



2024 OUR WORLD, FAMILY OF FAMILIES.

MARFAM DAILY THOUGHTS FOR FEBRUARY AND LENT PART 1

Theme: LOVE GIVES FAMILIES LIFE – BECOMING ECO-FRIENDLY FAMILIES



THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY are published daily on www.marfam.org.za, facebook, X, and emailed to subscribers. To receive by email send request to info@marfam.org.za. Tel +27 82 552 1275

Abbreviations: Pope Francis: LS = Laudato Si. AL = Amoris Laetitia FT = Fratelli Tutti. EG = Evangelii Gaudium LD = Laudate Deum. MM = Misericordia et Misera.

NOTICE. The 2024 FAMILY YEAR PLANNER, an OVERVIEW OF THE MONTHLY THEMES for the year and the THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY for February can be downloaded from www.marfam.org.za or ordered from us. The booklet *FAMILIES CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION* can be ordered. As we prepare for elections download the SACBC election prayer. www.sacbc.org.za

OVERVIEW FEBRUARY: Love gives Families life. God, the creator, is a lover and it is God's love, as Trinity, that is life-giving, creating life continually and sustaining and renewing creation. Our task and gift as human beings and life-givers is co-creation, with God, from conception to natural death, nurturing relationships 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 way to sustain life in its various forms. Life and love are very vulnerable and the lifegiving theme can be taken up during Lent for reflection and action. **Pope Francis:** *Love always gives life. The couple in giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, a living reflection of their love. AL165. 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 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. War is the ultimate lack of love.*

NOTICES.

WORLD MARRIAGE DAY is 2nd Sunday of February, an opportunity for couples and the whole parish to celebrate. .

LENT begins on 14 February. There is a separate section in this document, incorporating references to the LAUDATO SI ACTION PLATFORM GOALS, and some prayers also from the Laudato Si' Prayer Book.

SETTING THE SCENE. Short family anecdotes, life situations and some background to special days can enhance a family understanding of scripture and build the link between faith and life as families share their thoughts and feelings. Scripture passages of the day and quotations from Pope Francis' writings make these Thoughts a catechetical resource too.

CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT The technique known as "conversation in the Spirit" introduced by Pope Francis in the 2021-2023 Synod of Synodality process can be used as a form of family dialogue and family faith sharing. Its listening and sharing approach can be learned and practiced daily, weekly or whenever possible with the THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY.

A very simple family introduction to this Spirit-led process consists of each member silently reflecting on the topic, then prayerful speaking from the heart by each person, with attentive listening to the speaker by others, some silent reflection and sharing of key points that emerged. Families could include an activity e.g. drawing, singing, as appropriate and end with spontaneous or shared prayer. The important aspects are the sharing, i.e. prayerful speaking from the heart and listening without discussion or comment at that time.

February 1. Benedict Daswa. At the time of his murder there was clearly serious division within the community of the village of Mbahe. There were those who believed in the magical power of sangomas and there were those who had rejected those beliefs and had adopted Christianity. Benedict was a teacher, a lay minister in the church he built and a loving husband and father as well as caring for others in the community. He rejected the power of witchcraft and spoke and acted with great love. Through resentment and jealousy in his community he gained the crown of martyrdom.

Reflect, share, Scripture: *If I give away all I have and if I deliver my body to be burned but have not love I gain nothing. 1 Cor 13. Pope Francis: In difficult moments of history how often do we hear, 'Today our country needs heroes'? We ask,*

'Today what does our Church need?' Martyrs, witnesses, everyday saints of ordinary life, lives lived coherently; but we also need those who have the courage to accept the grace to be witnesses until the end, until death. Martyrs are the lifeblood of the Church.' April 2017. **Pray:** for the month ahead that we may be open to the call to love one another and increase our love for the greater world of families. Choose appropriate action.

February 2. Presentation of the Lord. Mapitso explained that this feast ends the 40 days of the Christmas season. It is also known as Candlemas to remind us again that Jesus is the Light of the World. Simeon and Anna who met them in the temple prophesied about the future role of Jesus. The feast also commemorates the ritual purification that was Jewish tradition for a woman and a family after childbirth. As in African cultures there was reverence for blood as a seat of life but bleeding also makes a woman ritually impure.

Reflect, share, Scripture: *When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. From Luke 2:22-40. **Pope Francis.** The concept of culture is valuable for grasping the various expressions of the Christian life in God's people. It has to do with the lifestyle of a given society, the specific way in which its members relate to one another, to other creatures and to God. EG115 **Pray:** for a growing understanding of culture in our modern world. Choose appropriate action.*

February 3. St Blaise. Kuan was a medical student. He shared, "Although St Blaise is said to have cured a young boy choking on a fishbone a tradition grew up around blessing of throats as well as of those suffering from diseases of the chest and lungs. Diphtheria and TB have been life-threatening diseases of their day. There have been many deaths related to HIV/AIDS in the last 30 years before anti-retroviral drugs were developed. Even more recently COVID-19 has caused many deaths but even more illness and general societal chaos, until a vaccine was developed that is better able to control the disease. Come to think of it, I wonder how many people prayed to St Blaise for his protection during COVID. Blessings and prayers about certain conditions remind us of God's care and concern for us in sickness."

