



MARFAM FAMILY YEAR PLANNER 2024.

THEME: OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES.

THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY - APRIL: GOD AND FAMILY

Becoming Eco-friendly Families.



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Abbreviations: Pope Francis: LS = Laudato Si. AL = Amoris Laetitia FT = Fratelli Tutti. EG = Evangelii Gaudium LD = Laudate Deum. FM = The Face of Mercy

OVERVIEW: APRIL Eastertime. God is Family. God, as Trinity is a family, the perfect community of love. Every human family, as individuals and a unit, is an image of God, and as a family is called to mirror the relationship of the Trinity. St Francis in his Canticle of the Creatures praises God: "We praise you Lord for all your creatures, brother sun, sister moon, brother fire, sister water, mother earth and all creation. To you O Lord do they belong, you created them and they bear your likeness." Humankind is especially gifted with the power of understanding, to love but to hurt and to forgive, because of love. How has the image of the Trinity been disfigured as fire, water and wind are today such destructive forces? Are we ready to collaborate to repair the damage we have done?

Pope Francis: *God is a family. The Father is the ultimate source of everything, the loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists. The Son, his reflection, through whom all things were created united himself to this earth when he was formed in the womb of Mary. The Spirit infinite bond of love is intimately at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways. The world was created by the three persons, acting as a single divine principle. The Trinity has left its mark on all creation. LS 238-239. Within the family which could be called a domestic church individuals enter upon an ecclesial experience of communion among persons which reflects, through grace, the mystery of the Holy Trinity. AL86.*

Setting the Scene. The format for the THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY is a SEE-JUDGE-ACT approach. A brief Look at Life, Scripture extract from the Day, Quotation from Pope Francis' writings and an invitation to pray and act. One of the aims is to create awareness of the encyclicals of Pope Francis on current issues in the Church and the world. As South Africa is preparing for elections on 29 May there are reference to this important event and a Prayer for South Africa.

A SIMPLE FAMILY PRAYER TO THE BLESSED TRINITY

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Blessed Trinity, you have shown us have to love, to be true family.
We're sorry for the things we've done to cause another pain, make us willing to forgive and so be whole again.
Bless our family today, keep us in your care, old and young or sick or healthy, those no longer there.
Help us care for others too, Jesus showed the way. For every family in all the world may we care each day. Amen

PRAYER FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA.

Merciful Father, send forth your Spirit upon us the people of Southern Africa. May we hear anew the voice of Jesus Christ inviting us to walk with him across the turbulent waters of our time. "Courage it is I. do not be afraid."

By the grace of the Holy Spirit empower us to bring comfort to the restless, hope to those who despair, healing to victims of violence and reconciliation where there is division.

May the Holy Spirit heal our families and communities. Grant us ethical and courageous leaders, who put the good of the people before their own interests.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit we commit ourselves to speak the truth with courage, to act justly in all we do, to share with those in need and always and everywhere to respect your gift of life as we strive to proclaim the values of the Kingdom in solidarity with all people of goodwill. Amen

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred let me sow love.

Where there is injury let me sow pardon. Where there is discord let me sow harmony.

Divine Master grant that I may not so much seek to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love

To receive sympathy as to give it.

For it is in giving that we receive, in pardoning that we are pardoned,

In forgetting self that we shall have unending peace with others. Amen

April 1. Easter Monday, Family Day public holiday SA.

The Permanenti family decided to have some word fun and so they shared:

They call it FAMILY DAY, here in the RSA. At work or when they play, we call it holiday because we've worked and prayed and played this long weekend of holy-holi-days!

We thank you God for F-A-M-I-L-Y. F for Father, M for Mother, I and Y-you complete the team, with L for Love the in-between.

There are many family days, - 365 days of every year, when in reality families need to be clothed and fed, housed and loved. What special meaning can we put on Easter Monday as a family day at the end of a presumed whole long weekend of holy family time? There are also many kinds of families with as many situations, both happy and sad. Some with a father, many with a mother, some with an I and a you. We're also becoming more and more aware of the whole family of creation, its ecosystems, its plants and animals and the many different relationships that exist within and between elements of creation. Let this day be an opportunity to praise and thank God for showing us the way to relationships, for the gift of family life, for the gift of our own families, for reflecting on the needs of all families and calling our political leadership to responsibility while we ourselves can reach out and do something really concrete for an underprivileged family.

