

THE JESUS TREE

According to Matthew



Jesus as Teacher and Example

Lenten Devotional For Families
www.catholicsprouts.com

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**“Life with
Christ is a
wonderful
adventure.”**

St. John Paul II

INTRODUCTION TO THE JESUS TREE

Never heard of the Jesus Tree before? Don't worry, you're not alone.

To be completely honest, I dreamt up the Jesus Tree just a couple of years ago as a way to serve my own young family better during Lent. I loved the daily devotional of the JESSE Tree that we used during Advent, and I was frustrated that nothing like that existed for Lent.

More than anything, the Jesus Tree is a systematic, daily devotional that encourages families to get to know Jesus Christ during the Lenten season. Just as the Jesse Tree invites families to get to know God the Father through a study of the Old Testament, the Jesus Tree invites families to get to know Jesus through a study of one of the Gospels. This book focuses on the Gospel of Matthew.

This Jesus Tree devotional begins with the birth of Jesus and ends with the Resurrection. A different story is assigned to each of the 40 days of Lent. Each day you will be given a short passage of scripture, an explanation of the scripture story, a prayer for your family, and a simple image on an ornament that represents the story. If you follow this devotional each day of Lent you will arrive at Easter having read nearly the entire book of Matthew and you will

be wonderfully prepared to enter into the Paschal Mystery.

Why does the Jesus Tree include the entire life of Jesus and not just His passion?

Simply, Jesus came to Earth and took on human form to do more than just suffer and die for our sins. Jesus came to Earth to be our Teacher. Through every word He speaks and action He takes we are given a beautiful lesson that we are asked to apply to our own lives.

Jesus was and is the Great Teacher.

St. Basil the Great referred once to the Incarnation as the incomprehensible God desiring to be comprehended. Where God the Father can seem far away and hard to understand, Jesus, the God the Son, came to Earth to live as we live and therefore show us HOW to live.

This is the great gift of the Gospels. We can hear the words Jesus said, contemplate His actions and His responses, and, in each of those moments, there is a beautiful lesson waiting for us.

Jesus is the fulfillment of everything. I have chosen to call this devotional the Jesus Tree because the ancestors of Jesus, those we learn about with the Jesse Tree, are ultimately redeemed through the wood of the Cross, the true TREE of our salvation.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book was written specifically for Catholic families, although it can serve as a beautiful reflection for anyone wishing to enter into a more intimate relationship with Jesus over the course of the Lenten season.

The Jesus Tree assigns a different story from the life of Jesus to each day of Lent. To explore this story, you will be given a short scripture passage, an explanation of what we might learn from Jesus in this story, a prayer for the family, and an image placed on an ornament that can be colored and hung on a tree or added to the count-down cross.

Each day's devotional is intended to be read aloud. My family enjoys using the Jesus Tree as part of our evening prayers during Lent, but I know other families begin their day with the Jesus Tree reflection, use it as part of their homeschool day, or even read through the reflections while eating supper.

In all, there are 41 different reflections and ornaments included in this devotional, one for each of the 40 days of Lent and one for Easter Sunday. Please remember that Sundays are not included in the 40 days of Lent, so no reflection is assigned to the Sundays within Lent.

Included with the purchase of this booklet is a digital bundle that includes ornaments and two count-down crosses, ready to be printed and used along with

this booklet. All of the ornaments and countdown trees are PDF's and ready to print. You can print on any kind of paper but, for durability, I recommend cardstock. We also laminate our cross and add little velcro circles so we can use it year after year.

Included in this printable bundle are 3 different variations of Jesus Tree Ornaments.

1. Large Jesus Tree Ornaments to color: These ornaments are 3.5" in diameter and come 6 ornaments to a page. They need to be colored and after they are colored, simply punch a hole in the top and add a string so it can be hung.
2. Mini Jesus Tree Ornaments to color: These ornaments are smaller, 1.5" in diameter, and also need to be colored. They come 24 to a page. Since they are small, however, they are designed to be cut out and glued to the printable "countdown cross," also included in this bundle.
3. Mini Jesus Tree Ornaments that are FULL COLOR: I thought that some people might not care to color, so I also included a full color version of the mini ornaments. These simply need to be printed, cut out, and pasted onto the countdown cross.

What should you use for your Jesus Tree?

There are several possibilities for hanging and displaying your printable Jesus Tree ornaments during Lent. The first two ideas will work well for the large ornaments. The final two ideas are for the mini ornaments.

1. You can use a large branch removed from one of your trees. Once the branch is cut, place it in water and set it upright in your living room. This can be particularly cool because, since it is part of a live tree, when you take it into the house in late winter, it has no leaves, but as it warms and drinks water, the leaves begin to sprout inside and becomes an exciting addition to your Easter decor. Only for cold climates.
2. You can also purchase a small light-up tree on Amazon. There are many options that are not pine trees.
3. Or, you can create a cross to display your ornaments, since the Cross is really the “Jesus Tree.” One idea for doing this is placing boards together in a cross shape and pounding in nails at various places to hang the ornaments from.
4. Finally, I designed the Printable Countdown Cross for the Mini Ornaments (find it in the files included with this purchase). Once put together, this cross will serve as a Countdown of sorts since there is a circle for each ornament in the Jesus Tree. Just paste on another ornament each day. There are 2 countdown crosses included-- one to color and one that is already brown.

If you ever lose track of these digital files, you will always have access to them at **www.catholicsprouts.com/resources-jt**

Spirit of Lent

Ash Wednesday



SCRIPTURE

“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. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Matthew 6:1-6

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of ashes reminds us that Jesus came to earth to show us through His life how we are called to live. Every action He takes, every word He speaks, is an invitation to follow Him and be like Him.

Today we hear Jesus teaching His disciples how to give to the poor, pray, and fast, things we are all called to focus on during Lent. Jesus tells us, however, that just doing these things is not enough. What matters more is WHY we do them and the attitude of our heart.

When we give to the poor, are we doing it out of genuine love for the people in need, or are we doing it out of pride, so that others will think we are good and generous?

When we take time to pray, are we doing so out of genuine love for God and a desire to be with Him, or are we instead hoping that others will see us praying and marvel at our holiness?

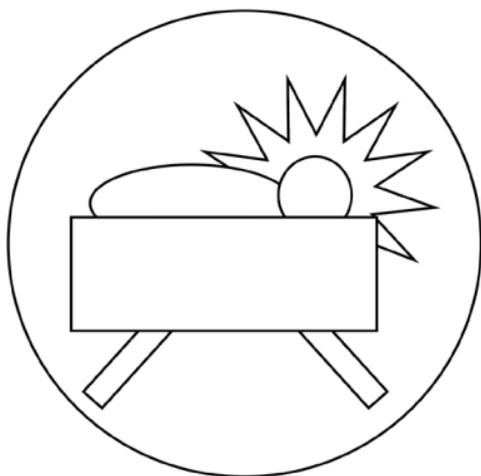
And, when we fast and deny ourselves things this Lent, do we do so out of a genuine hope that God might teach us a better way, or are we simply doing it so that our family and friends are pleased with our efforts?

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach us to model our lives after You.
Help us to remember always that the opinion of
the world doesn't matter. It is only You we should
try to please.

Birth of Jesus

Thursday after Ash Wednesday



SCRIPTURE

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

Luke 2:1,4-11

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of baby Jesus lying in a manger reminds us that we should place very little value on the things of this world.

Many of us are so used to the idea that Jesus, the King of the Universe, was born in a barn. We no longer marvel at this, but we need to continue to marvel!

Jesus chose to enter human history at a certain moment and in a certain way. He could have entered the world as a powerful, rich king, born in a fabulous castle, but Jesus instead chose poverty and humility.

With the inns all full, Jesus and His parents were cast out, welcomed only by humble animals. God then sent the angels to proclaim the birth of His son to shepherds, people who were looked down upon at the time. The wealthy and powerful were not informed of this great happening, only the simple shepherds.

What does this mean for us? It means that all the things we strive to achieve and acquire--possessions, fame, glory--all of these things are meaningless to God, and therefore they should be meaningless to us.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to value what You value, and not what is valued in this world.

Arrival of the Magi

Friday After Ash Wednesday



SCRIPTURE

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Matthew 2:1-3,7-11

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the three crowns reminds us that we are all called to journey to Jesus and bring Him the gifts we have.

Have you ever thought about the difficulties the Three Wise Men faced on their way to Bethlehem? Not only did they spend many, many long days on the backs of camels journeying across rough and dry terrain, they also had to deal with dangerous, violent characters like Herod.

Imagine also what people thought of these 3 'wise' men. People likely thought they were pretty foolish. Following a star...and at the end of it all, placing their precious gifts before a tiny baby in a barn? That's crazy.

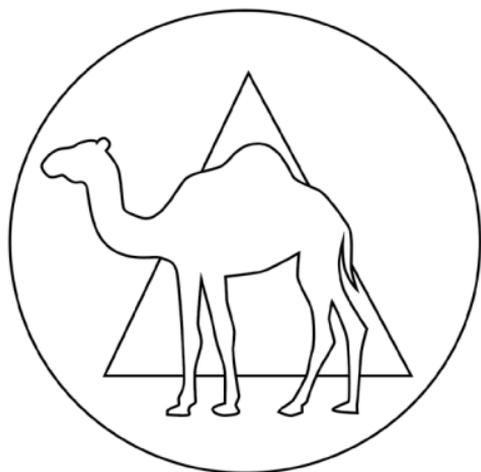
And yet, the Three Wise Men remained determined in their quest, just as we should be determined in our quest to find and honor Jesus. Maybe seeking Jesus will lead us in a different direction than those we know and love. Maybe we will look foolish to them. But, like the Three Wise Men, we should not give up or turn back. Lay your gifts at the feet of Jesus and praise Him because nothing else matters.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, help me to move closer to You, every single day. Keep my eyes fixed on You, just as the Wise Men's eyes were fixed on Your star.

Flee to Egypt

Saturday after Ash Wednesday



SCRIPTURE

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.

Matthew 2:13-16

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the Egyptian Pyramid reminds us that evil is real, and yet God will protect those who remain faithful to Him.

Jesus' life was threatened when He was still an infant. Herod, a jealous and violent king, was determined to exterminate anything and everything that threatened his power, including a Baby foretold by the prophets.

Why would God, the Creator of all things, allow the life of His Son to be threatened? Because from the very beginning God gave us the gift of free will. We can choose to love and obey Him, or we can choose to hate Him. Mary and Joseph made one choice, Herod another.

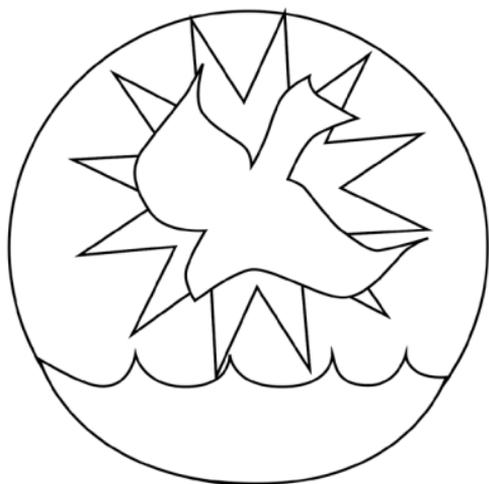
But God does not abandon us to the evil of the world. He will protect us if we listen to His voice and follow where He leads.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, protect me from the evil forces of this world. Help me to cling to You and obey Your commands.

Baptism in the Jordan

Monday of the First Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:13-17

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of dove over the water reminds us that we are God's beloved and He desires for us to seek repentance.

John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, was kind of a crazy guy. He wore furry clothes, ate bugs and honey, and spent a lot of time talking about sin. And yet, people were drawn to him and his message of repentance.

What does it mean to repent? When we repent, we acknowledge that what we have done is sinful and has damaged our relationship with God. We then make up our minds and our hearts to accept God's forgiveness, sin no more, and love God better.

That is what John was helping people do when Jesus showed up. John recognized Jesus as the Son of God and knew that He had no sins to be forgiven, and yet Jesus insisted on being baptized to show us how to live and how we should repent.

Immediately after the baptism, the heavens parted, a dove descended, and God's voice proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." God says these words to us too when we run to Him with repentant hearts and fall into His ocean of mercy and love.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to identify my sins and seek repentance. Teach me also to remain open to Your mercy and live as Your beloved child.

Temptation in the Desert

Tuesday of the First Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Matthew 4:1-11

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of Satan in the desert reminds us that the devil is real and he will tempt us to lose faith in God.

Immediately after the baptism, the Spirit lead Jesus out into the desert where He would be tested by Satan. Many people don't like to talk about Satan, and others think he doesn't exist, but as we can plainly see, Satan is real and he even tried to tempt Jesus.

Satan tempts Jesus with food, tempts Him with pride, encouraging Him to reveal His glory, and finally Satan tempts Him with power.

To all of these temptations, Jesus responds with quoted passages from the Bible. Why? Because the Bible is the very Word of God, so instead of attempting to fight Satan on His own strength, Jesus shows us that when faced with temptation, we should allow God to fight for us.

In the end, Satan is defeated and he leaves. Through this, Jesus shows us that God is stronger than Satan and all his temptations. We also learn that it is good and holy to experience hunger, humility and powerlessness out of love for God.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to trust in God when temptations come. Protect me from the wickedness and snares of the devil.

Calling the First Disciples

Wednesday of the First Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Matthew 4:18-22

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of Jesus calling from the shore reminds us that God desires to accomplish His work through us.

Today, we hear of Jesus calling His first disciples: Andrew, Peter, James, and John. Why did Jesus need disciples? Well, He really didn't.

Remember, Jesus was fully God. He could have accomplished everything on His own, but He chose to act through His disciples, just as He chooses to act through us today.