Reflect, share, Scripture: *Jesus said to the Eleven before his Ascension. "In my name they will cast out demons, they will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover." Mark 16:14-20 Catechism 1622. Suffering and illness have always been among the greatest problems that trouble the human spirit. Christians feel and experience pain as do all other people; yet their faith helps them to grasp more deeply the mystery of suffering and to bear their pain with greater courage. Part of the plan laid out by God's providence is that we should fight strenuously against all sickness and carefully seek the blessings of good health, so that we may fulfil our role in human society and in the Church" **Pray:** for and ask for the intercession of St Blaise on those still suffering from long COVID. Choose appropriate action.*

February 4. Sunday 5B. Fr Obed decided to share some of his story with the congregation. "When I was a young boy I had a deformed foot. Other boys used to make fun of me and the way I walked, but my grandmother always said to me, 'Be brave my child, God has a plan for you.' So I began to wonder about that plan, especially when I was hurt and angry. I would read the gospel stories especially about Jesus preaching and healing the sick and slowly it came to me that maybe God's plan had to do with that, preaching and caring for the sick. We did visit the shrine where some miracles had taken place and a miracle for me too was that a benefactor paid for the operation that was needed to repair my foot.

Reflect, share, Scripture: *Jesus healed many who were sick with various diseases. Mk 1:29-39. **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. From Jubilee of sick and suffering. **Pray:** to become more aware of the needs of those who are disabled that they may receive the help they need. Choose appropriate action.*

February 5. A story is told of an older couple who took up ballroom dancing. Why? Because the wife was feeling unloved. "He never touches me at all," she said, "and I need that, just to be held close as we do in our dancing class. The instructor would say, 'Now put your arm around her, hold her close, swing her about and move in time with each other.' What a joy that has been for me," she smiled, thinking, Isn't that healing ministry too?

Reflect, share, Scripture: *Wherever he came in villages, cities or country they laid the sick in the market places and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment and as many as touched it were made well. Mk 6:56. **Pope Francis:** Day after day touched by God's compassion we also can become passionate towards others. MV14. Message for World Day of the Poor 2023. Do not turn your face away from those who are poor. Everyone is our*

neighbour. Regardless of the colour of their skin, their social standing, the place from which they came this World Day of the Poor we pray that the same Spirit of love and mercy that was so strong in Tobit may touch our own hearts as we seek to build a future of compassion, justice and dignity for all. Choose appropriate action

February 6. Teenagers question many things, including family traditions and cultural practices. When Vusi was in confirmation class they discussed initiation. "Is this still important today now that we are Christians?" he asked. Some of the group rejected the idea of traditional practices while others believed it was necessary. The catechist was sensitive and sensible and asked them to consider, "Is there good or evil in such practices, or some of both? What is the loving thing to do? What would Jesus do? Discussing this matter with your families is very important, especially about their understanding of culture and tradition."

Reflect, share, Scripture: *You leave the commandment of God and hold fast to the tradition of men. From Mk 7:1-13.*

Pope Francis: *The human person by nature stands completely in need of life in society and always exists in reference to society finding there a concrete way of relating to reality. EG 115* **Pray:** *for openness to consider the traditions and practices of peoples. Choose appropriate action.*

February 7. Two priests were having a conversation about evil. "We don't often hear this in confession I must admit, but when I think about it I cannot get over some of the evil I see around me or read about in newspaper reports. How could people necklace another person, or torture someone and deliberately inflict maximum pain? Just think about the Israeli-Hamas war and what kind of brutal action by Hamas started it, while Israel appears to be bombing and killing civilians indiscriminately even though they deny this aspect. Is all kinds of torture and many acts of war, and even cruelty to animals an indication of a sick mind or do we all have such a potential evil streak in us?" "Maybe we do but those who do come to confession at least have a sensitivity about it. What I find difficult to understand is domestic violence. How can anyone, usually the man, inflict such pain on a person they are supposed to love, and how can the victim, usually a woman, continue to put up with it."

Reflect, share, Scripture: *"Do you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him. What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness." Mark 7: 14-23. Pope Francis:* *The celebration of mercy takes place in a very particular way in the Sacrament of Penance. Here we feel the embrace of the Father who comes to meet us. We are sinners and we bear the burden of contradiction between what we wish to do and what we do. Yet grace always precedes us. MM 8. Pray:* *for a decrease in deliberate violence and torture and a conversion towards accepting the dignity of others. Choose appropriate action.*

February 8. St Josephine Bakhita. After a talk on human trafficking Mercia had become concerned about this modern day slavery, as she had come to understand it. "Do people really know what a problem it is," she asked. "Take St Josephine Bakhita, Ok born already in 1869. As a young girl from Sudan she was kidnapped and sold and resold as a slave until she was rescued by an Italian family. She converted to Christianity and eventually became a religious sister and died in 1947. She is a patroness of those subjected to human trafficking which is a growing problem in many countries all over the world including here at home in South Africa where there is internal and external trafficking of people, especially girls and young women.

