



NOVEMBER - FAMILY LOSSES AND ENDINGS

DAILY THOUGHTS available on www.marfam.org.za, facebook and twitter. Request for email to info@marfam.org.za. Abbreviations: Pope Francis: LS = Laudato Si. AL = Amoris Laetitia FT = Fratelli Tutti. EG = Evangelii Gaudium LD = Laudate Deum. Synod on Synodality documents. Tttttttttttttttttttttt5t5

NOVEMBER. Family Losses and Endings. Losses big and small are inevitable experiences of daily life, from losing one’s car keys to losing a beloved spouse, child or parent through death. Birth, growth, decline and death are the natural cycle of every element of creation. Family breakup of different kinds also causes a sense of loss. For inanimate creatures it may be a painless letting go or a cataclysmic event, earthquake or flood. Death and decay are in many instances also a source of renewal of the land. Extinction is a serious concern for the animal and plant kingdoms. For us as humans, created with special capabilities and gifts to love and hurt and forgive, this time of the year is a special gift to remember life, losses and death and their Creator, as well as resurrection and reunion. **Pope Francis:** *If we accept death we can prepare ourselves for it. The better we live on this earth, the greater the happiness we will be able to share with our loved ones in heaven. AL 258. For human beings to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation, these are sins against the natural world, ourselves and against God. LS8.*

SETTING THE SCENE. The PPC invited all families in their prayer groups, wards or blocks to prepare a small “home altar,” with a bible, crucifix, photos or other mementoes, a place to remember and share with one another their memories around loss.

PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO ARE BEREAVED OR WIDOWED.
God, our Father, I remember in prayer whom I have loved, who had a special place in my heart and in my life and who is now no longer here with me. Thank you Lord, for the times that you gave us to share together the gift of life. Thank you Lord for the blessings and also the crosses you granted us over the years because they brought us closer to you. I pray for pardon and forgiveness for anything we did to hurt each other that still causes me pain. I pray that you will grant eternal rest and that my memories will be a source of comfort to me. I pray too that in time all those we loved will be reunited and live together with you in perfect joy. I make this prayer through Christ our Lord.
Amen From MARFAM prayers of life.

1 November. The Narrow Door. “I don’t think that Luke is very “merciful” in his gospel. If you don’t buy into the values of this Kingdom of God, you’re out in the cold.” “Plus the only way in is through a narrow door. Is that because only a few people wish to go in, or to make it difficult for people? When I saw it, the small door into the church in Bethlehem’s Manger Square reminded me of that narrow door and I was told it was like that because the big main entrance had been bricked up during the time of the Crusades to prevent soldiers on horseback from riding in. Makes you think.” The matrices carried on their discussion long after the debate and their teachers were glad. As Mr Bozzoli said, “Jesus taught that the wedding feast of Life, or of the Kingdom, presided over by the Master of the House, is open to all peoples of all nations. But we must still seek diligently for that narrow door that leads to eternal life.

Reflect, share, Scripture. *Strive to enter by the narrow door, for many I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Luke 13:22-30. Pope Francis: We need to take up an ancient lesson found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible, it is the conviction that “less is more.” LS222. “The Church is for everyone, everyone!!” Pope Francis at the 2023 Synod on synodality. Action and prayer:* Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost.

2 November. Commemoration of the Faithful Departed. Each year the parish went as a group to the cemetery to visit the graves of their own beloved deceased family and friends. After her husband died, year after year, Beatrice would debate with herself whether to go with them. At first she had felt a need for the company of others, then a remoteness, then pain again, and so until after a number of years she stopped going but still cherished his memories in her heart. One year, she deeply mourned the death of her cat, who had been her constant companion during the difficult years and thanked God for this special gift too.

Reflect, share, Scripture. *We would not have you ignorant brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 1 Thes 4:13. Pope Francis* For those who believe in you, Lord, life is not ended but changed. Our loved ones are not lost in the shades of nothingness; hope assures us that they are in the good strong hands of God. AL 256. *God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement. LD 68. Action and prayer:* Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost.

3 November. “What is going on in Israel, Gaza and large parts of the Middle East these days is extremely worrying, frightening and terribly tragic for everyone. Sometimes it does seem that the Jews and Christians are on the way out and radical Jihadist Muslim are taking over that part of the world. But some of us, Israelites, still hold on to the belief that this land is God’s gift to us, where God is present in a special way. Jesus himself could foresee the destruction of Jerusalem in his own day. What about today? Have we listened to the prophets of our time? We, Jews, still dream of a “homeland” for the family of God,” Rabbi Jenkowitz shared. Fr Meindl responded, “We Christians still follow Jesus who was on a mission to heal and free people from all evil. His journey was to end in Jerusalem. Are we not called to be peacemakers somehow?”