But, how can God act through me? I am so small and imperfect. You will see that the disciples were as imperfect as we are! Peter denied, Andrew and James abandoned Jesus, and they all struggled to fully believe, even after seeing miracle after miracle.

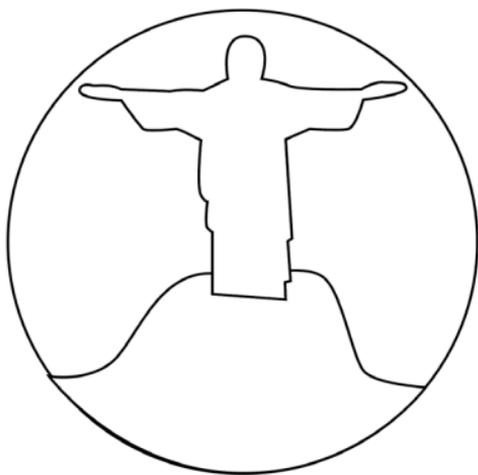
Despite these imperfections, Jesus patiently taught His disciples to live, think, and love like Him. Through those teachings and His followers, Jesus was able to redeem the whole world.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, help me to answer when You call and follow wherever you lead, confident that You will be able to do Your work through me.

Sermon on the Mount

Thursday of the First Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:1-12

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of Jesus preaching on the Mount reminds us that God's wisdom is better than the wisdom of this world.

Today, we hear Jesus teaching the Beatitudes, a list of traits that make us blessed. Although the Beatitudes paint a beautiful picture, this is a radical teaching. It was radical when Jesus first taught it and it remains radical today.

The wisdom of the world tells us that it is better to be confident than poor in spirit, to be happy than to mourn, to be strong than meek. The world also tells us that we should fight for what is ours. There is no room for mercy or peace. Make war and win. And finally, isn't it better to be loved and adored by all, than to be persecuted because we are devoted to a Man that lived and preached hundreds of years ago?

The answer to all of these objections is simple: the wisdom of humanity is foolishness to God.

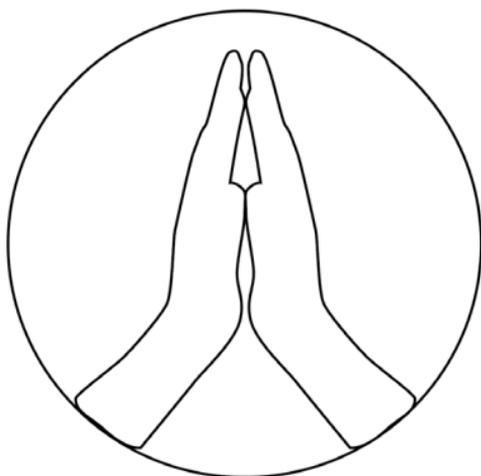
Instead, trust in God and work to please Him, not the forces of this world. For Heaven is where our treasure lies.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, please make me blessed. Help me to embrace suffering and hardship if it will bring me closer to You.

Teaching Us to Pray

Friday of the First Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

“Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Matthew 6:9-15

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The hands folded in prayer remind us of the powerful prayer Jesus taught us, the Our Father.

Throughout human history, people have worshiped all sorts of false gods, gods that they feared and cowered before and made sacrifices to. But then Jesus, God made Man, came to earth as our teacher and He taught us to call God “Our Father.”

What is the difference between the false gods of the pagans and a Father? Everything.

Where a false god demands homage and returns only fear, a Father knows His children by name and watches over them. A Father loves His children and searches for them when they stray. A Father provides for His children. A Father refuses to turn His back on His children, even when they are disobedient.

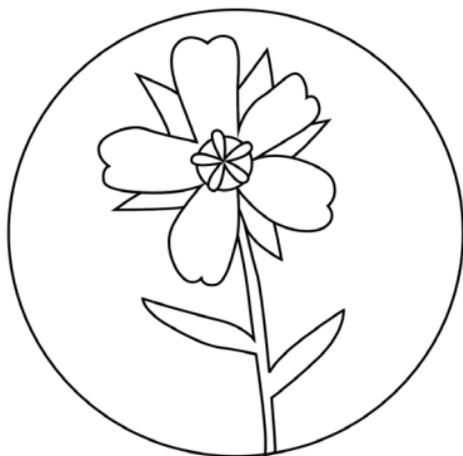
Through the Our Father, Jesus teaches us that the one, true, and powerful God of the universe is also our loving Father and that we can and should call on Him often! He will provide what we need, so we need not worry, and He is always standing ready to forgive our sins.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, draw me closer to the heart of God, my Father. Help me to depend on Him and to accept His mercy.

Lilies of the Field

Saturday of the First Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 6:25-33

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the wild flower reminds us that we need not worry. God will take care of us.

In the beginning, God created the world and everything in it. He not only created human beings, but also all of the plants and animals, the land and the water. Why did He create it all? He created it as a gift for us.

Every piece of creation, from the seemingly limitless ocean to a single grain of sand, was created by God and bears His mark. Because God is so good, He takes every opportunity to reveal Himself to us, if we would just pause and listen to Him.

Even the birds and the flowers that grow wild in the field are there to teach us about God. If God cares enough about a flower to dress it in beauty and splendor, then how much more does he care about us? God cares so very deeply about us, so we have no reason to worry!

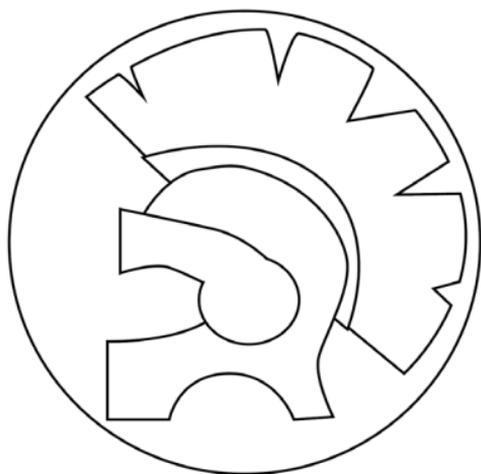
Jesus, the teacher, tells us to trust in God. Don't worry about food and clothes. Life is about so much more than those things. Allow God to take care of you!

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to entrust my needs to God.
Keep my mind focused on Heaven and not the
needs of this world.

Healing the Centurion's Servant

Monday of the Second Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress." And he said to him, "I will come and cure him." The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith." And the servant was healed in that hour.

Matthew 8:5-13

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the Centurion's Helmet reminds us that Jesus should be the true authority in our lives.

What does it mean to be an authority? The Centurion explains that he has soldiers and servants under his authority that obey him without question. He then turns to Jesus and states that he believes that Jesus also has authority.

But, what does Jesus have authority over? Everything.

At a word, the Centurion's servant is healed, without Jesus even coming to his bedside. Even illness and death are under Jesus' authority, and therefore required to obey Him.

But what about us? Are we under the authority of Jesus? Are we required to obey Him? Well, yes, but through His goodness, God has given us a choice, something we call free will. God does not desire that we are His slaves. No, we are His sons and daughters and just as we can rebel against our fathers and mothers, we can rebel against God.

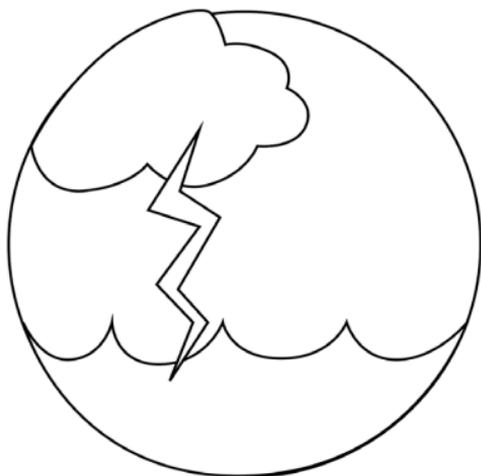
However, look at what happens when the Centurion acknowledges that Jesus has authority over him. Jesus is quick to help him and heals his servant.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, help me to accept You as the true authority in my life. Help me to obey and love You always.

Calming the Storm

Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. They were amazed, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

Matthew 8:23-27

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the storming sea reminds us that Jesus Christ is fully God.

Throughout history, various people have claimed that Jesus was just a very good man. He had some interesting ideas...but the idea that He was actually God, well they find that hard to believe.

But today, we see Jesus calm a storm. Afterward the disciples rightly wonder, "What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?" Yes, what sort of man is this?

Jesus is a man unlike any other that has ever walked the earth. He was fully man; He breathed and hurt and laughed and cried, just like us.

What is even more amazing is that Jesus was also fully God. He had power over illness and even death. He could control the winds and the seas. He also had power over those that tormented Him. He could have overpowered them in a heartbeat, just as He quieted the storm, and yet He chose, for our sake, to humble Himself and accept suffering so that we might be redeemed.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, You are the Lord of the Universe and also my brother. Teach me to choose humbleness as You did.

Healing the Paralytic

Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” Then some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk?’ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Stand up, take your bed and go to your home.” And he stood up and went to his home. When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.

Matthew 9:2-8

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the man healed from paralysis reminds us that Jesus desires to heal us, body and soul.

Imagine you are one of the people that carried the paralyzed man to Jesus. You believe that Jesus can heal your friend, but what is the first thing Jesus says? “Your sins are forgiven.” What? Did Jesus even notice that this man is paralyzed? Why is He talking about sins and forgiveness?

Jesus forgives that man’s sins first because He cares most about the state of our souls, not our bodies. In fact, it is only after the pharisees complain that Jesus heals the man’s body.

We were not made for this Earth. We were made for Heaven where our souls will go to exist forever with God. It is spiritual healing that we are in need of; healing that Jesus is happy to offer if we are open to accept it.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, heal my wounds and teach me to take good care of my soul, not just my body.

Calling Matthew

Thursday of the Second Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him.

And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

Matthew 9:9-13

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the coins on the scale reminds us that Jesus calls everyone to follow Him, even sinners and tax collectors.

In today's story, Jesus calls Matthew, the very man that wrote the Gospel we are reading. Why were the Pharisees shocked to see Jesus call Matthew, and then dine at his house? Because Matthew was a tax collector.

At the time of Jesus, the Jews lived under Roman authority. This means that they were forced to follow Roman laws and pay Roman taxes. The Romans hired certain Jews to collect taxes from their communities. The Romans, however, didn't pay the tax collectors for their work. Instead, tax collectors were encouraged to collect a little bit extra from those they taxed and keep it as their payment. As a result many tax collectors were corrupt and grew rich by overtaxing their community.

We don't know if Matthew was corrupt or not, but he was busy collecting taxes when Jesus called him. But when called Matthew stood immediately and followed Jesus.

Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus does not judge Matthew. He sees Matthew, loves him, and offers him mercy and forgiveness. Jesus offers the same love and mercy to all, no matter what they might have done in the past.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me not to judge people but instead to look on everyone with Your love and mercy.

Healing the Woman/ Raising the Girl

Friday of the Second Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread throughout that district.

Matthew 9:18-26

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the hand reaching out for Jesus' cloak reminds us that Jesus knows us and our hurts, and if we reach for Him in faith, He will save us.

Imagine how amazing it must have been to be with Jesus that day. He was setting off to raise a girl from the dead! How exciting! No wonder a large crowd had gathered and swarmed around Jesus.

In that crowd was a woman who had suffered through a painful and humiliating illness for 12 years. She believed in the power of Jesus, but she was shy. And so, in faith she reached out to touch Jesus' cloak.

Immediately Jesus turned to see who had touched Him. In another account of this story, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who touched me?" The disciples tell Jesus it would be impossible to see who had touched Him with the crowd pressing up on all sides!

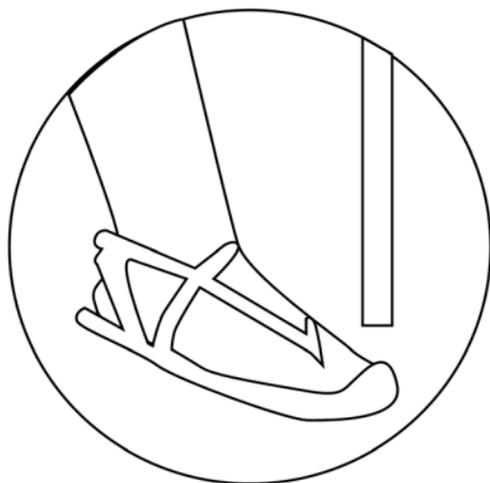
But Jesus knew the pain of the woman, as well as her faith. He cared about her, so He stopped to look her in the eye and address her. "Courage, daughter!" He tells her, "your faith has saved you." To Jesus, there are no nameless faces in the crowd. He knows and loves each of us, just as He knew and loved the women who reached out to touch His cloak.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to trust You with the secrets of my heart. Help me bring all of my pains and joys to You.

Sending Forth the 12

Saturday of the Second Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food."

Matthew 10:1-10

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the man setting out on a journey reminds us that what we have received from Jesus we are asked to share with others.

Jesus patiently taught His disciples for quite a while, but, as we hear today, there came a point where the disciples were sent out to share what He had taught them. The disciples, of course, were not the same men they had been when Jesus called them. Jesus had given them not only wisdom, but also authority over demons and illnesses, so that they might be able to cure people in the name of Jesus.

But why were the disciples sent out?

They were sent out for the same reason that we are sent out into the world. The truth and love that Jesus has shared with us is so beautiful and so powerful that we simply cannot keep it to ourselves. We must share it.

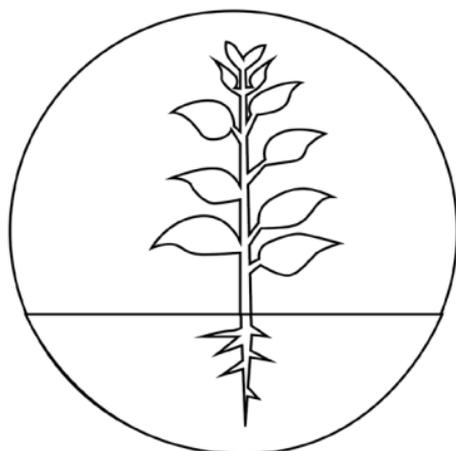
When the love of Jesus transforms our lives, we want this transformation for everyone. Therefore, we, like the disciples, head out into the world to preach and share the good news of Jesus Christ.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, thank you for the blessing of Your love and mercy. Teach me to spread Your love to others and preach the Good News to those who do not know You.

