

Come to me,
all you who are
weary and burdened, and
I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

2026
LENTEN
DEVOTIONAL

Written by the community of
St. Francis Episcopal Church



Welcome

to the tenth annual Lenten Devotional Booklet

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ...”
Matthew 11:28

I appreciate the imagery of being saddled down with the worries, traumas and heartaches of the world and being able to transfer it all to Someone Else. It sounds so great in theory, but it’s easier said than done, isn’t it? Fortunately, with practice and discipline, we can invite Christ to share our burdens and not keep them all to ourselves.

When my soul is heavy-laden, I must allow Christ to take my yoke. It’s what keeps me positive instead of jaded, hopeful instead of in despair, caring instead of cynical, seeing and believing in the beauty of life instead of giving into disillusionment, and willing to keep pushing forward instead of giving up. When we are in the midst of our trials, may we call upon Him to take our yoke. May we draw closer to Him instead of pulling away. May He keep our hearts softened, and may He protect and preserve all that is loving and holy and life-giving within each of us.

And speaking of life-giving ... my hope is that this booklet will be that for you in some small way. Thank you to **all** who have contributed to making the creation of this booklet possible *over an entire decade!* My heart sings every time I receive a “Yes” to my invitation to write a reflection! My deepest thanks to Laurie Anderson for her sharp editing skills and to Gina McQueen for formatting this booklet and collaborating with me on its design! And to all who have made themselves vulnerable in sharing their personal stories in their reflections, thank you for helping create a Lenten experience our parish family can walk through together as a faith community. May you each be blessed with a meaningful and Holy Lent!

In His Love,

Kristina Pela
Shepherd for Pastoral Care

←✿ Carving Out Devotional Time ✿→

For starters, keep it simple!

The key is to place yourself in surroundings that afford you the mental space to just “be.” Perhaps it’s a ritual of lighting a candle and settling on the couch or at a table with a journal; perhaps it’s outdoors, taking a walk or sitting in your garden, perhaps you can center yourself during your commute, or perhaps you stay in bed when you first arise and delve into the scriptures right away. Explore what works best for you.



Invite the Holy Spirit to be a part of your devotional time, praying from your heart or using a prepared prayer such as this:

*Dear God,
Quiet my Heart so that I may be still before You.
fill me with your presence,
and let Your Word
and the reflections of Your people
help me to hear Your voice.*

Read through the day’s scriptures slowly and deliberately, taking note of what words, phrases or images resonate with you. You may choose to journal or make notations in your Lenten Booklet. Read through the scriptures a second time, again noticing what catches your attention. Finish with the writer’s reflection.

Consider why certain phrases catch your attention and how they might be relevant to your present circumstances. Allow God’s Word and your thoughts to “marinate,” and trust that the Spirit is working during your devotional time and beyond.

May your devotional time fill you and be a time of discovery!

In God’s Love,

Kristina Pela
Shepherd for Pastoral Care



Ash Wednesday, February 18

Isaiah 58: 1-12; 2 Corinthians 5: 20b- 6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21; Psalm 103

Jesus said, "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven." Matthew 6:1

We begin the Lenten Season today, receiving ashes upon our foreheads to remind us of the fragility of life, the lessons of Jesus Christ, and repent of our failures, receiving forgiveness. I also remember what is important in life- not approval of others, but doing my best to fulfill God's plan for me.

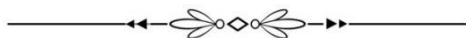
We all like approval and recognition. I do also. I remember to reflect on my motivation for action. Our readings say to act in secret, not to merely try to fit in with the group. I am usually embarrassed at recognition for doing what I am called to do.

I am inspired by many residents I have met, and the most accomplished do not reveal themselves, there is nothing for them to prove. I witness the self-awareness of doing what is right, regardless of others, and what happens is ultimately between the person and God. It reminds me that we are to live according to our faith, our beliefs, and let God be God.

At my previous congregation, I'd "fill in the gaps." by completing a detail which was missing. I took on overlooked activities such as including a name on the prayer list or placing the extra linen on the altar. After I left, my rector friend told me, "Some things are getting missed and no one knew who took care of the forgotten details." They were looking for the person; I mentioned that person was you.

When a member of my youth group was bullied by an adult, I stood by the youth. It was not well received; the adult treated this child as unworthy of respect. My youth group member said, "No one has ever come to support me like that." Nothing else was mentioned regarding the situation. Only the three of us remember the action.

Act according to faith, compassion, and belief. Act quietly, as in secret, only God needs to know. Jesus wants us to reflect upon our motivations for action, self-reflect to learn from our mistakes, building our treasures with compassionate connection in the world. I ask myself, "What does my heart tell me this day, and what treasures have I stored with God only this day?"



Reverend Celeste Stump is a deacon at St. Francis, chaplain at The Canterbury, mother, grandmother, friend, and child of God. She finds the sacred in every belief system and is inspired by the grace and love of each person she meets. Each day she is changed and in awe of the forgiveness and love of Jesus in her life. He is blessed and thankful to be part of this Spirit-filled community of St. Francis and The Canterbury.

Thursday, February 19

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 9:18-25; Psalm 1

“Moses said to all Israel the words which the Lord commanded him, ‘See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.” Deuteronomy 30:15-16

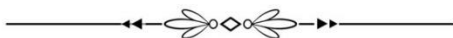
How do you make good choices? This is a question I’ve pondered and even struggled with for many years. We make good (or bad) choices based on the posture of our hearts. Fruitfulness flows from a kind heart. When we choose God, we choose a life rooted in meaning and purpose. Building a legacy does not begin when we have children or grandchildren; it begins the moment we decide whose voice we will follow... God’s, or our own? Will we obey the Lord and live, or will we rebel and be led astray? The choice is ours.

This is why Moses emphasizes hearing God. Stillness is attentive. Stillness teaches us how to listen. When we choose to make space for prayer, Scripture, and reflection, we learn to observe our heart posture around people, events, and choices. We choose to reflect, to ask ourselves where we could’ve done better. We begin to notice what draws us closer to God and what or who pulls us away.

Disobedience begins with distraction. A heart that turns away first stops listening. “Choose life,” Moses tells us - not only by avoiding evil, but by actively clinging to what is good. The life God offers is shaped by what we allow in and what we allow out: the habits we form, the values we put in play on the daily.

Lent invites us to examine these choices with honesty. What kind of life do we want to live? What kind of life do we want to leave behind? Today’s obedience becomes tomorrow’s inheritance. And the invitation remains open every single day, every single second: choose life, love the Lord, walk in His ways and hold fast to Him.

Legacy starts with you. You don’t have to play to the tune of the past.



Brittany Montiel is a paralegal, writer, and devoted student of Scripture who is passionate about faith, healing, and generational impact. She writes about the intersection of spiritual growth and everyday life, believing every small, faithful choice shapes lasting legacy.

Friday, February 20

Isaiah 58:1-9a; Matthew 9:10-17; Psalm 51:1-4,8-10

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” Psalm 51:1-2

This Psalm speaks deeply to me. It raises one persistent question: *Will God truly have mercy on me?* Will He really wash away my wickedness and cleanse me from my sin?

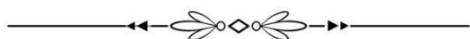
I try to love God with my whole heart and, most of the time, to love my neighbor. But is trying enough? Will my efforts ever be enough? Or will they always fall short? I do not know. And that uncertainty is why I cling to the hope that Psalm 51 is true.

Will my death be enough for God to purge me of my sins and restore my broken body and soul to wholeness in His kingdom? I hope so. All I can do is have faith and trust He will allow me to rejoice with Him and with others. I believe in the truth of Psalm 51 as I have experienced moments when my sins felt washed away. At times I have sensed God hiding His face from my failures, not in displeasure, but in love. Yet there are iniquities I refuse to let go of, sins that force me to look in the mirror and judge my own unworthiness. There I go again, standing in the way of God’s love. Will God truly show me mercy? Who am I to receive it when I have not consistently done His will or loved Him and my neighbor with my whole heart?

I am afraid of loving and not being loved in return. I have been hurt before, and I do not like the pain. Yet when I remember the times I experienced God’s mercy, I realize that the pain of those wounds lessened. I can see that I tried, even if imperfectly. Perhaps trying—turning back to God again and again—is enough to move my free will toward accepting His mercy.

Perhaps it is my ego that blocks me from receiving what is already offered. I am told that God’s mercy is always there and that we need only ask for it. But will He grant mercy even before I ask? And what about the sins I know I will commit in the future? When I fall again and feel unworthy, I hesitate to ask for mercy because I feel undeserving.

So what are we to do? Perhaps the answer is simple: we ask anyway. We return anyway. We trust anyway. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” And we hope—boldly—that His mercy is greater than our fear.



Darryl Tillman first attended St. Francis with Mary/Liz and John Bacon in 1995. The Episcopal Church and the Bacon family were new to him. He experienced only open, welcoming arms from St. Francis and the Bacons. He has been engaged in many areas at St. Francis for over 31 years.

Saturday, February 21

Isaiah 58:9b-14; Luke 5:27-32

After healing the paralyzed man, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up, left everything, and followed him.

The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance." Luke 5:29-32

Reading through today's scriptures, I was struck by the word "physician," I seem to spend lots of time with doctors, and I know that I am not alone. I've had to get in the habit of making medical appointments in blue on the calendar so they don't get lost. This passage made me pause.

Doing a little reading on the passage, I learned that Luke refers to the tax collector by his Hebrew name, Levi. His Greek name is "Matthew." This is the same Matthew that wrote the Gospel that bears his name. Levi/Matthew really does get up and follow Jesus.

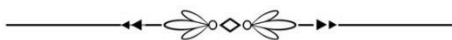
Levi then throws the banquet, where the Pharisees ask the disciples why Jesus is associating with such vile people. His answer speaks to us all. The tax collectors and sinners are those who are obviously "sick." Their sin is plain to see. They recognize they are clearly in need of help and are pursuing Jesus for the spiritual leader he is. The self-righteous Pharisees believe they are healthy and not in need of any spiritual healing.

We know that everyone needs healing whether their sickness is visible or not, whether they think they need it or not.

The passage calls me to acknowledge my sins and turn to Jesus for healing and a new way of being. I don't spend much time thinking of my sins and need to ask for forgiveness. I want to and need to remember Jesus loves and seeks out those who know they need saving, showing grace to those of us feeling like we don't belong and calling everyone to a new, repentant life

Next week I have my yearly physical. I will ask for and receive needed prescriptions, referrals, information and many other things.

Jesus is in the business of showing compassion and offering help to sinners in need of spiritual healing. "Dear Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."



Susie Willigrod and her husband Steve have been attending St Francis for about 10 years. Susie came for the choir, but both have found the entire church to be a loving home. You can find them both at yoga most Monday mornings!

Sunday February 22

Matthew 11:28-30



Come to me, all you
who are weary and burdened...