Reflect, share, Scripture. *Paul wrote, “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the law; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Rom 9:1-5 Pope Francis: sincere and humble worship of God bears fruit not in discrimination, hatred and violence, but in respect for the sacredness of life, respect for the dignity and freedom of others and loving commitment to the welfare of all. Terrorism is deplorable and threatens the security of people and disseminates panic, terror and pessimism, but this is not due to religion, even when terrorists instrumentalise it. It is due, to an accumulation of incorrect interpretations of religious texts and policies linked to hunger, poverty, injustice, oppression and pride. FT 283. Action and prayer:* Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost.

4 November. Family meals can be successful, happy or disastrous, depending on the food and drink, who is present, what the mood is like and how the conversation is guided. “Have you ever considered setting a place for Jesus at the dinner table? That might seem silly but it can be a visible sign of an invisible reality. “Like a sacrament you mean?” shouted Stuart who was always a bright spark. “In Luke’s gospel there are up to 16 stories of how Jesus ate with anyone, sometimes in large groups, but also in twos and threes, anywhere & everywhere – even with people who hated him! At such meals he acted as a “Wisdom Figure,” providing food for thought along with food for the body.

Reflect, share, Scripture. *One Sabbath Jesus went to dine at the house of a ruler who belonged to the Pharisees and they were watching him. Jesus said, “when you are invited do not sit down in a place of honour lest a more eminent man than you be invited. Everyone one who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” From Luke 14:1,7-11. Pope Francis* A family’s living space could turn into a domestic church, a setting for the eucharist, the presence of Christ seated at its table. AL 15 *In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. We learn to ask without demanding, to say “thank you” as an expression of genuine gratitude for what we have been given, to control our aggressivity and greed and ask forgiveness. LS 213 Action and prayer:* Hold a family prayer meal and remember the needs of those we have loved and lost.

5th November. Sunday All Saints. Fr Teddy asked the congregation, “Why do you suppose the gospel for this feast is the Beatitudes? I have been wondering about that myself until I realised that the qualities of those mentioned there in the way they live are in fact the qualities of saints. You know that St Paul called his people saints while they were still alive, but we tend to think of saints only after death and a process of canonisation. But let’s try to be saints in the way Paul saw it and live the beatitudes in our lives, our family lives. On top of that of course we must reflect on the saints in heaven. Who is your favourite? Mine is.....”

Reflect, share, Scripture. *Blessed are the poor in Spirit. Blessed are the merciful, those that mourn, those that hunger and thirst for justice. Blessed are the peacemakers and the pure in heart. From Matthew 5. Pope Francis: . Blessed Charles de Foucauld* Having been a soldier, a priest in Palestine, he finally directed his ideal of total surrender to God towards an identification with the poor, abandoned in the depths of the African desert. *In that setting he expressed his*

*desire to feel himself a brother to every human being and asked a friend to pray to God that I truly be the brother of all. He was killed by a band of marauders in 1916. He wanted to be, in the end the universal brother. FT 287. **Action and prayer:** Share about favourite saints and ask their intercession for the needs of those we have loved and lost.*

6 November. Joyce and Pat had both grown up in poor families struggling for survival. Education was a great value, but the education in positive values taught at home was equally important. "Even though we are not poor now, so much of what we were taught is still important. Our children know our doors are always open to those in need."

Reflect, share, Scripture. *When you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just. Luke 14:12-14. **Pope Francis:** The new evangelisation is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in the lives of the poor and to put them at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes but also to be their friends to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them. EG 198. **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost.*

7 November. "Mrs Page, the parish's volunteer psychologist shared with Fr Michael, "Isn't it strange how often people avoid what needs to be addressed, whether it is a terminal illness and approaching death, a marriage running into difficulties and fears about divorce or issues with children, other family members or work related matters. Is there a great fear of loss, so much so that we manage to hide it and pretend it doesn't exist?" "Or even refuse any help that is offered," he responded. "That always saddens me."

