered contemplatives, however, face different challenges in respect to the environment and the companions with which their search for God takes place. Since they do not live within the walls of a monastic building, they must personally define a comparable place and fashion a practice of prayer, contemplation and spiritual companioning that complements their monastery-without-walls.

The primary purpose of this on-line publication is to contribute to the formation of such an enclosure. Ideally, *the Journal* is a context in which members, candidates, and affiliates, explore and share aspects of their spiritual journeys and the role of the Cistercian charism and the monastery of The Abbey of Gethsemani in those journeys.

The Journal of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey invites different forms of reflection through essays, poetry and other written narratives, as well as through art, photographs and scholarly submissions, such as studies and reflections about Cistercians writers or themes. Monks of the Abbey are also invited to submit their works to the *Journal*.

The *Journal* is published exclusively digitally for electronic access. However, a printed copy of this month's journal (as well as some previous month's) will be made available at the Retreatant's Library at the Abbey. Please leave that copy available for others to view, in the event they do not have online access.

An editorial committee reviews submissions, may make suggestions for corrections or changes, if needed, and attempts to compose a balanced selection of material for each issue of the online periodical. The *Journal* will be published when sufficient material has been submitted and accepted. Submissions are needed on a regular basis so that regular issues can be created. Volunteers to help shape the *Journal* and assist with editorial committee reviews are welcome!

For further information, or to submit items for consideration, contact the Journal Committee, at the contact information listed below.

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Called to the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani

Today, I wish to share with you how I came to be a Lay Cistercian and some of my spiritual journey. When I was serious about seeking God and in discerning as to the community that God was calling me to there was a decision to be made. Was I to be a member of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey or the third order Carmelites? Around this same time, I was listening to a CD on the discernment process in following God's will. The speaker on the CD talked about making a list of pros and cons. So, I did, and this is how the pros and cons were stacking up.

[Carmelite Order pros and cons](#)

- I had Carmelites friends at my church – pro
- The meetings were a 45-minute drive – pro
- Familiar with Carmelite saints & writings – pro

[Lay Cistercian of Gethsemani pros and cons](#)

- I didn't know any Lay Cistercians – con
- The Abbey was a 6-hour drive – con
- Not familiar with Cistercian Saints etc. -- con
- Thomas Merton's writings – pro

You can see where this discernment was going. The Carmelites had all the pros which I took at face value, and I entered the Carmelite program to become a professed member. After about 4 months with the Carmelites my heart was unsettled. I was having mixed feelings about joining their order. One afternoon in prayer, God made it clear to me that I was to be with the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey.

As I sat in the center of the 3 pine trees which served as my place of prayer, my oratory, I had all kinds of conflicting thoughts that I was sharing with the Lord. Thoughts about why I was so unsettled in being in the Carmelites, thoughts about Thomas Merton wanting to be a Franciscan and how that did not work out for him. I then quieted myself and as I sat there, that is when I heard, "Go call the Abbey of Gethsemani." I immediately went up to the house and called the Abbey and Fr. Michael Casagram answered the phone. He asked

me where I lived. Since I did not live close to any of the existing LCG communities, he told me about the Spiritus LCG Community that held their meetings via conference calling. This was the beginning for me in becoming a LCG member.

This discernment process that started by sitting in the pines while in prayer has awakened me to listening with my heart and served as an affirmation. It has taught me to not take anything at face value, rather to take everything in prayer to the Lord and to listen. It has made me aware of praying intimately with the Lord. Today, 12 years after His call to the LCG, I find myself praying throughout the day. Now, there are many ways of praying throughout the day. Here I am focusing on praying through my active day in being mindful of my thoughts and discerning them with the Lord. For instance, if I have the need to talk to

Someone about a decision I am making or something that is troubling me, my first phone call is to the Lord in prayer. Sometimes, He even directs me to a place or a person.

As my spiritual journey continues, I am so grateful for Cistercian Spirituality in giving me insight into a deeper understanding of prayer with the interior workings of the heart. All Praise and Glory to God!

The A.R.T. of Agape Living

by Allen R. Thyssen

Agape, one of the Greek words for love, is a “divine command” (John 15:17) and the central ethical principle of Christian living. Jesus modeled it as a form of love mixed with forgiveness, a continually pardoning love that views the other as worthy of love, regardless of unworthiness. In 1 John 4:7-9 (*The Message* translation), we read:

“My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn’t know the first thing about God because God is love—so you can’t know him if you don’t love. This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him...”

