



MARFAM 2023. "OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES"

DAILY THOUGHTS FEBRUARY: LOVE GIVES FAMILIES LIFE"



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Abbreviations: Pope Francis: LS = *Laudato Si*. AL = *Amoris Laetitia* FT = *Fratelli Tutti*. FM = *The Face of Mercy*

Overview February. Love gives Families Life. God, the creator, is a lover and it is the love of God, as the Trinity, that is life-giving, creating life continually and sustaining and renewing what has been created. Our task and gift as human beings and life-givers is co-creation with God from conception to natural death but in particular in the nurturing and caring for children. By its nature, of total and lifelong commitment, marriage is the ideal love relationship. Love of nature and creation is a means of sustaining life in its various forms. Life and love are very vulnerable and fragile and need to be expressed as a deep concern for families and the common good. This lifegiving theme can be taken up during Lent for reflection and action. See Lenten resource from Ash Wednesday 22 February.

Pope Francis: *Love always gives life. The couple in giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love. AL 165. God's indulgent love always accompanies our human journey; through grace it heals and transforms hardened hearts, leading them back to the beginning, even through the way of the cross. AL62. Loving human relationships of commitment and care are mirrored and carried forward in care for creation. Caring for trees and rhinos and yet rejecting unborn human life and the needs of the destitute and poor is not fully lifegiving. Every creature is the object of the Father's tenderness.. LS 77.*

Setting the Scene. The Reflections are set in an imaginary parish with a number of family groups. The SEE-JUDGE-ACT approach is used, with a short anecdote, scripture and church teaching, action and prayer. Lenten reflections for February, with a more specific focus on Ecological Conversion are included but are also in a separate booklet.

Together with LOVE, **MARRIAGE** is an important topic for this month of February. World Marriage Day, first initiated by Marriage Encounter is celebrated on the 2nd Sunday of February. For married couples special prayers and blessings and a renewal of vows are available from MARFAM

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on 22 February. Suggestions for an eco-family friendly Lenten experience for families are included. A special Lenten booklet will be available with a greater focus on eco-family friendly spirituality and a Franciscan flavour.

February 1. Blessed Benedict Daswa. A respected school principal and family man, Daswa was stoned and killed by fellow-villagers in Venda on 2 February 1990 because they were jealous of his success and they hated him for his opposition to witchcraft. "One of Benedict's friends, also a principal, spoke about his attitude towards family life, "When men were at a District meeting, Benedict said, 'Men should help their wives. For example, if there is a baby at home and the Mother is busy, the Father should take care of the baby. The time has come for men to realise that we can do women's work.' Some men used to laugh at him, saying that he was overpowered by his wife. Benedict's response. 'You will be looked down on if you are the boss in the family, yet do not help your wife, and expect that the women will do everything for you. Biologically, we are meant to help one another.'" He was beatified as South Africa's 1st martyr in September 2015. Visit www.benedictdaswa.org.za for more.

Scripture: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶ who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it." Matthew 13:45-46. **Pope Francis.** *By their witness as well as their words families speak to others of Jesus. They pass on the faith, arouse a desire for God and reflect the beauty of the Gospel and its way of life. AL 184. Reflect, share, act and pray.*

February 2. Presentation of the Lord- Candlemas. Fr Shaun always kept the spirit of Christmas alive until this feast, 40 days after Christmas which reminds of Jesus the Light of the World It commemorates the parents of Jesus coming to Jerusalem for the ritual purification of a first-born son. Traditions whether religious, tribal or family play an important role in society giving people a sense of their identity. However, today some traditions are frowned upon as maybe being sexist, racist or anti one religion or another. If they discriminate in some way they can even be hurtful to some."

Scripture: *This child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign of contradiction. And a sword will pierce through your own soul also. Luke 2:22-40.* **Pope Francis.** *The lack of historical memory is a serious shortcoming in our society. A mentality that says, "then was then, now is now is ultimately immature; knowing and judging past events is the only way to build a meaningful future. AL 193. Reflect, share, act and pray.* In the interest of being loving should families have a choice in what traditions they will keep?" was a question posed for reflection in the prayer group.

February 3. St Blaise. This saint is said to have cured a young boy choking on a fishbone. From that a tradition grew up of the blessing of throats particularly of those suffering from diseases of the chest and lungs. Diphtheria and TB were life-threatening diseases in their day as TB, HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 were in their time. Blessings and prayers about certain conditions remind us of God's care and concern for us in sickness. We do our part by protecting ourselves and other creatures as best we can and trust in God for the rest.

Scripture. *"Suffering and illness have always been among the greatest problems. Christians feel and experience pain like all other people. Part of the plan laid out by God's providence is that we should fight against sickness and carefully seek the blessings of good health, so that we may fulfil our role in human society and in the Church" Catechism 1622* **Pope Francis:** *Jesus is the physician who heals with the medicine of love, for he takes upon himself our suffering and redeems it. We know that God can understand our infirmities, because he himself has personally experienced them. 2016 Jubilee of sick and suffering. Reflect, share, act and pray.*

February 4. George asked, "Is it a good thing or a bad thing that Christmas and Valentine's day have become so commercialised? Last December I saw a lot more Santa Claus figures than I saw nativity scenes and hardly any Christmas cards. Valentine may be about love but it can be so superficial and is a colossal waste of money. But I know that all relationships need cherishing whether it is going to a lonely place to rest or to celebrate together. Regular date nights doing whatever a couple choose to do are even better to keep romance alive. That applies particularly to those married couples who might be in danger of getting stale.

