**Solidarity with Sisters’ Communal Prayer**

**First Sunday of Lent, February 26, 2023**

*“Even now, says Yahweh,   
            return to me with your whole heart.”*

*(Joel 2:12)*

**HELLOs,** then Zoom host mutes everyone. **(Suzie De Quattro & Betty Thompson)**

**WELCOME (Suzie and Betty)**

Welcome, everyone!

* We are Suzie De Quattro and Betty Thompson. Our prayer today is very gratefully based on what Kathy and Bill Cavanaugh prepared for the first Sunday of Lent in 2022.
* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* Thanks to those who are leading our prayer: Kathy Cavanaugh, Kathleen Cross, Ann Masters, Alicia and George Urban, Nancy Sushinsky, Peg Duchesne, Richard McGinnis, Cecilia Estrada, Mary Dolmage, Maria Desjardins, and Jim De Quattro.
* We are always looking for new readers and grateful for all readers. Contact Kathy Linabery for March 12 and Terri Butel for March 19. Their emails can be found in Chat.

**SETTLING IN (Richard McGinnis)**

We are not all in the same place, but we can still be together by sharing a common breath.  So let us begin by slowly taking one collective breath together -  in and out.   With each breath let the Spirit of God settle deeper into you. Let your breath carry away tensions from your body and distractions from your mind.  In and out.   Now let’s take 3 more breaths.  One to be here…one to be together…and one to make space for the Spirit to act in you.

Now Mary Dolmage and Cecilia Estradawill lead us into our prayer together.

**OPENING RITUAL** **(Cecilia Estrada and Mary Dolmage)**

Mary: God of our deserts, God of our transformation, God of our fruitfulness, God of all who forget you and all who return to you, God of all who hope for new life, we are here to listen to you.

Cecilia: Beloved Community, Lent calls us to return to Yahweh with all our heart

Mary and All: O God, we hear you calling.

Cecilia: Beloved Community, we begin just where we are.

Mary and All: O God, we hear you calling.

Cecilia: Holy One, you appeal to us for justice, peace, and communion for all creation!

Mary and All: O God, we hear you calling.

Cecilia: “Lent is a call to weep for what we could have been and are not. Lent is the grace to grieve for what we should have done and did not. Lent is the opportunity to change what we ought to change but have not…. Lent is about becoming, doing and changing whatever it is that is blocking the fullness of life in us right now.”

Mary: Let us pause and reflect on what is blocking us, or maybe even protecting us, from being tugged into the unknown magnificence of resurrection.

[*Pause about 15 seconds – about 2 slow deep breaths.]*

Mary: Let us pray together:

Mary, Cecilia and All (muted):

I ask you, my sisters and brothers, to pray for me to our God.

Holy One, accept my deep sorrow for ways in which I participate in the brokenness of your world -- in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and what I have failed to do.

Thank you for your endless love for me, and for your forgiveness that comes even before I ask.

Help me to forgive myself.

Strengthen me to take an active part in bringing your grace to the world, in the company of all your children, all the saints, and all the Earth. Amen.

Cecilia: Now Nancy Sushinsky will introduce us to today’s theme.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME**  **(Nancy Sushinsky)**

**“Entering the struggle. Trust. Trouble. Temptation.”**

The Israelites remembered and trusted in God’s constant guiding Presence. The psalmist trusted God would be present in times of trouble. Jesus survived temptation in the desert, only by trusting in God’s Love and faithfulness. We too are invited to trust the Spirit is with us as we discern and make choices throughout our Lenten pilgrimage.

*(Slight pause)*

NowKathy Cavanaughwill read a poem by Jan Richardson.

Then I will offer questions for your reflection, followed by silence. Feel free to stay with whatever question calls you.

**READING 1**  **(Kathy Cavanaugh)**

We are beginning our Lenten Sundays together. Let us come alive and put ourselves into this wilderness story. We are invited to imagine what it would be like to walk together into the desert with Jesus!

Jan Richardson sets the tone for this movement with her painting, titled “Desert of the Beloved”. She asks “How else to enter the forty-day place that lay ahead of Jesus? How else to cross into the wilderness where Jesus would have no food, no community, nothing familiar—and to top it off, would have to wrestle with the devil? How else, but to go into that landscape with the knowledge of Jesus own name**, BELOVED !”**

Beloved Is Where We Begin

If you would enter

into the wilderness

do not begin

without a blessing.