Listening Speaks Louder Than Words

As they say, “Action speaks louder than words.” But then, sometimes no words (i.e. silence) is the more effective path. Glenn Boyd writes, “Before going to I Corinthians 13 for a definition of agape love, one might peruse the gospels for incarnational definitions – definitions that are discerned by reading how Jesus cared for people with special needs.” Boyd then links agape love with interpersonal communication and the skill of listening. “My dear brothers, take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry (James 1:19).” He calls this “agape listening.” and suggests that silence is its best manifestation. I was first taught the value of silent listening in the fifth grade when a Catholic priest was dispatched to preach a sermon on James 1:19 to all the churches in the area. The bishop thought it was that important. His message has stayed

with me now for over 60 years! Boyd observes that God reveals truth to us in the process of our caring for someone else.

Agape listening is so fundamental that another author, Arthur Frank, suggests that the gospels put agape on the same level of importance as belief in Jesus. If one believes in Jesus, he/she MUST practice agape love (and vice versa). God is said to BE this love. (1 John 4:16) Frank opines, “Consider: God doesn’t see us as bad and in need of punishment as much as lost and frightened by events beyond our control.”

First, Clear the Clutter!

Personal healing comes first. Thomas Keating had a handle on this in his teaching of “The Divine Therapy.” He taught that each of us has deep-seated psychological needs, needs for safety/security, affection/esteem, and power/control. Fully in place at birth, they are soon modified or removed by experiencing life in a fallen world. The mental flack blocks our ability to “agape” those we come in contact with. Our healing comes when we recognize that these needs can only be filled by a loving God. This recognition is often facilitated via the closet of centering prayer (Matt 6:6) where the Holy Spirit speaks in the silence between our thoughts. As our deep trauma is “unloaded” we are freed to be with and care for the “other.” Then, it becomes all about relationships.

It's All About Relationships!

Glenn Boyd picks up at this point with his acronym for the A.R.T. of Listening. “A” stands for “alliance,” that period when the parties are establishing rapport. “R” is for “respect” when both parties recognize the value of the other. Alliance and Respect lead to Transformation, “T” when both are changed as the Spirit engages the relationship. In other words, we come alongside the “other”, develop mutually engaging rapport, and are then transformed by the ensuing relationship within which the Holy Spirit is a party. “Agape listening” becomes “agape living.” And we both journey down what M. Scott Peck called that “road less traveled,” i.e. the road traveled by Jesus.

Practical advice for agape-based care is offered by Dr. Virgil Fry in his book, *Distrupted*. Fry writes,

“What is the secret of spiritual pastoral care? To me, the real quality of what makes spiritual pastoral care is engaged listening – learning to listen really to what’s going on with that person, rather than walking in and feeling like you’ve got to do all the talking. It’s more joining them where they are, in their path, and asking how God comes into that. So, it’s a relationship deal. It’s much more important than any magic words or running errands and doing the things that are very important.”

Sr. Alice Potts, a close friend of Virgil's and a Senior Chaplain at M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, was a world-class listener. She often shared her personal mission statement, i.e. "I want everything I come in contact with to be affected by the presence of God in my life." Perhaps there could be no better articulation of the art of agape living than that demonstrated by her life!

A Spirituality of Listening Prepares Us for Listening To God

Glenn Boyd's book, *The A.R.T. of Agape Listening*, is fundamentally about a spirituality of listening. One paragraph from page 98 reads as follows.

"By spirituality, I mean the inward and outward journey of the soul toward God. Spirituality points us to a process that allows God to be God – and allows us to be human. Agape-love names the royal road that leads to the heart of God. That journey is not for the faint of heart, although faithfulness does seem to result in a certain faithfulness in the weary traveler sometimes. Keep moving. There's hope, remember? What matters is the journey itself. What matters is that we know surprising things happen along the way, like the surprise the two disciples discovered on their way to Emmaus in Luke 24. "The stranger who joined them in their journey turned out to be the Risen Lord himself!"