Parable of the Sower

Monday of the Third Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

Matthew 13:1-9

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the plant with deep roots reminds us that we need to plant and nourish the Word of God deep in our hearts.

Later in this chapter of the Gospel, Jesus explains to His disciples that the seed is really “the Word of the kingdom”. Some have the Word snatched from them by the evil one. Some receive the Word with joy, but they are like rocky soil and the roots can not take hold, so persecution or hardship wither it. Some receive the Word, but the thorns of this world, anxiety or the lure of wealth, choke it and the Word dies. And finally, some receive the Word and plant it deep in the rich soil of their hearts where it can bear fruit.

But, what is the “Word”? Well the “Word of the kingdom” means many things, but all of those things point back to Jesus. He is the Word Made Flesh.

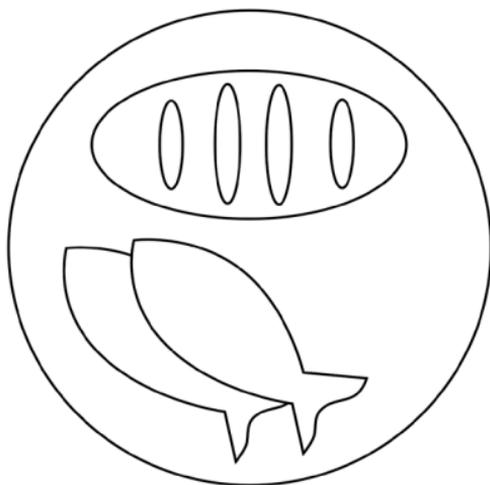
So, the question then becomes, how do we receive Jesus? Do we allow His teachings to take root in our life and bear fruit like the seeds that fell on rich soil? How can we tend to the seed of love receive as followers of Jesus, and encourage it to grow?

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, come into my life and transform me.
Take root in my heart and use me for Your holy
work.

Feeding the 5,000

Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Matthew 14:13-21

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the loaves and fish remind us that God sees our needs and will provide for us abundantly.

Some of the stories of Jesus in the Bible make it sound like Jesus was just a really nice guy. He was, of course, really nice, but He was so much more and if we look closely at the stories we can learn about who He was and who He is calling us to be.

Take the story of the loaves and the fish. Jesus takes pity on the crowd and miraculously feeds them. That's really nice, but consider this: while Jesus was praying in the desert and hungry, did He miraculously create food to feed Himself? No. Jesus did for others what He denied Himself.

Also, Jesus is God and He can do anything. Why did He make too much food then? Couldn't He see exactly how much food they would need?

Well, perhaps even in this situation, Jesus is trying to show us something about the nature of God. Not only does God hear our needs and provide for us, He provides abundantly. He is the source of all love and mercy and if we present our needs to Him, He will cover us in blessings.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to bring my needs to you and trust that you will answer me abundantly.

Walking on Water

Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Matthew 14:25-33

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of Christ reaching for Peter as he sinks into the water reminds us that we need to place our whole trust in Jesus, and keep our eyes fixed on Him.

Let's remember for a minute all that the disciples have seen up to this point as followers of Jesus. They have seen Jesus heal many people, miraculously feed 5,000 people with just a couple of loaves and fish, calm a storm, and even raise a little girl from the dead. And yet, when they see Him walking toward them on the water, they are convinced it is a ghost.

When they hear it is Jesus, Peter asks Jesus to command him to step out of the boat and come to Him. Incredibly, Peter steps out of the boat and is also able to stand upon the water! However, the force of the wind is too much and Peter takes his eyes off Jesus and begins to slip into the water. Immediately, Jesus reaches out and grabs Peter.

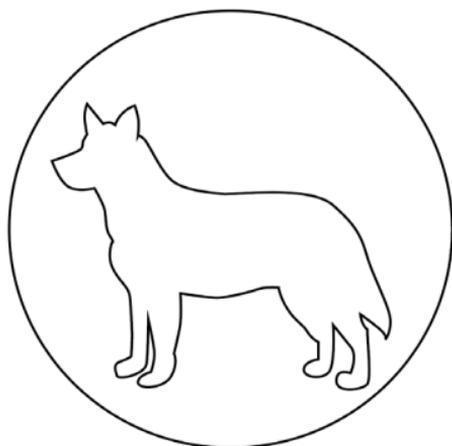
Like Peter and the disciples, we too have seen some incredible things from Jesus: answered prayers, forgiven sins, and His Real Presence in the Eucharist. And yet, when we are asked to do something brave, we too can take our eyes off our Jesus and forget to place our trust in Him. Thank goodness Jesus is always there, willing to reach out and catch us if we call.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to place my entire trust in you and not to be scared or overwhelmed by the storms of my life.

The Canaanite Woman

Thursday of the Third Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Matthew 15:22-28

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the dog reminds us that when we come to Jesus out of faith, He will answer us with love.

The story of the Canaanite Woman is a difficult story, even for adults. In fact, it might sound at first like Jesus is being mean to this woman.

First of all, the Canaanites were pagans, meaning they worshiped idols. For centuries, the Jews and the Canaanites had lived side-by-side, but not peacefully. There was violence and hatred on both sides.

Next, who are the children and dogs mentioned in the story? Jesus tells the woman that He has come to minister to the Nation of Israel, God's chosen people, His children. He does not do this to insult her. She simply was not a member of the Nation of Israel. He refers to her as a dog not to be insulting, but because dogs were an important symbol for the Canaanite people.

What is remarkable is that even after Jesus says no, even after the disciples tell her to go away, she persists and kneels at Jesus' feet in true faith and humility. She accepts that His mission might not include her, but she points out that in a family, even the dogs eat the scraps that fall to the floor, and with that Jesus, answers her prayer.

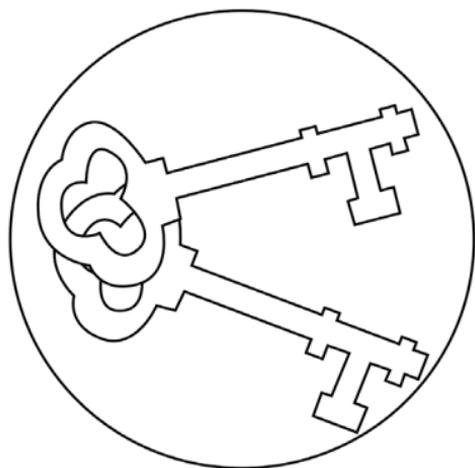
She genuinely believed in Him, and therefore He answered Her prayer.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to have total faith in You, and
You alone.

Peter's Confession

Friday of the Third Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Matthew 16:13-20

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the keys reminds us of Peter's bold confession that Jesus really is the promised Messiah.

To really understand Jesus, we need to remember that He was Jewish, a member of the Nation of Israel. What does this mean? Well, hundreds and hundreds of years before this, God had made a covenant with a man named Abraham. God promised to be their God, if they would be His people. For generations, God made the descendents of Abraham His special people, even when they rebelled against Him or forgot Him.

Through this all, God had a beautiful plan: to save the world. After the first sin in the Garden of Eden, humans were fated to sin and die, yet God had promised to send a Messiah to restore humanity and offer salvation to all. But before this could happen, God had to prepare the hearts of His people to receive this Messiah. So the Israelites waited, for hundreds of years.

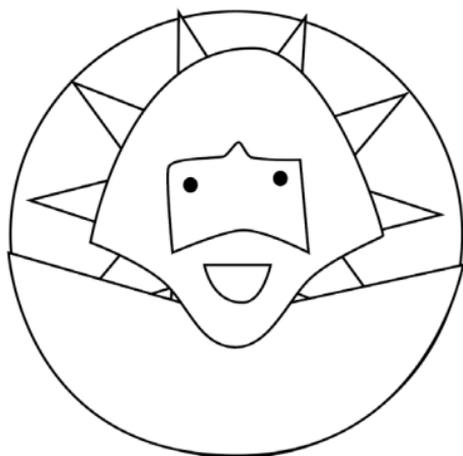
What Peter proclaims is really a HUGE deal. Those hundreds and hundreds of years of waiting were finally over! God had made good on His promise! He had sent a Messiah and that Messiah is Jesus Christ!

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, give me the excited, confident faith of Peter and help me to proclaim that You are indeed the long awaited Messiah of the world.

The Transfiguration

Saturday of the Third Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

Matthew 17:1-9

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of Jesus' shining face reminds us that Jesus is both fully man and fully God.

Imagine what it must have been like to be one of the disciples with Jesus on the mountain. To see Him beautifully transformed, His clothes shining like light, His face radiating, and then to see Him talking with the great heroes of the Old Testament: Moses and Elijah.

It must have been incredible, and a little scary! This man that you have been following, learning from, sharing your meals with, a man you thought of as your friend and teacher was not only a man, but also God! How incredible to witness that!

But then you might wonder why Jesus only showed His divine nature to three of His disciples. Why didn't He show everyone He was God?

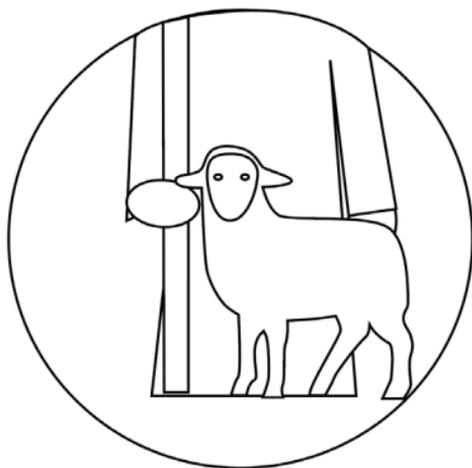
God alone knows this answer, but we can see from all that Jesus did that He desired our friendship and trust more than He desired our worship. In fact, in all of the Gospel stories, Jesus only uses His divine power to help others--to heal and save them, not Himself. Jesus was and is fully God, but He is also our brother, our friend, and our guide.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to worship you as God, and seek Your companionship as a friend and brother.

The Lost Sheep

Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

“What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.”

Matthew 18:12-14

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the shepherd and the lost sheep reminds us that God is always seeking us.

Jesus asks His disciples what their opinion is of a shepherd that leaves his 99 sheep to go and find the one bad sheep that ran away. The disciples likely told Jesus that they thought that shepherd was foolish! Why worry about that one sheep, you have 99 good sheep. Let that one go!

But this is not the nature of our God. He knows and loves each of us individually and He cares for us in a way that is unique and without end. If we stray, He will follow us. In fact, God is always seeking us. He is seeking ways to reveal Himself to us, ways to take our burden upon His own shoulders, ways to forgive us and wash us clean with His mercy.

We, however, are often like the sheep. We run from God. But, no matter how many times we run from God, He will never stop seeking us and when He finds us, He will rejoice and welcome us home, no matter how we might have sinned against Him.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to accept the love and mercy of God. Help me to stop running away and instead allow God to find me and carry me home.

Blessing the Children

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

Matthew 19:13-15

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of Jesus holding the hands of a child reminds us that Jesus values our smallness and our childlike trust in Him.

When Jesus stopped to play with and bless the children, His disciples complained. Why was Jesus wasting His time with kids? He should be teaching important, educated people, not children!

But Jesus sharply disagreed. Jesus even goes on to say that the “Kingdom of Heaven belongs to these”. Is He saying that children will get into Heaven before adults that have learned and studied their faith? He seems to be, but how can this be?

Once again, Jesus is showing us what He values. He values the traits of a child: complete trust, pure love, and exuberant joy.

The children looked at Jesus and they knew He was the Messiah. They didn’t need proof, they just trusted and loved.

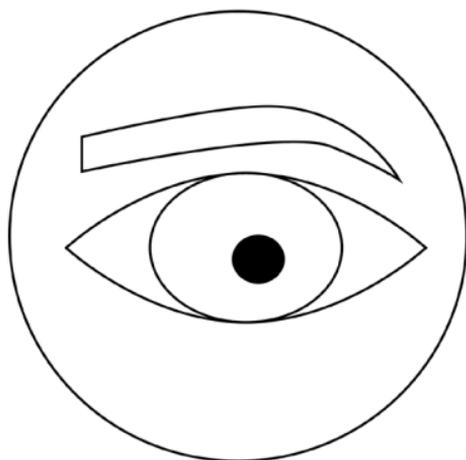
Jesus tells us all, no matter what age we are, that we need to act more like children, not like stuffy adults. We need to trust Him, love Him, and burst forth with joy simply because of who He is.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to be like the children in the Gospel. Teach me to trust, love, and rejoice simply because You are the Messiah.

Healing the Blind Man

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet; but they shouted even more loudly, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!" Jesus stood still and called them, saying, "What do you want me to do for you?" They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.

Matthew 20:29-34

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the eye that has been restored with sight reminds us that Jesus truly hears our prayers and petitions, and He has pity on us in our need.

Many of the stories of Jesus involve Him caring for people that His disciples and the crowd don't think He should bother with. Whether it is children or some poor blind men, those that followed Jesus saw these groups of people and thought they weren't worth Jesus' time.

But, Jesus disagreed.

Two blind men sat along the road and called out to Jesus as He passed. They called Him "Son of David", meaning that they believed He was the Messiah. While the others told them to be quiet, Jesus stopped, went over to them, and asked them what they wanted.

"To See!" they responded. Immediately Jesus is moved with pity for these men and He heals them. Most beautiful of all, when these men's eyes were opened and they could see, the first image they took in was God himself in human form, Jesus Christ.