Reflect, share, Scripture: *I will espouse you for ever. I will espouse you with righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will espouse you in faithfulness and you shall know the Lord. Hosea 2 readings of the day. Pope Francis:* *How I wish that all of us would hear God's cry, "Where is your brother?" Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting and undocumented labour. Let us not look the other way. EG 211 Pray:* *for a resolution to the problem of human trafficking and contribute in any way you can. .*

February 9. Aunty Pam had been a popular visitor to the family. As she got older she realised it was becoming more difficult to be in company as she found it hard to hear well and getting a hearing aid would be a big expense for her. She hated having to ask people to repeat things all the time. When she shared how awkward she felt and the family discussed the issue of hearing they all came to realise how lost in all kinds of settings the deaf, and hard of hearing must feel.

Reflect, share, Scripture: *Jesus took the deaf and dumb man aside and looking up to heaven he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha, be opened" and his ears were opened. Mk 7:31-37. Pope Francis: Families who lovingly accept the difficult trial of a child with special needs are greatly to be admired. They render the Church and society an invaluable witness of faithfulness to the gift of life. People with disabilities are a gift for the family and an opportunity to grow in love, mutual aid and unity. If the family in the light of faith accepts the presence of persons with special needs, they will be able to recognize and ensure the quality and value of every human life, with its proper needs, rights and opportunities. AL 47. Pray: that the needs of persons with disabilities will be addressed by all in the Church and society. Choose appropriate action.*

February 10. There is no doubt that Jesus was able to perform miracles of many kinds. "What is a miracle?" Tracy asked her children. "Feeding all of us every day with so little money and even inviting the other family down the road to join us too!" "I think that keeping the feeding scheme going in that refugee camp is a miracle too." And so they shared their thoughts on the subject. At times their own generosity and the willingness to share their own meagre supplies is a little miracle too. The point is that Jesus acted out of compassion for people in need and didn't perform miracles just to show what he could do.

Reflect, share, Scripture: *I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes they will faint on the way." Mk 8:1-10 Pope Francis: Jesus introduces us to the works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples. Let us rediscover the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. MV 15. Pray: for compassion, generosity and willingness to take part in feeding the hungry. Choose appropriate action.*

February 11. Sunday 6B. Fr Obed noted, "This Sunday has a number of things to commemorate. The feast of Our Lady of Lourdes fits in with the readings that speak about curing of leprosy. What could this possibly have to do with World Marriage Day, which is celebrated on this 2nd Sunday of February. While of course we are celebrating with our married couples, I always stress that Marriage is a Sacrament of the Church and so they are "our" couples. These days many marriages are under stress. The marriage rate is down, divorce and cohabitation are happening everywhere. The last few years have been particularly stressful for couples from a health perspective. Covid affected many, through illness and death. Gender based violence has reached pandemic proportions. While the HIV/AIDS pandemic has largely subsided there are other situations where individuals and couples are stigmatised, such as LGBTQ!+ which is not a disease. There are situations of war that separate families too. This year on WORLD MARRIAGE DAY I propose that while thanking God for the gift of marriage, let us all pray for couples and for an increase and understanding of the value, the meaning and the power of the sacrament in the Church and the world.

"It is not good that man should be alone—Healing the Sick by Healing Relationships," is the theme of Pope Francis' message for the 2024 commemoration of the World Day of the Sick, also held on 11 February.

Reflect, share, Scripture: *The leper who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let his hair hang loose and he shall cover his upper lip and cry, "Unclean, unclean" he shall dwell alone outside the camp. Lev 13:44-46 Pope Francis: God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters. FT 5. We cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal and family love. AL 89 By virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, every family becomes, in effect, a good for the Church. The safeguarding of the Lord's gift in the sacrament of matrimony is a concern not only of individual families, but of the entire Christian community. AL 87. Pray: Celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony for the whole Church community with a special blessing for married couples. Choose appropriate action.*

February 12. Although there have always been challenges, May considered how these days people are a lot more sceptical. They want proof and do not accept statements of belief without a satisfactory explanation for them. Ecology is a case in point. There are sceptics and fanatics. Questioning may be out of idle curiosity but frequently there is an honest need for greater understanding that cannot always or easily be met, as in some issues around climate change and in nature. There are human pastoral challenges concerning marriage and natural law, family planning and gender roles in the church. A current example is the issue of blessings. The document *Fiducia Supplicans* permits blessings of couples in irregular marriage situations. It can be taken as a simple sign of God's loving concern – as Pope Francis clearly does – or many see it as causing confusion, and so not as a helpful sign. People do want and deserve clarity. No doubt this makes Pope Francis and many other church leaders sigh too as Jesus did in his day.