Monday, February 23

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18; Matthew 25: 31-46; Psalm 19:7-14

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer" Psalm 19:14

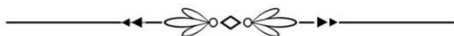
This verse first resonated with me when a priest at my church home for almost 25 years, in Zionsville, Indiana (which was called St. Francis in the Fields) used it before every sermon he gave. Hearing it week after week gave me many opportunities to think about it in different ways. This passage encourages us to examine both our outward expressions (the words of our mouth) and our inner lives (the meditation of our heart). The verse is a gentle invitation to live with integrity where our speech and thoughts are aligned and pleasing to God.

It is very easy to let my mind wander. Often it goes to places of worry or distraction. If I catch myself, I ask, "Are these thoughts pleasing to God?" The answer is usually no! God does not want us to worry about what is to come (or what has happened in the past). Our charge is to be present in the moment and trust that we can hand our worries over to God and He will help us.

God cares about our inner world as well as our spoken words. There are times when my words don't reflect what is truly in my heart. I might speak kindly to someone, but there is frustration in my heart. Or, conversely, I might speak with frustration when there is deep love in my heart. These disconnects challenge me to be authentic and make my words a true reflection of my heart, which is hopefully shaped by love and faith.

What can I do when my speech does not align with my inner values, beliefs or wants? Sometimes the desire to please others or avoid conflict leads me to say things I don't fully mean. Trying to be present in the moment can help me try to be more honest and show courage in my communications with others.

We all need God's help every day to work on these things. The verse calls God "my strength and my redeemer," which acknowledges that we need help from God to guide our thoughts and words. And when we fall short, we can always turn to God for renewal and support. He always shows us Grace and gives us another chance!



Joyce Alley is happy to be involved at St. Francis! After living in the Midwest for 32 years, she was grateful to come back to Palos Verdes and St. Francis in 2016. She and her husband Chris enjoy taking lovely walks with their dog, Remy, and playing pickleball.

Tuesday, February 24

Acts 1:15-26; Philippians 3:13-21; John 15:1, 6-16; Psalm 15

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.” John 15:9

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

John 15:12

How do we reconcile Christ’s mandate to demonstrate unconditional love when so many people’s actions are so incredibly unlovable?

I believe the answer lies in a word that is repeatedly stated in today’s Gospel: *abide*. Abiding is more than simply following God’s commandments; abiding means to dwell, to inhabit, to live in. While it is oftentimes all too easy to be disgusted by today’s headlines, it behooves us – and others -- to temper our reactions before we respond. The downtime between our initial emotional reaction to a person or an event and our actual response is where abiding in Christ can happen.

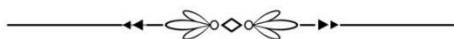
If I abide in Christ, instead of focusing on my despair and worrying about what the world is coming to, I ask God how I can influence my corner of the world positively and prevent someone from going down a destructive path.

If I abide in Christ and have suffered at someone else’s hand, I pray to not allow resentment or thoughts of revenge consume me; I pray for Christ to show me how to use the negative experience toward good and to recognize when someone is experiencing a similar challenge and step in to support them.

If I abide in Christ, instead of becoming reactionary in an upsetting situation, I pray for God to show me how I might be an instrument of His Love, His Peace and His Comfort, regardless of what anyone else is doing.

If I abide in Christ, I rely on Him to guide my reaction to anything in life, asking, “What now, Lord?” and then *listen* for His response before I express mine.

Christ doesn’t ask us to pretend the injustices aren’t there, nor does He tell us to gloss them over. But we don’t need to dwell on them. Instead, let us *dwell in Him*, tapping into that relationship when we’re struggling with our humanness and allow the Divinity of Christ within us to triumph.



Kristina Pela and her husband Fabrizio have been members of St. Francis for 26 years. Kristina relishes serving in Pastoral Care through the Taize service, the prayer teams, Sages, Good Grief and Lay Eucharistic Ministry.

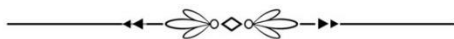
Wednesday, February 25

Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32; Psalm 51

“Create in me a clean heart, O God. And renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your holy Spirit from me. Give me the joy of your saving help again and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit. I shall teach your ways to the wicked and sinners shall return to you. Deliver me from death, O God and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness, O God of my salvation. Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. Had you desired it, I would have offered sacrifice, but you take no delight in burnt-offerings. The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Psalm 51:11-18

I loved this Psalm from the first time I heard it...I had the words memorized from that first exposure and the music associated with it was perfect! I first learned of this psalm when I spent a number of years as a volunteer Choir Director in the mountains of Western North Carolina - we were a strong, small group that sang as if it were the most blessed thing to do. What struck me most was that very simple request contained in the opening lines. David tells us that our God is always available to us if we'll only ask – but reminds us that specifics are important. He goes on in verse after verse showing us how we can learn to ask for what we need (no chocolate, no fatty foods), but the love of God.

Can't think of what to pray for? David can help you by this very small section of a larger psalm with its specificity of circumstance. Feel as if you have lost your place in the busy-ness of life? If you haven't already made the connection, try reading the text aloud while combining the words with the actions as he does. Even better, if you are a musician, or have those leanings, find an arrangement and try learning to put the words together with the thoughts and the very simple music. What an amazing blessing you will receive!



Jayne Bray, a former long-time parishioner, moved back to the South Bay after losing everything to two hurricanes in Florida. She has settled in Redondo Beach, where she can be close to her granddaughter, Brittany, and grandson, Leonardo; daughter Merideth is in Long Beach. Our favorite times are when we all get to sit together at St. Francis (when we are not whale-watching). Life is good, thank you God!

Thursday, February 26

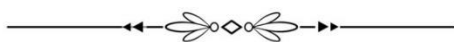
Esther (Apocrypha) 14:1-6, 12-14; Matthew 7:7-12; Psalm 138

This passage from Matthew where Jesus tells us that God answers our prayers is one that many people find comfort in. The thing about the answers to prayer is, that they are not always what we expect.

Father Mort Ward used to tell me that there are three basic answers to a prayer: yes, no, and surprise! There's a temptation in our instant gratification culture to approach our prayers to God as if God were a vending machine where our exact requests can be ordered. The truth of answered (and un-answered) prayer, I think, is much more in line with Father Mort's wisdom. If God knows the number of hairs on our heads, then certainly our Creator knows what is best for us. What we pray for and what we truly need are sometimes two different things. Sometimes prayers that feel unanswered can end up being same request achieved in a different and even better way. God often uses our prayers to help us become better versions of ourselves. A wise friend once reminded me that the Lord's Prayer says *THY* will be done, not *MY* will be done.

As I think on this passage further, I realize that it's about prayer yes, but it's about God's faithfulness to us too. If we are in relationship with God and communicating with our Heavenly Parent, then our needs will be met with divine wisdom, love and grace.

It did not go unnoticed that the last verse of this passage is the Golden Rule, "in everything do to others, as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the profits." I think this reminds us that just as God is faithful to meeting our needs, so to must we be faithful in trying to meet the needs of others. If we lean into our relationship with God's presence, wisdom, comfort, faithfulness and abiding love for us and treat each other in that same way, then I think that is God's prayer for us truly fulfilled.



Holly Valiquette has been a member of St Francis for 3 decades. When she prays for patience, she has learned to be amused and (grudgingly) grateful when God sends her things to strengthen her "waiting muscles."

Friday, February 27

Ezekiel 18:21-28; Matthew 5:20-26; Psalm 130

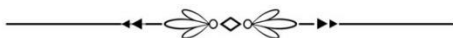
"I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in His word I put my hope." Psalm 130:5

"... for with the Lord is unfailing love..." Psalm 130:7b

These words spoke to me as I read the Psalm. I'm not sure if it's getting older or what, but over the past couple of years I have been working at and doing better to put my trust in God. To recognize He loves me for who I am and forgives me when I do something that offends others, essentially Him.

The words "unfailing love" resonate with me. I keep them in my heart and thank our Lord for what we have and pray for His continued mercy. When I get anxious, upset, frustrated or angry, I ask for His help and guidance and do my best to put my trust in Him. I don't always succeed, but I know He loves me anyway, and when I realize that, I am filled with hope.

My practice for Lent this year is to let go and let God be God. I am hopeful doing this for forty days will make it an ingrained habit and a thought process I can do regularly rather than frequently.



Mary Anna Cronin has been a member of St. Francis since 1997. She loves to read at the service, enjoys ushering and being on the Altar Guild. She is currently on the Vestry as well. Her husband and she are retired and enjoy the freedom of that journey.

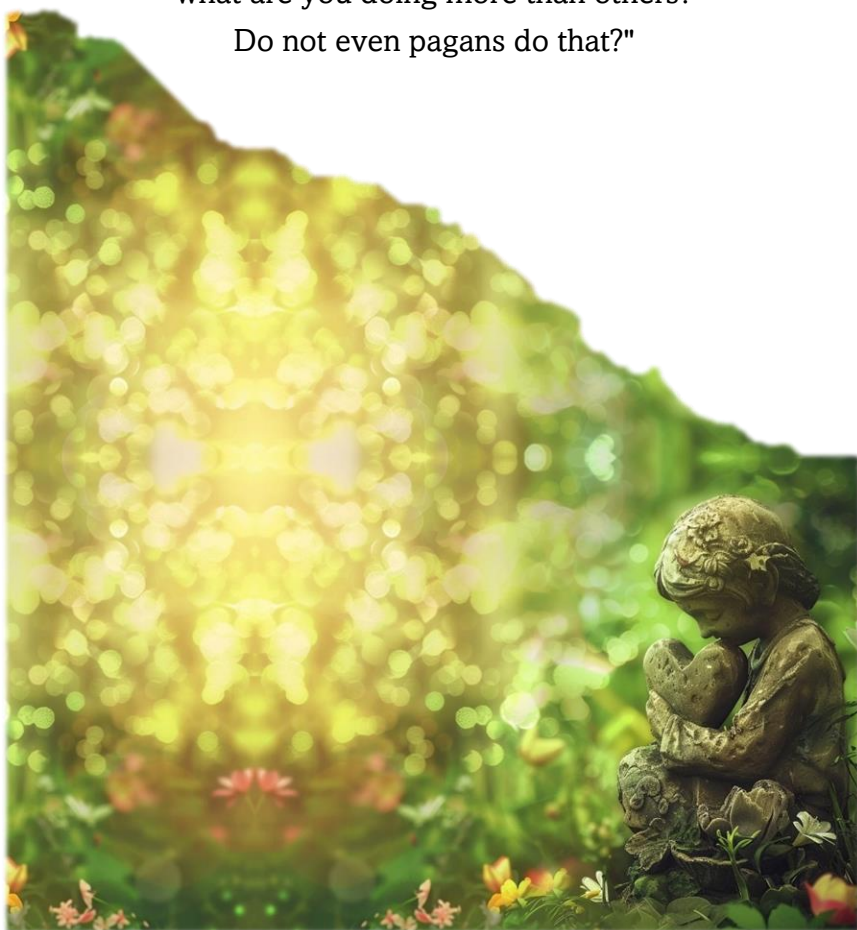
Saturday, February 28

Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Matthew 5:43-44, 47

“You have heard that it was said,
‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

But I tell you, love your enemies
and pray for those who persecute you
... if you greet only your own people,
what are you doing more than others?