Scripture: *Jesus said to them, "come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while." From Mark 6:30-34.* **Pope Francis:** *After the love that unites us to God, conjugal love is the "greatest form of friendship, "having all the traits of a concern for the good of the other, reciprocity, intimacy, warmth and stability are aspects of a shared intimacy. AL123 Reflect, share, act and pray.*

February 5. Sunday 5A. Fr Fidelis, the PPC and the family life team were working hard to promote marriage and family life and to celebrate later in the month. He started his homily by saying, "You are all salt of the earth members of our parish. Thank you. Jesus used the term in the Beatitudes and it has become a common saying. 'Salt of the earth' people are seen as good and stable, having a positive influence on those around them, who may be similar or different, young and old. I ask everyone to pray for and with married couples and remember that everyone is preparing in a remote way for a future marriage. Pray for strength and commitment that they may continue to be examples for their children and others in the community.

Scripture: *You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste how shall its saltiness be restored. From Matt 5:13-16.* **Pope Francis:** *The Church looks to married couples as the heart of the entire family, which in turn looks to Jesus. The sacrament is not a thing or a power for in it Christ himself now encounters Christian spouses. He dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens. AL 73. Reflect, share, act and pray.*

February 6. Grandad said, "I am not too hung up about historical truth or different theories about creation. I just love to read and reflect on the way the writers describe the events in a loving kind of way. God was there, the Spirit of God was there and God was pleased with what he had done. I wish we could all say that about the things we create. Don't you agree that can be something to pray about?" **Reflect, share, act and pray.**

Scripture: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void. Darkness was upon the face of the deep and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. Genesis 1.* **Pope Francis:** *A spirituality which forgets God as all-powerful and Creator is not acceptable. That is how we end up worshipping earthly powers or ourselves usurping the place of God to the point of claiming a right to trample his creation underfoot. LS 75*

February 7. “Do we stop and think what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God?” Gordon asked. “Do you kids think that God is a man, or what about women then? I heard a talk the other day that explained that God, as Trinity, is a community, a group, but a community of absolute, total, tender, life-giving love. That is what we are challenged to be, here at home, in our family, in everything we do and in the way we care for the environment too.”

Scripture: *God said “let us make man in our image, after our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the earth. God created man in his own image, male and female he created them. And God blessed them. Read from Genesis 1:20 – 2:4a. Pope Francis: Creation of man and woman shows us the immense dignity of each person who is not just something but someone, capable of self-knowledge, self-possession and freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. LS 65. Reflect, share, act and pray.*

February 8. St Josephine Bakhita, patron of the fight against human trafficking. By definition slavery is about lack of freedom and very often abusive treatment such as Josephine experienced as a child before she was bought by a caring family and taken to Italy. Slavery has existed from time immemorial and was essentially taken for granted until fairly recently. It was formally abolished internationally in the 19th century but reports claim that today there are more than 40 million people across the globe living in some form of slavery. In South Africa statistics state that there are ¼ million people in conditions of modern slavery and human trafficking inside and across borders remains a very serious problem. But lack of freedom is not only a crime against the human family, animals suffer too. Holding wild animals captive in atrocious conditions, poaching and killing are forms of slavery too. Adult rhinos are killed for their horns leaving baby rhinos defenceless. Little scaly pangolins are poached too and eaten as a delicacy in some Far Eastern countries. They are believed to have been the vehicle that transmitted the coronavirus from animal to human.

St Josephine Bakhita Prayer: *At this time in our history, when migration is increasing, we confirm our faith in the God of life, telling Him our concerns through prayer: “When we hear about boys, girls, men and women being deceived and taken to unknown places for sexual exploitation, forced labour and organ trade, our hearts feel indignation and our spirits suffer, because their dignity and rights are violated by threats, deceit and violence. Oh God, help us fight against all forms of slavery. Together with Saint Bakhita we ask you to put an end to human trafficking. Give us the wisdom and strength to be close to those who have been wounded in their body, heart and spirit, so that together we may reach the promise of life and tender and infinite love that you offer to our exploited brothers and sisters. Touch the hearts of those responsible for this serious crime and support our commitment to freedom, your gift for all your sons and daughters. <https://sma.ie/st-josephine-bakhita-from-slave-to-saint/>*

Pope Francis: *A sense of communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. It is inconsistent to combat trafficking in endangered animal and plant species while remaining completely indifferent to human trafficking, unconcerned about the poor or undertaking to destroy another human being seen as unwanted. LS91. Reflect, share, act and pray.*

February 9. David mused, “Of course this month is all about love but is there something special and unique about God choosing a specific and appropriate helper. How can we really judge whether two people fit well together, or are made for one another? It often feels like that in the beginning of a relationship but why doesn’t it last? I once saw a series of pictures about being a good fit. Two nice round balls don’t necessarily fit well together. The ideal wasn’t two perfect halves of an apple but something quite jagged with rough edges that need to be smoothed out. Maybe that is why roses have thorns.