Reflect, share, Scripture: *The Pharisees came seeking a sign from heaven to test him. And Jesus sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation."* Mark 8:11-13. **Pope Francis:** *Discernment must help to find possible ways of responding to God and growing in the midst of limits. By thinking that everything is black and white we sometimes close off the way of grace and of growth and discourage paths of sanctification which give glory to God.* AL305. **Pray:** *for openness to the pastoral approach and mind of Pope Francis. Choose appropriate action: study the document referred to above.*

February 13. Was Jesus playing word games with the disciples when he told them to beware of the yeast of Herod and of the Pharisees? Yeast is a leaven that affects everything around it. The yeast of Herod is the influence of political power that controls everything around it. The yeast of the Pharisees is Jewish religious tradition and practice based on the letter of the law and the many little laws about what could or could not be done, what food to eat, what dishes to use, what is or is not permitted on the Sabbath day etc. rather than the spirit of the law. Jesus' law is one of personal, human and pastoral concern for the needs of people, the community and all of creation. The upcoming election is an area of concern.

Reflect, share, Scripture: *And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"* From Mk 8:14-21. **Pope Francis :** *Under certain circumstances people find it very difficult to act differently. Therefore, while upholding a general rule it is necessary to recognise that responsibility with respect to certain actions or decision is not the same in all cases. Responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by certain psychological or social factors.* From AL302 **Pray:** *for a personal maturing faith through reflection and study around general and personal social issues and creation. Choose appropriate action. As today is also PANCAKE TUESDAY, or SHROVE TUESDAY, take this opportunity to make and enjoy pancakes, traditionally to use up flour, milk and eggs before the formal fast would start on Ash Wednesday.*

LENT 2024. OUR WORLD A FAMILY OF FAMILIES.

BECOMING ECO-FRIENDLY FAMILIES with prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

These headings are MARFAM's 2024 themes and the three pillars of Lenten spirituality. **THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY** continue as usual, built on the daily scripture readings with an anecdote and quotation from Pope Francis and/or a reference to one of the LS Action Platform goals. It is also recommended during this season to read the longer scripture passage for the day, not just the short extract and spend more time with an appropriate prayer.

Laudato Si' Action Platform goals.

1. Response to the cry of the earth.
2. Response to the cry of the poor.
3. Ecological economics
4. Adoption of sustainable lifestyles
5. Ecological education
6. Ecological spirituality
7. Community resilience and empowerment.

Ecological spirituality LSAP goal 6 is the Lent 2024 primary goal. For family's ecological spirituality the 2023 Synod on Synodality's listening and sharing approach, now known as "**Conversation in the Spirit**" is recommended and can be learned and practiced daily, weekly or whenever possible with the THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY. A very simple family introduction to the Spirit-led process consists of each participant's preliminary reflection on the topic, prayerful speaking from the heart by each speaker, attentive listening to the speaker, silent reflection and sharing of key points that emerged. Families could include an activity e.g. drawing, singing, as appropriate and end with spontaneous or shared prayer.

The focus on climate change has become more and more urgent as noted by Pope Francis in *LAUDATE DEUM*, his Apostolic Exhortation in preparation for COP 28 the UN climate conference in Dubai in 2023. This focused strongly on the need to cut down on the use of fossil fuels. However on a more personal spiritual level LD writes on a spirituality of nature as well as efforts made by households to reduce pollution and waste and create a new ecological awareness culture. LD 71. **Adoption of sustainable lifestyles Goal 4 can be an general Lenten objective towards BECOMING AN ECO-FRIENDLY FAMILY.** Other LSAP goals are built into the THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY.

The encyclical *LAUDATO SI* remains the major reference source on the subject of ecological conversion and makes many references to all of creation. *Fratelli Tutti* the 2022 encyclical on social friendship focuses more on the human aspect. All

these writings are valuable sources for faith sharing for the LSAP sector for families and individuals. Some prayers are taken from the *Laudato Si* Prayer Book. Reference is also made to the 2023 MARFAM booklet *FAMILIES CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION* which unpacks the LSAP goals and contains writing and sayings of Pope Francis from other documents.

DAILY LENTEN ACTS OF LOVE AND SACRIFICE

1. BE conscious of God in a stranger.
2. BE a good neighbour helping when needed.
3. BE a peacemaker or a peacekeeper
4. BE generous with someone in need.
5. BE patient with an old person or a child
6. BE eco—conscious, plant a tree for nature.
7. BE willing to forgive even when it hurts to do so.
8. BE eco-conscious start a vegetable patch
9. BE frugal. Have a meatless meal.
10. BE waterwise. Save, don't waste water
11. BE present with someone who is lonely.
12. BE generous with a beggar.. Look in his face.
13. BE health-conscious. Give up fizzy drinks for Lent.
14. BE polite to everyone, even people you don't like.
15. BE prayerful with Jesus at home or in church.
16. BE punctual and not make other people late or wait.
17. BE eco-conscious. Recycle what you can.
18. BE willing to share your belongings in the family.
19. BE animal and nature conscious.
20. BE caring, give food and drink to a hungry person.
21. Don't BE rude or cheeky to a parent or other adult.
22. Don't BE a bully to someone weaker than you.
23. Don't BE greedy when others are hungry.
24. Don't BE lazy, clean up your neighbourhood
25. Don't BE violent, hitting or hurting someone.
26. Don't BE wasteful, save electricity where you can.
27. Don't BE selfish and refuse to help others.
28. Don't BE dishonest in thought, word or deed .
29. Don't BE angry or sulk if you don't get your way
30. Don't BE judgemental about differences in others.
31. Don't BE a substance abuser.
32. Don't BE ungrateful for what you have received.
33. Don't BE unforgiving.
34. Don't BE a couch-potato. Go do some exercise.
35. Don't BE neglectful. Think of other's needs
36. Don't BE argumentative, learn to discuss sensibly.
37. Don't BE impatient.
38. Don't BE mean. Be willing to sacrifice for others.
39. Don't BE unaware of the problems in society.
40. Don't BE self-centred and refuse to help others.