Not only were their physical eyes opened, but their eyes of faith were opened as well. Healed they jumped up and followed Jesus.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to bring all of my needs and fears and hopes to you. Open the eyes of my heart so that I can truly see You in all of Your glory.

Entering Jerusalem

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Matthew 21:6-11

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the palm branches reminds us of the changeable nature of human hearts, and the constant, loving nature of God's heart.

What an incredible welcome Jesus received when He entered Jerusalem! A crowd gathered and carpeted the road for this Holy Man. They screamed out "Hosanna" as He passed by, proclaiming that He really was the Holy One of God!

And yet, just days later in the same city, Jesus would once again walk past a crowd gathered in the streets of Jerusalem, but this time it would be an angry crowd, eager to see Him crucified.

The shocking truth is that many of the same people that greeted Jesus with palm branches also spat at Him and called for His crucifixion.

How can this be? As humans we are weak and swayed by the forces of the world and sometimes led to do terrible things.

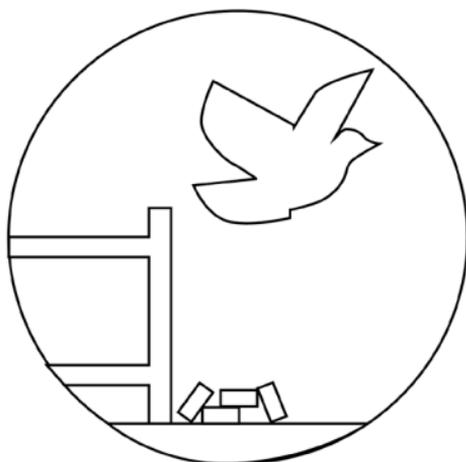
But Jesus is not like that. Jesus was firm and unshakeable in His choice to love. When He entered the city and was greeted like a king or prophet, He did not boast or celebrate. And when He was led through the city under the weight of the Cross, He did not scream in anger or despair. He simply continued to love.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus. Teach me to love like You, with a deep and constant love that will not be shaken by moments of glory or moments of defeat.

Cleansing the Temple

Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, "It is written,

'My house shall be called a house of prayer';
but you are making it a den of robbers."

The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read,

'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies
you have prepared praise for yourself?'"

Matthew 21:12-16

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The overturned table and spilled coins remind us that Jesus calls us to drive out all of the distractions in the temple of our hearts that take us away from prayer and communion with God.

The story of Jesus cleansing the temple is the only time we see Jesus mad. This gospel passage tells us He flips tables and, in John's gospel, we are told that Jesus even made a whip out of cords to drive people out of the temple.

Why is He so mad that people are busy buying and selling in the temple? After all, in the Jewish faith people needed to present an animal sacrifice in the temple at certain key moments of a person's life.

Jesus explains that the temple was made for the worship of God, and it was being used as a place of business and greed, where sellers took advantage of those coming to worship God.

But, we know that we don't just worship God at church. We were created to worship God with every moment of our lives. Therefore, Jesus wants to not only drive the greed and distraction from churches, but also from our hearts.

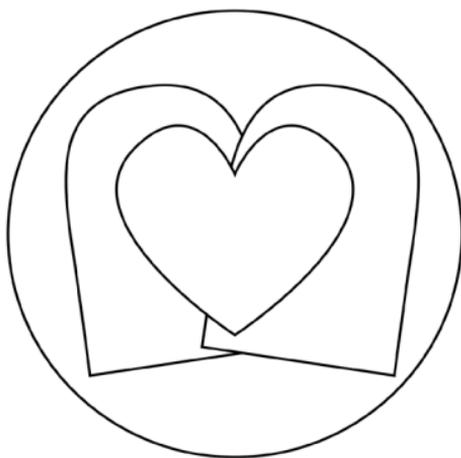
What are the things we place above God in our heart? How can we allow Jesus cleanse our hearts of these things, just as He cleansed the temple?

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to make the temple of my heart a sacred and holy place where You are my only focus and love.

The Greatest Commandment

Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Matthew 22:34-40

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the stone tablets and the heart remind us that as followers of Jesus we are called to love God and our neighbor.

The Pharisees were trying very hard to find a reason to discredit Jesus, so they posed a difficult question to Him, “Which commandment is the greatest?” The Pharisees saw this as an impossible question to answer. No matter what Jesus said, they could argue that He was wrong and proclaim Him to be a fool.

But Jesus refused to fall into their trap. He gave the perfect answer that not only silenced His enemies but also teaches us just how simple being a follower of Jesus is: All we must do is love God and love our neighbor.

Often we try to complicate our faith. Although all of the details and teachings of our Faith are important, they must only be tackled AFTER we have offered all that we are to God, and look with love on our neighbor. Without love, none of these details matter.

This was the major sin of the Pharisees. They knew all of the teachings of their faith perfectly, and yet they failed to love. Therefore, they were hypocrites and their faith was hallow.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to truly give myself entirely to You and then, filled with Your love, teach me to love all I encounter.

Anointing at Bethany

Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, “Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.” But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

Matthew 26:6-13

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the alabaster jar of costly oil reminds us that nothing we offer to Jesus will ever be a waste.

It can be hard to think about giving something away without getting anything in return. When you have a job, you will give your time and skills in exchange for money, and that money will be exchanged for food and other things we need to live. Even when we generously give to the poor, we receive a feeling of goodwill in exchange for that charitable deed.

But, in this Gospel passage we see a woman “waste” expensive oil on Jesus. The disciples complain about the waste saying that, at the very least, this oil could have been sold and the money used to feed the hungry, but Jesus silences them. He welcomes the woman’s gesture and encourages us to act like her.

Yes, Jesus encourages us to “waste” things on Him. He wants us to freely offer what we have to Him without any hope of getting anything in return. When we give Jesus 15 minutes of prayer we should be like Jesus who gave us everything on the Cross, with no expectation of being repaid.

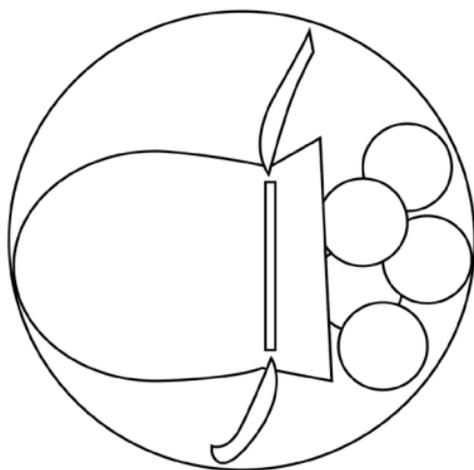
Any true gift is, in a sense, a waste. We offer what we have to someone we love with no strings attached.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to give everything to You, just as You did for me on the Cross.

Judas' Betrayal

Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him. When it was evening, Jesus took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" Jesus answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."

Matthew 26:14-16, 20-25

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the pouch filled with silver reminds us that we can all be tempted to betray Jesus for money and power.

We know that Judas betrays Jesus, but it is important to understand why. Like the other disciples, Judas walked away from his life to follow Jesus. Jesus chose Judas to be part of His inner circle of followers. Judas sat at the feet of Jesus and marveled at His teaching. He witnessed miracle after miracle and saw the great love Jesus had for all.

So why did Judas betray Him? Likely, it was greed.

At various places in the Gospel, we are told that Judas “kept the purse”, meaning he managed everyone’s money. Rich people very likely offered donations to Jesus’ ministry and all of that money went into one bag, that Judas managed. The money was used to pay for food and the needs of the group, or offered to the needy they met. We are also told that Judas stole from the group’s money. Therefore, when he heard that he could become rich if he betrayed Jesus, he could not resist the temptation.

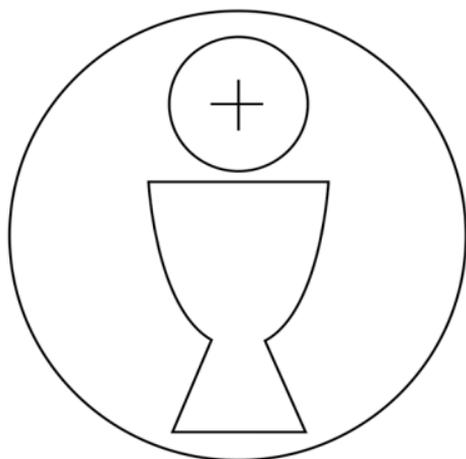
But Judas is not the only one who has betrayed Jesus for money. Anyone tempted to do immoral work for money, to steal from a friend or give less to the church or the poor, simply because they are greedy, is also choosing to betray Jesus for money.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to resist the temptation of money and power and instead, place my love and trust in You alone.

The Last Supper

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Matthew 26:26-30

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the chalice and host reminds us of the profound gift of the Eucharist, where we are called to consume the real Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was a member of the Jewish faith and because of this, He observed the Passover. Centuries before, the ancestors of Jesus, the entire Israelite Nation, was enslaved in Egypt. God heard their cries and called Moses to lead the people to freedom. Through Moses, God sent a series of plagues on the Nation of Egypt. The last plague, the Passover, where God's angel passed through Egypt and struck down the first born of every family, finally convinced Pharaoh to free the Israelites.

God spared His people from this last plague by having them mark their houses with the blood of an unblemished lamb and eat a special passover meal.

What the Jewish people did not realize is that the Passover was just the first half of the story. Jesus offered a dramatic conclusion to these events at the Last Supper and on Good Friday. Jesus Himself became the unspoiled lamb whose blood protects us from destruction. And not only that, He offers us His Body and Blood as real food and drink so that we might be fully connected to Him.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to marvel at the wonder of the Eucharist and fully believe in the True Presence.

Agony in the Garden

Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Matthew 26:36-46

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of Jesus' hands folded in prayer in the garden reminds us that our prayers can comfort the suffering heart of Jesus.

The Agony in the Garden is a powerful reminder of Jesus' humanity. He weeps and even begs God to spare Him from the horrors of the coming day. He knows what He is being asked to do and He responds as a human that will feel every pain, physical and emotional. In the end, however, He shows us how important it is to remain obedient to God.

While enduring His agony in the garden, His only comfort is His disciples. He begs them to stay awake and support Him in prayer. He is grieved when He returns again and again to find them asleep. Why does this bother Jesus? He is God after all, what does He need our prayers, or the prayers of His disciples for?

In truth, Jesus doesn't need our prayers. He is more than able to accomplish everything on His own. Yet, He desires our prayers because they are a comfort to Him. Isn't it incredible to know that we have something we can offer Jesus as a gift in His moment of agony? Our prayers are a beautiful gift for Jesus, and a comfort to His suffering heart.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me how much you value my prayers and company. Help me to stay awake with You as You approach Your suffering.

Jesus is Arrested

Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?" At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Matthew 26:47-56

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the sword and torch remind us of the way Jesus willingly went to His suffering and death.

The soldiers sent by the High Priest came armed with swords and torches, as if they were in pursuit of a criminal. Humbly, Jesus allowed Himself to be arrested and led off to His torture and death. Jesus is God. He had calmed storms, raised the dead, and expelled demons from people. He easily could have protected Himself from a few soldiers. But He didn't do this.

When one of His disciples pulled out a sword to defend Him, Jesus rebuked him. Unlike the disciples, Jesus had fully accepted what was going to happen and He allowed it to happen, knowing that His suffering and death would redeem the whole world.

Jesus was ready to give the gift of Himself.

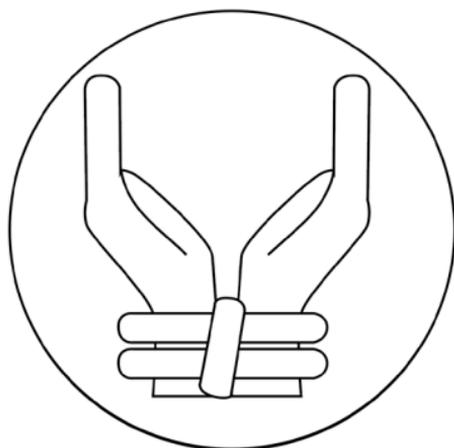
Once Jesus is arrested He is forced to face the coming events alone. Every one of His disciples abandoned Him. And so, like a lamb led to slaughter, Jesus is the willing sacrifice that chose love rather than saving Himself from pain, suffering, and humiliation.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to more perfectly accept the will of God. Show me how to stop fighting for control and instead allow God to direct my steps.

Before the Sanhedrin

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent



SCRIPTURE

Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" The high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?" They answered, "He deserves death." Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, saying, "Prophesy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?"

Matthew 26:57-68

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of Jesus' hands tied as He stands before the Sanhedrin reminds us of how we are called to act when faced with persecution.

After being arrested, Jesus was bound and taken to the High Priest. Although it was the middle of the night, many of the elders and scribes had gathered, all with the intention of finding evidence to condemn Jesus.

Men stood and told lies about Jesus. The soldiers beat Him and spat upon Him, yet Jesus did not fight back or seek to defend Himself. Instead, He remained silent.

When pushed to respond He did so boldly. He quoted scripture that stated plainly that He was indeed the Son of Man, the Messiah. Enraged, the High Priest ripped his robes and condemned Jesus to death.

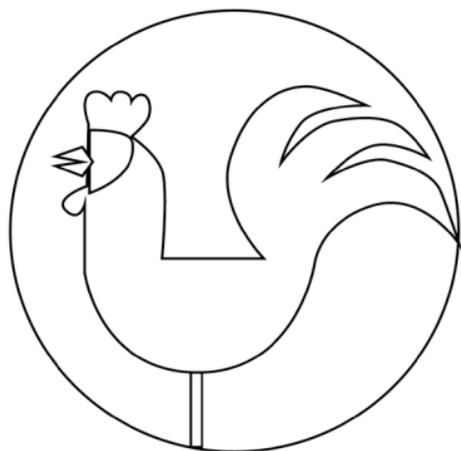
As followers of Jesus, it is possible that one day we will face persecution, that we will be abused and lies will be told about us too. And, like Jesus, we are called to stand bravely while being persecuted. Don't scream out in your defense. Don't hit back. Instead, allow God to supply your defense and offer your suffering up to Jesus as a beautiful gift.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to bravely face persecution as You did before the Sanhedrin. Show me how to love even when I am being abused and lies are being told about me.