Scripture: *God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.” Adam said “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. ” Genesis 2: 18-25. Pope Francis. Loving another person involves the joy of contemplating and appreciating their innate beauty and sacredness which is greater than my needs. AL 127 Reflect, share, act and pray.*

February 10. Jeanette smiled to herself and thought, “Funny that. God made the man first but she was the one who took the initiative and fed him the apple. That is certainly still her lot and being a good cook, making attractive dishes is a pleasure that many women, but men too, do enjoy. It must have been quite a temptation to look at a most desirable tree of fruit. Isn’t that how it generally is with temptation, you wouldn’t feel tempted if something wasn’t attractive?” What about animals and plants and how they make choices? Plants are certainly designed to attract bees and other pollinators.

Scripture: *When the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruits and ate and she also gave some to her husband and he ate. Gen 3:1-8. Pope Francis. We must never forget that our human equilibrium is fragile; there is a part of us that resists*

real human growth, and any moment it can unleash the most primitive and selfish tendencies. AL 157 **Reflect, share, act and pray.**

February 11. Our Lady of Lourdes. Portia shared, “Sickness is part of family life as we well know and it affects members of all ages, but maybe most strongly the elderly. But for many of us a sick baby or little child seems to be the most vulnerable. I think it is helpful to have a Day of the Sick, appropriately on the feastday of Our Day of Lourdes, because that gives everyone a chance to reflect seriously on how we deal with the subject, even considering our pets or other creatures.”

Pope Francis: *On the thirty-first World Day of the Sick, as the whole Church journeys along the synodal path, I invite all of us to reflect on the fact that it is especially through the experience of vulnerability and illness that we can learn to walk together according to the style of God, which is closeness, compassion, and tenderness. The World Day of the Sick calls for prayer and closeness towards those who suffer. Yet it also aims to raise the awareness of God’s people, healthcare institutions and civil society with regard to a new way of moving forward together. The prophecy of Ezekiel judges harshly the priorities of those who wield economic, cultural, and political power over others: “You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost. (Eze 34:3-4). God’s word is always illuminating and timely; not only in what it denounces, but also in what it proposes **Reflect, share, act and pray.** Invite Mary to pray with you for those who are sick.*

February 12. Sunday 6A. World Marriage Day. Also see www.wmd.org.za. Fr Fidelis had invited couples to give their testimony on this day during the homily by sharing about their relationship. He considered it valuable for their own sake, their children and as examples in the community. Joe and Tracy who were celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary shared, “Being apostles is not our own choice but it is God who chose us in our unworthiness and makes us worthy. Over the years, through times of joy and suffering we experienced that calling from God, a call to unity and to deeper faith and love for one another and through that for God. “

Fr continued, “Today’s gospel is a challenging one. Matthew uses the words, ‘It was said, but I say.’ The Law of Christ is not like man-made laws possibly arrived at through a referendum, by consensus or determined by the ruling party in power. The law of Christ goes deeper; it is a law given by love and lived out in tenderness, love and mercy. Jesus uses very strong words referring to faithfulness, adultery and divorce. Difficult pastoral challenges related to marriage were considered by the Synods on the Family in 2014-5 and discussed by Pope Francis in his response in Amoris Laetitia. He did not make changes in Church’s teaching but proposed a more merciful view, careful discernment with pastors and decisions to be made in conscience. I recommend that you discuss these issues of divorced and remarried people being barred from Communion, cohabitation and same sex unions too with one another and especially with young people who will hopefully consider marriage in the future. Help one another to see that ideally marriage should be built on the power of love, not the love of power.” **Reflect, share, act and pray.**

Scripture: *It was said, whoever divorces his wife let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife except on the grounds of unchastity makes her an adulteress and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Matthew 5:17-37* **Pope Francis:** *The Synod Fathers reached a consensus which I support. “In considering a pastoral approach towards people who have contracted a civil marriage, who are divorced and remarried, or simply living together the Church has the responsibility of helping them understand the divine working of grace in their lives and offering them assistance so they can reach the fulness of God’s plan for them. AL297.*

A simple Marriage Prayer. We praise and thank you Father for the gift of love and the gift of our marriage. Help us in good times to be thankful and in hard times to depend on your loving care for us and trust in your desire for our marriage to be a sign of love and of Jesus present in our lives and in the world around us. Amen.

February 13. In their discussion about sin the catechist had used the story of Cain and Abel. Cain was jealous of his brother and ended up killing him. “I believe that jealousy is a serious problem in some families, starting from small children right up to adults. I don’t see it as something extraordinary but as a natural thing that needs to be dealt with in children. However, it still has to be overcome later in life or it can sour any relationship.” Neo asked, “Mam, do animals have feelings too, like being jealous of one another?” “What do you think” was the response.