ECO-FRIENDLY LENTEN PRAYERS.

Morning prayer. Loving Creator, As I begin this new day, I ask for the grace of loving attention as I make decisions throughout the day. Open my heart to remember that the ultimate goal of my life is to be in a loving relationship with You, myself, my neighbor, and the earth. Amen

From *Laudato Si'* prayer book.

PEACE PRAYER OF ST FRANCIS.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith,
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying (to self) that we are born to eternal life.
Amen

PRAYER FOR OUR EARTH. *Pope Francis, Laudato Si', 2015.*

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.
Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES PRAYER.

God of Love, creator of all, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You are a family, a community of love, model and inspiration for us, the human family. To us you have given dominion over your creation with the task of caring for all species, plant, animal and human,

We have grown and laboured, but have failed by not always pursuing the common good. We have abused the members of our families, destroyed many areas of our common home and neglected the good of all out of self-interest and greed. We were not always aware of the gravity of our lack of love, but we hear the cry and recognize and acknowledge our sinfulness and guilt.

God of Mercy, we praise and thank you for your love. Forgive us our failures as we learn to forgive others, so that your Kingdom of love, joy, peace, justice and freedom may come to fulfillment. Holy Spirit by your light guide us on our way, teach us to guard the earth and care for the poor of all families of creation with the love, integrity and care they deserve. May our family always have the strength and commitment to follow Jesus' way. Mary, Mother and Queen of all Creation pray with us and for us. Amen

February 14. Ash Wednesday. The Morgans had made a commitment to meet as a family to practice the "Conversation in the Spirit" form of dialogue, that Pope Francis introduced into the Synod on Synodality in 2023. They thought it would be helpful to practice the listening and sharing and to pray and talk about what Lent could mean for them. Starting on Ash Wednesday they shared their thoughts: "Why do so many people go to church on Ash Wednesday to get a blessing with ashes on their foreheads? What does it really mean for them or is it to show off to others or some kind of superstition?" "You do see people walking in the street with their ash cross. One time someone tried to wipe my forehead thinking I had picked up a bit of dirt". Jay said, "I was wondering how we could celebrate Valentine's Day combined with Ash Wednesday. It's lovely that we're doing it together as a family even though fasting and eating a simple meal is quite a sacrifice." "Let's also remember those people who are alone at this time and for much of their lives."

Reflect, share, Scripture: *"The beginning of Lent is marked with the blessing and imposition of ashes. The act of doing so symbolises our fragility and mortality as well as our need to be redeemed by the mercy of God." From the Missal. "Harden not your hearts but listen to the voice of the Lord. (Verse before the Gospel) Ps95:7. **Pope Francis:** Lent is a time of mercy because no sinner can ever tire of asking forgiveness and all can feel the welcoming embrace of the Father. MM 21*

Pray one of the Lenten prayers.: *for the season ahead that we may be open to one another and the needs of the greater world of families. Choose appropriate action. LSAP goal 4. Sustainable lifestyles.*

February 15. Brigitte shared, "When we seriously consider this reading for today I do realise that no one has the right to just do as they please as so many of us, young people and older ones, seem to think. We have to make a choice between good and evil and the commandments are quite a handy way to consider what that involves." "I think the LSAP goals are also quite a useful way to look at good and evil." Think of **The Cry of the Earth. LSAP goal 1.**

Reflect, share, Scripture: *See I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, then you shall live and multiply and the Lord your God will bless you in the land. Read Deut 30:15-20 **Pope Francis:** 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. LS 69 **Pray one of the Lenten prayers.:** for openness to all of creation and the greater world of families, and not the human family alone, as has been the Church's traditional focus. Choose appropriate action. LSAP Goal 6. Ecological spirituality.*

February 16. Grandad took a turn to share. "For me, I believe there are rights and obligations, duties and privileges that are good and appropriate at different times. A smile came over his face. "It is so good to celebrate at a wedding or at an anniversary, and we don't do that often enough. Is that what Jesus meant too?" Mom responded, "Maybe, but also not quite so literally. Jesus loved using life-like examples and was speaking about himself, as being the bridegroom, you know." "But didn't he love weddings too?" They all laughed and shared a little on the weddings they had been to of family and friends." Josh, being skeptical about all the money that gets spent on weddings, said, "Couldn't some of that money be better spent elsewhere?"