Do not even pagans do that?”



Sunday March 1

Matthew 11:28-30



...and I will give you rest.

Monday, March 2

Daniel 9:3-10; Luke 6:27-38; Psalm 79:1-9

"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." Luke 6:27-28

"Do to others as you would have them do to you." Luke 6:31

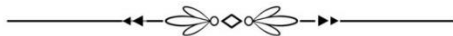
When our daughter Sofia was 4, her 6-year-old brother Tavio flicked her during a spat. She flicked him back, exclaiming, "Do unto others, big brother!" meaning that because he flicked her, she was entitled to flick him back.

Clearly, our daughter's 4-year-old interpretation of Christ's words was skewed, but I think most of us can empathize with the knee-jerk reflex of wanting to retaliate when the "other" starts flicking you. Turning the other cheek doesn't come naturally, and as a parent, praying for others who have made your child's life miserable is not an easy path to take.

I recall the first time I prayed for one of our son's "enemies" – a bully at school. I included this boy's name in my evening prayers with Tavio, and I immediately sensed Tavio's body grow rigid with displeasure. But we prayed for that boy nevertheless. In some ways, it felt pointless, and yet it was the only proactive action we could take at that point. Fortunately, the following year they went to different high schools, and their paths did not cross again.

Until they did. Years later, Tavio was visiting another church, and this boy happened to be there. Tavio didn't initially recognize him, but the boy approached Tavio and said, "I was a real jerk to you in middle school and I want to apologize. I was going through a really bad time in my life and I hadn't found God yet, and I just want to say I'm sorry."

While I'd told my children that many bullies eventually grow up to see the error of their ways, I never led them to expect to witness the fruits of that, let alone receive a genuine personal apology. I have to admit it was a challenge for me back then to convince myself that the right course of action was to follow Jesus' example of praying for your enemies. I am grateful that, years later, we were blessed to reap the reward of having done just that.



Kristina Pela and her husband Fabrizio's children are now almost 24 and 26 years of age, and they're grateful to have been raised in the St. Francis family, enjoying the youth group, choristers, and acolyting throughout the years. Kristina is happy to report that they stopped flicking each other a long time ago! Sofia is now an office manager in Santa Barbara, and Tavio is an economic analyst in Grand Rapids, MI, and will be getting married this October.

Tuesday, March 3

Isaiah 1:2-4, 16-2; Matthew 23:1-12; Psalm 50

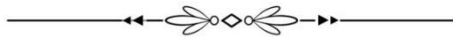
In the passage from Isaiah, the Lord addresses His disobedient children. He gives them a scorching scolding, calling Israel “a sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, offspring who do evil, children who deal corruptly.” YIKES! Those children have become “utterly estranged” from their Father.

When I first read this scripture, I read it from the point of view of the child. Boy, did I feel the heat of this parental chastisement! In subsequent readings, I flipped the point of view. How must the Father feel? I have lived the role of both parent and child. At times, I was the rebellious, unruly child, (hello, teen years!). Later in life, I was the exasperated parent to children rejecting guidance and testing my patience (teen years, hello again!). Some rejecting of parental authority is necessary for children to establish identity as they enter adulthood. Hmm...could this apply to reaching spiritual maturity as well? Should we test our Father in Heaven?

I don't have answers for those questions. But here is how my earthly experience informs me. I know a parent's wisdom is generally far beyond the wisdom of a child. Children may make alarming choices that have potential for serious and permanent harm. A parent's job is to guide and protect their children from those choices. The last and saddest potential in parent/child relations is to become, and remain, estranged. When I insert my spiritual Father into this earthly equation, I can proclaim that God is the one with the wisdom. He protects and guides me from dangerous choices. He reaches out to stay in relationship with me but I must reach out to Him, too. As a good parent would, the Father offers me choice:

“If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoke.”

As a parent, the choices I offered didn't go *that* far. Then again, *I'm not the Lord*. But, just as I expected my children to know when the discussion and lecture were done, the Lord seemed to expect the same from His children!



Sharon Craig-Insalata claims she listens to way too many political podcasts (balanced by walking and hiking off the ensuing stress). She loves bug hunting and doing Mega Kaboom science experiments with her granddaughter Mae. She enjoys her very talented husband making her delicious meals (which she also walks and hikes off).

Wednesday, March 4

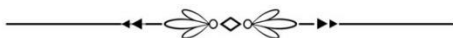
Jeremiah 18:1-11, 18-20; Matthew 20:17-28; Psalm 31: 9-16

“...whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve...” Matthew 20:26-28

Two of the readings for today concern being changed by God. These readings resonated with me because several times in my life I have been “hit upside my head” by God (figuratively), and these events have caused me to change my attitudes toward people. One of those times involves my handicapped nephew. I was sitting alone in my family room one afternoon and was thinking negative thoughts about my nephew and how he was not treating his mother (with whom he lived) well enough, when I was suddenly overcome by guilt for my negative thoughts and started crying. I knew that the Holy Spirit had created a change in my heart about my nephew, and I asked God for forgiveness for my past negative thoughts. I did not know that his mother was going to die a couple years after that, leaving my nephew grieving and with little means of support. Since that time, I have tried to be his “servant,” providing financial support and acting as a mother figure giving emotional support.

The quote from the book of Matthew cited above implies that, as disciples of Jesus, we must be the “servant” or “slave” of others. The reading from the prophet Jeremiah compares God to a potter who has remade a vessel that was spoiled into a good vessel. Although the remainder of Jeremiah’s message talks about Israel, it is clear that God can also change individuals, just as a potter can remake the clay.

As we think about God changing us this Lent, let us pray to him as stated in Psalm 31: “Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love” (Psalm 31:16, NRSV)



Suellen Eslinger joined St. Francis on-line in 2020 and became a member in 2021. She is a retired Aerospace engineer. Her principal hobby is music, and she sings in the St. Francis choir and plays the recorder. She loves learning about the Word of God.

Thursday, March 5

Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31; Psalm 1

“Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength.”
Jeremiah 17:5

“Their delight is in the law of the Lord, and they meditate on his law day and night.” Psalm 1:2

It is easy to let faith become performative. It is easy to believe that if we go to church and are seen going to church; that if we make ourselves useful, volunteer when asked, and give what is expected, then we must be living God’s word. That our duty has been done, and all is right in our world.

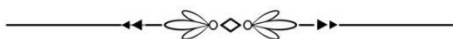
But faith has never been meant to rest only on its outward signs. Clothing ourselves in the trappings of belief, however beautiful or sincere, is not the same as tending to the life of the soul beneath them. A rich exterior cannot replace an interior relationship with God.

When was the last time you knelt in silence and spoke to God with no one watching?

When was the last time you sang a hymn alone, where no one could hear? Our great mystics returned to this truth again and again: the invitation to turn inward in pursuit of God. To pray in darkness and in secrecy, as St. John of the Cross describes. To build an interior castle, as St. Teresa of Avila so beautifully teaches.

We are living in “interesting times,” and I have found myself returning to the book, “Man’s Search for Meaning,” written by one of the survivors of Auschwitz. This book quietly reminds me that when everything external is stripped away – certainty, comfort, control – it is our interior life that remains. A rich inner life is not a luxury, but a necessity for resilience. In unpredictable and unsettled times, when so much feels fragile or beyond our grasp, it is this interior grounding that sustains us – just as it sustained the mystics who learned to meet God not in stability, but in surrender.

For God is not found in looking outward, or in carefully performing faith for others to see. God is found in the quiet contemplation of Christ’s love – and in the steady, humbling knowledge that if all else fails, you are still, and have always been, chosen by God.



Shelley Reece is the Missioner for Youth and Programming at St. Francis, overseeing children’s and youth programming, nursery coordination, Sunday School, Youth Group, and family events like Faithful Families. She is also a karate instructor at Ancient Ways Karate and a competitive martial artist. In her free time, she enjoys Spartan OCRs, surfing, and pretty much anything that requires her to sign a waiver before she begins!

Friday, March 6

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-28; Matthew 21:33-43; Psalm 105

The story of Joseph has always unsettled me. I struggle to understand how a father could openly favor one child, planting jealousy and division within his own family. Yet Scripture reveals a pattern: Jacob favored Joseph's mother, just as Jacob himself was favored by his own mother while Esau was favored by their father. Like most family stories, it is complicated and painfully human. Jacob's favoritism made Joseph a target. Joseph was also a truth teller — and being both the favorite and the truth teller placed him in great danger.

I feel a similar discomfort in Jesus' parable of the landowner who sent servants to collect produce from his vineyard. At first, the task seems simple. But when the servants are beaten, stoned, and killed, it is difficult to comprehend why the landowner continues sending others, ultimately sending his own son, who is also killed by jealous tenants.

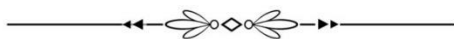
Scripture frequently challenges my understanding. I wrestle with how Joseph, trafficked into Egypt by his brothers, could forgive them. Though Joseph initially responds with intimidation and testing, he ultimately embraces his brothers and provides for his entire family. Perhaps Joseph understood the sacred responsibility of being a truth teller. What anchors me are Jesus' words: *"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone... the kingdom of God will be given to those who produce its fruit."*

In today's world, truth can feel difficult to discern. Many speak convincingly, yet not all voices bear truth. Some truth tellers gain prominence, stirring jealousy and resistance. Still, the parable reminds me that God persistently sends truth tellers, even when they are mistreated, because truth ultimately brings justice and restoration.

God sent Jesus as the Divine Truth Teller, modeling how we are called to live. Jesus teaches that a good tree bears good fruit. When discerning truth, I've learned to look for the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Where these are present, God's kingdom is near — in those who protect the vulnerable, feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, and speak truth with love and dignity.

Truth tellers are often rejected because truth is hard to hear. Yet, take heart! Jesus reminds us that rejected stones can become cornerstones — foundations for the goodness yet to come.

God, grant me and my Saint Francis family eyes to see and ears to hear. Give us courage to speak truth with love and to bear fruit that reflects Your kingdom.



According to her 5th grade son, Angie Witt is a kind, devoted, truthful, and empathetic woman who is always open to new ideas. She is a wife, and mother of two boys and a 4-year-old puppy.

Saturday, March 7

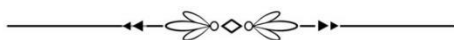
Micah 7:14-15, 18-20; Luke 15:11-32

“The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great kindness. He will not always accuse us, nor will he keep his anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our wickedness. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so is his mercy great upon those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us.”
Psalm 103:8-12

When I sit with this passage, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for who God is and how He treats us. The Lord is compassionate and merciful, and slow to anger. God does not deal with me according to my sins or repay me for my failures. Instead of holding my mistakes against me, He meets me with patience and love. It reminds me that I am not defined by my worst moments, but by God’s grace.