Reflect, share, Scripture. *A man gave a great banquet and invited many. When the time came he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited. "Come for all is now ready." But they all began to make excuses. From Luke: 14: 15-24. **Pope Francis:** the life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises, yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty. Couples should be helped to realise that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship, instead it can improve, settle and mature the wine of their union. AL 232. In responding to the climate crises we can note the rise of a false or superficial ecology which bolsters complacency and a cheerful recklessness. Such evasiveness serves as a licence to carry on with our present lifestyles and models of consumption. This is the way human beings contrive to feed their self-destructive vices; trying not to see them, acknowledge them, delay important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen. LS 59. **Action and prayer:** Reflect and share on the fear of dying and Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost.*

8 November "What on earth could Jesus mean by saying we have to hate everything and everyone and take up one's own cross to follow him?" Jasmine had often pondered over this statement. "Can he really mean hate, or is he using exaggerating language to make his point?" When her husband left her for another woman she was devastated. There were times when she felt as if she did hate him and even the whole world. Gradually she came to see Jesus' statement differently. This was a cross and she realised that for her not having that earthly attachment could become a positive way forward.

Reflect, share, Scripture. *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:25-33. **Pope Francis.** The joy of the gospel is such that it cannot be taken away from us by anyone or anything. The evils of our world, and those of the church must not be excuses for diminishing our commitment and our fervour. EG 84. True wisdom demands an encounter with reality. The ability to sit down and listen to others, typical of interpersonal encounters .today's world is largely a deaf world. The frantic pace of the modern world prevents us from listening attentively to what another person is saying. Halfway through we interrupt him and want to contradict what he has not even finished saying. St Francis heard the voice of God, the voice of the poor, the voice of the infirm and the voice of nature. He made of them a way of life. FT 48. **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost.*

9 November. Loss. “Have you seen those adverts on street poles or been given leaflets at traffic lights about some forms of healing ministry promoted in our country these days. Is it really possible to “Bring back lost lover” with muti or other practices or is there an element of witchcraft or superstition we Catholics are not OK with. Loss is a natural part of life, and also a consequence of original sin. It causes much heartache and needs to be properly dealt with. Some of us pray to St Anthony to find lost things like car keys or ID books. Others go to Retrouvaille, a programme for troubled marriages hoping to “rediscover” their love that they think they may have lost. Jesus told stories of God’s care for us including for sinners and the joy of finding what was lost. He tells of the shepherd who goes after one of the 100 who was lost and the woman who goes after one lost coin out of ten.

Reflect, share, Scripture. *The woman said, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost. Just so I tell you there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Luke 15:3-10: **Pope Francis.** Today our challenge is not so much atheism as the need to respond adequately to many people’s thirst for God, lest they try to satisfy it with alienating solutions or with a disembodied Jesus who demands nothing of us with regard to others. EG 89. What we all need is an ecological conversion whereby the effects of an encounter with Jesus Christ becomes evident in a relationship with the world around us. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue. LS 217*
Action and prayer: Remember in prayer the times of experiencing “lost and found.”

10 November. Too many people nowadays lose their jobs, some even more than once, and seldom through any fault of their own. Not all of them have made provision for this and many do feel too old to dig and too ashamed to beg. Debt counsellors and financial advisors have their hands full. Is their advice always honest and for the benefit of their client or for themselves? That situation is really as old as the hills. In the gospel Jesus noted that even bad managers make decisions that will help not only themselves. But is that just? We cannot give away what doesn’t belong to us in order to buy favour as in Jesus’ parable of the dishonest steward. As children of the light we have much to learn about the proper use of goods – to benefit everyone. Jesus is being sarcastic in making his comment about the wisdom of the dishonest servant.

Reflect, share, Scripture. *The master commended the dishonest steward for his prudence. “Sons of this world are wiser in their own generation than the sons of light.” Luke 16:1-8. **Pope Francis.** It is chilling to realise that the capacities expanded by technology have given those with the knowledge and especially the economic resources to use them an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world. Never has humanity had such power over itself yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used. LD 23. **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those who have lost much and if possible offer help.*

11th November. There is a back-to-front saying these days: “less is more.” What could that possibly mean? Charles sat down with the children when they were quite young. “You know that my father lost everything he owned when his land was taken away from him and with that his source of income. We children had to learn to manage with very little. We were able to rebuild our fortune but I am proud to say that father never allowed us to cheat anyone. Our experience taught us to be more generous with the poor. I believe that small moneys used faithfully can help, especially in teaching us wisdom and integrity in our use of greater wealth in money or other things. God who sees the heart knows where our primary love and values are.