Reflect, share, Scripture: *The disciples of John came to Jesus saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus said, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them and then they will fast."* Matt 9:14-15. **Pope Francis:** *The journey of life that leads a man and a woman to meet one another, to love one another and to promise mutual fidelity before God is often interrupted by suffering, betrayal and loneliness.* MM 14 **Pray one of the Lenten prayers.** *that families will be rational in their financial planning, save, fast, and give alms to others in need. Choose appropriate action.* LSAP goal 3. *Ecological Economics.*

February 17. Bernard as usual wanted to be otherwise. "I don't see why tax collectors should be seen as sinners. Don't they have a right to work for SARS or whatever form it took in those days. That doesn't make them sinners surely." Refilwe explained, "in those days tax collectors worked for the oppressors. Maybe it was like here in the apartheid days before we considered the question of human rights and family rights such as being able to live together as a family in one place." "However, surely it isn't the tax collector today who is a sinner, but the corrupt people who bribe, steal and defraud the tax man. Are they the ones that Jesus would be dining with, and then calling to repentance? LSAP Goal 6 ecological spirituality.

Reflect, share, Scripture: *"Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick do; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* Luke 5:32 **Pope Francis:** *The spiritual stature of a person's life is measured by love, which in the end remains the criterion for the definitive decision about a human life's work or lack thereof.* FT 92 *Nothing of what a repentant sinner places before God's mercy can be excluded from the embrace of forgiveness. for this reason none of us has the right to make forgiveness conditional.* MM2 *In St Francis canticle of the creatures he includes a statement, "praised be you my Lord, through those who give pardon (to others,) because of your love for them all." Everything is connected. Concern for the environment needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings, and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.* LS 91. **Pray:**

THE CANTICLE OF THE CREATURES.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing,
To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,

especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom You give us light.

And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor; and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,
through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation.

Blessed are those who endure in peace, for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no one living can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin.

Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility.

February 18. Lent 1B. Fr Obed reminded the congregations that the gospel for the 1st Sunday of Lent each year is about the temptation of Jesus. "We're all tempted by the devil but also by our own selfish inclinations. Temptation in itself is not a sin, but giving in to it will be. We're tempted in big and small things and need to reflect and see how we can change our ways. I would like you in your families to discuss this and some time during Lent Catholics can prepare for Confession,

but a moment for examination of conscience and reconciliation at home, also with those who go to other churches, can even come before that.”

Reflect, share, Scripture: *At that time the Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts and the angels ministered to him. Read Mk 1:12-15* **Pope Francis:** *Efforts by households to reduce pollution and waste, and to consume with prudence, are creating a new culture. The mere fact that personal, family and community habits are changing is contributing to greater concern about the unfulfilled responsibilities of the political sectors and indignation at the lack of interest shown by the powerful. LD 71. LS Goal 7 Community empowerment.* **Pray one of the Lenten prayers.:** *Reflect on one’s own temptations. Pray the Our Father regularly and meditate on the words, “Lead us not into temptation,” or “save us from the time of trial.” Choose appropriate action. LSAP Goal 7 community empowerment*

February 19. Mrs Benadie led some family groups in their sharing. “Lent is about rights and also responsibilities. I think that sometimes it seems easier to go and love your neighbour then to make peace with your own family. For some reason the close relationships in a family do make us more vulnerable. Most of us wouldn't treat other people the way we treat our own family. Why is there domestic violence, abuse, incest within a family?” She looked around and added, “We have to study that aspect of intimacy. The closer you are, the more you hurt one another. Not so?” George added another thought. “As we’re also focusing on other families of nature, I am fascinated watching wild life TV programmes where in the mating game, lions fight lions, and elephants other elephants. They might even kill the other. Is that a law of nature, that we humans should have been able to overcome?”

Reflect, share, 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.” Read Levit 19: 11-18.* **Pope Francis:** *In the story of Cain and Abel we see how envy led Cain to commit the ultimate injustice against his brother, which in turn ruptured the relationship of Cain and God and between Cain and the earth from which he was banished. LS 70. St Francis loved every creature God created. His life is a far cry from our situation today where sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable and attacks on nature. LS 66* **Pray:** *for peace and tolerance in family relationships everywhere. Choose appropriate action. LSAP goal 6 ecological spirituality.*

February 20. Adrian shared, “In our catechism class the teacher told us we are all priests because of our baptism. That made us think. We can't exactly all say Mass or preach as the priest does.” Dad added, “but I think we do have a special power to speak on behalf of God, even in our own homes.” “That sounds good, but we kids don't exactly listen to our parents as if they were God or the priest and as we should, do we? Oh, and should parents listen to us?”

Reflect, share, Scripture: *“My word that goes forth from my mouth shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I intended. Isaiah 55:11.* **Pope Francis:** *Certain inclinations develop in childhood and become so deeply rooted that they remain throughout life, as attractions to a particular value or as repugnance to certain ways of acting. AL274* *We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing and its human roots, concern and affect us all. LS 14. Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded. LS 13* **Pray one of the Lenten prayers.:** *to listen to the Cry of the Earth. LSAP goal 1. Choose appropriate action.*

February 21. Abigail, in typical teenage fashion said, “Remember the other day we talked about fasting. I don't think I have ever seen anyone putting on sackcloth. It must feel horrible. But that is not the point is it? It is about repentance. I like the word metanoia. It is turning back from times when we have done wrong, abused our own rights and ignored rights of others. Metanoia then requires us to repent and fasting was a traditional way to do that. I read that St Francis really chastised his body, hardly eating anything. Do we still fast from eating and drinking or giving up things, or how can we repent?”