AGAPE (ἀγάπη): embraces an all-encompassing love that transcends and persists regardless of circumstances; Agape goes beyond just one's emotions to the extent of seeking the best for others. I am told that recent scholarship in the Greek New Testament world suggests that "agape" and "phileo" are often used interchangeably. For example, John 3:19 speaks of people "loving" darkness more than light, and it uses "agape" to describe "loving the darkness." (The implications of this scholarly observation are taken to be beyond the scope of this Reflection.)

References:

Virgil Fry, *Disrupted – Finding God In Illness and Loss*

Glenn Boyd, *The A.R.T. of Agape Listening – The Miracle of Mutuality*

Arthur Frank, *Just Listening: Narrative and Deep Illness*

Jeff Christian, email observation on the use of "agape", 10 March 2024.

Note: The views expressed in this Reflection are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect those of any other individual or organization he may be associated with. Additionally, the author is not a student of Greek and has, in this Reflection, simply used references from generally available published material.

The following article came from an organization called *Spirituality and Practice*. I found it extremely helpful to see what other spiritual practices that others may engage in, that I am not doing presently. There are 37 different practices listed here. I wonder if perhaps you can think of more, of things that you may do as a spiritual practice that has been beneficial to your walk and growth as a Lay Cistercian of Gethsemani Abbey.

Alphabet of Spiritual Literacy

By Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

Spiritual practices from all traditions... the letters to know, to read the world spiritually and to spell meaning in daily life.

Attention

Pay attention. Stay awake and totally alert. See with receptive eyes and discover a world of ceaseless wonders.

Beauty

Walk the path of beauty. Relish and encourage its inward and outward expressions.
Acknowledge the radiance of the creation.

Being Present

Live in the present moment. Don't obsess about the past or worry about the future. All you need is right here now.

Compassion

Open your heart, mind, and soul to the pain and suffering in the world. Reach out to others and discover the rewards and obligations of deep feeling.

Connections

Cultivate the art of making connections. See how your life is intimately related to all life on the planet.

Devotion

Express your feelings of praise and adoration through devotional practices. Pray with words and pray through your actions.

Enthusiasm

Celebrate life with this intoxicating passion. It adds zest to everything and helps build community. Hold nothing back.

Faith

Recognize and accept that there is another dimension to life than what is obvious to us. Live with obstacles, doubt, and paradox, knowing that God is always present in the world.

Forgiveness

In both your private and public lives, discover the sweet release that comes from forgiving others. Feel the healing balm of being forgiven and of forgiving yourself.

Grace

Accept grace and your world will be larger, deeper, richer, and fuller. Look for its intimations everywhere. Let this seed of the Giver of Life bloom in your words and deeds.

Gratitude

Spell out your days with a grammar of gratitude. Be thankful for all the blessings in your life.

Hope

Let this positive and potent emotion fuel your dreams and support your service to others. Through your attitudes and actions, encourage others never to lose hope.

Hospitality

Practice hospitality in a world where too often strangers are feared, enemies are hated, and the "other" is shunned. Welcome guests and alien ideas with graciousness.

Imagination

Give imagination free rein in your life. Explore its images and ponder its meaning-making moments, and it will always present you with something new to be seen, felt, or made known.

Joy

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad. Find this divine energy in your daily life and share it with others.

Justice

Seek liberty and justice for all. Work for a free and fair world where oppression and inequality no longer exist.

Kindness

Let the Spirit flow through you in little acts of kindness, brief words of encouragement, and manifold expressions of courtesy. These deeds will add to the planet's fund of goodwill.

Listening

Cultivate the art of deep listening in which you lean toward the world in love. All things in the universe want to be heard, as do the many voices inside us.

Love

Fall in love repeatedly every day. Love your family, your neighbors, your enemies, and yourself. And don't stop with humans. Love animals, plants, stones, even the galaxies.

Meaning

Constantly try to discover the significance of your experiences. I seek further understandings from sacred texts and spiritual teachers.

Nurturing

Take good care of the best that is within you. Self-exploration and personal growth continue throughout our lifetimes and equip us to tend to the needs of others.

Openness

Hold an open house in your heart for all people and all things. Practice empathy with others and receptiveness toward the universe.

Peace

Protect the earth's future by promoting peace every day. Your small steps will link you with others who are combating violence in the world.

Play

Be playful. Express your creative spirit in spontaneity. Hurrah the pleasures of being and let loose your laughter.