Reflect, share. Scripture: *Read the relevant scripture passage. On the day of Pentecost, Peter lifted up his voice and addressed them, 'Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem let this be known to you and give ear to my words. This Jesus God raised up and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit he has poured out this which you see and hear'. Acts: 2:22-33.*

Pope Francis: *The triune God is a communion of love and the family is its living reflection. Our God in his deepest mystery is not solitude but a family, for he has within himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family which is love. That love in the divine family is the Holy Spirit. AL 11. When a family is welcoming and reaches out to others, especially the poor and the neglected it is a symbol, witness and participant in the Church's motherhood. AL324.*

April 2. Tuesday of Easter week. Magdalen shared, "I'm fascinated by the Resurrection story where Mary Magdalene is weeping, and, looking up, sees someone she assumes is the gardener but doesn't recognize it is Jesus at first. We know God is everywhere, but would you or I recognize him in an ordinary person doing his job? A gardener can be quite symbolic for us right now. With a focus on ecological conversion we can recognize God present in this aspect of creation; God as gardener, planting and tending his creation, resuscitating dying plants maybe."

Reflect, share, pray, Scripture: *Supposing him to be the gardener Mary Magdalene said to him, "Sir if you have carried him away tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away. Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned to him, saying, "Rabboni." Jesus said, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father, my Father and your Father, my God and your God." John 20:11-18. Pope Francis : Jesus took up the biblical faith in God, the Creator, emphasizing a fundamental truth: God is Father. In talking with his disciples Jesus would invite them to recognize the paternal relationship God has with all his creatures. LS 96. The creatures of this world no longer appear to us under mere natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end. There is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop in a poor person's face. The world sings of an infinite Love, how can we fail to care for it? LD 65. ACTION: in prayer let your mind wander a little. Can you think of times when you were conscious of God's presence around you? Can you cultivate such an awareness more?*

April 3. Wednesday of Easter week. Peter shared in his group, "I've often thought about those two strangers on the road, they don't have names but they have played an intriguing and important role throughout the history of the Church. I've also thought of them as a pair, maybe they were a couple, maybe they even had their kids with them and imagine how they enjoyed having Jesus walk and talk with them. We should also do that more often, have a Family Talk Walk."

Reflect, share, pray, Scripture: *Jesus said to the two men, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses he interpreted to them the Scriptures. "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures? Luke 24:13-35 Pope Francis: We are constantly reminded that each of those who live with us merits complete attention since he or she possesses infinite dignity as an object of the Father's immense love. AL323 Action. How does a Family Talk Walk as a parish activity grab you?*

April 4. Thursday in Easter week. Most of the parish families' members were either all Catholic or some belonged to different Christian churches. Beauty had married a Jewish boy and they did practice some of the Catholic and some Jewish traditions at home. When Passover and Easter were on different weekends it got confusing but they explained

the reason for the dating of these events and also got talking about Islam and its different days of remembrance, like Ramadan, recognizing that it was the message of God, YHWH or Allah that really mattered.

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, and in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed. God having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness. Acts 3: 11-26. Pope Francis:* *There is an aspect of mercy that goes beyond the confines of the Church. It relates us to Judaism and Islam, both of which consider mercy to be one of God's most important attributes. Israel was the first to receive this revelation which continues in history as the source of an inexhaustible richness meant to be shared with all mankind. FM23* Action. At this time are we challenged by or more accepting of other faiths than we were in the past?

April 5. Friday of Easter week. Abram came from a family of fishermen that had made their living in the fishing village of Pater Noster up the west coast of South Africa for generations. But there were times these days when they caught little or nothing, which was a big worry for their families. The women began a prayer campaign. And it worked. One early morning after another futile night Abram's wife met them on the beach. "I had a powerful dream," she said, "it was as if God was telling us to continue to trust in him and his care for our families and community. I believe you should go out again." Some of the men grumbled but they went and were delighted with their catch. "Not quite 153!" Abram's brother teased but when they had come back the men, women and children knelt down to give thanks to God for his mercy but also knew they had to consider what God's plan for them for their future would be.

Reflect, share, pray, Scripture: . "Jesus said, "Cast the nets on the right side of the boat and you will find fish." From John 21:1-14. **Pope Francis:** *All family life is a shepherding in mercy. Each of us by our love and care leaves a mark on the life of others. Each of us is a fisher of men, who in Jesus' name, casts the net to others, or a farmer who tills the fresh soil of those whom he or she loves, seeking to bring out the best in them. AL322.* Action. Share some experiences when your trust in God's care was answered.