Do not leave

without hearing

who you are:

Beloved.

Named by the One

who has traveled this path

before you.

Do not go

without letting it echo

in your ears

and if you find

it is hard

do not despair:

That is what this journey is for.

I cannot promise

this blessing will free you

from danger, from fear, from hunger, or thirst.

from the scorching of the sun

or the fall of the night.

But I can tell you

that you will know

the strange graces

that come to our aid

only on a road such as this,

bearing comfort and strength,

that come along side us

for no other cause

than to lean themselves

toward our ear

and with their curious insistence whisper our name:

Beloved.

Beloved.

Beloved.

*[Slight pause ]*

A picture containing outdoor, mountain, nature, dune

Description automatically generated**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS (Nancy Sushinsky)**

Recall a time when life seemed like a desert… What were you feeling? What strange graces came to your aid?

When was an unexpected time when you felt beloved?

**COMMUNAL REFLECTION** (**Betty:** Slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

**(Betty)** Now Jim De Quattro will read to us from the Gospel of Matthew. This gospel is read every first Sunday in Lent. It sets the scene for how much God’s loving grace and word can strengthen us during times of trouble and temptation. Jesus, hungry and tired, drew strength and clarity from the word of God to resist each temptation to turn from God’s plan.

**READING 2** [**Matthew 4:1-11**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/matthew/4?1) **(Jim De Quattro)**

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert  
to be tempted by the Devil.  
After fasting for forty days and forty nights,  
he was hungry.  
Then the tempter approached and said,  
"If you are God’s Own

command that these stones turn into loaves of bread."  
Jesus replied,  
"It is written:  
One does not live on bread alone,  
but on every word that comes forth  
from the mouth of God."  
  
Next the Devil took him to the Holy City,  
and set him on the parapet of the temple,  
and said, "If you are God’s Own,

throw yourself down.  
For it is written:  
God will command the angels to take care of you  
and with their hands they will support you,  
lest you dash your foot against a stone."  
Jesus answered him,  
"Again it is written,  
You shall not put God, to the test."

Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain,  
and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence,  
promising, "All these I will give to you,  
if you fall down and worship me.  
At this, Jesus said to the Devil,  
"Away with you, Satan!  
It is written:  
You will worship the Most High God: and God alone shall you serve."  
  
Then the Devil left and, behold,  
angels came and ministered to Jesus.

*[Slight pause]*

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS**  **(Nancy Sushinsky)**

When have you put God to the test?

How are you different because of times

you spent “in a desert”?

**COMMUNAL REFLECTION** (**Betty:** Slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

**(Betty) :** Now Alicia and George Urban will read excerpts from Sister Mary McGlone’s reflection on “The First Sunday in Lent.”

**READING 3 (Alicia and George Urban)**

**(Alicia) :** Sister Mary McGlone offers several insights about today’s Gospel:

For example**: “…** the devil introduces the first and third temptations with the challenge, ‘If you are God’s Own.’ That implies that Jesus’ desert sojourn began immediately after his baptism where he heard God proclaim, ‘You are my Own Beloved, with you I am well pleased.’ Luke presents the temptations as Jesus’ struggle to live as a faithful child of God. We believe Jesus of Nazareth was a human being in every sense of the word.” He lives out his mission which will lead him into his passion, agony in the garden, crucifixion, and resurrection. “Anyone who lives in passion, anyone who becomes deeply committed to the cause of Jesus’ mission. will be tempted in the same way Jesus was.”

**(George) :**  Next, some thoughts about how subtle temptation can be: “The trickiest thing about temptations is that they can arrive in the camouflage of good ideas, even as ways to advance the reign of God. The devil is an expert at disguise: slicker than fake news and much more subtle than our ads that claim absurdities like the idea that love is confined in a particular make of car. “

**(Alicia) :**  The last insight that Sister Mary offers us is about how temptation is not a one-and-done thing. Luke’s telling of this story ends by saying: “the devil departed from Jesus awaiting another opportune time.” Temptation was not a one-time event for Jesus any more than it is for us.