So why do I find it hard to forgive others and especially those people closest to me? I find myself reflecting on something my parents did that I still resent, or something my best friend said that hurt in a time of conflict. I often counsel my children to look at difficult situations as learning opportunities, take what you can from them and then use that experience to move on – don’t create baggage that holds you back. My daughter actually repeated my advice back to me recently...

If God forgives me so completely, how can I withhold forgiveness from others? When I hold onto anger or resentment, I forget the mercy I have received so freely. This passage challenges me to forgive as God forgives by not keeping a record of wrongs, not clinging to resentments, but choosing compassion even when it is difficult. As I grow in gratitude for God’s mercy, I pray that my heart becomes more like His, slower to anger, quicker to forgive, and rooted in love.



Mary Deley, and her husband Tony, live in Rancho Palos Verdes. Along with their three adult children, Adelaide, Clara and Will, they have been members of St. Francis for over 20 years. She enjoys hosting fellowship events and is so grateful to be a part of this warm and welcoming parish.

Sunday March 8

Matthew 11: 28-30



Take my yoke upon you
and learn from me...

Monday, March 9

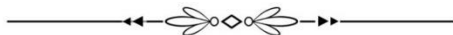
2 Kings 5:1-15b; Luke 4: 23 – 30; Psalm 42

Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. Luke 4:26

The scripture didn't just speak to me, it shouted to me! Maybe it was fate, faith, ESP, spiritual synchronicity, and the Holy Spirit! Here's why: Prior to reading these scriptures, a cousin from Lebanon, who now lives in Torrance, called to see if she and her family could visit us for a belated Christmas gift exchange. I excitedly replied, "Yes, please! It will be wonderful to see everyone!"

It's our tradition to offer refreshments to visitors, and though I wasn't prepared with an ethnic assortment of appetizers (mezza), I had one of my favorite Lebanese desserts, Knafee on hand. It's a hot Filo dough cheese pastry served with warm sugar syrup. It's a famous delicacy in Sidon where I first enjoyed it! I still recall every delicious bite and almost every moment with two of my cousins from their village and my American roommate from the American University of Beirut. It was a rainy winter morning, but being in Sidon was warm and comforting. We could actually catch a glimpse of Sidon from my cousins' seaside village, Jieh, where my mother was raised. Sidon boasts a Crusaders fortress which we last visited in 2012; yes, much had changed, but memories never change. During my cousin's visit, we must have mentioned Sidon more than 10 times while tasting the Knafee. While it didn't taste like the one in Sidon, our minds were savoring delicious, sweet times with beloved relatives feasting with God now.

I couldn't believe that one of my scriptures referred to Sidon, after an unexpected, happy afternoon with relatives chatting about Sidon! I felt happy, just as I had the week prior celebrating Christmas with our son, daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren back East. I thanked God for those joys. I admit that last year was the most difficult year with Dick's health challenges and my lack of patience and acceptance. I had retired from teaching in schools and teaching dance. I had little time to write, though I did manage to publish one softbound book about my incredible mother. My life was very different, and I prayed to God to keep me strong and healthy. Once again, I felt the Holy Spirit that afternoon and wanted to exclaim, "Yes, there is a God! God listens to us. There is goodness in the world and more goodness to come in His world!"



Elizabeth Cantine feels blessed to be part of the church family at St. Francis and to serve on the ministries of prayer team, lay reader and oblation bearer. Prior ministries include teaching dance to the youth group and choreographing Godspell and Amahl. She is also blessed to be part of her loving family as wife, mom, Nina and godmother.

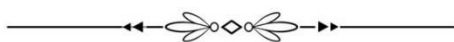
Tuesday, March 10

Song of the Three Young Men 2-4, 11-20a; Matthew 18:21-35; Psalm 25

My neighbor's dog bit me, severely and repeatedly, in late August of last year, necessitating a trip to the ER and a long healing process, which isn't fully over. The neighbor in question is not anyone's favorite on our otherwise congenial cul-de-sac. A week later, the same dog bit another neighbor, also sending her to the ER, which is when thoughts of vengeance and punishment fully flowered on the block. For good reason, many of my neighbors encouraged us to seek the maximum penalty, sue the owner for all he's worth, etc. There was no talk of forgiveness, no pleas to cool off and be the bigger person. For my part, I found myself increasingly trying to not be angry, though I confess the thought of outright forgiveness escaped me. The issue finally resolved with the city putting the dog down, in spite of its owner's assurances that the dog was safe and that it was in fact the animosity of all his neighbors, over decades, that led to (or perhaps justified in his mind) the attacks. It wasn't, but that's what he had come to believe, not being able to accept that negligence and powerful dogs are a dangerous combination.

So, here we are, half a year later, on the cusp of Lent and my passage, randomly assigned, is from Matthew 18:21-25. It's Peter asking a very typically "Peter" question: "How many times should I forgive my sister, seven?" I imagine Peter thought this was erring on the side of caution, as, like most of us, he probably figured two or three forgiveness was generous, especially for repeat offenders. Christ's response was "77" times, followed by a parable, of course. My neighbor has, over the course of many years, maybe done something needing forgiveness 3 or 4 times. The message from Matthew is crystal clear then.

In the end though, I'm not sure that Christ's answer to Peter has very much to do with the latter's forgiving others. The question is: how many times will we be forgiven when we fail to do God's will, to love our neighbors as ourselves? The answer to that, running tally and a likely lowball estimate on my part, for me is around 7,777. I have done things today that I probably need to think about during confession this Sunday, and I am confident I will be forgiven. So is my neighbor.



Tim Coleman has been a member of St. Francis for the last 12 years. He has been an English teacher in Palos Verdes for the last 22 years. He and his wife, Julie, along with their daughter, Alice, love being a part of the St. Francis family. Tim is looking forward to returning to the Vestry.

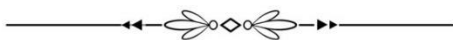
Wednesday, March 11

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 5-9; Matthew 5:17-19; Psalm 78

California is a beautiful place, full of stunning vistas of ocean beaches, majestic mountains, and rolling oak-clad hills framed by a cloudless blue sky. For many of us, one of the iconic California experiences is the drive on Highway 41 from the south entrance of Yosemite National Park to Yosemite Valley. Drivers enter a dark tunnel that opens to a stunning view of a light-filled valley with waterfalls, magnificent cliffs, and the almost impossibly perfect symmetry of Half Dome. For me, this view is always a preview of entering paradise, a place that is so far beyond the grind and suffering of daily life that I cannot help but be ecstatically happy when I see it.

Today's readings tell us that to get to this "new land," whether in our own earthly existence or in heaven, we must follow "statutes and ordinances" taught by the prophets and by Jesus. In Deuteronomy, Moses tells the people to "give heed" (to what I am teaching you) "so that you may live to enter and occupy the land...that the Lord is giving you." Much later in Biblical history, Jesus (the New Moses) says "Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill...whoever does these commandments...will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

From infancy we have learned these laws and commandments. "Love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, and mind." "Love your neighbor as yourself." "Follow the Ten Commandments." "Respect the dignity of all people." Following these precepts sounds easy on paper, but living as God wants us to live so we reach that "promised land" is hard in a world filled with greed, egotism, envy, suffering, and setbacks. For me, I can only attempt to live as God wishes by prioritizing my spiritual life. Spirituality, in forms such as prayer, meditation, and the nurturing grace of regular worship, anchors my life and gives me hope for the future. I'm daily grateful for the spiritual practices I have been taught and for the support of my St. Francis family along my journey. Together we are preparing to enter the land that the Lord is giving us.



Gayle Taylor is a retired English teacher who enjoys painting, cooking, volunteer work, and playing with her grandchildren. She has been a member of St. Francis for over forty years and is currently serving on the Vestry and as the coordinator for our outreach to St. Luke's Breakfast and Showers Program.

Thursday, March 12

Jeremiah 7:23 –28; Psalm 95: 6 – 11; Luke 11: 14 – 23

There is no middle ground.

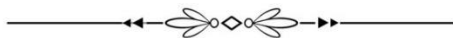
God made this message clear over and over. In Jeremiah, God commanded his people to walk only in the way that He commanded them and persistently sent His servants day after day with this message. But they did not listen. In Psalm 95, God warned that His people who refused to follow His commandments were wayward in their hearts, and “shall not enter into my rest.”

Luke records an incident in what must have been a scary display of power. In front of a mob, Jesus performed a miracle when He cast out a demon from a man who had been mute. While many were amazed, some questioned whether he, in fact, derived His power from another Demon. And, to test Him, some demanded that Jesus produce a sign from Heaven. (Psalm 95 mentions that God was tested in spite of His works.) Jesus responded that “Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house.” There is no need to call to them for additional Demons.

Jeremiah sums up the situation in harsh but real fashion: “So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen. You shall call them, but they will not answer you. This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the Lord their God and did not accept discipline; truth has perished.” Therefore, we must pick a side. As Jesus put it, “Whoever is not with me is against me.” Tough talk.

What does this mean to me? How much does this affect my daily life? In a request from one of the disciples, Jesus taught the disciples to say the words we call the Lord’s prayer. In that prayer Jesus cautions against being led into temptation.

Perhaps Jesus knows that I need His help to resist.



Joe Young is a long-time friend of Gayle Taylor. Together they have travelled extensively in several countries and participated in Earthwatch expeditions. Joe is part of St. Francis’s online community and tunes in most Sunday mornings.

Friday, March 13

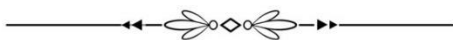
Hosea 14:1-9; Mark 12:28-34; Psalm 81

(A scribe asked Jesus) *“Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is . . . you shall love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.*
Mark 12:28-30

The Pharisees and their Scribes were powerful religious leaders who adhered to very strict Jewish laws and rituals. Jesus called them hypocrites for being self-righteous and becoming wealthy through unscrupulous means and ignoring or mistreating those they were meant to help. His teachings challenged their power so strongly that they tried to trap him with religious questions, hoping to find grounds to put him to death.

As a teenager, I became serious about attending church and was baptized into a fundamentalist denomination which had very strict “commandments” one should follow in order to be a “good Christian.” Following my college graduation, I joined the Episcopal Church, drawn in by its genuine warmth and hospitality, as well as its earnest commitment to centering life around compassion for God and others. Here at St. Francis, we have a banner in the sanctuary stating those as our guiding principles.

If we genuinely try to follow these principles, the other commandments will naturally be upheld. In today’s turbulent times, in our country and the world, I am extremely grateful for those who publicly speak out to encourage us to be kind and caring for others, reflecting our Episcopalian value that this aligns with God’s will. Loving others is, in essence, also serving the Lord: Matthew 25:40 “. . .whatever you did for the least of these who are members of my family, you did for me.” Imagine how more humane and gentler the world would be if everyone could value others as children of God.



Laurie Anderson Is the mother of two grown sons and “nana” to three teenage and adult grandchildren. Raised in Southwest Los Angeles, she earned her BA degree from UCSB and a teaching credential from USC. She taught elementary school in Torrance in the early 1960’s and later tutored writing in the Palos Verdes high schools. She has been an active member of St. Francis for about 20 years and has served twice on the vestry.