Questing

Savor questions and thrill to the quest. See your life as a journey that quickens your faith and deepens your soul.

Reverence

Practice reverence for life. The sacred is in, with, and under all the things of the world. Respond with appropriate respect and awe.

Shadow

Give up trying to hide, deny, or escape from your imperfections. Listen to what your demons have to say to you.

Silence

Slow down. Be calm. Find a place where you can regularly practice silence. There you will find the resources to revitalize your body, mind, and soul.

Teachers

Be willing to learn from the spiritual teachers all around you, however unlikely or unlike you they may be. Always be a sensitive student.

Transformation

Welcome the positive changes that are taking place in your life. Open the windows and let in some fresh air. Wholeness and healing are waiting in the wings.

Unity

In this age of global spirituality, we respect differences but affirm commonalities. Work together with those who are trying to make the world a better place.

Vision

Practice the art of seeing the invisible. Use the wisdom of your personal visions to renew yourself and your community.

Wonder

Cultivate a vibrant curiosity and welcome the reports of your senses. The world is alive and moving toward you with rare epiphanies and wonderful surprises. Remember you are standing on holy ground.

X-The Mystery

Accept the unknown as part of life. Don't try to unravel the profound mysteries of God, human nature, and the natural world. Love the ineffable.

Yearning

Follow your heart's boundless desire. It takes you out of yourself and fosters an appreciation for the multidimensional pleasures of life.

You

Accept that you are a child of God. Sing your own song with gusto. Fulfill your mission as a co-partner with the Holy One in the unfolding drama of the universe.

Zeal

Be passionately aroused by life. Cherish every moment, honor your commitments, and treasure your kinship with all.

Lectio Divina

Prepared by Allen Thyssen

What follows here is a wonderful link to a pamphlet prepared by Allen Thyssen, one of our LCG members. It could be used as a 40-day program for Lent. In addition, Thyssen writes, “One spiritual practice I have found helpful is called Lectio Divina, or “divine reading.” The flyer (contained within the link) explains how it is done and suggests a program of “**Forty Days with Jesus.**” However, it can also be used as a personal devotional during any other time of the year. However, if you do the 40 days, I suspect you will come out of it knowing what your next steps should be.

[Lectio Divina Pamphlet 25May23 \(6\).pdf](#)

It works best when you type in the link rather than attempt to cut and paste it.

The Door of Silence

Adam Bailey

January 2024

“I am loud,” I wrote in my journal when I first came to the Abbey of Gethsemani fourteen years ago. “To spend but five minutes in silence, my stomach rumbles, loudly. I even breathe loudly. In and out. Loudly. I knock a water bottle over. Everyone stares. I cannot shift in my seat without causing a ruckus of fabric rubbing chair rubbing floor. I am loud.” In the cold of January 2010, the last month in which I would be a teenager, I enrolled in an intensive month-long course in contemplative writing as a Berea College student, living at the Sisters of Loretto Motherhouse in Nerinx, Kentucky, while on retreat there and at the Abbey of Gethsemani nearby. I was drawn, like many, to the austerity of silence and solitude. I was wrong, like many, to view silence and solitude as the doors out of a loud, troubled world.

That journal goes on to reveal a younger me that felt isolated and alone. I felt misunderstood by my friends and family. I was wrestling with my career and vocational path, and with the contradictions of spiritual identity in the early 21st Century. I thought I was unique in these delusions—not unlike every other nineteen-year-old college kid, I realize in hindsight. I wanted the world to shut up, I wanted myself to shut up, and I wanted to be happily alone. My preoccupation with what other retreatants might think of my stomach-rumbling, chair-creaking ruckus was as much a manifestation of my pride as the natural settling of mind and body into the rhythm of meditation. Silence and solitude felt like the exit door from it all, but that comical if self-centered clunkiness and discomfort stemmed from going the wrong way through that door.

There was a deep reality that the journal of a jaded college kid could only begin to skirt around: instead of a door out, silence and solitude are the door into community, love, and friendship. Rather than retreating from the world, monasticism thrusts contemplatives into the middle of it in community. Rather than running away from people, solitude unites us with the world in love. Rather than shushing, silence opens us up to the voices of all as the dearest of friends.