Scripture: "The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. Cain was very angry. The Lord said, "why are you angry? If you do well will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well sin is lurking at the door. Its desire is for you but you must master it." From Genesis 4:1-15. **Pope Francis:** Envy is a form of sadness provoked by another's prosperity; it shows that we are not concerned for the happiness of others but only with our own well-being. Love makes us rise above ourselves, envy closes us in on ourselves. AL 95. Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbour for whose care and custody I am responsible ruins my relationship with myself with others, with God and with the earth. LS 70 **Reflect, share, act and pray.**

February 14. St Valentine's Day. One family group did some research about Valentine. "From different legends about St Valentine we believe he was a martyr, a kind man and instrumental in helping couples in love. One legend tells how he arranged for newly married soldiers not to be sent to war. Another tells how he helped young couples facing difficulties to be able to get married." "Maybe this encouragement should be taken up, as many couples nowadays choose not to marry, possibly afraid to make a commitment for better and for worse. Most often Valentine's Day is about romantic love at all ages, just sentimental feelings even. Romance is a good and valuable thing and needs to be sustained for a healthy relationship but on its own, surely, that is not sustainable throughout a lifetime."

Scripture: From Gen chapters 6-7. The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And he was sorry that he had made them. I will blot out man whom I have created. But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord. Then the Lord said, "go into the ark, you and all your household for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. **Pope Francis:** Pastoral initiatives aimed at helping married couples to grow in love also help their children by preparing them for their future married life. Traditional practices like St Valentine's Day should not be underestimated. Commercial interests are quicker to see the potential than we are in the Church. AL 208 **Reflect, share, act and pray.**

February 15. Owen and Julie were discussing their children and he once asked, "Are you ever sorry that we had them?" She thought for a bit and replied, "It's a hard one, but I must admit honestly that much as I love them there are times when the going gets pretty tough. But remember that there was a time when God even felt sorry he had created humankind because of their bad behaviour. We do know that his mercy and love were greater than his anger and disappointment and he started afresh." Owen continued, "when God looks today at the people he created and put in charge of the rest of creation, we know he is also disappointed with how we have treated his creation. It is not his doing but ours"

Scripture: Noah removed the covering of the ark and the face of the ground was dry. Then he built an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings. When the Lord smelled the pleasing odour of Noah's sacrifice the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done." Gen 8. **Pope Francis:** Through Noah who was innocent and just God decided to open a path of salvation and he gave humanity the chance of a new beginning. All it takes is one good person to restore hope! LS 71. God does not deny justice. He rather envelopes it and surpasses it with an even greater event in which we experience love as the foundation of true justice. FM 21. **Reflect, share, act and pray.**

February 16. Julie referred back to the previous day's issue. "It struck me that it was love that made God start over, not the fact that anyone had repented and asked forgiveness. How often do we as parents do the same, forgive and carry on? Remembering the Noah story and the rainbow at times has been a real encouragement to me with the kids. In the case of concern for the environment God will not be the one to destroy everything. Just look at the horrific war in Ukraine and how much destruction that has caused to human life and the environment. I do feel helpless about that but know that God has not abandoned us."

Scripture: God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the air and upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Genesis 9:1-13. **Pope Francis:** The Biblical tradition shows that this new beginning or renewal entails recovering and respecting the rhythms inscribed in nature by the hand of the Creator. LS 71. The ancient stories, full of symbolism bear witness to a conviction that everything is interconnected and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others. LS 70. **Reflect, share, act and pray.**

February 17. Jock had visited Iraq and seen the ruins of some of the ancient little towers called ziggurats, He explained that these structures were possibly the basis for the biblical story of the tower of Babel. It tells how the people were punished for their pride in wanting to build a tower all the way to heaven. God punished them by scrambling their languages so they couldn't communicate. Language can be a real barrier to communication, in families, communities and nations. Beauty said, "I think love can overcome that barrier. Mohammed and I do have different home languages and faiths, but we really love each other even though at times communication can be difficult." "I hope that will be true in time," her mom thought to herself.

Scripture: *The whole earth had one language and few words. As men migrated they said, "Come let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens and let us make a name for ourselves." The Lord came down to see and said, "This is only the beginning of what they will do. Come let us go down and there confuse their language so that they may not understand one another. So the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the earth. Gen 11. **Pope Francis:** I would like to tell you a story, a biblical midrash by a rabbi of the twelfth century, the story of the building of the Tower of Babel. He says that the bricks had to be made. This meant making the mud, bringing the straw, mixing them, then, in the oven, and when the brick was made it had to be hoisted up, to build the Tower. Every brick was a treasure, for all the work it took. When a brick fell, it was a national tragedy, and that worker guilty of breaking it was punished. But if a worker fell, nothing happened: it was something else. This still happens today: if investments in banks, drop a little, it's a tragedy! But if people are starving, if they have nothing to eat, if they are not healthy, it does not matter! This is our crisis today! And the witness of a poor Church for the poor goes against this mentality. Pentecost 2013 **Reflect, share, act and pray.***

February 18. Transfiguration. Tony had always considered this episode in the life of the apostles a precious mountain-top experience as he called it. Jesus was transfigured before the three apostles and they experienced him in a unique glorious way. Tony and Anthea had longed for a baby for five years, ever since their marriage. It was after they had been introduced to Natural Family Planning and learned to identify their fertile times accurately that their little miracle happened. Discovering the pregnancy was a mountain-top experience for them, but the birth of their baby an even greater one. Their heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving was: "Lord it is so good for us to be here. Help us always to make a loving home for our family and share our love with others."