Saturday, March 14

Hosea 6:1-6; Luke 18:9-14; Psalm 51

"I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

Luke 18:14b

In this parable, Jesus describes two men going up to the temple to pray: a Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisee stands prominently praying, loudly proclaiming his virtues, thanking God that he is not like other sinners, and boasting of his religious practices. In contrast, the tax collector stands at a distance, unwilling even to look up to heaven, beating his breast in sorrow and simply pleading, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

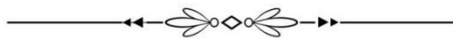
Jesus concludes by declaring that the tax collector, not the Pharisee, went home justified before God. He adds the principle: "For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Humility is a recurring theme in Jesus' teachings, and He repeatedly warns against pride and self-righteousness, underscoring obedience, faith, and action over mere words or appearances. The Pharisee embodies external (perhaps insincere?) piety and judgmentalism, relying on his works to elevate himself, which runs counter to Jesus' emphasis on inner humility and dependence on God's grace. The tax collector, acknowledging his sinfulness, aligns with Jesus' call to repentance and faith, showing that God's approval comes not from self-justification but from humble contrition. Jesus is offering a timeless path to align with God's nature and orient toward heaven.

This spiritual truth is also supported by what we observe in human behavior today and the resulting harms and benefits. In fact, research shows that humility fosters resilience by reducing excessive self-preoccupation, lowering anxiety, and enhancing emotional well-being. And more broadly, imagine a society where people are humbler, or in other words, less sure of themselves and locked into their unyielding conclusions, biases, pre-conceived notions.

Wouldn't we be living in a world that is less polarized, where we are more curious about the reasons why someone's opinion differs from ours than we are in convincing everyone that we are "right"? And wouldn't that strengthen social bonds by encouraging empathy and reducing defensiveness, resulting in more stable human connections and more meaningful reconciliations?

There is great hope here: in humble contrition, we find both divine justification and lasting human flourishing.



Fabrizio Pela and his wife Kristina have been parishioners for over 20 years. They enjoy connecting with the wonderful people of this blessed church community, and receiving spiritual nourishment that keeps life's challenges in perspective.



Sunday,
March 15

Matthew 11:28-30

...for I am gentle and
humble in heart...

Monday, March 16

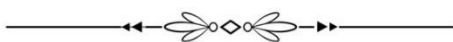
Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 30; John 4:43-54

The day before this devotional was due, I was still struggling with what to write. Like all good procrastinators, I checked my email. There, I found *The Episcopal News* and a call to action signed that very morning by 154 Episcopal bishops. The statement begins, “We, the undersigned bishops of The Episcopal Church, write today out of grief, righteous anger, and steadfast hope,” and ends with, “In the face of fear, we choose hope.” Reading it, I quickly realized that today’s readings are directly relevant and offer guidance for our lives today.

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines hope as “desire accompanied by expectation of obtaining what is desired or belief that it is obtainable.” That expectation gives hope its strength. Our bishops’ call to action is built on hope as a means to navigate the crises and questions we face in 2026. That same conviction appears throughout today’s readings.

Isaiah 65:17–25 describes “new heavens and a new earth,” in which the hopes include: “No more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,” “They shall not labor in vain,” “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,” and “They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.” Psalm 30:1–6, 11–13 shares this theme of hope by recounting the Lord’s responses to human challenges: “I cried out to you, and you restored me to health,” “Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning,” and “You have turned my wailing into dancing; you have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.” The Gospel of John 4:43–54 describes Jesus’ second miracle, in which he saved the dying son of a royal official. Only the strength of the official’s hope compelled him to travel a great distance from Capernaum, uphill to Cana, to beg Jesus to heal his son.

I am still in awe that these readings, written two or three thousand years ago, have such resonance today. They remind us of the power of hope as we navigate the challenges we face in our own lives.



Hal Yee, his wife, Frances, and their two now adult children have been members of St. Francis for nearly 15 years. They enjoy participating in Coffee Hour and Hal just completed 4 years as a member of the Vestry.

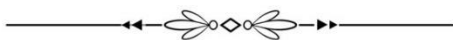
Tuesday, March 17

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; John 5:1-18; Psalm 46

John tells the story of a man who had an infirmity for 38 years. This man was next to a healing pool of water, which at certain times would heal the first person stepping into it of whatever affliction he had. Jesus saw this man and asked if he would like to be healed. The man told Jesus yes, but someone always beat him to it as he had no one to help him into the water. Jesus commanded him to get up, take his bed, and walk. The man did so.

It was the Sabbath, and there were Jews who told the man it was against the law to carry one's bed on the Sabbath. They asked the man to tell them who had told him to pick up the bed. The man answered that it was the person who had healed him and made him whole. The Jews sought to kill Jesus, because he had "done these things" on the Sabbath. Jesus told them that His Father worked on the Sabbath, so He does as well. The Jews then sought even more to kill Him, because not only had He broken the restrictions of the Sabbath, but in saying God was His Father, He made himself the equal of God.

This powerful passage illustrates how an entrenched bureaucracy can get so bogged down enforcing its arcane rules that it fails to recognize the presence of someone who personifies the very reason the bureaucracy was established in the first place, and the passage demonstrates that it is that reason-for-existence rather than the bureaucracy's system of man-made rules that should be held above all else. Specifically, though the Jewish hierarchy was established for the worship of God and devised rubrics thought to promote that worship, that hierarchy didn't recognize that God — in the form of Jesus — was among them, and He was performing miracles without being tied down by the rules the hierarchy had created. It's a good example of not seeing the forest for the trees.



Clint Alley grew up Presbyterian and was confirmed as an Episcopalian in 1965. He joined St. Francis about eighteen years ago after moving to the local area from Virginia. He has continually served as a lay reader, primarily at the 8:00 service, since joining St. Francis. He also served on the Vestry and as Junior Warden for four years.

Wednesday, March 18

Isaiah 49:8-15; John 5:19-29; Psalm 14:8-19

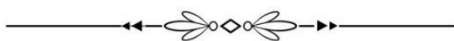
Psalm 14 describes the Lord as "full of compassion slow to anger and of great kindness, loving to everyone, righteous in all his ways."

These are all qualities we may or may not try to develop and practice in our daily lives. But they are surely qualities we recognize and remember when we experience or observe them.

One of my first jobs was as a school social worker in a part of central Florida where there was a large city surrounded by sand and small palm trees, an area known as a "rural slum." Small one-room houses with no plumbing were scattered about. This was one of the areas whose children went to one of the schools I was assigned to serve. I needed to verify the birth date of a middle schooler and went to her home in this area. I was welcomed by her mother, given a family Bible to verify the birthdate and was struck by the mom's concern for her daughter. She was illiterate, but gracious and loving. We would say very poor financially, but rich in other qualities. She made sure her daughter went to school every day. It was obvious her priority was her daughter's welfare.

I also remember another family at another school whose way of life was so different. I went to this home because their middle school daughter was frequently absent from school. Her expensive home was lovely. But her mother was not gracious and welcoming. She was rude and defensive, and said she and her husband thought their thirteen-year-old daughter didn't need to go to school, that she needed to stay home and help her mother. Later the school district had to initiate legal proceedings so that the girl could go to school. The contrast between these two families was unforgettable.

We may not have great resources or skills, we may wonder what our role and value is in this world, but we surely can make a difference in someone's life by being kind and then even kinder, compassionate and then even more compassionate, slow and then even slower to anger, forgiving and more forgiving in our relationships in our daily lives with family members, friends and casual encounters.



Patt Parker has been blessed to be a member of St. Francis for 62 years.

Thursday, March 19

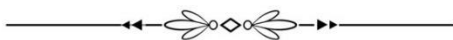
2 Samuel 7:4, 8-16; Romans 4:13-18; Luke 2:41-52

“The promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law that are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.”
Romans 4:13-15

Laws tell people what they should and should not do; what is right and what is wrong. God recognized this when he handed down the Ten Commandments to Moses. Laws are necessary for order, but resorting to laws is not the answer to most of our daily concerns, and laws certainly do not promise salvation, which I interpret the words “inherit the world” above to mean.

I represented Japan-based companies doing business in the United States for over thirty years. While I encountered legal issues on a daily basis, there were relatively few instances during that time in which the companies I represented had to rely on the legal system for a definitive, final decision (i.e. the “wrath” of the law) to determine behavior. Primarily, this was because management wanted to follow the applicable law (rather than find ways around it), requested my advice as to the law in a particular situation, and relied on engineering and sales for business success, rather than on the uncertainties of the legal system.

I believe that faith, trust, love, and similar virtues are more important in our daily life. Faith is particularly important in difficult, life-threatening situations. For example, I just finished reading The Boys in the Light, an incredible, true story about two Jewish teenage boys who escaped from a Nazi concentration camp in 1945 and were rescued (and returned to physical health) by a Company of American soldiers, led by Lt. Elmer Hovland of Minnesota, that landed in Normandy and fought across France into Germany. Years later, when asked what had kept him so strong during the War, Elmer responded, “My Christian faith. I carried that catechism that they issued. I read from that every morning and every night. (T)he reason I think I am here today is because I put my trust in the Lord and he more than took care of me.” (p. 261.)



Richard Briggs is an attorney who has worshipped at St. Francis for over forty years. He raised his two sons at St. Francis and met his wife Sara Schulz through the Church.

Friday, March 20

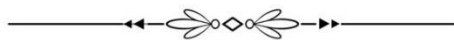
Wisdom 2:1a, 12-24; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30; Psalm 34

“For God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it.” Wisdom 2:23-24

“Through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it.” I don’t like this verse, or this idea, that those who experience death belong to the devil’s party. That means everyone belongs to the devil, because everyone dies. But I know that not everyone belongs to the devil, as I know that though we die a physical death, we are reborn in the resurrection. In this instance death is not just a literal death, but it is sin – the absence of God. But again, there was only one of us who was without sin – so where does that land us? Because we are sinful, does that mean we belong to the devil?

Those who are sinful and unrepentant belong to the devil. The key word here is unrepentant. Once we reach an age or intellect where we know what we are doing, we become capable of sin; sin is based on intent, and we daily sin by things done, and by things left undone. When we sin it’s not that God is absent, as that is impossible – it’s that we choose not to acknowledge God’s presence in our lives. Every sin is a small death – a small bit of corruption that we willfully allow to happen to ourselves. But every time we repent of our sins our souls are made clean; every time we choose love over hate, faith over doubt, hope over despair, we are choosing life instead of death, God instead of sin.

To those on the outside of our faith we might look like hypocrites, because we are. Why keep repenting when you’re going to do the same thing again? It’s sort of like asking, why do you wash your clothes when you know they’re just going to get dirty again? We were made to be incorruptible, and one day, we will achieve this. But so long as we are in this world, we know that it is only through God that we are made whole; only through God that we are made clean and new again. God doesn’t fault us for the number of times we return and repent, but celebrates that we want to be made new again.