Peter Denies

Monday of Holy Week



SCRIPTURE

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before all of them, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Matthew 26:69-75

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the rooster reminds us that it is a serious sin to deny Jesus Christ.

Unlike the other disciples, Peter did follow Jesus to the court of the High Priest, but he remained outside while they questioned and accused Jesus. While waiting, a few of those gathered there realized that Peter was a follower of Jesus. They were eager to make fun of Peter for this.

Filled with pride and fear, Peter denied even knowing Jesus. He became furious and even swore that he was not one of Jesus' followers. He denied three times, and then a rooster crowed and he was reminded that Jesus had predicted his betrayal.

Denying Jesus is a major sin and Peter knew this. In a very real way, Peter betrayed Jesus just as Judas did. Peter denied Jesus to protect himself. Where Judas chose money over Jesus, Peter chose to care more about what others thought of him than remaining loyal to the Lord of the Universe, Jesus Christ.

And yet, Peter went on to be the the very first Pope and leader of the Christian Church. The difference between Peter and Judas is that Peter immediately wept and begged God for forgiveness, and because God is an ocean of mercy, Peter was forgiven.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to remain loyal and devoted to you in every situation, even when I am being made fun of for my faith and holy life.

Before Pilate

Tuesday of Holy Week



SCRIPTURE

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Matthew 27:11-14, 16-18, 20-22, 24, 26

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the Roman column and laurel leaves reminds us of Pontius Pilate and how, when we refuse to stand against evil, we become part of that evil.

At numerous times in this Gospel passage, we are told that Pontius Pilate knew it was wrong to send Jesus to His death. He knew that the Chief Priests and elders had brought Jesus before him out of envy. He received word from his wife that she had dreamt of this innocent man, and that Pilate should release him. And yet, Pilate allowed Jesus to be crucified.

Like Pilate, the members of the crowd also refused to stand up to evil, and therefore became part of that evil. Pressured by the leaders of their faith, they screamed for Jesus to be crucified. Very likely, some of those screaming for His death had also greeted Jesus as the Messiah just a few days before, and yet, out of fear of their leaders, they begged for the life of Barabbas, a known murderer, and sent Jesus to His death.

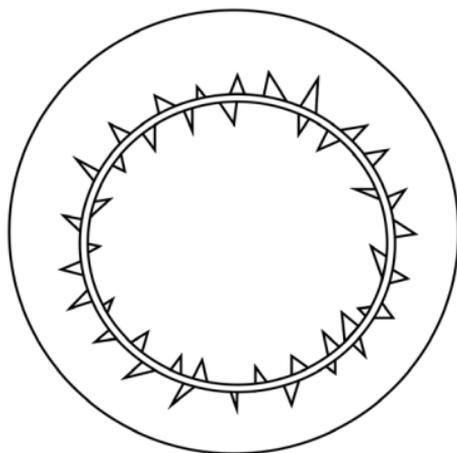
Even the disciples became part of this. After abandoning Jesus, they are simply not there to stand up against evil. And so, with no one to stand up to evil, everyone became part of it.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to be brave and stand up for good in the face of evil, even when it is hard or dangerous.

Mockery of the Soldiers

Wednesday of Holy Week



SCRIPTURE

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Matthew 27:27-31

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the crown of thorns reminds us that although Jesus was God, He choose to endure pain and anguish out of love for us.

After Jesus was cruelly whipped and stripped of His clothes, the soldiers wove a crown out of sharp thorns and pressed it down on Jesus' head. Then, they began to mock Jesus.

Perhaps we can imagine how painful and humiliating this was for Jesus. What we can't imagine, however, is what it would have been like to endure these things when you have the power to stop them. What it would have been like to CHOOSE to endure these terrible things.

Remember, Jesus is the King of Kings. Jesus is crowned with glory and power, and yet, He allows the soldiers to crown Him with mockery, pain, and humiliation. At any moment, He could have called down legions of angels to defend Him, but He didn't do this. He accepted His suffering and through it all, continued to love.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to suffer as you did, out of genuine love.

The Crucifixion

Thursday of Holy Week



SCRIPTURE

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.'"

Matthew 27:32-43

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of Jesus carrying the Cross reminds us that what the world sees as weak and foolish, is not seen as weak and foolish by God.

By all worldly accounts, on Good Friday Jesus was a failure. Even His closest friends had abandoned Him as He struggled beneath the weight of the Cross. He staggered and a complete stranger was forced to help Him carry His Cross. When they reached Golgotha, Jesus was nailed to the Cross and executed as if He were nothing more than a common criminal.

To add to His humiliation, leaders of His faith came to mock Him. “Why doesn’t He save Himself?” they teased. “He said He was the Son of God, well prove it!”. In the eyes of the world, Jesus was a failure and a fool.

But what the world could not see was plain to God. Jesus had chosen to die for us. He knew that His death had great value and that refusing to use His power to save Himself would, in the end, save the whole world.

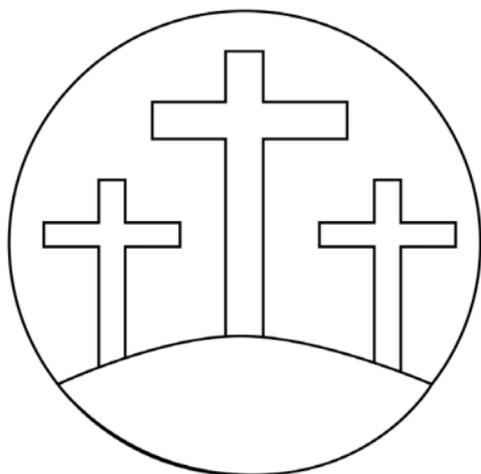
That moment when a humble man allowed Himself to be nailed to the Cross was not a moment of defeat, it was a moment of profound victory over sin.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to see with eyes of faith. Help me to reject the wisdom of this world, and instead see as God sees.

Dies on the Cross

Friday of Holy Week



SCRIPTURE

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Matthew 27:45-54

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the Cross reminds us of the profound sacrifice offered for our sins.

After hours of suffering, Jesus bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

This quiet moment shook the world. The veil in the temple was torn, an earthquake erupted, and the dead came out of their tombs! Why such a commotion?

Because Jesus was the Son of God. At the moment of Jesus' death, His Heavenly Father grieved as any father would. Jesus, His Beloved Son, had come into the world to love and serve, only to be dismissed, abused, and crucified. And God was heartbroken.

From the very beginning, God has been a faithful and loving Father. He guided His chosen people, the Israelites, through countless struggles and forgave them again and again. He tested their faith, but His love was always greater and filled with mercy.

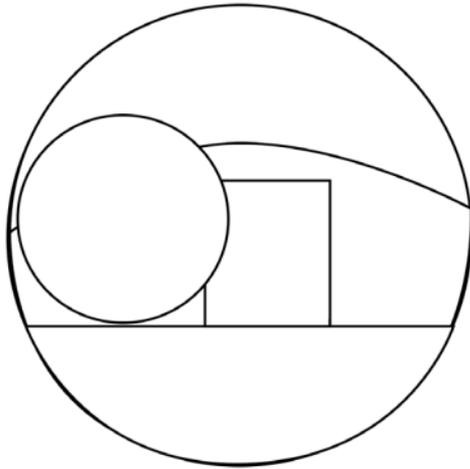
The most profound moment of generous, Fatherly love any of us have ever experienced was the moment Jesus offered Himself up on the Cross for our sins. In that moment, God gave us everything, He refused to hold anything back, even His beloved Son. God was willing to break His own heart so that we might know how much He loves us.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach me to love with the generous and endless love the Father, and to embrace suffering with love.

Laid in the Tomb

Saturday of Holy Week



SCRIPTURE

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

Matthew 27:57-61

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the tomb reminds us that often we are called to wait with Jesus in moments of sorrow, but if we stay near to Him, He will fill us with joy.

There were very few left to care for Jesus after He had died on the Cross. Joseph of Arimathea asked for His body and laid Him in a stranger's tomb. Jesus' mother was there, as well as a few other women, but the Man who had once been surrounded by vast crowds of thousands was largely abandoned.

Crushed and confused, a few of the women that had loved Jesus remained outside His tomb and wept. They believed that Jesus truly was the Son of God, despite the fact that He had just been killed. Devastated, they did not abandon their faith, as they did not abandon Jesus, but all they had to offer Him now was their tears.

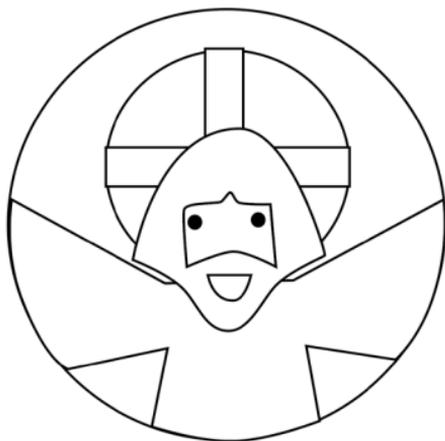
The tomb was a place of great sorrow that night. But, on Easter Sunday, that same tomb would become a place of unsurpassable joy. With Jesus the sorrow is part of the story, but it is not the end of the story.

OUR PRAYER

Oh Jesus, teach us to wait with you, even in moments of pain and suffering, because we know that with You, pain will always be followed by joy.

The Resurrection

Easter Sunday



SCRIPTURE

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Matthew 28:1-10

CALLED TO FOLLOW

The image of the Risen Lord reminds us that for our sake Jesus has conquered everything, even death.

Death is something all humans will one day experience. We often approach death with dread and uncertainty, but as followers of Jesus, we have no reason to fear.

Jesus entered death, willingly, so that He might conquer it, for all of us.

It might appear that death is the end of the story for us, but when Jesus rose from the dead, He changed everything. He destroyed sin's hold on us by offering Himself up as the eternal sacrifice. We are washed clean with His blood and when we endeavor to be His followers, we too will be raised from the dead and join Jesus in eternal life in Heaven.

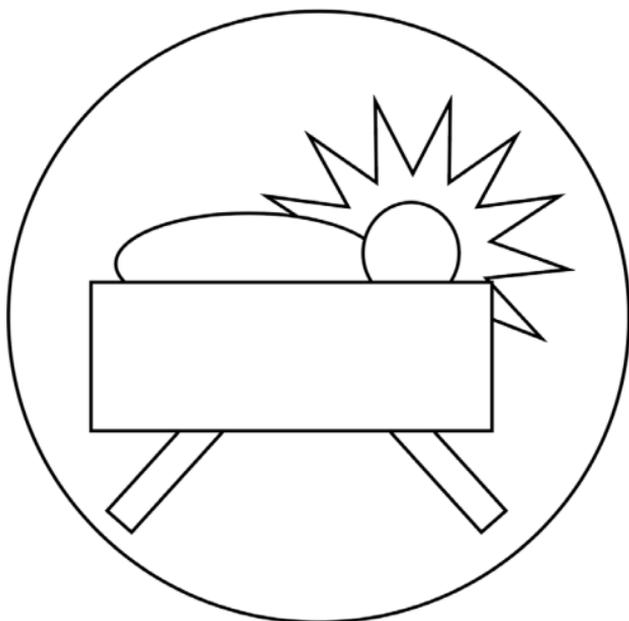
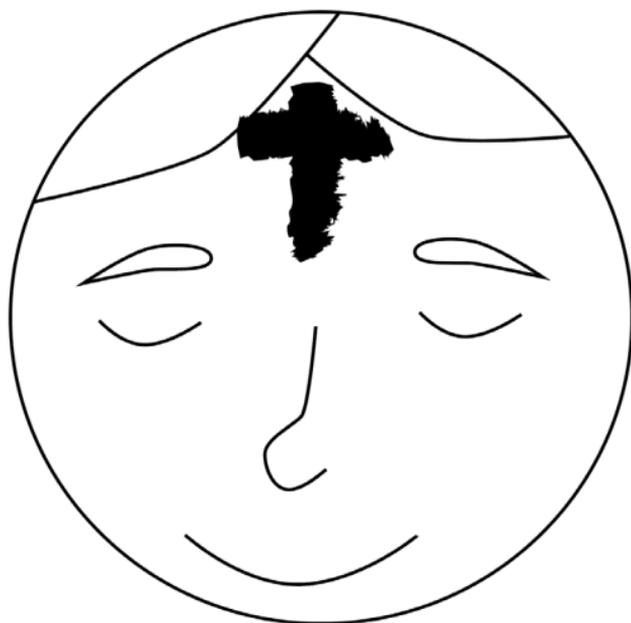
Jesus is the champion. He willingly embraced pain, humiliation, and death so that He might conquer death and free the whole world. That is the miracle and gift of Easter. That is the beautiful plan of God.