April 6. Saturday of Easter week. Paul reminded his family group, "Do you remember the incident when our former Chief Justice who is also a very committed member of his church said something deemed to be pro-Israel that offended some other people. They judged his statement to be against official foreign policy which is currently more pro-Palestinian. They challenged him and told him to apologise, but he refused and stood by his beliefs. It caused quite some drama in legal circles.

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture. *The rulers charged them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Peter and John answered the rulers, "whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." Acts 4:13-21. Pope Francis:* *I ask God to prepare our hearts to encounter our brothers and sisters, so that we may overcome our differences rooted in political thinking, language, culture and religion. Let us ask him to anoint our whole being with the balm of his mercy, which heals the injuries caused by mistakes, misunderstanding and disputes. Let us ask him for the grace to send us forth, in humility and meekness along the demanding but enriching path of seeking peace. FT254.* Action. consider and pray on the question, would I have the courage of my convictions in a debate?

April 7. Sunday Easter 2. Divine Mercy Sunday. Fr Bryan decided to share some of his thoughts on this day. "How did the early Church grow?" he asked. "Were the disciples all fired up immediately or did they need extra help, like we all do all the time. This Divine Mercy Sunday is celebrating God's mercy, as an extra something available to us as a special devotion emphasizing the need to put our trust in God's mercy. It was started after St Faustina received visions of Jesus. We also invite the Holy Spirit to help us examine our lives and, in justice, acknowledge ourselves to be sinners and in need of mercy and forgiveness. We, priests, have been given special sacramental powers to forgive sins in the name of God and in all humility. I do wish that more people would appreciate what that can mean for them. It can even be a way of 'touching' Jesus who is the Face of God's mercy. The Divine Mercy devotion can be promoted in parishes and families too.

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture. *Jesus said, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. And he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any they are retained." John 20:19-31. Pope Francis:* *"I ask God to prepare our hearts to encounter our brothers and sisters so that we may overcome our differences rooted in political thinking, language, culture and religion. Let us ask him to anoint our whole being with the balm of his mercy, which heals the injuries caused by mistakes, misunderstandings and disputes. And let us ask him for the grace to send us forth, in humility and meekness, along the demanding but enriching path of seeking peace." FT254.* Action. The Sacrament of Reconciliation has been quite widely forgotten in recent years. Have you received this sacrament during this easter season?

April 8. Norah and Amy had become active promoters of Care for Creation. Norah said, "I love it, when the Bible reminds us of the Creator of heaven and earth and everything in them. And that everything can mean dogs and dassies, birds, bees and bugs, as well as the trees and plants that are now clearly going into autumn and winter. Will they all survive the cold and will the poor and homeless people be able to survive?"

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture. *When Peter and John were released they and their friends raised their voices and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who by the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were against your holy servant Jesus." Acts 4:23-31*
Pope Francis: *Faith convictions can offer Christians and other believers ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters. Christians realise that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith. LS 64. Action. Consider what provision are we making to care for the poor and the earth this coming winter? Can I lobby the politicians to address these needs?*

April 9. Portia shared in their faith sharing group, "Do you know that for us Africans the word "moya" is used in different ways. It can mean wind, or spirit or the Holy Spirit. Jesus was talking to Nicodemus using wind as a natural phenomenon to illustrate its mysteriousness and comparing it to the Holy Spirit in an almost magical way. We all know wind as an element of creation, but it seems that the word or concept "spirit" is understood in different ways. It is good to be aware of the culture and understanding of one another's world view. We have a lovely hymn "Tshollela moya wa hao Jesu," which means "Lord send us your Holy Spirit," Let me teach it to those of you who don't know it."

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture. *Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born anew. The wind blows where it wills and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit. John 3:7-15. Pope Francis: The Holy Spirit can be said to possess an infinite creativity, proper to the divine mind, which knows how to loosen the knots of human affairs, including the most complex and inscrutable. LS 80*
Share on how well do we understand one another's religious ways of thinking and acting in the same church?

April 10. The group leaders were reflecting on the progress that had been made in promoting faith sharing over the years. "We haven't really started to practice the synodal way of Conversations in the Spirit, with dialogue and careful listening." Octavia commented, "I can hardly believe that it is 8 years since we celebrated the Year of Mercy and started a study of Pope Francis' special document. Mercy is still a difficult concept for me, especially God's mercy, in the context of 'Do not judge.' I know that it was Jesus' mission to help us to understand that."