Scripture: *Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain, apart by themselves. He was transfigured before them and his garments became glistening, intensely white. Peter said to Jesus, 'Master it is well that we are here.' Mk 9:2-13 **Pope Francis:** "We need to climb the mountain, a place of silence, to find ourselves and hear the voice of the Lord. But we cannot stay there. The encounter with God pushes us to come down from the mountain' and down into the plain where we meet many brothers and sisters weighed down by fatigue, injustice, and both material and spiritual poverty." Transfiguration 2014 **Reflect, share, act and pray.***

February 19. 7th Sunday Year A. Fr Jim had been concerned about the number of hurting and broken marriages and considered how he could be God's merciful agent. When Bruce and Zoey's marriage finally failed after many affairs and reconciliations there was obviously a lot of bitterness, anger and hurt. When Bruce decided to apply for an annulment on the grounds that he had never been totally committed from the beginning Zoey's anger exploded. "He has hurt me like this, all I want is to hurt him back," she told Fr Jim who was counselling her. He could see how an annulment can be a very hurtful process when couples just want to get back at each other, but where couples have grown to be more merciful, able to forgive even when going their separate ways and let go it can become a very healing process too.

Scripture: *"You have heard it said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', but I say to you "do not resist one who is evil. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Matthew 5:38-39. **Pope Francis:** The slowness of the annulment process caused distress and strain on the parties. With the new documents I wished to make clear that the bishop himself has been appointed shepherd and head and is the judge of those faithful entrusted to his care to ensure easier access to justice. AL 243.. **Reflect, share, act and pray.***

February 20. In the parish family groups some had become more aware of the environment and its spirituality. Charles asked in his group, "Where do we find the most wisdom, in the elderly or the youth? Or do both have a measure that also depends on their circumstances? Or maybe we have to acknowledge it as a gift from God as the

Wisdom books in the Bible state.” Anthea, a confirmation candidate commented, “I am discovering that there is wisdom even in nature. You can call it instinct but animals know about breeding, if and when. Plants too know how to respond to climactic conditions. It might be instinct of knowledge, or what would be different to wisdom based on experience?” They concluded, “We too often take nature for granted.”

Scripture: *All wisdom comes from the Lord and is with him for ever. The sand of the sea, the drops of rain, and the days of eternity – who can count them? The height of heaven, the breadth of the earth, the abyss and wisdom – who can search them out? Wisdom was created before all things. The source of wisdom is God’s word in the highest heaven. She dwells with all flesh according to his gift and he supplied her to those who love him. Sirach 1:1-10* **Pope Francis:** *The creating word expresses a free choice. Creation is of the order of love. God’s love is the fundamental moving force in all created things. LS 77. We are free to apply our intelligence towards things evolving positively or towards adding new ills, new causes of suffering and real setbacks. This is what makes for the excitement and drama of human history in which freedom, growth, salvation and love can blossom, or lead towards decadence and mutual destruction. LS 79. Reflect, share, act and pray.*

February 21. Little Amy said, “Jesus was such a good teacher. I wish I had a teacher like him. I think I would always listen and learn.” “Aren't you just saying that because he loved little children?” her brother asked. Mom added, “maybe, but he said an important thing, telling us all to be child-like.” The family discussed the words of Jesus. ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.’ He was talking about power and control when he said, “if anyone wants to be first he must be last and servant of all.” “Are children then meant to be servants?” Peter asked. “Well, not really but they certainly shouldn't have the power or control over their parents or carers. Everyone should know their place.” See Mk 9:30-37.

Scripture: *Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. From Mk 9:30-37. Pope Francis:* *Let us think about the many children who suffer from forms of violence that rob them of the joy of life. I keep thinking of their sorrowful and bewildered faces. They are pleading for our help to be set free from the slavery of the contemporary world. FM 19 Reflect, share, act and pray.*

LENTEN DAILY THOUGHTS WITH POPE FRANCIS AND ST FRANCIS. Extracts from MARFAM'S revised Lenten booklet LOVE IS HIS LAW, LOVE IS HIS WAY.

Introduction. The Christmas reflections built in stories about St Francis and God's Love in Jesus in the Incarnation. The theme of Love remains embedded in our minds and hearts during Lent with love through sacrifice. From the time he answered God's call Francis was imbued with God's love in all of creation, but he particularly grew to identify with Jesus, crucified out of love. This loving union with Jesus in the Father's love, in spite of his own woundedness and suffering, brought him the overwhelming joy he shared with all of creation. Pope Francis, not only in *Laudato Si'* but also in his other writings, including *Amoris Laetitia* and *Fratelli Tutti*, shares this knowledge and joy. We are invited to join in this journey.

SOME ECO-FRIENDLY LENTEN ACTS OF LOVE AND SACRIFICE.

LENTEN PRACTICES IN FAMILIES. A family group discussed, "A sacrifice is essentially something offered to God. It can mean taking up something, doing, making, giving extra time for the benefit of others but offered to God." "Jack added, "I have noticed that often time is taken during Lent for churchy things but not much was done at home. This Lent we can focus more on that. Making up our own Family Lenten calendar and building in eco-family friendly acts gives ideas for action and prayer. We can even pray the Stations of the Cross for Families at home and in church!"

LAUDATO SI GOALS. from the Laudato Si Action Platform. These are built into the Lenten Daily Thoughts .

The **Response to the Cry of the Earth** is a call to protect our common home for the wellbeing of all, as we equitably address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and ecological sustainability.