By knocking on the door of silence and solitude, I had arrived at the right door for the wrong reasons. In the years that have transpired since then, I have been corrected and nurtured by Cistercian spirituality. In Chapter One of his Rule, St. Benedict outlines a model of contemplative life to be lived together in community, not apart in loneliness. While the fabric of the Rule is largely the technical structure of monasticism, it is stitched

together implicitly by the essential thread of community life. In but one example, Chapter Thirteen is on the surface little more than a script of prayers and readings to be said in the morning. A look deeper, however, highlights the importance of cultivating community within the monastic enclosure. The chapter directs the slow speed at which the first morning psalm should be read, to give enough time that “everyone can be present” by the second psalm, even those who are late from work or sleep (p. 110). The chapter goes on to prescribe the audible (rather than silent) morning recitation of the Our Father because life together will undoubtedly get bumpy, and everyone should be reminded aloud of the scriptural imperative “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us.” Silence and solitude are so foreign to contemporary American life that we cannot help but view monastic life through a lens of rugged individualism or self-reliance. On the contrary, in the Cistercian charism, silence and solitude do not make us independent, they connect us to the holy at the center of each other in a community for which we patiently wait and forgive.

In 1949, after seven years at Gethsemani, Thomas Merton left the monastery for the first time to help run an errand to Louisville. He expected to be shocked at seeing the wickedness of the outside world that he had so eagerly forsaken. Instead, he saw only the goodness of people and how much God loved them all, writing, “Perhaps the things I had resented about the world when I left it were defects of my own that I had projected upon it,” (*The Sign of Jonas*, p. 91). A year later, he would write, “It is clear to me that solitude is my vocation, not as a flight from the world, but as my place in the world,” (pp. 257-258). Within Merton’s life and work we see his movement away from solitude for the sake of solitude toward solitude for the sake of love for the world.

In a scene evocative of Merton’s epiphany, St. Aelred experienced his own awakening 800 years earlier as the Cistercian Abbot of Rievaulx: “The day before yesterday, as I was walking the round of the cloister . . . I found no one whom I did not love and no one by whom, I felt sure, I was not loved. I was filled with such joy that it surpassed all the delights of this world. I felt, indeed, my spirit transfused into all and the affection of all to have passed into me,” (*The Way of Friendship*, p. 65). Aelred’s work delicately leads us from this mutual love to a word for which modern life seems to have little use beyond childhood: friendship. “The person who abides in friendship,” Aelred says in a dialogue with his own friend Ivo, “abides in God, and God in that person,” (p. 62). The Abbot waxes poetic, as he muses, “The best medicine in life is a friend . . . Not even water, nor the sun, nor fire do we use in more instances than a friend,” (p. 63). He admits that we will have only a few such spiritual friends in this lifetime but that in eternity friendship “will be outpoured upon all, and by all outpoured upon God, and God shall be all in all,” (p. 66). Cistercian monasticism

may seem to the world to be marked principally by silenced sign language behind cold hermitage doors, but instead it brims with the warmth of friendship.

Late one night fourteen years ago, I tip-toed down a hallway of the Loretto Motherhouse on old creaky floorboards. I was half afraid of waking someone, and wholly afraid of interrupting the silence. As I struggled with a stubborn doorknob, one of the sisters, Sister Mary, came barreling through the other side of the door toward me, hopping on one foot. “Hello!” she bellowed, “A splinter! Do you have any tweezers?!” She stayed put while I went to find a pair.

Like that same stubborn doorknob referenced in my old journal, I am still at the door of silence and solitude. But rather than seeking a way out of the world, I hope I am crashing like Sister Mary through it loudly with my troubles and into community, love, and friendship.

Works Cited

Chittister, J. (2010). *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* (Spiritual Legacy Series). Crossroad.

Aelred, & Pennington, M. B. (2001). *The Way of Friendship: Selected Spiritual Writings*. New City Press.