Reflect, share, Scripture. *He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much. You can’t serve both God and Money or Mammon. From Luke 16:9-15. **Pope Francis** Ethics leads to a God who calls for a committed response which is outside of the categories of the marketplace. God calls human beings to their full realisation and to freedom from all forms of enslavement. From EG 57. In recent years we can note that astounded and excited by the promises of any number of false prophets, the poor themselves at times fall prey to the illusion of a world that is not being built for them. LD 31. **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and have suffered loss.*

12 November. Sunday 32A. Father Daniel with the Parish Family Team had started a group of bereaved parents. “This is for your support of one another,” he said. “The group will meet once a month but you are free to meet informally with one another at any time. “Hope is the one concept I have to hold on to,” Mrs Peters shared with her friend Joey, as she sat weeping quietly. “How could a young boy like him, on the brink of life die in such a gruesome accident. I know he hadn’t been a regular church goer since he was confirmed but I hope that his faith and my prayers even helped him to

make his peace with God in those moments before he died.” As she comforted her friend Joey reflected on the troubling situation around wild-life poaching a passionate interest of hers. “Animals also have feelings” she thought. “How many grieving rhino, elephant or pangolin families there must be too.”

Reflect, share, Scripture. *We would not have you ignorant, brethren concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 1 Thes. 4:13-14. Pope Francis* How can we even begin to understand the grief of parents who have lost a child? It is as if time stops altogether, a chasm opens to engulf both past and future. How many people – I can understand them – get angry with God. AL254. *It consoles us to know that those who die do not completely pass away and faith assures us that the risen Lord will never abandon us. AL256. Action and prayer:* Remember in prayer the needs of all creatures who have loved and lost.

13 November. Mrs Pierce was a catechist and a teacher. She shared, “We hear a lot about child trafficking, how these traffickers groom children to become prostitutes. Is that sinful for the young people or for the traffickers? Or what about those who go to prostitutes, surely that is sinful? The children are tempted with sweets, cell phones, clothes and are given drugs that cause them to become addicts. Could their behaviour then be regarded as sinful?” After an incident the school had sent a notice to families to talk to their children about trafficking but of course temptation and sin was not something the school addressed, but the catechists sent a letter to parents. They, as the first educators of their children, dare not lose out on doing their duty or else their children may lose their lives.

Reflect, share, Scripture. *Jesus said, Temptations to sin are sure to come but woe to him by whom they come! But anyone who tempts children does a great wrong, such people should be thrown away.” Luke 17:1-6. Pope Francis* The sexual exploitation of children is another scandalous and perverse reality in present-day society. Sexual abuse of children is all the more scandalous when it occurs in places where they ought to be most safe, in families, schools, communities and Christian institutions. AL 45. **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those who have suffered abuse of any kind.

14th November. A priest shared with the group about his experience with ministering to those approaching death. Some seem so afraid, some seem to hold back even though their condition is terminal. Nowadays there is discussion about assisted suicide especially when pain becomes too much to bear. “But,” he said, “I have found that helping people to die in peace may well include healing of relationships, dealing with unfinished business and making things right with family members. When this has been done they are ready to go in peace. Families should understand that this can happen and speak about death when they can. Preparing the dying as well as those being left behind are a special form of family ministry.”

Reflect, share, Scripture. *The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died and their departure was thought to be an affliction and their going from us to be their destruction, but they are at peace. Wisdom 2: 23 -3:9. Pope Francis:* If we accept death we can prepare ourselves for it. The way is to grow in our love for those who walk at our side until that day, when death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more. AL258. **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those preparing for death and those who will be left behind.

15 November 11th. All illnesses, physical and mental, result in a loss in the quality of life. Some are fatal. Some diseases cause a loss in dignity too as sufferers are discriminated against and stigmatised. Many of those infected with HIV and those who have died from Aids related diseases have suffered serious psychological and emotional pain too. Leprosy was a terminal disease until very recent times and in Jesus’ day sufferers lived as outcasts from the community. An important part of St Francis’ conversion was his willingness to touch a leper and later to work with lepers. Covid required isolation and many families suffered mental trauma especially when members died alone and they had no sense of closure. As a family activity reflect back on times of family illness and how you responded to the needs experienced.

Reflect, share, Scripture. *One of the lepers when he saw he was healed turned back praising God. Jesus asked,, Were not ten lepers cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except his foreigner?” Luke 17:11-19. Pope Francis:* The family can discover together with the Christian community new approaches, a different way

*of understanding and identifying with others by welcoming and caring for the mystery of the frailty of human life. AL47. The earth's resources are being plundered because of short-sighted approaches to the economy, the loss of forests and woodlands entails the loss of species which may constitute extremely important resources in the future for food and for curing disease and other uses. LS 32. **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost.*

16 November. The Kingdom. From Jesus' own time until now people keep asking about the coming of the Kingdom. "Where is it, what does it look like?" they asked him. Different churches and theologians using the Bible and external signs, described in the Book of Revelation, have tried to identify the end times. We think of those who have died already experiencing it. However do we sometimes forget the words of Jesus himself, when he said, "Behold the kingdom of God is in your midst?" But even those words continue to confuse us. Is it within each one, in the Church, in Christianity, wherever the values of the Kingdom are lived, or wherever Wisdom is found?