The **Response to the Cry of the Poor** is a call to promote eco-justice, aware that we are called to defend human life from conception to death, and all forms of life on Earth. Assist with poverty alleviation projects.

Ecological Economics acknowledges that the economy is a sub-system of human society, which itself is embedded within the biosphere – our common home.

The **Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles** is about the ideal of sufficiency in the use of resources and energy.

Ecological Education is about re-thinking and re-designing curricular and institutional reform in the spirit of integral ecology in order to foster ecological awareness and transformative action.

Ecological Spirituality springs from an ecological conversion and helps us to "discover God in all things," the beauty of creation and the sighs of the sick and afflicted, aware that the life of the spirit is not remote from worldly realities.

Community Resilience and Empowerment. A synodal journey of community engagement and participatory action.

Environmental awareness. Study and Read: subscribe to eco-friendly newsletters on-line. Select topics of interest to study further on climate, biodiversity and a simpler lifestyle. Read up on biomimicry, i.e. lessons we can learn from nature. Read up on water and electricity saving, carbon footprints, healthy diets. Watch TV series and programmes on climate action and protection of creation around the world. Read up St Francis' life and way of life and study Pope Francis writings.

Do: Do a family project on becoming eco-friendly: pray privately and together, do faith sharing ideally together, check your family carbon footprint and try to reduce it. Support conservation projects for wild life, birds, bees, insects. Lobby about chosen issues – plastic pollution, environmental clean-up. Grow herbs, vegetables, trees, eat more healthily – less meat, more vegetables.. Donate unused items to charity. Family fast days (Friday fast) can save money to donate for feeding projects. Exercise to keep fit. Hold a Family Reconciliation service and Confession. Have a Family Prayer Meal.

Save money: Cut down alcohol, smoking, fizzy drinks, junk food, bottled water, car use. Think twice before you spend, do clothes-swop, buy in bulk and share. Have a meatless day, Save energy and water,

Waste reduction: Recycle and reuse. Avoid single use plastics, styrofoam, avoid wasting food, compost food wastage. Don't waste time.

Energy Saving: Do energy use check, switch off unnecessary and unused lights, TV and plugs. Use solar power and rechargeable batteries. Cut TV, computer and cellphone time, saves data.

Water saving: Use "grey" water from bath, shower and washing for toilets and garden. Don't run taps when not needed. Use drip irrigation in garden or veggie patch.

Recycle: Contribute to recycling projects. Plastic, paper, glass, make ecobricks out of plastic 2l bottles stuffed with plastic

General: clean up environment, plant trees, support ecological campaigns in church, school and society. Cutting time on-line or cellphone and relax.

Care for others: Make time for relationships, befriend, share, give away unused stuff. give to poor, care for sick and lonely.

February 22. Ash Wednesday Jack, a catechist, offered the family groups an explanation for the three Catholic practices of Lent which are each a form of daily repentance and sacrifice: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. "Prayer, personal or communal, makes room for God in our lives. Fasting can mean denying ourselves, possibly something we particularly like, to share with others in need or just as self-denial. Almsgiving is sharing with others some of our gifts, time, talents, money or other possessions. St Francis of Assisi made this three-fold Lenten practice his daily mission and way of life."

Who was St Francis: Francis Bernardone, born into a wealthy merchant family, as a young adult was a playboy, became a soldier and was wounded, captured and imprisoned for a year during a war between Assisi and a neighbouring town. He began to feel disillusioned with the materialistic, secular way of life and felt drawn towards a life of poverty. Prayer and reflection led him to publicly reject his family. Stripping off his smart clothes he gave them back to his father and put on the simple peasant's robe tied up with a rope, which after 800 years is still a feature of some Franciscan brothers, priests and sisters.

While out walking, in a small derelict church he heard a voice from the crucifix, "Francis go and rebuild my church, as you can see it is falling into ruin." He started rebuilding but came to see that his call was not about the building of stone but for the people and Church leaders. He chose a new way of life of prayer, poverty and humility. Soon friends and other men converted to his way. Later Clare, a daughter of a noble family in Assisi, who was captivated by his vision, asked to join.

Francis was no highly educated theologian and never became a priest. He intensely experienced God's love in the Incarnate and Crucified Jesus. While travelling, preaching and teaching his growing community of friars and Clare's community of sisters, Francis lived a life of ongoing conversion, humbly and in peace with every person and all creatures. He came to see everything as his family, calling the elements of creation by name as Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Mother Earth, also Brother Wolf, Sister Dove.

Scripture: "Even now," says the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping and mourning." Joel 2:12-18. "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." From the blessing with ashes.

Pope Francis: Our sister, Mother Earth, cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth; our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and receive life and refreshment from her waters. LS2. St Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology, lived out joyfully and authentically. He loved and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving and his open-heartedness. LS11. **Reflect, share, act, pray.** As family members share what you particularly admire in St Francis. What is God calling you to do at this moment? Review the *Laudato Si* goals for a good understanding.

February 23. "Road rage is a horrible thing but surely it is so often brought on by someone breaking the law, or being selfish in the traffic," Mohale said. "Taxis are the worst on the road," Gordon added. Joyce said, "The recent load shedding that we have been faced with has really messed up the traffic flow, multiplied our anger and frustration and the accident rate on the roads no end. Where is the evil in all that and how can we each deal with the situation in the most "life-giving" way."