Merton, Thomas. (1979). *The Sign of Jonas*. Mariner Books

Words and Pictures,

as found in a book written by Esther de Waal, [A Seven Day Journey with Thomas Merton.](#)

Compiled by Esther de Waal

- It might be a good thing to open our eyes and see.
- It is essential to experience all the times and moods of one good place.
- It is God's love that warms me in the sun and God's love that sends the cold rain.
- It is God's love that feeds me in the bread I eat.
- It is God's love that feeds me also by hunger and fasting.
- It is God's who breathes on me with the light winds of the river and in the breezes of the wood.
- As we go about the world everything we meet and everything we see and hear and touch --- plants in us something of heaven.
- It is good and praiseworthy to look at some real created thing and feel and appreciate its reality. Just let the reality of what is real sink into you ... for through real things we can reach Him who is infinitely real.
- A tree gives glory to God by being a tree. For in being what God meant it to be it is obeying Him. The more a tree is like itself it is like Him. This particular tree will give glory to God by spreading out its roots in the earth and raising its branches into the air and the light in a way that no other tree before or after it ever did or will do.
- There is in all things an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a silence that is a fount of action and joy. It rises up in wordless gentleness and flows out to me from the unseen roots of all created beings, welcoming me tenderly, saluting me with indescribable humility.
- If I am supposed to hoe a garden or make a table, then I will be obeying God if I am true to the task I am performing. To do the work carefully and well, with love and

respect for the nature of my task and with due attention to its purpose, is to unite myself to God's will in my work. In this way I become his instrument. He works through me.

- The sun on the grass was beautiful. Even the ground seemed alive.

Attributed to Thomas Merton



Silence is God's Creation and Special Gift

By Linda Richards

Silence is an invisible sacrament, a subtle sign of humble love.

Silence as a sacrament is to be held deeply within and to be savored, to be nurtured, to be honored.

When Silence enters into my day, I try to take time to sit with it and simply breathe.

The Silence cloaks me with comfort, wisdom, and even confidence.

The Silence feeds me by the spoonful throughout my life and nourishes my very body and soul.

Silence is God's give to each and every being. It is the treasure available every moment we open the doors of our hearts and allow the Silence to welcome itself back.

Because Silence always knows when to whisper "Stop! It's time for me."

Solitude

By Linda Richards

I am peeking into a new space called Solitude You are vast, you have no boundaries, and you beckon me to enter your hallowed halls.

I am cautious, not used to your allure, your possibilities, your vastness, and your mystery.

I am cautious; I don't know you at all.

I've only tasted the edges of your offering in the past, but (Ah Ha), it appears that I may be ready.

Ready to take a chance, ready to put one foot forward and then the next.

Destination is undetermined, purpose is illusive, space is indescribable, but my interest is activated, and my heart is open enough to pursue a new unknown potential friend.

You have a name, Solitude, and you say to me, "Welcome, come be with me for a while and stay as long as you like."

How can I resist such a gift?



Easter

By Linda Boerstler

In my soul, my heart laid bare ---
Like a dusty empty tomb.
The cold of dark, chilled me deep
Light will not fill this room.
The silence, filled me with dread,
My heart it beat as almost dead.
With demons screaming in my head,
In a place more barren than a womb.

I cried out His holy name --
It was the only name I knew.
I could only feel my shame
And fear was all I knew.
The absence of everything I held dear
Left me alone, no one was near.
There was no answer – nothing clear,
Beyond anything I could do.

There was no easy end to this.
No place to run and hide.
No one to wrap me safe in arms.
No one standing by my side.

I was certain all hope was lost,
I prayed for mercy; I knew not the cost.
Like refuse to the heap – be tossed
And much easier if I had died.

Just when I thought all life was gone --
Came an explosion of light – and glory,
And I stood wide-eyed in rusty chains
When Christ came to end the story
Of my brokenness and filthy sin --
Of the desolation within --
And over death I knew He'd win
In a burst of brightening fury.

The chains were quickly broken
Though He said not a word.
It was if the sky had spoken
Stilling the song over every bird.
Though I was dead within my heart
Soon the breath of life did start,
Demons, illness and hate depart
For the voice of God has spoken.

I am alive! So, you can live!
I shed my blood for you!
Your wretched soul, no more in sin

My wounds have made it new.

Death – it has no hold on me

And now I hope that you can see

That by my death you are set free

And by my resurrection forever live.



Stock image

Bible Journal Prompts for Holy Week

Bible journal prompts for each day of Holy Week will help you reflect on the significance of these events and deepen your understanding of the love of Christ.