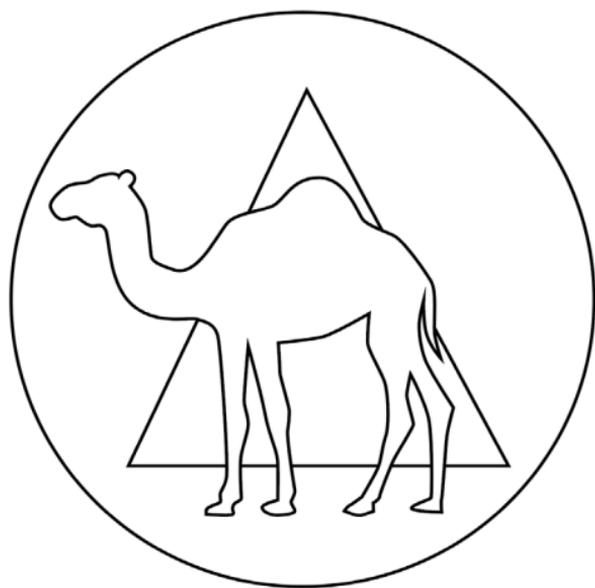
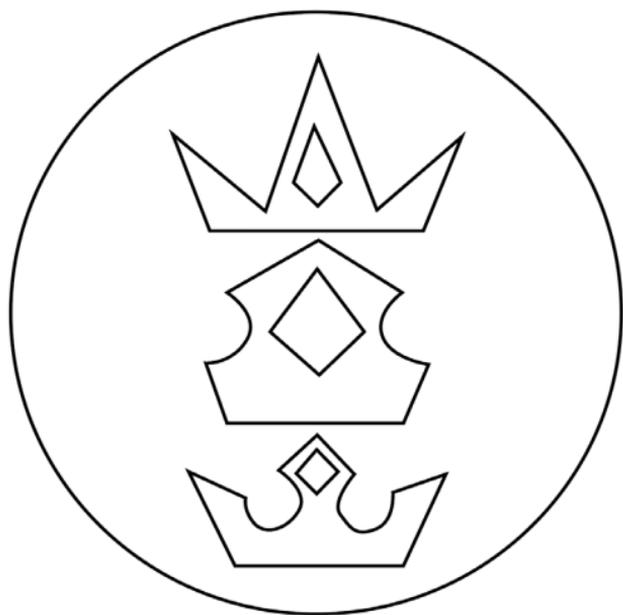
We are an Easter People! Live in the joy of the resurrection and rejoice in the victory of our good and faithful teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ.

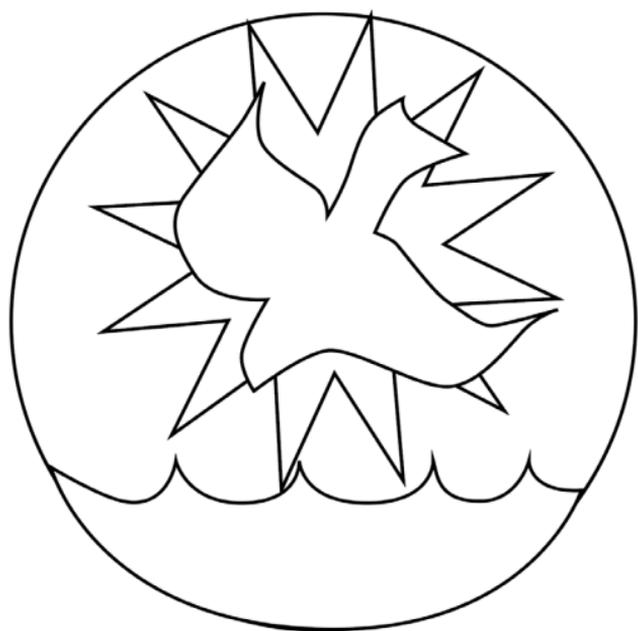
OUR PRAYER

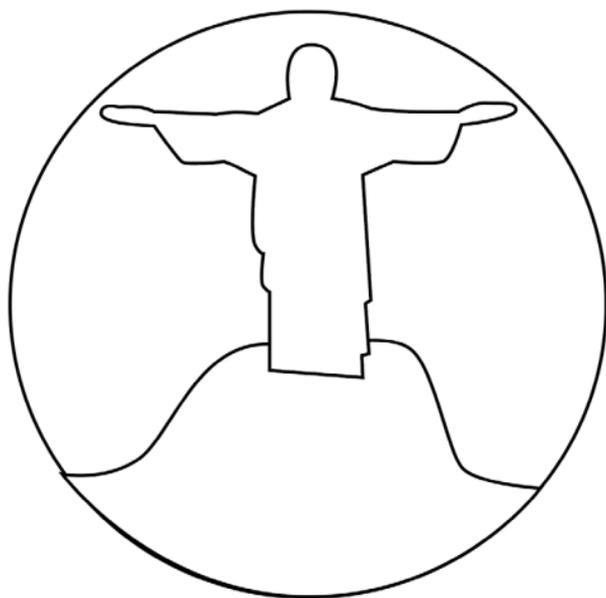
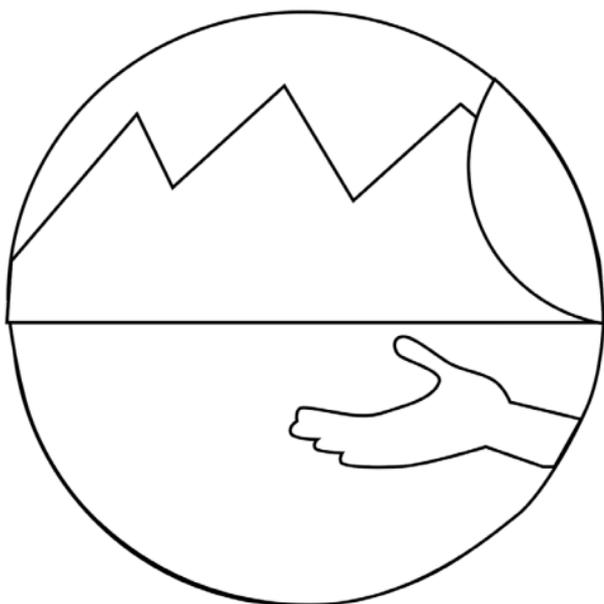
Oh Jesus, teach me to rejoice in Your victory.
Help me to follow You more perfectly so that I
might join You in Heaven when this life is over.

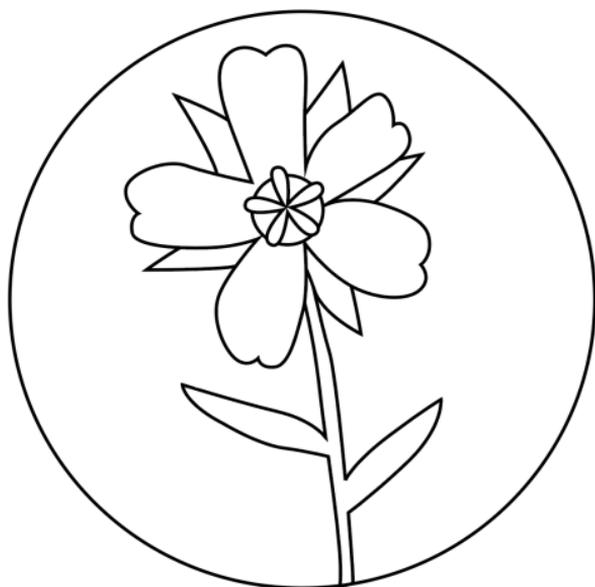
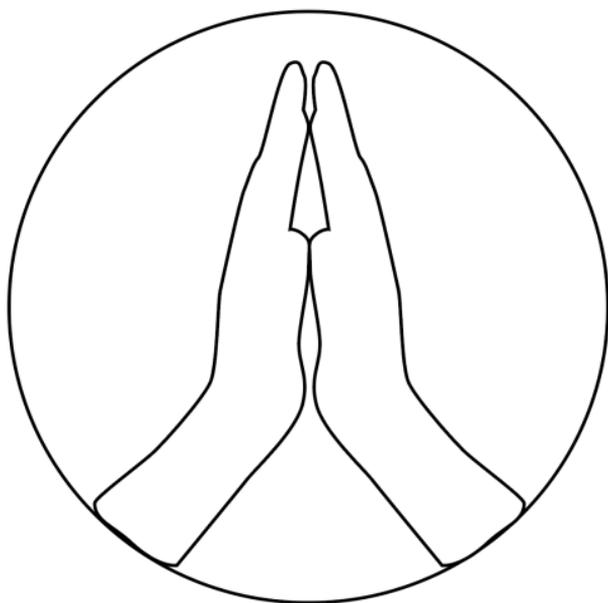
ORNAMENTS

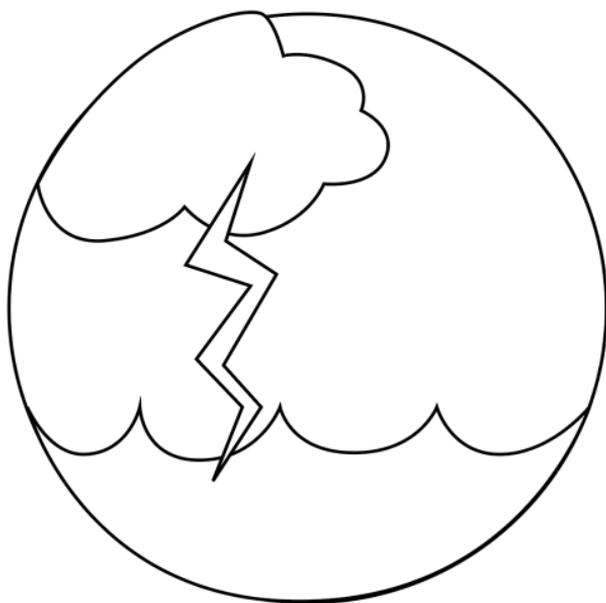
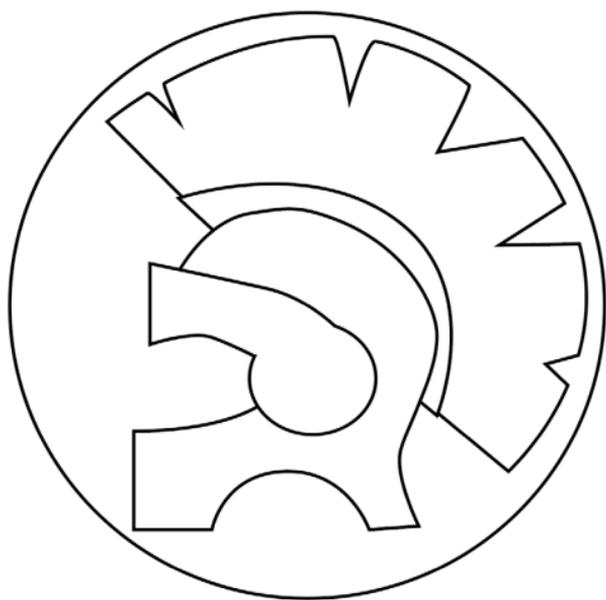


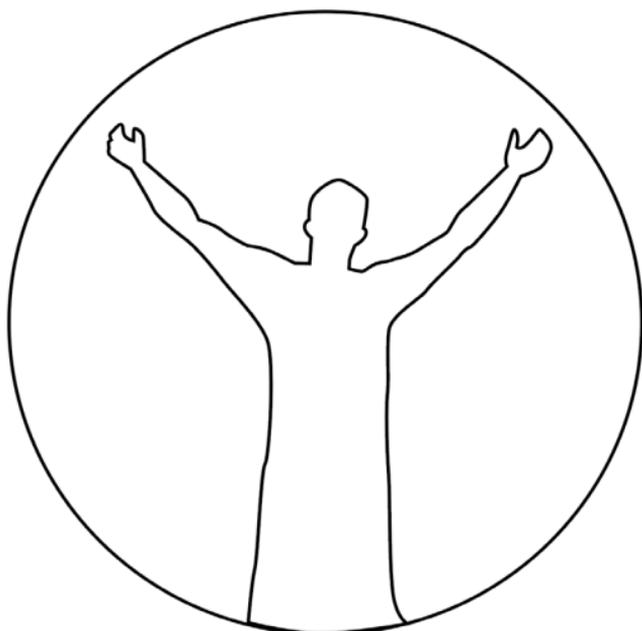


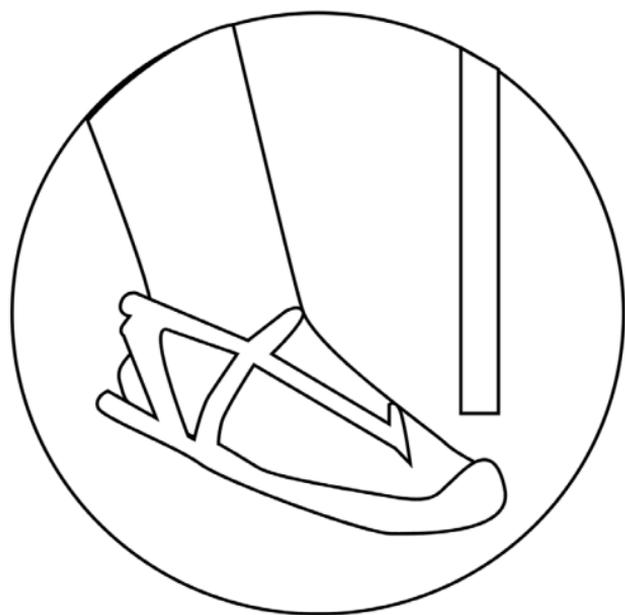
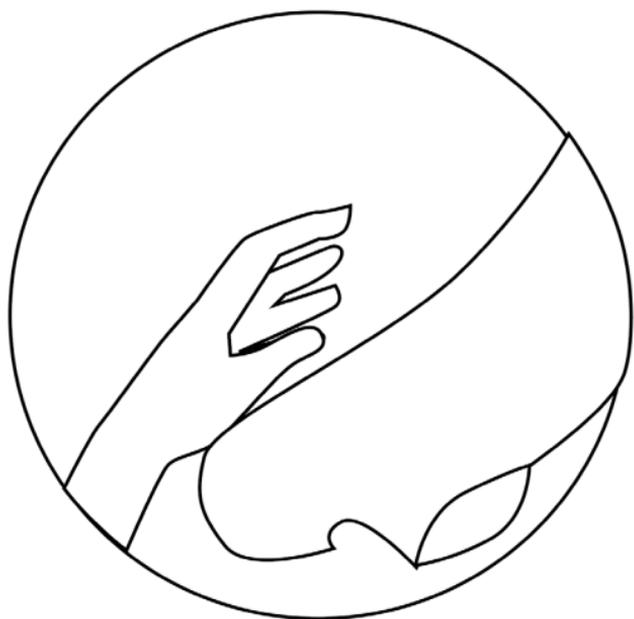