The Rev. Jason Shelby has been the rector at St. Francis for three years. Jason and his wife Jennifer have three children and live in PVE. Between church and family, Jason has five minutes to think about how awesome Star Wars is.

Saturday, March 21

Jeremiah 11:18-20; Psalm 7:6-11; John 7:37-52

“Awake. O my God, decree justice” Psalm 7:7a

“Let the malice of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous”
Psalm 7:10a

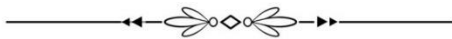
“God is my shield and my defense...” Psalm 7:11a

Today, both around the world and at home, turmoil and instability are widespread. When news reports contradict each other, it can be hard to know what’s accurate, and accounts of power abuse frequently include incidents resulting in suffering or loss of life. This ongoing insecurity creates challenges in knowing how we can respond.

Despite the confusion and unrest, we, as Christians, are not left alone to figure out what to think and do. Through Jesus Christ, we have been given the abiding Holy Spirit as our advocate and guide even in uncertain times. We can cry out to Our Heavenly Father, as the Psalmist does in these passages, for direction.

Closer to home, day-to-day situations in our personal lives can often lead to feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about how best to respond. We may be faced with illness, caregiving for loved ones, and/or the stress of everyday activities and important decisions. How can we truly believe that “God is my shield and my defense”? How do we “let go and let God” take over to direct us?

I have personally found that a few minutes of quiet time each day, including reflection, reading and prayers each day helps me reset my thinking and instincts, so I make better choices in what I say and do. The guide I use is actually part of the Episcopal rosary, which can be done with or without the beads themselves. I select passages from the Book of Common Prayer for these categories: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication and Petition, personalizing them to fit my own situation and needs. If I get busy with daily activities and do not set aside this brief time, I definitely notice that I tend to misuse time and make poor choices, causing me stress throughout the day.

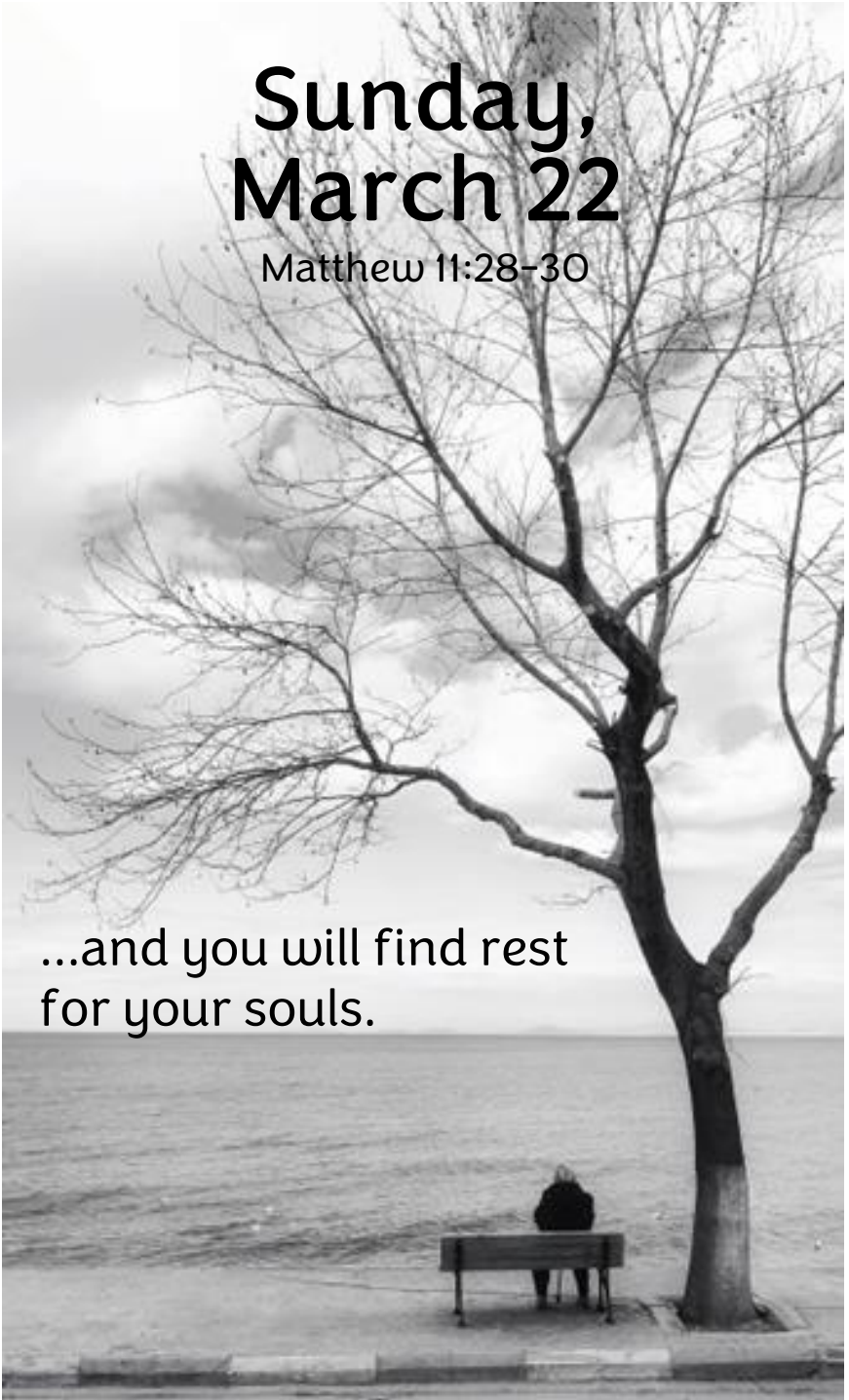


Laurie Anderson Is the mother of two grown sons and “nana” to three teenage and adult grandchildren. Raised in Southwest Los Angeles, she earned her BA degree from UCSB and a teaching credential from USC. She taught elementary school in Torrance in the early 1960’s and later tutored writing in the Palos Verdes high schools. She has been an active member of St. Francis for about 20 years and has served twice on the vestry.

Sunday, March 22

Matthew 11:28-30

...and you will find rest
for your souls.



Monday, March 23

Psalm 23

¹ The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,^[a]

I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house
of the Lord
forever.



Tuesday, March 24

Numbers 21:4-9; John 8:21-30; Psalm 102

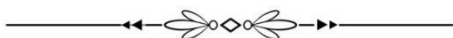
“So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.”
Numbers 21:9

The people were complaining...again. “You brought us to the desert to kill us. There is no water and no food, and the food is terrible.” I sometimes wonder if it wasn’t that Moses wasn’t allowed into the Holy Land, but that when he finally had a chance to get away from the Israelites after listening to their incessant complaining for forty years, and he took it. Moses had every reason to believe that their complaining wouldn’t end when they arrived in the land of Milk and Honey; once there, they would probably complain about how they missed picking up the mana from the earth every day, and now they had to prepare all their meals and set up homes...

Today’s reading from Numbers raises a number of questions, to which there are no satisfactory answers. Why did God send snakes to attack the people? Yes, they were being unfaithful and ungrateful, but that was their deal. Throwing venomous snakes at them seems arbitrarily cruel. But this isn’t possible, because God is neither arbitrary nor cruel. When the people repented, why didn’t God call off the snakes? That seems far easier than having Moses craft a bronze serpent for people to gaze upon and be healed when they were bitten. There’s also the rule against graven images, and this seems dangerously close to it.

The people were careless with their words – their speech was venomous, and with each slight they hoped to inflict pain upon Moses and God. In turn, they were attacked by snakes, and it was only when many had died and many more were in danger of dying that they repented. God didn’t remove the snakes, but God did provide a way for them to be healed; they had to look at an effigy of that which inflicted pain – they had to face a version of their tormenter. And in facing their tormenter, they were healed.

God doesn’t remove our obstacles, but God gives us the means for working through them, and so often that means facing our fears and acknowledging our dependence on God alone. The bronze snake can’t bite them – but it does remind them of their pain, and the reason for their pain. God is not against us, but God will also remind us that we are not in charge, which in the end, is a good thing.



The Rev. Jason Shelby has been the rector at St. Francis for three years. Jason and his wife Jennifer have three children and live in PVE. Between church and family, Jason has five minutes to think about how awesome Star Wars is.

Wednesday, March 25

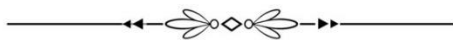
Isaiah 7:10-14; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38; Psalm 40:5-10

“Great things are they that you have done, O Lord my God! How great your wonders and your plans for us! There is none who can be compared with you. Oh, that I could make them known and tell them! But they are more than I can count. In sacrifice and offering you take no pleasure (you have given me ears to hear you); burnt-offering and sin-offering you have not required, and so I said, ‘Behold, I come.’ In the roll of the book it is written concerning me: ‘I love to do your will, O my God; your law is deep in my heart.’ I proclaimed righteousness in the great congregation; behold, I did not restrain my lips; and that, O Lord, you know.” Psalm 40:5-10

I was the youngest of five in an Irish Catholic family with two devout parents. Faith shaped our culture, our routines, and our community. Thirteen years of Catholic school gave me a strong sense of belonging and lifelong friendships, but the idea of “doing God’s will” wasn’t something we talked about. Instead, the message was more about doing the right thing because God was watching.

Now, in my fifties, my understanding of God has shifted profoundly. I no longer see God as punishing, but as loving. Psalm 40 captures the relationship I have grown into, a relationship rooted in trust, surrender, and love. The passage in Psalm 40 beautifully reflects my relationship with God. Choosing to live in God’s will brings a deep sense of peace, joy, happiness, and freedom; freedom from fear, freedom to be fully myself, and freedom to live with an open and loving heart.

Because my relationship with God is now grounded in love, I’m able to bring that peace into the relationships that matter most: as a mother to three adult children, as a partner to my beloved Greg, as a teacher to my eager kindergarteners, and as a friend who deeply values connection. My faith is no longer about obligation, it is about love, presence, and living with an open heart.



Julie Murray is a frequent visitor to St. Francis with her dear friends, the Sams Family. The Lenten Devotional has been a beautiful part of her morning routine for many years.

Thursday, March 26

Genesis 17:1-8; John 8:51-59; Psalm 105

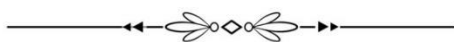
“So they picked up stones to throw at him.” John 8:59

In this passage we see the forces that will send Jesus to the cross, Jesus stern, Jesus in danger. What lesson is here for us? That the people in the temple are bad people, and that we, knowing better, are good people? That the only way to life is to follow Jesus, to accept that he is of God, and that everybody else is in trouble?

This is not a moment of healing, joy, forgiveness, grace - it's a hard conversation, one I know I don't have enough context for, with allusions to the prophets and accusations of possession by demons. The people in the temple won't or can't believe in Jesus as son of God, and Jesus doesn't say, "I understand; it's not easy to believe. I love you anyway, and I'll be here for you whenever you're ready for answers or a miracle or a nice talk over coffee." He doesn't say, "Don't worry. I'll fix it."