1. Read John 12:1-8 Reflect on the woman's act of pouring perfume on Jesus' feet. What does it teach you about true worship? How can you express your love for Jesus through your actions? Are there any areas in your life where you must surrender your desires and possessions to God? How can you use your resources to serve and bless others?

Mary Anoints Jesus at Bethany (ESV unless stated otherwise)

Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So, they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

2. Read John 13:1-17. Put yourself in the shoes of one of the disciples. How do you think you would have reacted to Jesus washing your feet? What areas of pride do you need to let go of to submit to Jesus fully? How can you serve others with humility and love? Are there any people you need to forgive or reconcile with in your life?

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus

answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

3. Read Matthew 26:36-46. Imagine Jesus' feelings as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. How does this passage deepen your appreciation for his sacrifice? Have you ever faced a difficult decision or circumstance where you had to obey God's will over your desires? How can you find strength and comfort knowing that Jesus understands your struggles and emotions? Are there any areas in your life where you need to pray for God's will to be done?

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." And again, he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

4. Read Mark 14:43-52. Consider Judas' betrayal of Jesus. Have you ever experienced betrayal from someone close to you? How can you find healing and forgiveness? How can you extend forgiveness to those who have hurt you, even when difficult? Are there any areas where you need to trust God's sovereignty and faithfulness, even when others let you down? How can you pray for those who have betrayed you?

Judas betrays Jesus

And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard." And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" And he kissed him. And they laid hands on him and seized him. But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled." And they all left him and fled. And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

5. Read Luke 22:54-62. Reflect on Peter's denial of Jesus. Have you ever denied your faith? How can you be strengthened to stand firm in the face of temptation? How can you guard your heart and mind against temptation and doubt? Are there any areas in your life where you need to confess and repent of sin? How can you seek accountability and support from other believers in your walk with *God*?

Peter Denies Jesus

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him,

“Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” 62 And he went out and wept bitterly.

6. Read Matthew 27:27-31. Imagine witnessing Jesus being beaten and mocked by the soldiers. What emotions does this stir in you? How can you cultivate greater gratitude and awe for Jesus’s sacrifice for you? How can you show compassion and love to others suffering or oppressed? Are there any areas in your life where you need to lay down your comfort and convenience for the sake of others?

Jesus Is Mocked

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor’s headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

7. Read John 19:16-22. Ponder Pilate’s decision to have Jesus crucified. What does this teach you about the role of personal conviction in making difficult decisions? How can you seek God’s wisdom and guidance in making difficult decisions? Are there any areas in your life where you need to trust God’s sovereignty and goodness, even when things don’t go according to plan? How can you pray for those in positions of authority that they would make wise and just decisions?

Delivered him over to them to be crucified.

So, they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So, the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

8. Read Luke 23:26-43. Reflect on the exchange between Jesus and the two criminals on the cross. What does it teach you about God’s mercy and grace? How can you receive and extend God’s mercy and grace to others? Are there any areas in your life where you need to lay down your pride and accept the forgiveness that God offers? How can you share the message of salvation and hope with those around you?

The Crucifixion

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 33 And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.” One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

9. Read John 19:38-42. Contemplate Joseph of Arimathea’s boldness in requesting Jesus’ body for burial. How can you find the courage to take a stand for what you believe in? Are there any areas in your life where you need to speak up and take action?

Jesus Is Buried

After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So, he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So, they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

10. Read Matthew 28:1-10. Celebrate the joy of Easter morning! What does the resurrection mean to you personally How can you live in light of this truth? Reflect on the hope and promise of new life through Jesus' resurrection. What changes can you make in your life to live more fully in the power of this truth?

The Resurrection

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

This has been compiled from a variety of sources that I use for my own studies. I hope that journaling through these scriptures during Holy Week brings a new brightness to your Easter and Day of Resurrection. Feel free to use your desired translation of the Holy Scripture.

Linda Boerstler

Acknowledgements

Please feel free to comment if you would like to see different topics, photos, links for speakers and music. We would like to include as much variety as possible and to highlight artwork, writing, songs, etc., by any one of our members who would like to participate. Please note that sometimes a photo that is sent doesn't transfer correctly, or for some other reason will not paste into the document. If sending a photo, please try to send it as a Jpeg file to make it easier to include in the journal. We will include as much material as I am sent, there is no limitation presently as to what size the journal needs to be. Everything that is submitted is considered for publication.

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