**(George) :** With these three insights in mind, …”today’s Gospel invites us into the 40 days of Lent as a time to contemplate and learn from Jesus about how to be faithful children of God. Jesus did it to show us how to do the same.”

Henry Nouwen also tells us about Jesus’ desert encounter: “In the hardship of the desert, dwelling in the presence of God, Jesus peacefully listens to the devil speak and then answers peacefully with truth.”

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS (Nancy Sushinsky)**

Recall a time when you responded to temptations peacefully and with truth. (Pause.) What helps you to do that?

What temptations most easily divert you from serving only the Holy One?

**COMMUNAL REFLECTION** (**Betty:** Slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

Betty: Ann Masters will lead our sharing.

**SHARING (Ann Masters)**

We invite you to share the essence what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you have reflected upon our reading and music. We welcome everyone who wants to speak, and we also know that the wisdom of this community includes both words shared and silent listening.

So let’s begin in silence as we gather our reflections. *[Long-ish pause]*

Now who would like to start our sharing? Remember to unmute yourself to speak and mute yourself again afterwards.

[Sharing]

[If there is silence more than about 30 seconds before anyone speaks:] Take whatever quiet you need before you speak.

[If there is extended silence during the sharing:] Is there anyone else who would like to share?  *[Pause for a slow, deep breath.]*

*[Stop by about 20 minutes after the hour.]*

Thank you.  Let us pause for a minute of silence to hold all that has been said, and to notice what is rising in us in response. [Long pause.] We can continue after the final song, as we often do.

Holding onto what the Holy One is saying, we turn to God in prayer.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY (Kathleen Cross)**

Become aware of any prayer that has been forming in you this morning. *[Pause….]*

Our response today is: **Faithful One, we cry to you, hear our prayer.**

On this one year anniversary of the war in Ukraine, for all the people impacted by the invasion in Ukraine, in Russia, and in other countries – **Faithful One, we cry to you, hear our prayer.**

For the people of Poland, in thanksgiving that they have welcomed one-and-a-half million Ukrainian refugees as settlers – and for us, in commitment to open ourselves and our borders to people seeking safety and opportunity -- **Faithful One, we cry to you, hear our prayer.**

For Jimmy Carter, Catholic sisters, and all who keep showing us creative ways to settle conflict, eliminate gun violence, and build a just society – **Faithful One, we cry to you, hear our prayer.**

For the people of Turkey and Syria and all who are suffering because of natural disasters – **Faithful One, we cry to you, hear our prayer.**

For confidence in your forgiveness so that we then forgive others and forgive ourselves -- -- **Faithful One, we cry to you, hear our prayer.**

For creativity and persistence in our Lenten journeys toward a resurrection with Jesus for all saints and sinners, all broken relationships, and the whole Earth -- **Faithful One, we cry to you, hear our prayer.**

For what else shall we pray?

(Shared prayers) **Faithful One, we cry to you, hear our prayer.**

Thank you!

O You who love us more than we can imagine, we are grateful for this chance to give you our prayers, spoken and unspoken. We entrust the outcome to you. Amen.

**OFFERTORY (Richard McGinnis)**

Holy One, we bring you ourselves knowing you accept us just as we are and forgive us before we forgive ourselves.

We pause in silence to reflect on our Lenten intentions – how is that intention taking root or evolving in me? *(Long pause)*

We turn again to you and ask - In what specific way am I hearing your call to me for this coming week? *(Long pause)*

Holy One, we offer our whole selves to you, all that we have and all that we are. We pray that you will help us to be bold in our mission and in our witness. May we who have been given so much, give to others in need, support those who suffer or mourn, give peace to those in trouble, work for unity in our world and love our neighbor as Jesus taught us. Blessed Be!

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Maria Desjardins)**

O Great Love, we are humbled and emboldened

to know that you trust us to be your body in this world.

We are part of that body as we let go of all that separates us from you,

and as we embrace one another and your entire creation with merciful love.

We give you thanks for your presence in and among us.  *[Pause.]*

We remember the night before Jesus died.

At dinner with friends, Jesus knew all that would soon be asked of them,

and, loving them to the end, Jesus showed them how to care for each other

as they went out into the world.

First Jesus washed their feet

and said, “… as I have done for you, you should also do.”