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *Jesus said to Nicodemus, "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. John 3:16-21. Pope Francis: Forgiving does not mean forgetting. In the face of a reality that can in no way be denied, relativised or concealed, forgiveness is still possible. In the face of an action that can never be tolerated, justified or excused, we can still forgive. Free and heartfelt forgiveness is something noble, a reflection of God's own infinite ability to forgive. FT250. Pray for courage and openness to forgive something that is still burdening you.*

April 11. Doctors, nurses and paramedics too are frontline workers often dealing with the reality of life and death. But other challenging situations arise too. Sophie, a nurse, working in a public hospital shared, "I wonder what would happen if I refused to do some procedures, like abortion, that are against my religion and my conscience. If I say, 'I must obey God rather than men,' I could lose my job and it won't be easy to get another post." Mrs Adams replied, "I understand and I believe that somehow we need to pray for courage to obey our conscience because after all we're answerable to God in the end."

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *After the leaders forbade them to preach Peter and the apostles answered, "we must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree, God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit. Acts 5:27-33. Pope Francis: It should be acknowledged that among the most important crises of the modern world are a desensitized conscience, a distancing from religious values and individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies that deify the human person and introduce worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendental principles. FT275. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them. AL36. Share: Ask yourself how well formed your conscience is and do you always obey it.*

April 12. George raised a challenging issue that had come up a short while ago. “The Vatican, supported by Pope Francis, has said that those in irregular unions may receive a blessing, as blessings are given by God to whoever asks. This has started a controversy as some would say that same sex unions, or other irregular situations are sinful and sin cannot be blessed. “ So they discussed the issue of sin and someone asked if breaking your own fast by eating something you had given up for Lent is a sin? Is that simplistic? George replied, “I think that there are many sinful things in other areas of life, big and small, like selling of weapons, corruption, fraud, theft and causing pollution and sexual abuse, that don’t seem to get enough attention. How much fraud has never been addressed from the State Capture disaster. Are we taking that into consideration in considering who to vote for? I sometimes wonder where the main focus in the Church is or should be when it comes to sin, justice and to mercy.” “And blessings!”

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *When Peter and John had stood before the council, Gamaliel warned the council, “Men of Israel take care what you do with these men. If this plan of theirs or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God.” Acts 5:34-42. Pope Francis:* *Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships, with God, with our neighbour and with the earth. These have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. LS 66. Action. Reflect and act on what things in my life I consider sinful?*

April 13. When Moses and James met at the Sunday soccer game they sometimes complained that their wives were always busy with sodality matters. “I want her home on Sunday morning to cook for us,” Moses said and James nodded his agreement. Daniel, overhearing them chipped in, “I’m sad. My wife died of Covid-19 and so what am I alone supposed to do? My children all have their own families or sodalities to be worried about. So I invited them all for a general family meeting to talk things through. I am glad that we were able to use the new synodal dialogue process, to share our feelings and even our differences that had been bothering us. Listening carefully to one another helped us to come up with some suggestions that we can all live with.”

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *In those days when the disciples were increasing in number the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the Twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore pick out from among you seven men of good repute full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. Acts 6:1-7. Pope Francis:* *When injustices have occurred on both sides, it is important to take into clear account whether they were equally great or in any way comparable. The bishops of Croatia have stated that we owe equal respect to every innocent victim. There can be no racial, national, confessional or partisan differences.” FT253 Share: Are we dealing with family issues in the best way God would wish for us all?*

April 14. Sunday Easter 3. Fr Brian messaged his congregation, “The apostles really took some convincing that Jesus was really alive, didn’t they, even though they were filled with joy. What are the hardest things for us to believe? That we are truly loved? That God, the Trinity, really loves each of us, in their own ways, and/or that our spouses, parents, families and friends love us and that their love is a sign of God’s love? And do we believe we have a mission as human beings to the rest of creation? I do wonder though if other creatures – other than our pets - would know how to love us?”

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *“While they still disbelieved for joy and wondered, he said to them, “Have you anything to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate before them. Then he said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you. It is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” Luke 24:35-48. Pope Francis:* *The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of maturity in all things. Human beings endowed with intelligence and love and drawn by the fullness of Christ are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator. LS83. Pray for an increase in belief in our important calling as witnesses.*

April 15. Hunger and food security are massive problems in our day. This is partly still a result of the Covid-19 pandemic but also related to climate change and a result of years of corruption and mismanagement at all levels, government as well as private sector and even charities. However, at the same time a tremendous amount of good has been done over the years to feed the hungry when disasters happen. Every one of the family groups on reading the gospel considered the two aspects; providing food and providing spiritual nourishment. Peter voiced the general opinion, “This two-sided problem is likely to be with us, long after the next pandemic is over, probably forever, and we all have to recognize that we are co-responsible for one another in whatever way we can help.”