Reflect, share, Scripture. *In wisdom there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, subtle, unpolluted, invulnerable, loving the good, humane, steadfast, free from anxiety. God loves nothing so much as the man who lives with wisdom. From Wisdom 7:22-8:1 "Gods kingdom is in your midst", says Jesus. Luke 17:20-25: **Pope Francis** The kingdom already present and growing in our midst engages us at every level of our being and reminds us of the principle of discernment. It must be directed to all men and the whole man. EG 181. The Synod on Synodality actions; discern how the Spirit calls families, not just individuals to be vehicles of fraternity. How can we consider the home as a place for pastoral ministry and proclamation through practice of the Conversations in the Spirit. **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost.*

17th November. Taking Action. Isn't it true that in spite of all the strife, conflict and disasters that we see on TV every day we mostly carry on living as normal. We may give some money to a disaster fund or a charity out of a sense of obligation, maybe guilt or compassion. It seems that mainly when people have suffered a loss or are suffering from a particular disease they are prepared to take some action, maybe form or join a support group like COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS for those who have lost a child or SUICIDES ANONYMOUS.

Reflect, share, Scripture. *If they have the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of all things?" Wisdom 13:1-9. **Pope Francis** : if the family in the light of faith accepts the presence of persons with special needs they will be able to recognise and ensure the quality and value of every human life, with its proper needs, rights and opportunities. AL47. The Judaeo-Christian vision of the cosmos defends the unique and central value of the human being amid the marvellous concert of all God's creatures. Today we are forced to recognise that human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures. As part of the universe all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect. LD 67. **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost.*

18 November. Widowhood. Widows are commonly mentioned in the Bible, primarily because of their vulnerability, rather than the fact that they are widows, have lost a spouse and maybe mourning that loss and learning to deal with the life experience. Widowers too have to work through the process which can take a long time. For some this results initially in a state of confusion, a sense of helplessness and inadequacy. Gradually the widowed may recover a desire for justice especially if they have been abused or exploited.

Reflect, share, Scripture. *"In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man and there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Give me justice. Vindicate me against my enemy." The judge said to himself, because this widow bothers me, I will give her what she wants or she will wear me out by her continual coming. Luke 18:1-8. **Pope Francis** . When a society is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes no political programme or resource spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquillity. EG 59. Losing one's spouse is particularly difficult, from the moment of enduring a loss some display an ability to concentrate their energies in a greater dedication to their children and grandchildren. Those who do not have relatives to receive affection from should be aided by the Christian community, with particular attention and availability, especially if they are poor. AL 254 . **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost, especially the widowed.*

19th Sunday 33 A. WORLD DAY OF THE POOR. “Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor” (Tob 4:7). The parish Care Group gathered for their “tea, biscuit and sharing” time after the monthly Mass for the elderly. Doris opened with, “One of my favourite verses in the Bible is from Proverbs and it is interesting that it is the 1st reading for this coming World Day of the Poor on Sunday. “Who can find a good wife? She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. It makes me feel good to work together with my husband in the SSV and share in their work of caring for the poor.” The group listened quietly and one by one they shared their story and acknowledged each other. Audrey said, “My mother was very involved in this work too and we watched her going to lots of meetings. Because of my disability I could never do more than stay home and knit blanket squares, but lots of lonely people used to come by and I taught them to knit too. Although we never made money out of it we were delighted to win a prize for the greatest number of blankets we donated to the children’s home.” Florence only occasionally came and sometimes she looked really frail. As they listened to her story they realised how poor and difficult her home life was, an abusive alcoholic man who abused her and their daughter. Norah had been raped and become pregnant. George had lost his leg in an accident. Beauty’s life had been wonderful until she had a battle with cancer. Each one, rich and poor, had a life story of pains and joys. As they shared and listened and acknowledged, they understood how supportive such a group could be to the women and the occasional man in their daily battles against poverty of so many kinds. Adam put up a poster with his favourite saying of St Mother Teresa. “The greatest poverty is lack of love.” They nodded and went home encouraged.