I find it puzzling that earlier in the same chapter of John, the people in the temple (the same people?) present Jesus with an adulterous woman and when he says to let he who is without sin cast the first stone, they listen, and every one of them goes outside. It's easier for them to acknowledge their own sin, to forgive the sin of another person (and neither of those are easy), than to live with Jesus saying what they can't accept.

Stones are usually easy to come by and satisfying to throw. When we pass judgment on one another, are we picking up a stone? If we look further for grace and for compassion, can we put it down again? After we practice putting down our stones, remembering our own things done and left undone, what comes next?



Anna Joyce is usually at the 10 o'clock service with her husband Mike and children David (8), Mary (3), and Sarah (1). She enjoys writing in pencil, reading seed catalogs, and playing "soccer" with her kids.

Friday, March 27

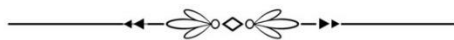
Jeremiah 20:7-13; John 10:31-42; Psalm 18

“Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” John 10:36-38

In today’s Gospel we read that the Jews want to stone Jesus because they feel he is lying about being God. Jesus’s response is simple. He says if you don’t believe me, look at my good works. Look at what I have done.

In my classroom, one of the subjects I teach is writing. It isn’t my favorite subject by any means, but over the years, I have collected some great lessons from co-workers and in-services. One of the lessons is about show, not tell. In this lesson, I instruct my students to think about their emotions. In their writing they often say things like, “I was sad,” or “He was excited,” or “She was scared.” Although those thoughts might be true, they are boring, and don’t connect the reader. I try to get them to think about times they were excited, or sad, or happy. What were they doing? What does this look like? The reader will know how someone is feeling by how you describe it. For example, “When John hit the ball, we watched it soar over the back fence. That home run clinched the win for our team. We all stormed the field and cheered. We gave John a bunch of high-fives and hugs.” When I show them that and ask the class how John is feeling, they know he is happy and excited and having the best day of his life. They connect to that because of similar experiences in their own lives.

Show, not tell, is a powerful thing. It worked for Jesus. Though the Jews still tried to arrest him, it got people thinking. Today, we aren’t seeing Jesus’s miracles such as walking on water and turning water into wine. But, when I wake up each morning, I am greeted by His good works. We are blessed each morning to be greeted by the sun and ocean here in California. When I go to Oregon, I am surrounded by the river, mountains, and the tall Redwood trees. The people I encounter each day, whether they be friends, family, or strangers, encourage me to see Jesus in each one. I strive to live like Jesus and to show in my actions what it means to follow him.



Jennifer Sams is a wife, mother, teacher, friend, and lover of cats. She loves to quilt, knit, and read in her free time. She loves to travel to Oregon and Kentucky to see her parents and kids. The St. Francis family is a blessing in her life.

Saturday, March 28

Ezekiel 37:21-28; John 11:45-53; Psalm 85:1-7

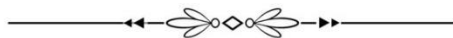
“He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God.” John 11:51-52

Today’s readings focus on some of the prophecies about the restoration of Israel as a nation and of Jesus as the Davidic king over Israel. When Babylon conquered Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel, thousands of Israelites were exiled. Ezekiel was a priest in Judah who was sent into exile in Babylon, and while he was there, he began his ministry as a prophet, sharing his predictions and visions, and preaching about God’s laws.

Ezekiel prophesied that Israel would be restored as one nation containing all of the land God had given to Jacob, and that the people of Israel would be gathered into that nation from all over the world. Earlier, the northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered by Assyria, and its people were removed and scattered. Ezekiel was talking about all of the Jewish people being unified into one nation, under Kings David and Solomon. The restoration of Israel was partially satisfied when Persia conquered Babylon and allowed the exiled Jews to return to their homeland. It was further satisfied when Israel was created as a nation in 1948 and many Jews returned there; however, it still has not been completely fulfilled, since the modern nation of Israel does not include all of Jacob’s lands.

Ezekiel also prophesied that God’s servant David would be king over the people of Israel, that they would have one shepherd, and that God would make a covenant of peace with them. Ezekiel did not know that God had also given him a vision of Jesus, the Messiah! The Gospel of John says that Caiaphas, the high priest, had foretold that Jesus would die “to gather into one the dispersed children of God.” Caiaphas knew of Ezekiel’s prophecies and was afraid that if Jesus was allowed to live, all of the people would believe in him, and the Romans would destroy the temple and the nation.

The fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecies is not yet complete. Every week in our communion service, we state the Memorial Acclamation: “Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again”. As we remember Christ’s death and resurrection during Holy Week, let us renew our faith that Christ will come again and that all of Ezekiel’s prophecies will finally be fulfilled.

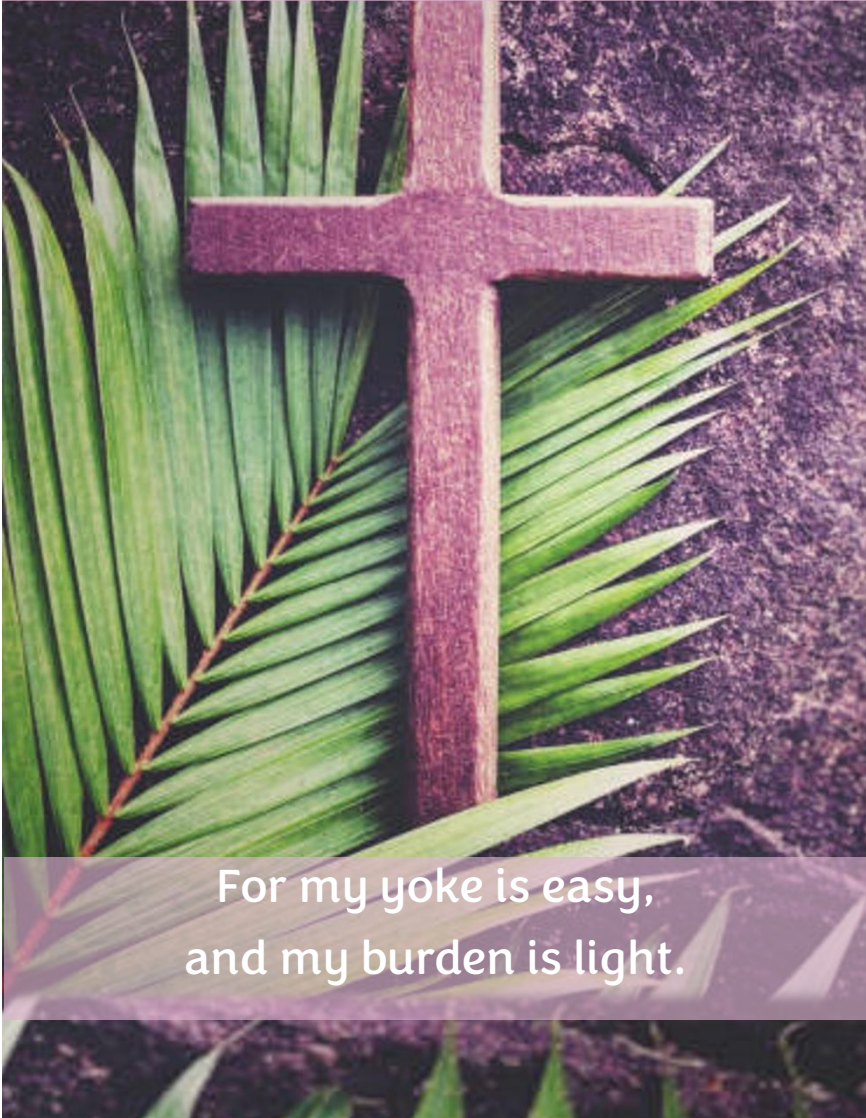


Suellen Eslinger joined St. Francis on-line in 2020 and became a member in 2021. She is a retired Aerospace engineer. Her principal hobby is music, and she sings in the St. Francis choir and plays the recorder. She loves learning about the Word of God.

Palm Sunday

March 29

Matthew 11:28-30



For my yoke is easy,
and my burden is light.

Monday, March 30

Isaiah 42:1-9; Hebrews 9:11-15; John 12:1-11; Psalm 36

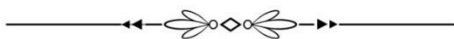
“Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair.” John 12:3

I lived on campus in college. I was on the soccer team and once several of us were hanging out in the room of a player named Heidi. My only connection to Heidi really was that of playing on the same team. She was “cool” and I remember feeling self-conscious in her room, as a decidedly *not* cool person. In my awkwardness I absently started looking around and picked up a bottle of perfume on her dresser, opening the top to smell it. Placing it back down, I clumsily tipped it over and a portion spilled out. My background was basically that of a “country hick” and I didn’t know that it was expensive perfume that I had spilled. I was embarrassed, but when I saw the look on Heidi’s face I was *horrified*. She weakly tried to reassure me that it was okay, but I knew that I had foolishly wasted something that was precious to her. In those painful minutes, the beautiful smell of that perfume was only an upsetting reminder of a bumbling action I couldn’t undo.

When I read the story of Mary’s gift of the costly perfume lavished on Jesus’ feet, I’m reminded of how something like the beautiful aroma of perfume can mean very different things to different people based on the circumstances.

In the gospel story, what did the scent mean to the different people present? To Jesus... to Judas... to Mary? Nard was a perfume traditionally used for burial. I imagine the aroma represented both love and sadness to Mary, who seemed to have a deeper understanding of what was ahead for her teacher and beloved friend. It also referenced the miracle Jesus had performed of raising her brother, Lazarus, from the dead. For Judas, it seems only to have represented wasted money. For Jesus, a tender act of love and a physical reminder of the difficult sacrifice that was drawing closer.

On this first day of Holy Week, take a moment to imagine yourself in that room filled with the scent of perfume. Reflect on what it represented — not foolish waste, but love and sacrifice, both for Mary and most profoundly, Jesus. A sacrifice given in love is never wasted. Amen.



Cara Nilsen lives in Long Beach with her wife Leah and is spending a year at St. Francis as she discerns a possible call to ordained ministry. Cara enjoys drawing & painting, British television, and walks at El Dorado Nature Center.

Tuesday, March 31

Isaiah 49:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36; Psalm 71

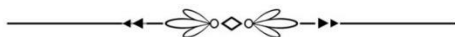
“He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me” Isaiah 49:2

“Let my mouth be full of your praise and your glory all the day long” Psalm 71:8

Middle School Girls are famous for having “sharp tongues.” Sadly, I cannot claim to have been the exception. During a church youth retreat in the Shenandoah Mountains, a fellow youth group member paid me some attention and my reaction was unkind. I do not remember what I said, nor who the boy was. What I do remember, vividly, was the Youth Group Leader who took me aside to point out my unkind behavior. She told me it had taken a lot of courage for my peer to approach me, and that I could have chosen, at a minimum, to be respectful. She said, “It will cost you very little, if anything, to be kind.” Her words were impactful and I was ashamed, but now, I am so very grateful to her.