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: After 5000 men had eaten their fill Jesus and the disciples disappeared from there. The disciples of Jesus saw him walking on the sea. Jesus later spoke to the people who had searched and found him. "You seek me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God, the Father, set his seal. John 6:22-29. **Pope Francis:** To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some is one way of refusing to face the issue of food security. The planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption. We know that approximately a third of all food produced is discarded and wherever food is thrown out it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor. LS50 ACTION. What is our role in dealing with the twofold need for physical and spiritual nourishment?

April 16. Obed said, "Stephen and the disciples in those very early days of the Church had great courage, verbally attacking the leaders because of their lack of acceptance of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. What can we do? I don't want to risk being arrested for speaking out or being killed for my faith. I have heard that in our day and age there have been as many or more martyrs than ever before, some at the hands of radical groups of Muslims, but we read regularly of priests and religious being attacked right in our country where the incidence of crime is one of the highest in the world. On the whole religious extremism and bigotry has not ended has it? Why don't we pray for an increase in our own faith and a growth in universal solidarity and fraternity."

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: Stephen full of grace and power did great wonders and signs among the people. Speaking to the elders and the scribes he said, "you stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit." They were enraged, but he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, "Behold I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." They cried out and stopped their ears and cast him out of the city and stoned him. Acts 7:51- 8:1. **Pope Francis.** The Church has been present for centuries throughout the world. She can understand from her own experience of grace and sin, the beauty of universal love. All human things are our concern, wherever the councils of nations come together to establish the rights and duties of man we are honoured to be permitted to take our place among them. In the power of the risen Lord the Church wants to give birth to a new world, where all of us are brothers and sisters, where there is room for all those whom societies discard, where justice and peace are resplendent. FT 278.

April 17. All the parents in the groups were heard to express concern that so many of the youth were making connections and also attending services in Pentecostal churches that seemed more lively. "In a way I think it is OK if they go there to pray and worship and for fellowship but what worries me is that there is no true communion. Jesus did say, "I am the bread of life" and I believe we need to be fed with his body and blood." "Not having been able to go to Mass and receive communion for months during Covid didn't help either and it is sad that there are people young and older who haven't come back to church to be able to receive Jesus in communion." "I wonder what people really believe." "Our prayer and faith sharing at home have helped us but we all do need to be taught more, about ecological conversions especially."

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: Jesus said to the crowds, "I am the bread of life. I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but to do the will of him who sent me. This is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. John: 6:35-40. **Pope Francis:** One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly throughout the incarnation the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole. LS 99. The Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation. LS236. ACTION. Pray for a deepening understanding of our faith in today's context.

April 18. The parents continued their discussion. "That story of Philip and him sharing the story of Jesus in such a way that the Ethiopian was convinced enough to ask for baptism is really powerful. Do we have such preachers that can hold our and the kids' attention?" "It can be a problem that the style in other churches is often more dynamic." "In the Catholic Church there are programmes, some for youth, Theology of the Body or Charismatic or Encounter movements that do grab people with new insight of spirituality." "Sodalities or groups seem to be a binding factor too." "But it has been said that youth are forced into confirmation, which is seen as a church-leaving event and that somehow the confirmation catechesis is not like RCIA, where people freely choose to come for baptism or being received into the Church. Could more be done by families sharing their faith life at home?"

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *An Ethiopian, a eunuch, a minister to the queen had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning in his chariot while reading the prophet Isaiah, "Like a sheep, led to the slaughter, or a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opened not his mouth." The Spirit told Philip to join him and Philip explained the passage and told him the good news of Jesus. As they came to some water the eunuch asked to be baptized. After that the Spirit took Philip away and, passing on, he preached the gospel to all the towns. Acts 8:26-40. Pope Francis: The Lord's presence dwells in real and concrete families with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes. The spirituality of family love is made up of 100s of small but real gesture. In that variety of gifts and encounters which deepen communion God has its dwelling place. If a family is centred on Christ, he will unify and illumine its entire life. Moments of pain and difficulty will be experienced in union with the Lord's cross and his closeness will make it possible to surmount them AL 315-7. . ACTION. Share and pray, do I make enough efforts to renew and enrich our family faith experience?*

April 19. Conversion experiences was one of Marie's favourite topics and she had written a whole little booklet on it. She shared, "I have discovered much about my own faith through these conversion stories. Some were life-changing events, like Saul's, others were more like a process of change. Some men and women felt called to join a religious congregation. Turning away from an addiction to drugs, alcohol or gambling can be a conversion too. Most of us have small conversion experiences, possibly during a time of fasting like Lent. A conversion towards interreligious dialogue is a strong feature of our time and ecological conversion is too."