Reflect, share, Scripture. *Who can find a good wife? The heart of her husband trusts in her. She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. From Proverbs 31. Pope Francis: The message for WORLD DAY OF THE POOR 2023 tells in short part of the story of the book of Tobit, of the family of Tobit and Anna and their son Tobias. Tobit a very righteous man living in exile among pagans sends his son off on a journey and gives him this advice. “Revere the Lord all your days, my son and refuse to sin or to transgress his commandments. Live uprightly all the days of your life and do not walk in the ways of wrongdoing. Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor.” His father encourages him, “to all those who practice righteousness give alms from your possessions and do not let your eye begrudge the gift when you make it.” Tobit 4:7* Download the whole message from.

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/poveri/documents/20230613-messaggio-vii-giornatamondiale-poveri-2023.html> **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of the poor and their losses.

20th November. Turning to Other Spirits. Witchcraft and satanism in some form are phenomena in South Africa and the wider world, today, but they are not the same. Witchcraft tends to be concerned with traditional cultures, ancestors, spirits, and curses, but not with Satan, the devil which is a different form or worship that surfaces from time to time, often among the youth. Fear and anxiety over life situations leads people to have recourse to traditional practices and consulting their ancestors. Turning from the God who revealed himself to Abraham and the Israelites and adopting false gods of other neighbouring tribes has been done frequently over the centuries. As Christianity spread and came into contact with other religions there were influences too.

Reflect, share, Scripture. *Many, even from Israel, gladly adopted the false religion, they sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath. 1 Maccabees. Pope Francis It is important to realise that there are no lasting changes without cultural changes, without a maturing of lifestyles and convictions within societies, and there are no cultural changes without personal changes. LD 70. From the Synod on Synodality Africa Continental Report.* The Church came with a culture into another culture. Synodality should help to listen to the cultural practices that have been either ignored, condemned or suppressed by the Western culture through which the Gospel was preached to Africans. These cultural practices, some deeply influenced and changed by Western and Christian cultural influences, continue to affect the way Christians live out the Gospel. They should, therefore, be listened to in view of either integrating, purifying or collectively rejecting them based on a clear understanding of the exigencies of the Gospel. **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost.

21 November. Beliefs and Morality. Belief systems influence morality. Assisted suicide or euthanasia, rejecting treatment or blood transfusions and vaccination, rejecting or accepting divorce and abortion are some moral issues that religious people agonise over and have been part of the recent Synod on Synodality conversations. Within families, even when all are Christians, there may be different belief systems. Catholics uphold as best they can the teaching of the Church with integrity, and based on their own, and, ideally, well-formed conscience. The story in the book of Maccabees

about the sacrificial killing of the scribe Eleazar illustrates how this man of integrity, not wishing to give scandal to his fellow believers, chose death over the option of eating pork which was against his belief system. 2 Maccabees 6:18-31

Reflect, share, Scripture. *Eleazar said, "Such pretence is not worthy of our time of life" he said, "lest many of the young should suppose that Eleazar in his ninetieth year has gone over to an alien religion and through my pretence for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they should be led astray. Pope Francis: What to expect from COP28 in DUBAI? If we are confident in the capacity of human beings to transcend their personal interests and to think in bigger terms we can keep hoping that COP 28 will allow for a decisive acceleration of energy transition with effective commitments subject to ongoing monitoring. We must move beyond the mentality of appearing to be concerned but have the courage needed to produce substantial changes. LD 54-56. Action and prayer:* Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost.

22 November. The Bible study group was quite shocked when they compared Luke's and Matthew's versions of the parable of the Talents. How could Jesus be talking about slaying the man who didn't make any profit? They carefully studied the two versions and some commentaries and came to realise that in Luke Jesus was portraying a cruel, tyrannical ruler who would readily kill someone. The group also read the account of the martyrdom in Maccabees of 7 brothers and their mother. They then considered whether all this was any different to our society today, in the world, the country or even in homes where conflict is common and gender based violence is at pandemic proportions. How much unacceptable violence is taking place and why?

Reflect, share, Scripture. *In those days it happened that 7 brothers and their mother were arrested and being compelled by the king under torture to partake of unlawful swine's flesh. 2 Mac 7:1, 20-3. The harsh king in the parable of the talents commanded his servants, "But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me." Luke 19:11-28. Pope Francis Today in many places we hear a call for greater security. But until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples is reversed it will be impossible to eliminate violence. Just as goodness tends to spread, the toleration of evil, which is injustice, tends to expand and quietly to undermine any political and social system, no matter how solid it may appear. EG 59 It frequently becomes clear that in practice human rights are not equal for all. Respect for those rights is the preliminary condition for a country's social and economic development. When the dignity of the human person is respected and his or her rights recognised and guaranteed, creativity and interdependence thrive and actions further the common good. FT 22. Action and prayer:* Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost.