St Francis. A life-changing event for him was a peace-building journey to Damietta in Egypt to meet a Muslim sultan, a leader in the war between the Christian Crusaders and the Muslims. *The poverty and austerity of St Francis were no mere veneer of ascetism, but something much more radical, a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.* LS11

Scripture: Moses said, "see I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments then you shall live. From Deut 30:15-20 **Pope Francis:** Let us say to the Lord, "I am angry with this person. I pray to you for him. To pray for a person with whom I am irritated is a beautiful step forward in love, an act of evangelisation. Let us do it today. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal of fraternal love. EG 101 Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection. Each is willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things. LS69. St Francis: **Reflect, share, act, pray.** How can we repent of our choices of evil instead of good? What does Moses, in speaking of life and death, tell us about being life-giving and preserving creation? *Laudato Si* speaks of integral conversion.

February 24. Fasting. The participants of the family groups were thinking about ways to fast so as to be life-giving. "Isaiah's reading gives us good ideas," Vincent said. "Our family has also made up a list of "Acts of Love and Sacrifice," with many suggestions for fasting to choose from. We have added more environmental ideas too, like saving water and electricity, caring for nature, finding out more about conservation, and the CO2 everyone is talking about, etc."

Jackson suggested a weekly family fast day and donating the money saved to charity, e.g. the SVP, for a meal for a poor family. See the MARFAM list of eco-family friendly sacrifices.

St Francis, even as a young boy, had been generous with the poor. As he was discovering his vocation there was a serious break-down in his relationship with his father, because he started giving away his father's goods, money and food. For himself, he prayed and fasted constantly as a penance and denied himself any pleasure in food. From the *Life of St Francis of Assisi by St Bonaventure*. "When he perceived by his example that many were inspired to bear the Cross of Christ with fervour, he himself was inspired, like a good leader of the army of Christ, to consider the saying, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh and its emotions and lusts." He restrained his sensual appetites with such strict discipline that he would barely take what was necessary to support life, as it was difficult to satisfy the needs of the body without yielding to the inclinations of the senses. He seldom allowed himself cooked food and would either sprinkle it with ashes, or by pouring water over it, would as far as possible destroy its savour and taste. He was always discovering methods of more rigorous abstinence."

Scripture: "Thus says the Lord God, "Behold in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure and oppress all your workers. You fast only to quarrel and to fight. Is not the fast that I choose to loose the bonds of wickedness, let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house, when you see the naked to cover him and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Isaiah 58: 1-9.

Pope Francis: Social love is the key to authentic development. In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural - must be given renewed value and become the constant and highest norm for all activity. LS 231. **Reflect, share, act, pray.** Do you consider St Francis' fasting to be excessive? How can we as a family practise doing penance by fasting? Reflect on the *Laudato Si* goal of "sustainable living."

February 25. The Franciscan way. Everyone in the family groups agreed that thinking more about the February theme for the month, "Love gives families life," had so far given them insights and will help to make a very meaningful Lenten journey. Gathering more information about St Francis, his way and his teaching will also help.

"Francis began his pilgrim journey of conversion alone. He was no longer interested in his friends, wealth and a good life. He chose to be detached from any possessions and lived as a beggar for some time, while physically rebuilding the abandoned church at San Damiano. As his conversion deepened, Francis used to praise God, the Artist, in every one of God's works. Whatever joy he found he referred to their maker. Everything cried out to him, 'He who made us is infinitely good!' He called animals "brother" or "sister," and he exhorted them to praise God. He would go through the streets, inviting everyone to sing with him. One time when he came upon an almond tree, he said, 'Brother Almond, speak to me of God.'" And the almond tree blossomed. Saint Francis can do this for us once we are caught up in his life and teachings. He makes us blossom, wherever and whoever we are, because we see, in him what could happen if we embrace the overflowing goodness of God revealed in everything that exists and so experience God's joy."

Here are the eight teachings of St. Francis of Assisi." From Franciscan Media. (Google for more details of the teachings and read the explanations)

1. The Wonder of the Incarnation
2. Evangelical Poverty
3. Live the Gospel
4. Go and Repair God's House
5. Peace.
6. God's House Is All of Creation.
7. The Joy of Humble Praise and Service of God
8. The Teaching of Teachings: Love.

The highest of all loves is the total love of God leading to true love of neighbor and the true love of neighbor leading to the love of God. "Let us love the Lord God with all our heart and all our soul, with all our mind and all our strength and with fortitude and with total understanding, with all of our power, with every effort, every affection, every emotion, every desire, and every wish." — From the Rule of St Francis 1221, Chapter XXIII

Scripture: If you take away the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire with good things, make your bones strong and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose waters do not fail. Is 58: 9-14.

Pope Francis. God, who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way. In the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much is always present. He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth and his love

constantly impels us to find new ways forward. Praise be to him! LS 245 **Reflect, share, act, pray.** Explore which of the teachings of St Francis appeals to you. Consider how they relate to the *Laudato Si* goals.