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *Saul still breathing threats and murder against the disciples went to Damascus to look for and arrest disciples. As he journeyed suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?" and he said, "Who are you?" Acts: 9:1-20. Pope Francis: St Francis did not wage a war of words aimed at imposing doctrines; he simply spread the love of God. He understood that God is love and those who abide in love abide in God. FT4. Pope Francis and the Grand Imam in Abu Dhabi in 2019 produced a DECLARATION ON HUMAN FRATERNITY AND WORLD PEACE. "In the name of God, who has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and who has called them to live together as brothers and sisters, to fill the earth and make known the values of goodness, love and peace we declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path, mutual cooperation as the code of conduct, reciprocal understanding as the method and standard." FT 285. Action. Study, discuss and pray over the statement on human fraternity.*

April 20. Jennifer began, "There is a nursery rhyme that starts, "Mary, Mary quite contrary, how does your garden grow? With silver bells and cockle shells and pretty maids all in a row." "It is not just because I am a teacher, but as a thinking human being I know that we have to reflect on what makes things happen, what makes a garden grow? Right physical conditions for sure, but also a caring attitude and the right actions. Pope Francis, speaking about peace and social friendship as a basis for communion and good relationships within a group or between groups, calls it a *culture of encounter* and proposes dialogue. Approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another and to find common ground is dialogue and leads to another important concept, the common good. I wonder to what extent our politicians are focusing on the common good?"

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *In those days the Church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied. Peter came to the saints that lived at Lydda. He found a man, Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years and was paralysed. Peter said to him. "Jesus Christ heals you. Rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. Acts 9:31-42. Pope Francis: Life for all its confrontations is the art of encounter. I have often called for the growth of a culture of encounter capable of transcending our differences and division. Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable. FT215 Action. How can a culture of encounter be promoted as a community attitude. Dialogue is between generations, among our people, for we are that people, readiness to give and receive, while remaining open to the truth. Constructive dialogue occurs between many rich cultural components of society: popular culture, university culture, youth culture, artistic culture, technological culture, economic culture, family culture and media culture. FT 199.*

April 21. Sunday Easter 4B. Fr Brian smiled to himself as he messaged his people, "Sheep and shepherds are mentioned often in the Bible, Old and New Testaments, and by other ancient religions, as sheep were an important part of domestic life, for milk, meat and wool. They were treasured possessions that demanded care, provided by a shepherd, either an owner or a hireling, as Jesus refers to in the gospel. What is our general attitude towards them today when sheep farming is a different type, a major industry? Some of us know all about them, others only know about a lamb chop on a braai and most people have never seen a real live sheep. They are considered to be quite stupid and docile, inclined to follow obediently or be herded into pens. In Biblical passages the image of a shepherd is

of a genuine committed and caring person, leading the way while his sheep love him and follow him faithfully. But shepherds, although valued for their commitment, faithfulness and tender care, have never had any great social status, being simple and poor folk. Is that the image God wants us to have?

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees. I know my own and my own know me as the Father knows me and I know the Father. I have other sheep that are not of this fold: I must bring them also and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd. John 10:11-18. Pope Francis: We cannot forget Christ's desire that they may all be one. Hearing his call we recognize with sorrow that the process of globalization still lacks the prophetic and spiritual contribution of unity among Christians. This notwithstanding, even as we make this journey towards full communion we already have the duty to offer common witness to the love of God for all people by working together in the service of humanity. FT280. ACTION. How helpful is the imagery of us as sheep, and shepherds as leaders and carers for us today? Are we too independent to want to be told what to do?*

April 22. In their guidelines for the family faith sharing groups it was recommended that people should not be forced to share, initially at least. However as the gospel quotation for the day is many people's favourite it would be a great opportunity for everyone to share their thoughts and feelings. So this time each one was invited to share a thought, personal, intellectual, friendly or whatever. Antonette kicked off, "I'm a head-person. I've been studying reproduction in nature for some projects of my own. I am absolutely overwhelmed by the generosity and overabundance of God's giving. In frogs, and many sea creatures millions of eggs are produced, most of which go to waste, unfertilized. Have you tried to clean a watermelon or a pawpaw to put into a smoothy machine and see how many pips it produces? Each one could produce a new plant. I'm growing veggies and was intrigued to discover that my butternut plant has to have male and female flowers. Did you know that there are plenty of plants like that? God, the creator, is amazing."