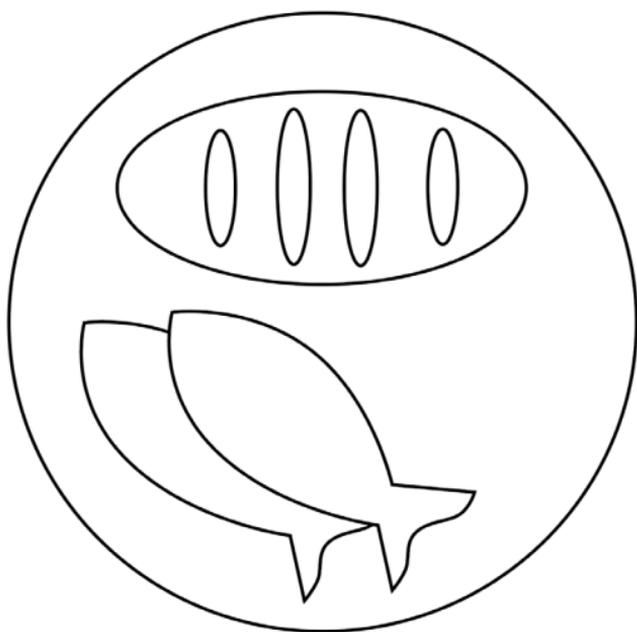
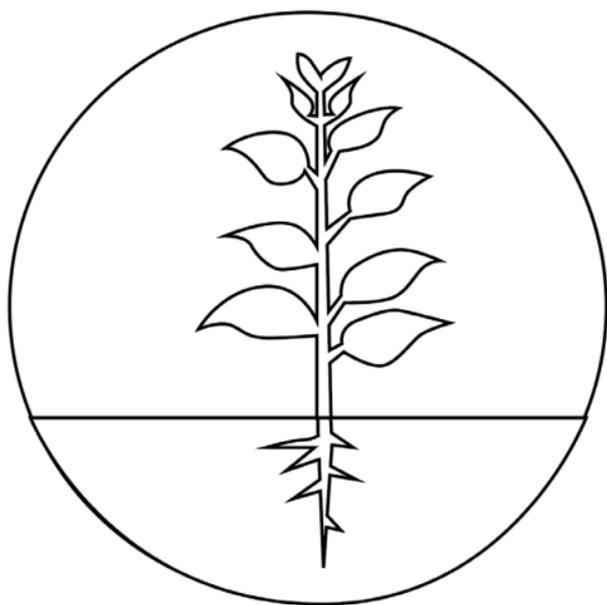


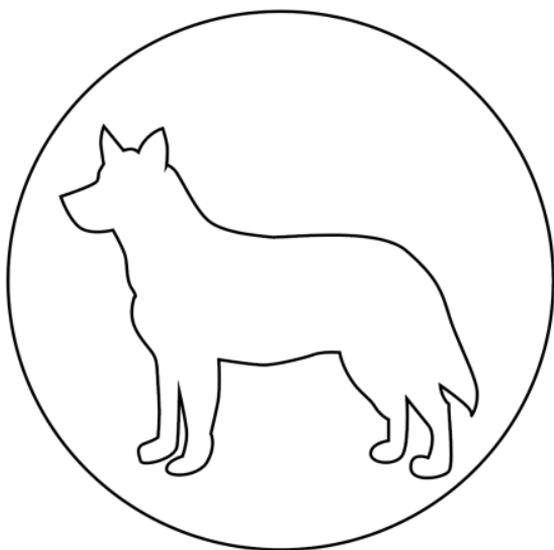


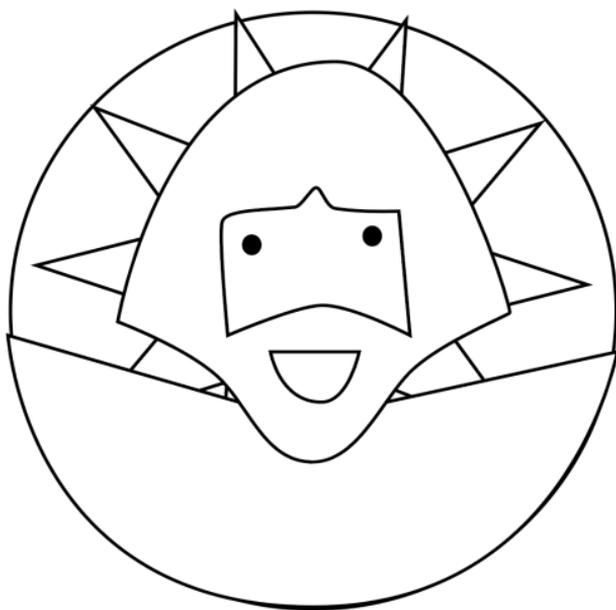
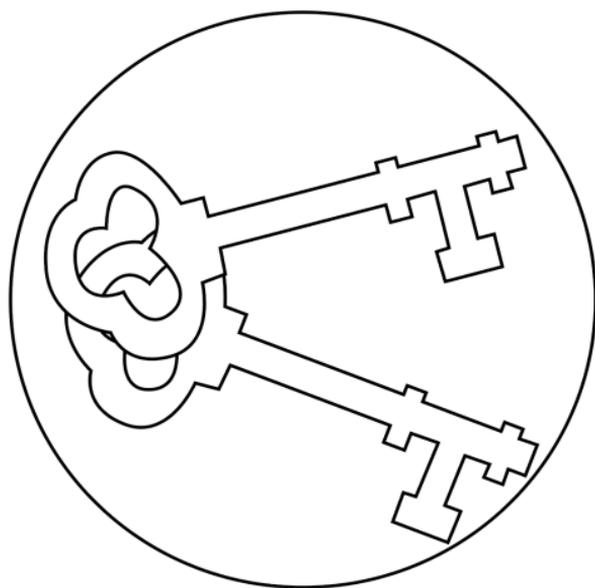


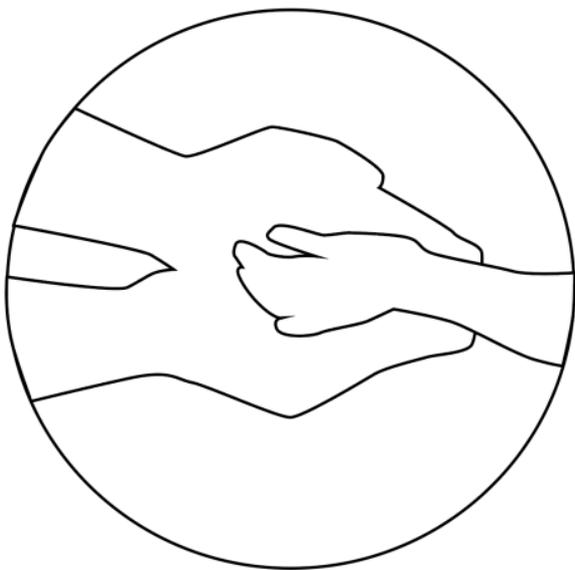
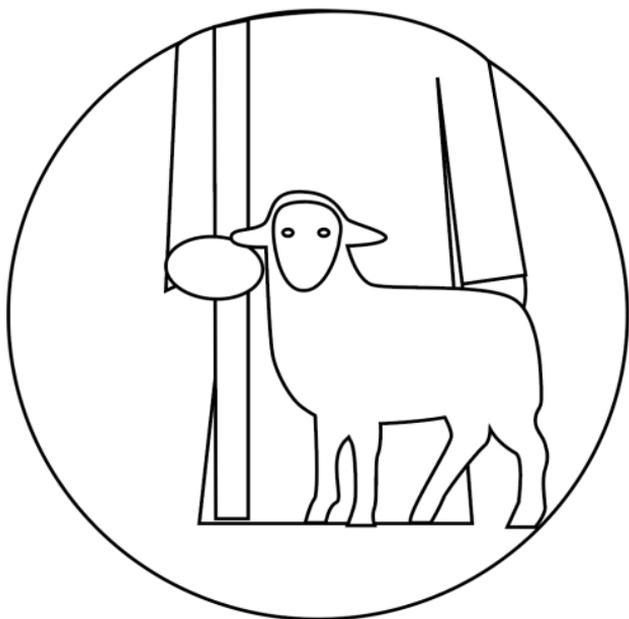


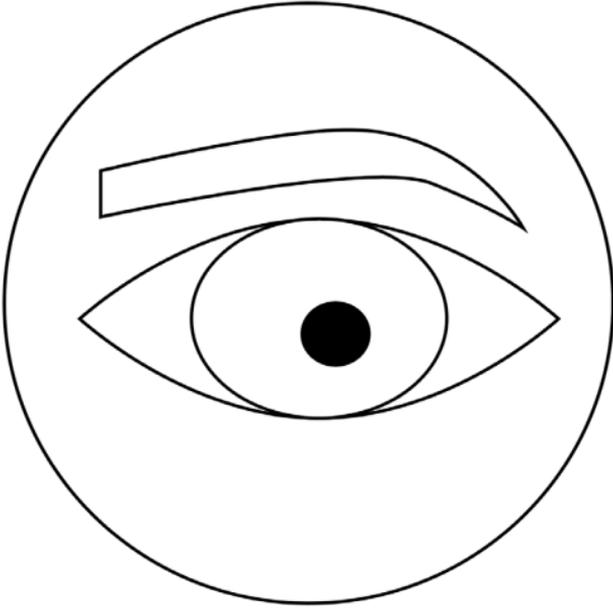


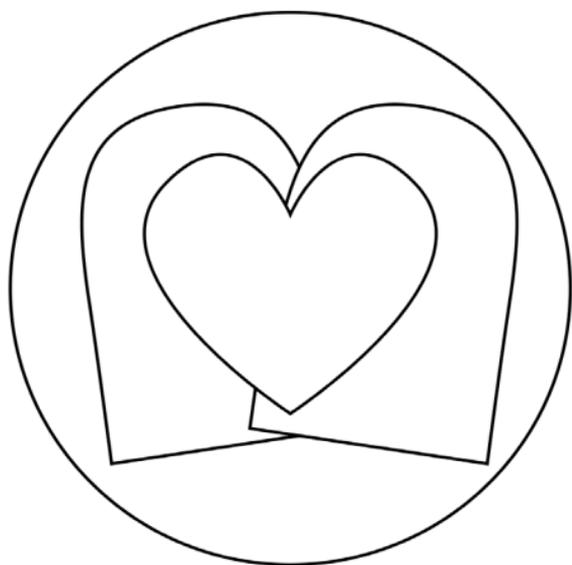
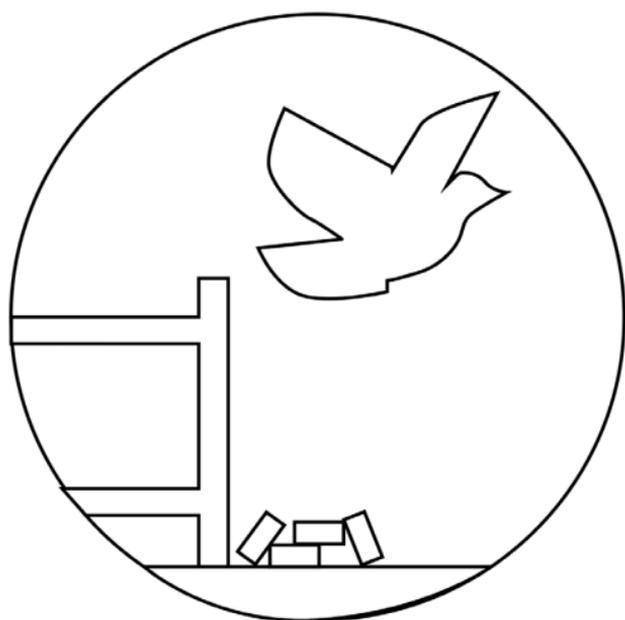


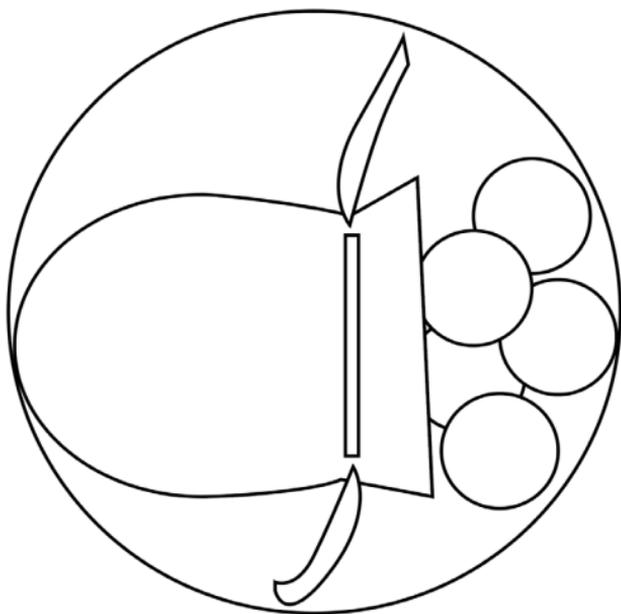
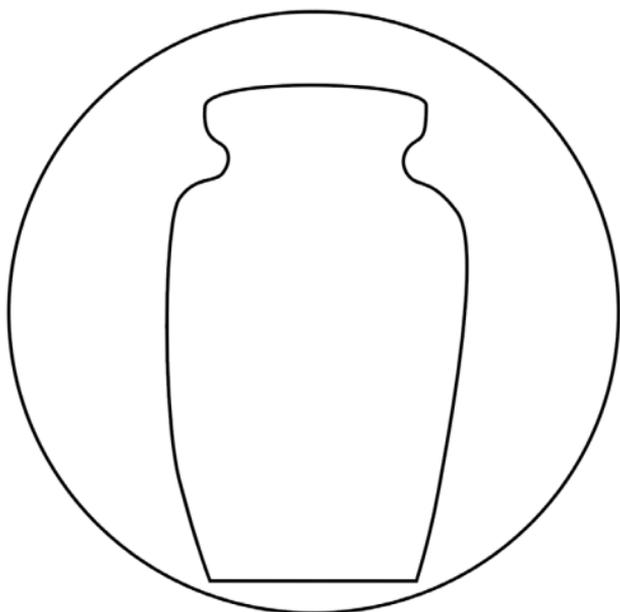