Reflect, share, Scripture: *Jonah proclaimed a fast, put on sackcloth, sit in ashes. The king issued a proclamation that every creature should not eat or drink so as to repent from their evil ways. Read Jonah 3:1-10* *Jesus began to say, “this generation is an evil generation. It seeks a sign but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.* **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. We are called to promote a culture of mercy based on the rediscovery of encounter with others, a culture in which no one looks at another with indifference or turns away. MM20. **Pray one of the Lenten prayers.:** That we may be open to one another and the needs of the greater world of families. Choose appropriate action. LSAP goal 7. Community empowerment

February 22. Laurenda was the one who opened the sharing. “When you think about it, leaders and rulers have rights but we call them duties and responsibilities, saying they should do what they are supposed to do to rule with honesty and integrity. At the same time there are also always jealous people scheming and plotting against good leaders and others buying favours and bribing bad leaders for personal gain.

Reflect, share, Scripture: *Queen Esther seized with deathly anxiety fled to the Lord. Save us from the hand of our enemies. Read From Esther 14. Jesus said, “Ask and you will receive.” Mat 7:7. Pope Francis. Ethics has come to be viewed with a certain scornful derision. It is seen as counterproductive, too human. It is felt to be a threat since it condemns the manipulation and debasement of the person. EG 56. Politicians are doers, builders with ambitious goals, possessed of a broad, realistic and pragmatic gaze that looks beyond their own borders. Their biggest concern should not be about a drop in the polls, but about finding effective solutions to the phenomenon of social and economic exclusion: human trafficking, the sexual exploitation of boys and girls, slave labour, the drug and weapons trade, terrorism and international organized crime. We must avoid every temptation to fall into a declarationist nominalism that would assuage our consciences We need to ensure that our institutions are truly effective in the struggle against all these scourges. FT 188* **Pray one of the Lenten prayers.:** *for the leaders of the world, where many countries are preparing for elections. Pray for free and fair elections everywhere that leaders will respond to the urgent needs of climate change and the greater world of all families. Choose appropriate action. LSAP Goals 3 AND 5*

February 23. Martha was careful about the point she wanted to make. “Conflict in extended families is not uncommon. They may all have grown up together but one may be more or less successful than another, cleverer, have more children or in some cultures more wives. Expectations about roles, rights and responsibilities in traditional families are quite complex. Modern young adults sometimes want to do away with traditions, which also includes ‘black tax’ to support other family members. Peace in the family has given over to individual wants and needs.”

Reflect, share, Scripture: *“Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement. If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you leave your gift there and go first to be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift. Read Matt 5:20-26 Pope Francis: The lack of historical memory is a serious shortcoming in our society. Knowing and judging past events is the only way to build a meaningful future. AL 193. A country flourishes when constructive dialogue occurs between its many rich cultural components : popular culture, university culture, youth culture, artistic culture, technological culture, economic culture, family culture and media culture. FT199* **Pray one of the Lenten prayers.:** *for the different generations in the family and for peace in the home. Choose appropriate action to strive for peace. LSAP GOAL 6 Ecological spirituality*

February 24. Nicholas also came up with some awkward questions. “Should prisoners have rights, or soldiers on each side in a war? Do rights only apply to good people, or also to those who have done something wrong or if we disagree with them? That can be difficult in a family too. After all rights come from being created in the image of God, which we all are.” Mrs Meyer thought to herself of her son and others, even priests, in prison for sexually abusing a child. She found it hard to forgive her son and thinking about the family of the child made her wonder even more.

Reflect, share, Scripture: *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Matthew 5:44 SACBC to the Clergy, Religious and Faithful, December 2016. Brothers and Sisters, Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, called on the universal Church to fast and pray for the healing and consolation of those who have been sexually abused, especially women, children and vulnerable people. We, your Bishops, acknowledge our failures at times in adequately dealing with issues especially within our own church structures. We want to work with all structures in society and especially our priests, church personnel and church workers in creating a safe environment for children and vulnerable people. We ask forgiveness for ourselves and for our clergy. Archbishop Brislin. Pray one of the Lenten prayers.:* *for the success of the ministry of safeguarding minors and all vulnerable people from abuse. Choose appropriate action. LSAP GOAL 2 Cry of the poor.*

February 25. Lent 2B. Transfiguration. Fr Obed reminded the congregation about the stories of God's relationship with His people, especially family stories like that of Abraham and his son Isaac. To test him God asked Abraham to offer the boy as a sacrifice, a burnt offering. Fr Obed, looked down at the altar servers and asked, "Would your father do such a thing? Most likely not, as we Christians no longer practise human sacrifice as was done in ancient times. But there are fathers who have to take responsibility for the suffering and death of their children from neglect or hunger or try to force girls to have sex and later to have abortions. Is that so different? What makes us behave in life-giving rather than life-destructive ways if not a strong relationship with Jesus? Sometimes we need and are given signs to strengthen our faith like the three apostles who witnessed the transfiguration where they saw Jesus in a glorified form."