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *"I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly." John 10:10. Pope Francis. Everything is connected and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity. LS240. By developing our individual God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm, in resolving the world's problems and offering ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable. LS220. Action. Invite people to share their thoughts and feelings about a favourite scripture passage, so as to give glory to God.*

April 23. The application of faith to life, the role of laity, couples, women, youth and the elderly were all good discussions topics for an adult family, but even the youth in confirmation had some contributions to make. "What does it really mean to be called a Christian? Is it because one is a regular churchgoer, a committed follower of Jesus, studying his way, encountering him? It seems that, like in the book of Revelations in the early days, now too people may be lukewarm and not burning with passion. Is that a sign of the times today? But then how come people are passionate about soccer players or singers and actors? How can we tease out what it is that makes for a real passionate Christian?"

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul and when he had found him he brought him to Antioch. They met with the Church and taught a large company of people. And in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians. From Acts 11:19-26. Pope Francis. Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour! EG 109 Various expressions of popular piety are a treasure of spirituality for many families. Jesus knocks on the door of families, to share with them the Eucharistic supper. There spouses can always seal anew the paschal covenant which united them and which ought to reflect the covenant which God sealed with mankind on the cross. AL 318*

April 24. Mrs Potgieter continued to reflect, "What is Jesus advocating for? True freedom, and achieving that. is part of the message of the Kingdom of Jesus. I loved the description we used in our catechism classes; a kingdom of love, justice, truth, peace and freedom. St Francis and Pope Francis also promote humility and poverty. That is more concrete and more complicated. Not owning anything at all is a special vocation for some, but the cry of the poor is for everyone. Not having enough to eat is certainly not a good thing, but the attitude of greed and wanting more and more does not make us content with life or give us true freedom." "Talk about election and reflection. This is a time when we really need to challenge our leaders' motives."

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *At that time Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. The Father who sent me has himself given me the commandment what to say. John 12:44-50. Pope Francis: A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfillment. Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. LS 222. 96 Action.* Share and pray, for a greater appreciation of the values of the kingdom in our politicians including humility and poverty which is also the cry of the poor.

April 25. St Mark. Evangelist. In her sodality Portia shared some insight she had learned from her own mother. "Every year the Church's has a stronger focus on one of the gospels. 2024 is the year of Mark, a disciple of Paul and of Peter and believed to be the earliest gospel-writer. Also of interest from tradition is that Mark brought the Church to Africa. Each gospel ends with a call to go out and preach the gospel everywhere. I believe that not everyone of us is called to go out into all the world, and many of us are called to stay at home and build a little church, a little kingdom too. And that's not just for stay-at-home mothers. All of us women and men in our families, sodalities, workplaces, schools, and even the gym can be spreading the gospel." "Priscilla said, "I do agree and for me that is almost like speaking a new tongue, taking the words from the gospel for today."

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole of creation. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons, they will speak in new tongues, they will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover. Mark 16:15-20; Pope Francis: Labour makes possible the development of society and provides for the sustenance, stability and fruitfulness of one's family. 'May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. May you see your children's children.' Ps 128. AL 24. The family is the place in which life – the gift of God – can be properly welcomed and protected against attack, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. AL213. ACTION.* Choose an appropriate action.

April 26. Jock shared, "I know that it is almost two years since we were faced with the stresses and ravages of COVID, and even now there are cases cropping up here and there all the time. Every time I hear of a new case it brings back to me the terrible experience we had when my beloved wife was infected and after some weeks she died. I and our son were also infected but fortunately recovered. We knew of other cases, but one is never fully prepared for the ultimate reality. Each of us in the family went through weeks of grieving on our own but gradually we did learn to share our thoughts and feelings with one another as I know the Holy Spirit came to comfort us. Over time too I have found a new interest and a joy in the many facets of caring for creation, fully aware that it too is facing a struggle for survival. My professional experience has been a great outlet for me there.