23rd November. Jesus' Concern. Going on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land has been popular for many centuries. Nowadays Jerusalem doesn't look like it did in Jesus' time as it was partly destroyed by the Romans only 30 years after his death. It was captured and fought over in many wars over the centuries, right up to our day. No doubt Jesus would weep as grievously as ever over Jerusalem today and the fate of its Jewish children as well as the Palestinians and various Christian groups who also have a share in the city. How many other cities in the world would he weep over, not because of external enemies but because the enemy is within? Would he weep over ours?

Reflect, share, Scripture. *Jesus wept over Jerusalem saying, "The days are coming when your enemies will hem you in on every side and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you because you did not know the time of your visitation." Luke 19:41-44. Pope Francis: Eight years have passed since I published the encyclical Laudato Si, when I wanted to share with all of you my brothers and sisters of our suffering planet my heartfelt concerns about the care of our common home. Yet with the passage of time, I have realised that our responses have not been adequate while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point. The impact of climate change will increasingly prejudice the lives and families of many persons. We will feel its effects in the areas of healthcare, sources of employment, access to resources, housing, forced migration, etc. LD 2. Action and prayer:* Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost.

24th November. Jesus. Margaret once challenged the Sacred Heart Sodality members about the wording on their T-shirts. "Yes, we do see Jesus as meek, mild and humble but is that your favourite image of him? There are different images and

sometimes I can relate better to the one where he overturns the tables of the money-changers and chases those selling sacrificial animals away. I want the Jesus I hope to meet one day to be a powerful kingly figure.”

Reflect, share, Scripture. *Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, “it is written, ‘my house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers. Luke 19:45-48. Pope Francis: May our concern for the poor always be marked by Gospel realism. Spirit-led discernment is demanded, in order to recognise the genuine needs of our brothers and sisters. What the poor need is certainly our humanity, our hearts open to love. Let us never forget that we are called to find Christ in them, World Day of the Poor message. “Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor” (Tob 4:7) Action and prayer: Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost and ask ourselves, “Who are my saints?” .*

25th November. 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE. This campaign every year from 25 November to 10th December is an opportunity to create awareness, to dialogue and share, for many organisations but also for men and women, at home, school and work. The issue is not equality but a loss, the physical, emotional and psychological abuse and especially treating women and children as objects, rather than human beings with value and dignity. We are all created in the image of God but not all treated with the same respect. The right attitude should be taught and modelled at home, so just take a look around at your own relationships. How are we doing?

Reflect, share, Scripture. *King Antiochus became sick with grief. “To what distress I have come. I remember the evils I did in Jerusalem. I seized all her vessels of silver and gold and sent to destroy the inhabitants of Judah without good reason. I know that it is because of this that these evils have come upon me. 1 Mac. 6. The human person is the clearest reflection of God’s presence in the world; all of the Church’s work in pursuit of both justice and peace is designed to protect and promote the dignity of every person. Pope Francis: Extreme poverty and other situations of family breakdown sometimes even led families to sell their children for prostitution or for organ trafficking. AL 46. Modesty is a natural means whereby we defend our personal privacy and prevent ourselves from being turned into objects to be used. Without a sense of modesty, affection and sexuality can be reduced to an obsession with genitality and unhealthy behaviours that distort our capacity for love and with forms of sexual violence that lead to inhuman treatment or cause hurt to others. AL 282. Action and prayer: Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost, especially to abuse and femicide.*

26th November. Sunday. Christ the King. There are many parishes dedicated to Christ the King, but at St Damian's Fr Teddy had put a crown on the figure on the cross for all to see. He spoke of kings and queens, princes and princesses who hold a rather confusing place in society today. “We admire them for their status but many of us don't really want them to rule over us. We prefer democratically elected leaders. Even Jesus hardly presented an admirable kingly figure as he stood before Pilate, but yet he embodied true kingly qualities of giving his life for his people. At his 2nd coming he will be the universal king of all who are on the side of truth and listen to his voice. ‘Will you be among his subjects? Will you be among the sheep or goats?’