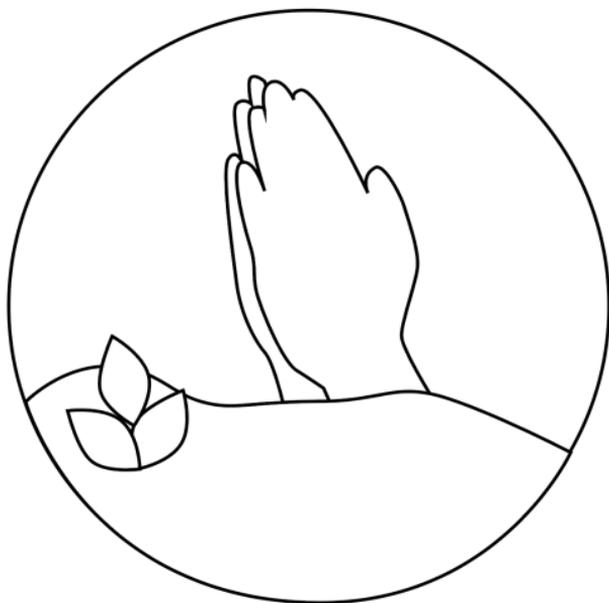
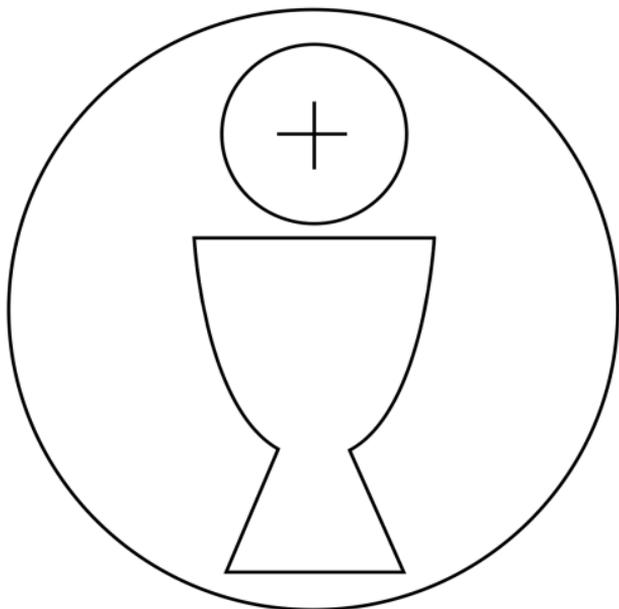


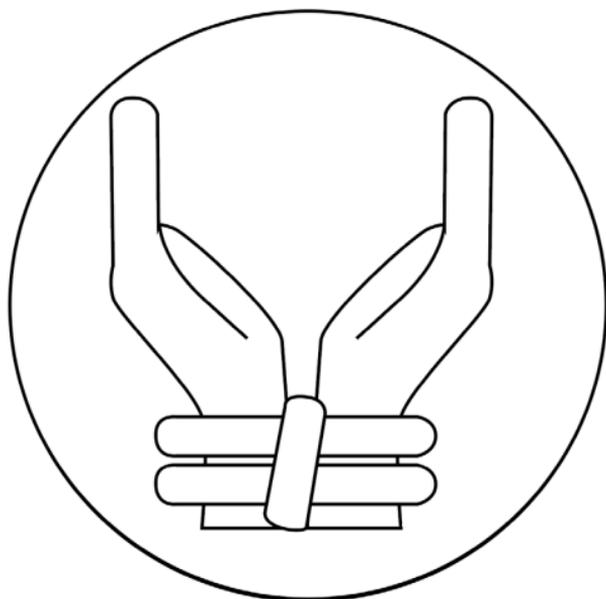
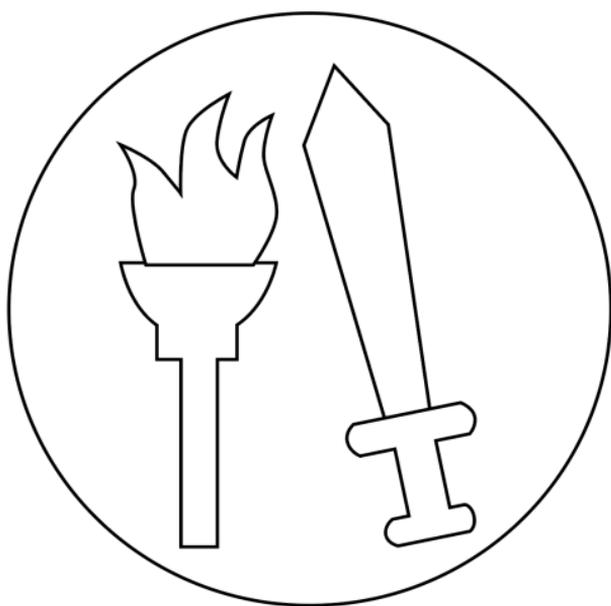


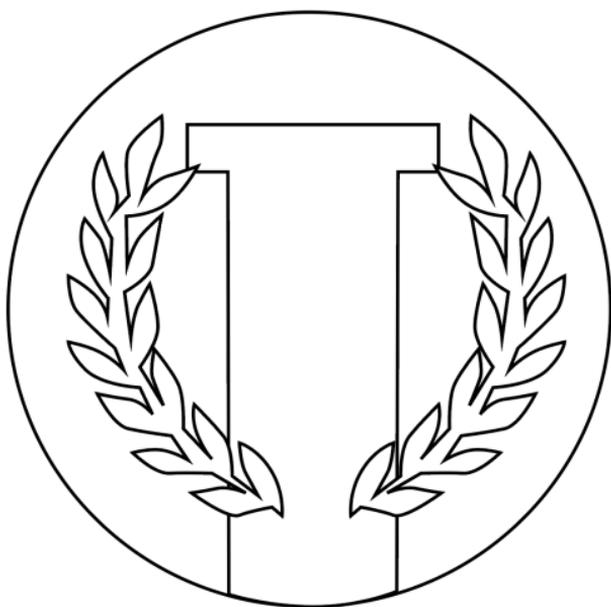
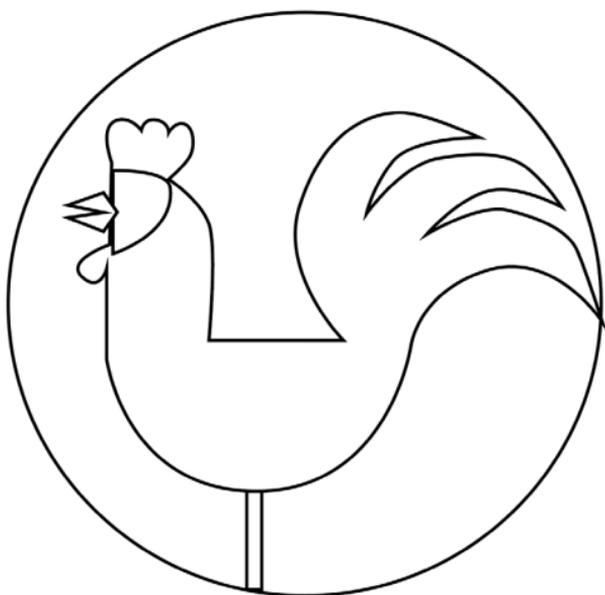


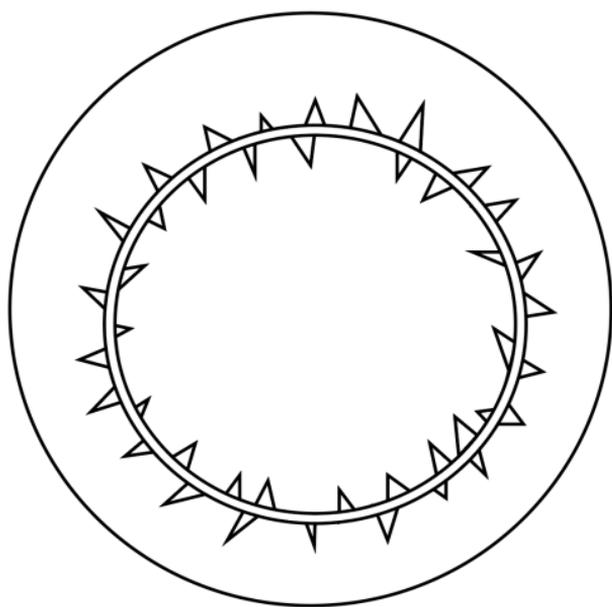


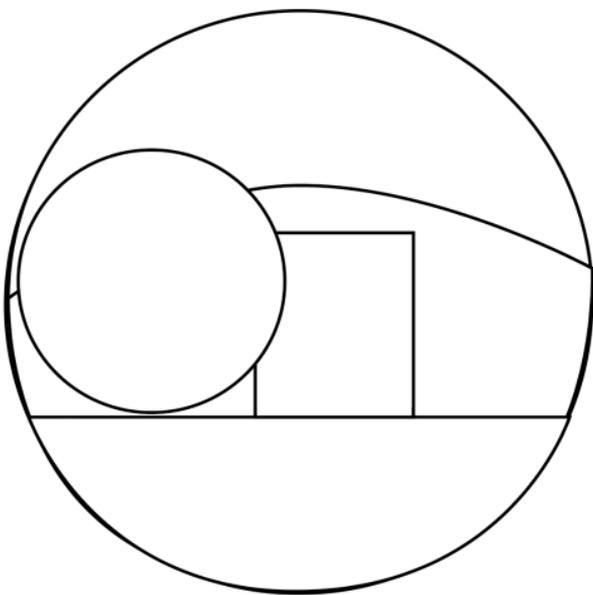
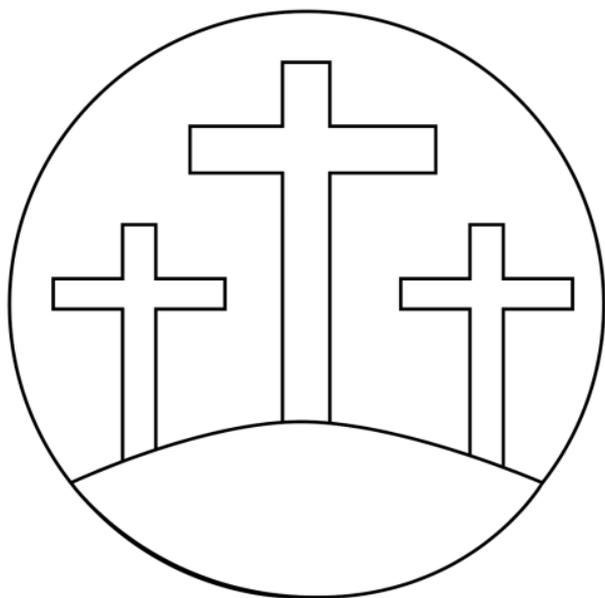


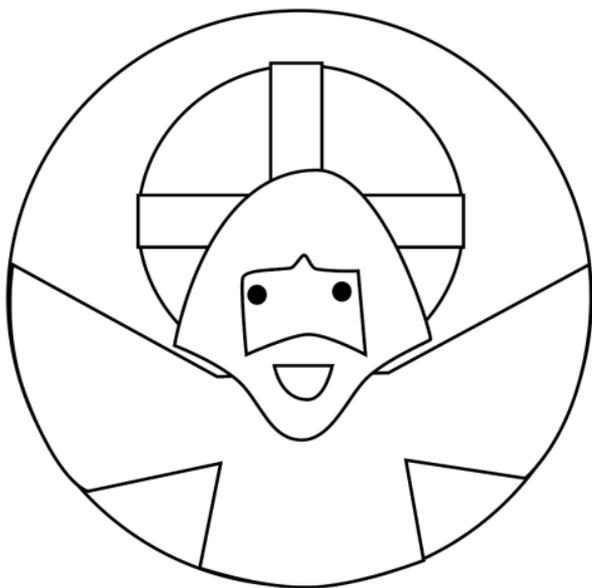












You can also find these ornaments digitally as well as other printable Jesus Tree resources at www.catholicprouts.com/resources-jt

THE AUTHOR



NANCY BANDZUCH is a wife and mother of five little ones. She lives just outside of Kansas City and enjoys stitching, reading, making mud pies and dreams one day of owning goats. She loves her Catholic faith and enjoys sharing it with others on her blog and podcast.

Nancy dreamt up the Jesus Tree Devotional for her own family. She desired to have a daily, systematic prayer to use during Lent, similiar to the Jesse Tree which is used during Advent. It is her deepest hope that these little reflections lead to good discussions in your family, and that through Mary we can all be lead into a deeper relationship with Jesus.

You can connect with Nancy on her website: **www.catholicssprouts.com** or one of her podcasts: **Catholic Sprouts: Daily Podcast for Catholic Kids** available wherever you listen.

COVER ART BY



ANNIE VAETH is a wife and mother to three adorable children. She is a transplant to Southern California where you can find her doodling, cycling or planning home school field trips. She has been painting and drawing all her life and has a passion for creating contemporary Catholic art.

You can find Annie on Instagram and Facebook **@papermonastery** where she posts videos and pictures of her latest art projects.