Reflect, share, pray. Scripture: *Jesus said, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am you may be also." John 14:1-6. Pope Francis: Ordinarily the grieving process takes a fair amount of time. With a sincere and patient process of prayer and interior liberation, peace returns. We help the grieving person to realise that after the loss of a loved one we still have a mission to carry out and it does us no good to prolong the suffering as if it were a form of tribute. 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 255-6.*

April 27. Freedom Day. The speaker began, "What does freedom mean to you as an individual and a member of a family and community? It can even mean different things in these different contexts. On this holiday celebrating and commemorating the day 30 years ago, in 1994, when the first fully democratic election was held in South Africa, we should be able to celebrate freedom and our constitution. But do we? Freedom is precious. It was and always is hard-bought and should be greatly appreciated. But it is not for free. It was bought at a price and still costs for many people, in fact for all of us. We, as families can consider the cost of freedom and should share with those too young to remember the past. They need to know as they will now be voting for a new government soon that will continue the work that has to be done for us, for them and for those coming after them too."

Reflect, share, pray. Preface for Reconciliation. *It is truly right and just that we should give you thanks and praise O God, almighty Father for all you do in this world, through our Lord Jesus Christ. For though the human race is divided by dissension and discord, yet we know that by testing us you change our hearts to prepare them for reconciliation. Even more by your Spirit you move human hearts that enemies may speak to each other again, adversaries may join hands and peoples seek to meet together. By the working of your power it comes about O Lord that hatred is overcome by love, revenge gives way to forgiveness and discord is changed to mutual respect. Pope Francis: The*

proclamation of faith calls for stressing what is most needed today: God's saving love which precedes any moral and religious obligation on our part; it should not impose the truth but appeal to freedom and be marked by joy, encouragement and balance. EG 165. Keeping our missionary fervour alive calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit. There is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills EG 280.
ACTION. Are we taking the requirements for a free and fair election sufficiently seriously, also informing our youth.

April 28. 5th Sunday of Easter B. Fr Brian shared a brief thought on the image of pruning the vine. "There's no such thing as 'I'm all right Jack,' is there? Just when you think you're OK there is something more that can or should be done. Don't you find that there is a real challenge to grow as parents in your families? Kids will tell you that it sometimes seems that God is never satisfied, and neither are you. We have to keep on pruning as of course the vine keeps growing. Tell them, 'Remember, if you think you are standing still in one place you're actually going backwards because everything else is moving forward. Just look at nature; there is always something happening, even if it is hibernating. That is where our faith and our trust in God's love comes in. That is what we can pray for together."

Reflect, share, pray. *I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit he takes away and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. John 15:1-8* **Pope Francis:** *"Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands, you shall be happy and it shall go well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house. Your children will be like olive shoots around your table. (Ps128) AL 8. The ability of human couples to beget life is the path along which the history of salvation progresses. Seen this way, the couple's fruitful relationship becomes an image for understanding and describing the mystery of God himself, for in the Christian vision of the Trinity God is contemplated as Father, Son and Spirit. AL 11.*
ACTION: pray Mary, blessed wife and mother, pray for us.

April 29. Beliefs and traditions. Busisiwe said in her sodality group. "Along with our Catholic faith are we passing on some of our traditions and also our superstitions to our children? Call it witchcraft, or just superstition but don't we simply pass on our fears and traditional beliefs out of fear too. If we had not paid lobola I would subconsciously at least consider any harm to our children as a punishment from the ancestors. Will our kids living in this modern world pick up what is good and what is superstition about the traditions families practice, or will they have their own modern beliefs?"

Reflect, share, pray. *When the crowd saw that the cripple man had been healed they said, "the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men." And they called Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes, the names of their gods. When Paul and Barnabas heard this they rushed out among the multitude crying, "Men why are you doing this? We are also men like you and bring you good news, that you should turn from these things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all. Acts 14- 5-18.* **Pope Francis:** *We need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times the way we present our Christian beliefs and treat other people has helped contribute to today's problematic situation. At times we have proposed a far too abstract and theoretical ideal of marriage, far removed from concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families. AL36*

April 30. Older parents. Archie shared, "In our groups we have mostly been talking about us and our children but are there not some here who still have our own older parents living with us too, or who may need constant care from us. For Bernie and me, this is the more difficult part of our family; parenting up rather than down. We do try to respect them even if we find Bernie's father difficult, and you can't tell them what to do like you do with your kids. I find myself praying for peace and patience in our home, the kind of peace Jesus obviously is able to bring." Bernie added with a smile, "I sometimes compare my "old man" to our old Labrador, Prince, our other "old man" who is also still part of our family and needs constant care too. We really are a family of families!"

Reflect, share, pray. *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. John 14:27.* **Pope Francis:** *Our elderly are men and women, fathers and mothers, who came before us on our own road, in our own house, in our daily battle for a worthy life. "How I would like a Church that challenges the throw-away culture by the overflowing joy of a new embrace between young and old." AL 191. Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another. Each of us are responsible for the care of this family. LS42.*