Reflect, share, Scripture: *Jesus took Peter, James and John and led them up a mountain apart; and he was transfigured before them and his garments became glistening intensely white. Read Mark 9:2-11 Pope Francis: The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known? EG In talking with his disciples Jesus would invite them to recognize the paternal relationship God has with all his creatures. With moving tenderness he would remind that that each one of them is important in God's eyes, "are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?" In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ present from the beginning. LS98-99 **Pray one of the Lenten prayers.:** for growth in the tender love of the Father for all his creatures. Choose appropriate action. LSAP GOAL 1 Cry of the earth.*

February 26. Moses spoke as a parent and a teacher. "Living the spirit of *ubuntu* as a family value can be hard. Is *ubuntu* like mercy, a right, a responsibility, a duty born of love, something we learn from the example of God? We parents and teachers struggle with discipline and finding suitable punishments these days for our children. Teaching self-discipline is important and enforcing discipline, teaching moral values and right behaviour are also rights and a responsibilities, that I don't think we, parents, are always well enough equipped for. Maybe we should rerun that parenting course or promote the Stations of the Cross for Families this Lent. Faith sharing in families is also an important activity.

Reflect, share, Scripture: *O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and merciful love with those who love him and keep his commandment, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from You. We have not listened to your servants the prophets. Read Dan 9:4-10. Pope Francis: It is essential to help children realise misbehaviour has consequences. It is important that discipline not lead to discouragement to be instead a stimulus to further progress. AL 268-270. **Pray one of the Lenten prayers.:** for our own families across the generations that the love in our homes will be the foundation on which to build our futures. Choose appropriate action. LSAP goal 6.*

February 27. Mike was interested in justice and peace issues. "We all have a right to judge for ourselves who and what is right and wrong. Obeying some commandments is absolutely essential, e.g. don't murder or rape. It seems that many laws are almost seen to be arbitrary, e.g. fraud, obeying traffic rules, paying your e-tag. Then there are those that the law does not seem to be able to deal with, e.g. State Capture. We should all have to stand up for what we believe. It's no good complaining about the government's ineffectiveness and then still vote for them. 'Practise what you preach.' Jesus accuses the Pharisees of not practising what they preach."

Reflect, share, Scripture: *The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practise and observe whatever they tell you, but not do what they do, for they preach but do not practise. Read Matt 23:1-2. Pope Francis: Freedom is something magnificent, yet it can also be dissipated and lost. Moral education has to do with cultivating freedom through ideas, incentives, practical applications, rewards, examples and more. AL 267 The spiritual stature of a person's life is measured by love, which in the end remains the criterion for the definitive decision about a human life's work. All of us need to recognize that love takes first place; love must never be put at risk and the greatest danger lies in failing to love. (cf 1 Cor 13) FT 92 **Pray one of the Lenten prayers.:** for effective moral education for families of today. Choose appropriate action. LSAP goal 5 education.*

February 28. "Because there are so many single moms these days, surely it is OK for them to really look out for their kids and want the best for them, best school, nice clothes and toys. That is a way they want to show their love." That is what a group of families discussed. "Yes, but not forcing them to achieve beyond their potential and pushing them to the front. That is what Jesus said to the mother who wanted her sons to have special places in heaven." Maybe today he would have said, "I think, spending quality time with growing children is the 1st priority."

Reflect, share, Scripture: Jesus said, 'you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. It shall not be so among you, but whoever would be great among you must be your servant. The Son of man came not to be served but to serve'. Read Matt 20:17-28 **Pope Francis:** Parents can be prone to impulsive and wasteful consumption, which then affects their children, who find it increasingly difficult to acquire a home of their own and build a family. Not thinking about the future is linked to our inability to broaden the scope of present interests and to give consideration to those who remain excluded from development, the poor of today and of the future. LS162. **Pray one of the Lenten prayers.:** for the families of today and their difficulties in bringing up children. Choose appropriate action. LSAP 7 communion empowerment

February 29. Young Jerry was named after the prophet Jeremiah. The prophet had grown old, having first been called by God while still young and having matured in his ministry. His task was speaking for God, judging right from wrong and recognising human weaknesses. He was often disillusioned with his people, so much so that at times he told God he just wanted to sit down and die. Burn out is still a common feature amongst those who work for charity, the Church and for God.

Reflect, share, Scripture: Cursed is the man who trusts in people. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt. I, the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruits of his doings. Read Jer.17:5-10. **Pope Francis:** Doing what is right means more than judging what seems best or knowing clearly what needs to be done. We have to arrive at the point where the good that the intellect grasps can take root in us as a thirst for the good that outweighs other attractions. AL 265. **Pray one of the Lenten prayers.:** for spiritual growth during this season of Lent that we may be open to one another and the needs of the greater world of families. Choose appropriate action. LSAP goal 6 Ecological spirituality.