Reflect, share, Scripture. *When the son of man comes before him will be gathered all the nations and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates sheep from the goats. Read Matthew 25:31-46. Pope Francis : The New Testament does not only tell us of the earthly Jesus, It also shows him risen and glorious, present throughout creation by his universal Lordship. Our gaze is directed to the end of time, when the Son will deliver all things to the Father so that God may be everything to everyone, LS 100. Action and prayer: Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost as we reflect on eternal life.*

27th November. Widows and orphans are commonly mentioned in the Bible as being poor and needy. We often think of grandmothers caring for grandchildren who are orphaned, having lost one or both parents. There are also youth and child-headed families of orphans, who have lost the love and support of a parent, financially, psychologically, emotionally and spiritually. Do we in our extended families and parishes offer the support needed to all kinds of families in need so that they will remain close to God and not feel angry and rejected in their hardship?

Reflect, share, Scripture. *Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasure and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins. He said, “this poor widow has put in more than all of the, out of her poverty she put in all the living that she had. From Luke 21:1-4. Pope Francis: Every human being enjoys the right to life, to bodily integrity and the means necessary for the proper development of life. How much still needs to be done for this to become a reality not least*

through a serious and effective commitment on the part of political leaders. For all the limitations and at times the failures of politics in discerning and serving the common good may the spirit of solidarity and subsidiarity continue to grow among citizens who believe in the value of voluntary commitment to serving the poor. Those living in poverty must also be involved and accompanied in a process of change and responsibility. Message of World Day of the Poor 2023. **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost and those who remain.

28 November. In very recent times there have been many of the events that Jesus mentioned when he spoke of the end times. Earthquakes, fires, famines and disease have come and there is a constant state of war somewhere in the world. But these things have also been happening for the last 2000 years and people have always debated whether the end is near. What is becoming more marked today is a greater awareness of how we, humankind, are contributing to these events, the breakdown of relationships and in particular the destruction of our environment. Pope Francis in his 2015 encyclical *LAUDATO SI* calls on us to look forward and protect our environment, *THE WORLD OUR HOME*, a call now reinforced through his *LAUDATE DEUM* and irrespective of how long it will remain our home, before the 2nd Coming. **Reflect, share, Scripture.** “When you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for this must first take place, but the end will not be at once.” Luke 21:5-11 **Pope Francis:** We are far from the so-called end of history since the conditions for a sustainable and peaceful development have not yet been adequately articulated and realised. EG 59 The growth of the past two centuries has not always led to an integral development and an improvement in the quality of life. some signs are symptomatic of real social decline, the silent rupture of the bonds of integration and social cohesion. LS 46. **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost, especially all those killed in wars at this time. .

29th November. Judgement. Prudence had done a Biblical Studies course for her degree and had also taken an interest in Biblical history. In these last weeks of the liturgical year readings from the book of Daniel featured quite a lot. She explained that some of them referred to the history of the Jewish people when they were captives in Babylon and how different kings treated them and their traditions. Every country and nation has its special traditions that it values. Desecration of these would result in judgement and punishment. When King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem he brought people and their precious possessions of gold and silver from the temple to Babylon. Later, his son Belshazzar wanted to have a feast and use these treasured items. During the feast a hand was seen writing mysterious words on the wall. Naturally the king and his guests were terrified. They called for Daniel to interpret the message. He told them that it meant that the king had been judged and found wanting and would be removed from his kingdom.

Reflect, share, Scripture. “God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end.” From Dan 5. **Pope Francis:** Eight years have passed since I published the encyclical *Laudato Si*, when I wanted to share with you, my brothers and sisters of our suffering planet, my heartfelt concerns about care for our common home. Yet with the passage of time I have realised that our responses have not been adequate while the world is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point. The impact of climate change will increasingly prejudice the lives and families of many persons. LD 2. **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost especially in political strife.

30th November. Daniel and the lion’s den. Mom mused, “Almost every young child already knows the story of Daniel and the lion’s den and how God saved him. Do they know this happened because he was not afraid to lose his life, but he was faithful to God instead of obeying the laws of the kingdom? King Darius was fond of Daniel and did not want him to be killed but he had to obey his own law. When God saved Daniel from the lions the king was glad and spread the word to everyone that Daniel’s God was the greatest. This is a great teaching story.”

Reflect, share, Scripture. Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths and they have not hurt me because I was found blameless before him. From Dan 6:11-27. **Pope Francis** Today’s vast and rapid cultural changes demand that we constantly seek ways of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness. The deposit of the faith is one thing. The way it is expressed is another. EG 41. The 2023 Synod on Synodality proposes a new methodology for Conversations in the Spirit based on listening and discernment which can be applied in different settings, families, youth, community gatherings etc. **Action and prayer:** Remember in prayer the needs of those we have loved and lost, young and old.