At our next youth retreat, her message was driven home when a Sr High member gave me encouragement. It meant the world to me and lifted me up. Both interactions impacted my life positively. It has been 50 years, yet the words of these two people continue to influence how I interact with others. Their mouths were like a “sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand”, teaching me, loving me and helping me to be a better person.

Psalm 71 gives instruction as to how we are to use the weapon God has made for us. Our words should be full of “praise and glory” for Him, but also for each other. The words we choose and how we use them are important, especially in today’s world of heightened rhetoric and constant dissonance. My brother’s child uses gender neutral pronouns, and I have struggled to find a word that describes their identity while also inferring their important role in my life. I have known Avery for 26 years, it is hard for me to shake my remembered history with them. I’ve learned that the word “nibbling” is the gender neutral term for niece and nephew. By choosing this word, I can honor what is important to both of us, and they love me for making the effort. Some people have scoffed off my efforts, but it has cost me nothing to choose love for my nibbling. Words matter. Let your mouth be a weapon for love, kindness and joy!



Shelly Zak and her husband Bill have been attending St. Francis for 20 years. Shelly is so grateful for her family including her daughters, Elisabeth (29), Kimberley (28 - today March 31st, Happy Birthday Kimberley), Christine (25), and soon to be Son-in-Law Michael. Elisabeth and Michael will be married August 8, 2026 in San Clemente, CA.

Wednesday, April 1

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Hebrews 12:1-3; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

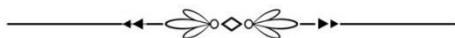
“The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.” Isaiah 50:4a

As I read the beginning of today’s verses from Isaiah, memories of several individuals who I’ve known throughout my more than 25 years at St. Francis immediately sprung to mind. People who have shared words of wisdom; others who have offered prayers; many who have blessed me with words of encouragement and loving support; others who have engaged me in thought-provoking conversations. I’ve heard sermons that have moved me; I’ve taken part in spiritual formation groups to further grow my connection to God; I’ve teamed up with volunteers at various fundraisers and functions. I’ve been lifted by people’s words when I’m weary, and I know I don’t walk alone.

Though I’ve known God my entire life, my parents were “Christmas/Easter” churchgoers; I never had a church family until Fabrizio & I came to St. Francis 26 years ago. I never knew what I was missing out on!

As a natural introvert who is more comfortable at home than out and about with a group of people, I’m grateful to have found much richness in pushing the boundaries of my comfort zone throughout the years by taking part in numerous ministries, serving on the Vestry, volunteering in a variety of capacities, or simply sticking around at coffee hour. While I was initially motivated by my excitement to “serve others,” I did not realize how much I would be served – not just socially, but spiritually as well.

God blesses each of us with “the tongue of a teacher” – sometimes when we call upon Him, but oftentimes unexpectedly and unbeknownst to us. These nuggets of wisdom often surface at random times, in seemingly “insignificant” interactions. This is but one reason why I encourage you to prioritize engaging with our church family. Life is full, and free time is limited. But your presence may be sustaining to someone who is weary, or you may end up being the recipient of much-needed sustenance yourself. You never know!



Kristina Pela is grateful for the countless parishioners she’s known throughout her time at St. Francis. Some have moved away, others have gone home to heaven, and obviously – and thankfully -- a boatload is still here. Most have left an indelible imprint upon her, for which she is forever grateful.

MAUNDY THURSDAY, April 2



Exodus 12:1-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35; Psalm 116

"The Lord protects the unwary, when I was brought low, he saved me."

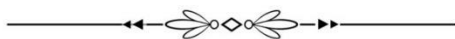
Psalm 116:6

In today's reading from 1 Corinthians, I am struck by how strong a tradition of replicating the Last Supper in the observance of Communion is to so many, in so much of our world. For nearly 2,000 years we not only repeat the actions but also the words used: "Do this in remembrance of Me." I find that hearing them never gets old, and new feelings arise each time.

I know as parents, there are many times we wish to pass along something to our children that we feel is very important to us at the time. It may be years before we ever know if they heard us or not. I think Christ must have gone to the cross thinking the same thing.

I have seen death multiple times. In my job as a nurse in the ICU, death was always near. I was with my parents when they died, but losing my child was not the same. That was my lowest point.

But God showed me how strong a community James and I had to support us before and after he died. The loving feeling I was left with after his memorial helped me to decide to work with the funeral/memorials team of the Altar Guild. That work has helped me to share with others and lift me up.



Anna Eakins has been coming to services at St Francis since January, 1971. She was baptized in the chapel, married there and her 3 children were baptized and confirmed at St Francis. Her daughter was also married in the chapel. She has 4 grandchildren who are a big part of her life.

GOOD FRIDAY, April 3



Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42; Psalm 22

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:6

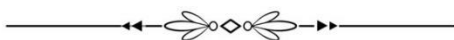
I grew up in Baltimore, and when I was young, Good Friday was a day of solemnity. It was a state holiday in Maryland, and schools and banks were closed, as were most stores and businesses. Many people had a holiday from work, which gave them time in the middle of the day to go to Good Friday services. I remember going with my mother to the 3-hour Good Friday afternoon service at our church (and staying the entire time!).

Today in California, Good Friday is no longer a day of solemnity in our culture. It is not a state or bank holiday, and most stores and businesses are open. Many Christians have to work on Good Friday, and no longer find it easy to attend a service in the afternoon (like at St. Francis) or in the evening at a Tenebrae Service (held at some other area churches). Nevertheless, we still need to find time on Good Friday to remember what this day means to us as Christians. One of the ways to do this is to spend some quiet time in contemplation with today's readings.

I suggest starting with the reading from the Gospel of John. This is the story of the arrest, crucifixion, and death of Jesus, a story that we have heard many times and that is the principal one to remember on Good Friday. This story was well known and extremely important to early Christians. It appears in all four Gospels although with some different details in each.

Next, if you have time, go to the reading from Isaiah, which is the prophecy of the “suffering servant” that foretells of Jesus’ suffering for our iniquities, and to the 22nd Psalm. The 22nd Psalm also contains verses that foretell of Good Friday events, even though this psalm was written by David crying out to God about his own sufferings. This psalm contains one of the last sayings of Jesus while on the cross, reported by the Gospels of Matthew and Mark: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1, NRSV translation)

While today we contemplate the story of that first terrible Good Friday, as Christians we have hope, because we know that we will soon get to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday morning.



Suellen Eslinger joined St. Francis on-line in 2020 and became a member in 2021. She is a retired Aerospace engineer. Her principal hobby is music, and she sings in the St. Francis choir and plays the recorder. She loves learning about the Word of God.

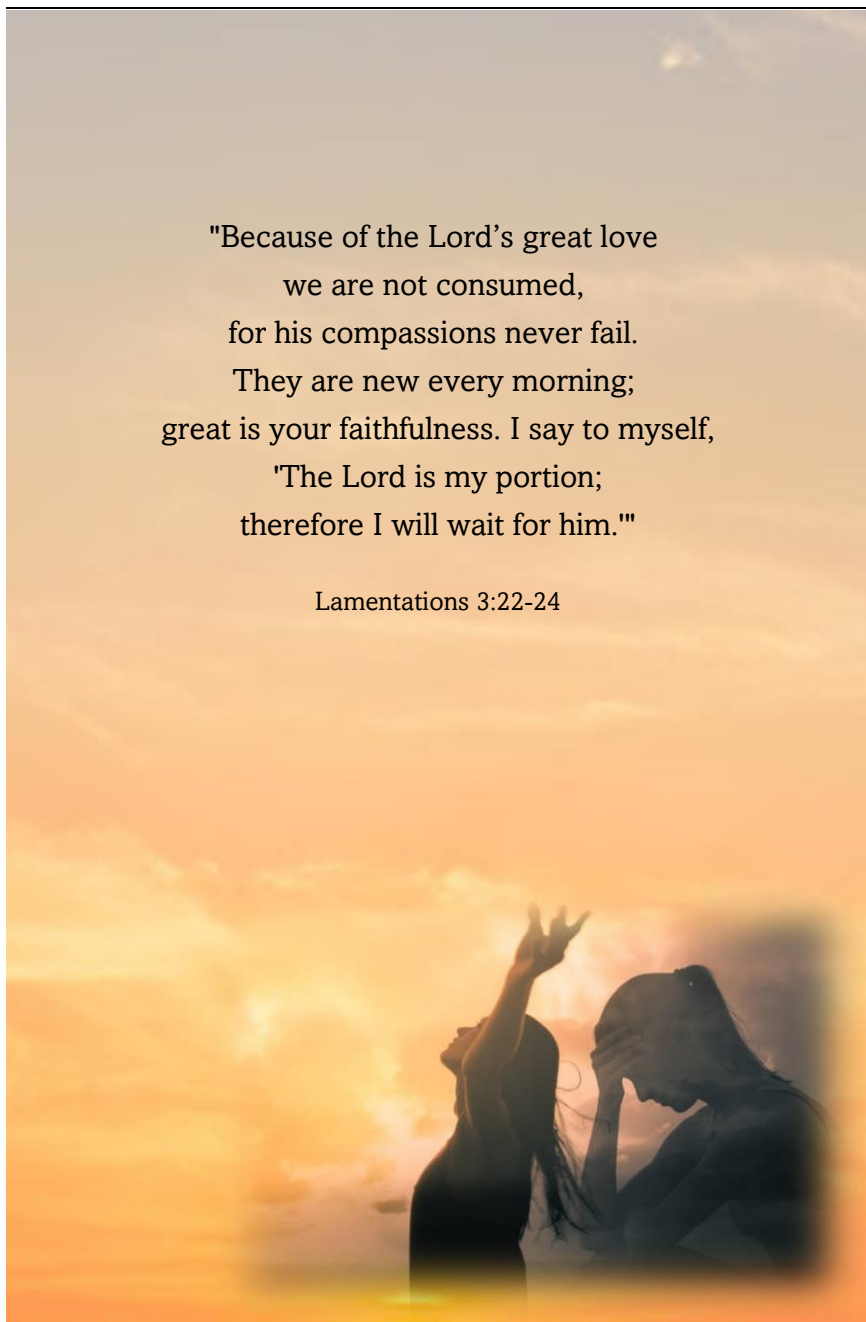
HOLY SATURDAY, April 4



Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24; 1 Peter 4:1-8; John 19:38-42; Psalm 31

"Because of the Lord's great love
we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness. I say to myself,
"The Lord is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."

Lamentations 3:22-24



A misty forest scene with tall trees and a path leading into the distance. The image is used as a background for the text.

EASTER SUNDAY

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all you who are weary
and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and
learn from me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and
my burden is light.



↔ Notes ↔

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Contributors: *The community of St. Francis*

Editor: *Kristina Pela*

Assistant Editor: Laurie Anderson

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St. Francis Episcopal Church
2200 Via Rosa, Palos Verdes, CA 90274
310.375.4617 • www.stfrancispalosverdes.org