Then he looked at what was in front of them, the bread and the wine,

gifts of Earth and the work of human hands, and blessed them.

So let us, too, invite God right now into what is front and center in our lives

knowing that God will indeed enter what we offer – and bless it.  *[Pause.]*

Let us know God within ourselves so that we become God’s living presence in our world. [Pause.]

Holy One, we entrust ourselves to you and to one another.

Make us your bread of abundance.  Make us your wine of joy.

Let even our fragments be plenty to share.

Amen.

**THE PRAYER OF JESUS (Peg Duchesne)**

Now let us join our hearts as if we could join our hands to pray in harmony with our family throughout the world:

Our Father, Our Mother, you are here among us.

Blessed be Your Creation.

May Your reign be a reality here on earth.

May we become more interested in building Your kin-dom here and now

rather than waiting for it to come down from above.

Let us share our bread with those who hunger.

Let us learn to forgive as well as to receive forgiveness.

Help us through the time of temptation, delivering us from all evil.

For ours are the eternal blessings that you pour upon the earth.

Amen.

**FINAL BLESSING (Suzie De Quattro)**

This blessing  
is for when

you are in the desert  
and cannot imagine

the next step toward

a new beginning,

the heart made whole.

When all that inhabits you  
feels foreign,  
your heart made strange  
and beating a broken  
and unfamiliar cadence.

Then let there come  
a voice that speaks  
into the shattering,

reminding you  
that who you are  
is here.

Every shard  
even now,  
piece joining to piece  
in an ancient,  
remembered rhythm

that bears you  
steadily deeper  
into the heart of the one  
who has already dreamed you  
complete.

**CLOSING SONG (Suzie De Quattro)**

Now, as we continue to walk our journey of faith together let us listen to this African American Spiritual journey song: “ I Want Jesus To Walk With Me” (sung by Eric Bibb).

Betty: play <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOPLLOrcugI>

**RESOURCES:**

* Initial blessing: Jan Richardson, from “Lent 1: beloved Is Where We Begin”; The Painted Prayerbook, February 2016:http;//[paintedprayerbook.com/…/lent-1-beloved](http://paintedprayerbook.com/%25E2%2580%25A6/lent-1-beloved)-is-where.../. Used with permission.
* Opening Ritual – “Lent is a call…” quote from Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister: <http://rosemarieberger.com/2011/03/15/joan-chittister-lent-is-a-chance-to-grieve/>
* Image for second silence: “How are sand dunes formed and why do they even exist?” from New Scientist <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg24833081-000-how-are-sand-dunes-formed-and-why-do-they-even-exist/>
* Image for first communal silence: “Desert of the Beloved” © Jan Richardson. Used with permission.
* Mary M. McGlone: Cycle C Sunday Resources, “Entering the Struggle” quoted March 10, 2019; February 3rd, 2022; Published by National Catholic Reporter and March 6, 2022: https://[www.ncronline.org](http://www.ncronline.org)/print/sunday-resource/march-6-first-sunday-lent
* Gospel of Luke 4:1-16, *The Inclusive Bible; The First Egalitarian Translation*, A Sheed and Ward Book; ROWMAN and LITTLEFIELD Publishers, INC, 2007.
* “I Want Jesus To Walk With Me” listed as being from the African American Tradition . Calvin Earl, who successfully lobbied before Congress in 2007 to recognize African American Spiritual Songs as national treasures, relays the story of an early tour of the Fisk Jubilee singers where the singing of “I want Jesus To Walk With Me” saved them from a mob. It is not unusual for a spiritual to have an unknown source. These songs are the spontaneous utterances of those who originally sang them. They are the fruit of the creative spirit of an entire people rather than individuals. These historical songs tell us about the people in a land of bondage struggling to be free, their source of strength in time of trouble. These songs are known as ‘Journey Songs”..a companion spiritual.(Victoria Schwarz and Rev. Wilson Pruitt, 4, 08, 2019 from Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church) <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-i-want-jesus-to-walk-with-me>
* Henry J. M. Nouwen: “Letters to Marc About Jesus: Living a spiritual life in a material world.”; Harper, SanFrancisco Publisher, 1998
* Final Blessing: an abridged blessing by Jan Richardson from her book, [The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief](http://janrichardson.com/books).