February 26. Sunday Lent 1A. “Wow, we have two temptation stories today,” Fr Fidelis began his homily, “that of our first ancestors and of Jesus. Eve gave in to the devil, ate the fruit and then she tempted Adam who also gave in. That makes them both guilty. They recognized their sinfulness when they saw their own nakedness. Jesus was not guilty of sin because he was able to resist the devil. Temptation comes to us all as we well know and I think you will agree with me when I ask myself too, “Isn't it quite difficult to decide when something is temptation and something a sin?” He paused for a bit, then added, “Why not discuss the issue at home and think of some examples.”

St Francis. “All Christians agree that Jesus is divine, but we have different views as to why God became human. Many believe that God sent Jesus as the repairman, to correct the damage that had been caused by the original sin of humanity's first parents, Adam and Eve. For the Franciscan theologian John Duns Scotus the reason for God's choosing to become man is God's love, not human sin. The incarnation means that God becomes a human person, a baby, poor, helpless and humble. God freely chooses to move beyond his own self-loving and to share that loving with something other, namely all of creation, especially but not exclusively humankind. Scotus recognizes that God's love is hard to see in the misery of the abandoned Jesus on the cross, but the love glorifies the whole creational project in the Resurrection. From *Care for Creation.*” In simpler terms, God loved, God continues to love, God wants to share that love and be part of his creation which includes suffering and overcoming death. Jesus did experience temptation but he did not ever sin.

Scripture: *The serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “God knows that when you eat of the tree your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Gen 2 – 3. At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. From Matthew 4:1-11.*

Pope Francis: *the creation accounts suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships; with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible these vital relationships have been broken, outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator,, humanity and creation was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. It is significant that the harmony which St Francis experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture. LS 66. **Reflect, share, act, pray.** Consider the concept of God's love being the reason for the Incarnation.*

February 27. Mrs Beatus had developed a great interest in the life of St Francis and found her research most enlightening. She shared, “Francis himself was no great theologian but others around and after him developed his thought and experience into a spirituality which has now been followed by millions of men and women all over the world. At the centre of his life is the *Incarnate Crucified Lord of all Creation* whom Francis called our “Elder brother.” She added, “I can't help wondering “If God, as Trinity, is in a sense a family, a community of love, surely the same can be said of creation and, looking at it more specifically with family eyes, we can say, “Creation is a family of families.” Then applying this one can look at this larger animal family, plant family or insect family of families and see the particular characteristics of what makes a family - bonding, belonging, care and protection, unconditional love especially of the vulnerable, young, old, weak, etc. “ Patrick added, “but at the same time why is there more domestic violence, abuse, and incest within a family? Why do we hurt the most those love the most?”

Scripture: *You shall not hate your brother in your heart and take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Leviticus 19:11-18. **Pope Francis:** In the Judeo-Christian tradition the word creation has a broader meaning than nature, for it has to do with God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion. LS 76. **Reflect, share, act, pray.** How can a deeper understanding of the *Laudato Si* goal of “the cry of the poor” be enriched by an understanding of family.*

February 28. Brother Sun and Sister Moon, sister water, mother earth. Bruce, the group's scripture scholar noted, “Scripture contains a number of accounts or references to creation in different contexts. As in Genesis 1 and 2, details differ about the order of creation but the central message is the wisdom, power and goodness of God and our dependence on him for sustaining and providing for all of creation.

St Francis. “Each morning the planet turns towards the sun, soaking in its warmth and suckling its life energy. Every second our great generous sun offers up four million tons of itself, transformed into radiant light and energy, for all life

to use. Green plants absorb it, convert it into food and energy which too is provided for all life, human, plant and animal. All life depends on energy, and all energy has the sun as its ultimate source. With St Francis we revel in the miracle of Brother Sun, whose life-giving energy courses through our bodies, warming our hearts, as it ignites our dreams, our fuel and our work in the world. " From *Care for Creation*. p 58.

When considering the solar system as a whole, the moon and the stars, we can ask, "Is the universe still seen as a source of amazing wonder and beauty, or as another element to be colonized and appropriated for our use? Today in spite of the harm we humans have done to creation, in particular during the last 200 years, - global warming, CO2 emission, air and plastic pollution, - the elements are still beautiful and precious. We need to go out into the world of nature, to observe and reflect on this to fully appreciate their beauty and value. Science has studied creation in much more depth and we now know so much more about the universe. As we reflect on the beauty as well as the destruction in creation can we become conscious of the link with the incarnation? Jesus, God's Word of love is present and as Crucified Lord bears the imprints of the wounds we have inflicted on the elements of our world.

From St Francis Canticle of All Creatures

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord, All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour and all blessings.

To you alone, Most High, do they belong, and no mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your Name.

Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun,

Who is the day through whom You give us light.

And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour, Of You Most High, he bears the likeness.

Scripture: *Thus saith the Lord, "as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth. It shall not return to me empty, but shall accomplish that which I intend and prosper in the thing for which I sent it. Isaiah 55: 10-11*

Pope Francis: *We need to grasp the variety of things in their multiple relationships. We understand better the importance and meaning of each creature if we contemplate it within the entirety of God's plan. LS 86.*

Reflect, share, act, pray. *As family members, research, read up and share on references to God and creation in the Bible and the world. Are the sun, moon and stars recognized for their beauty and for giving glory to God. How can this relate to the Laudato Si goal of "the cry of the earth." .*