



2026 OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES

MARFAM THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY – FEBRUARY



THEME: LOVE GIVES FAMILIES LIFE and LENT - part 1.

THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY are downloadable from www.marfam.org.za, request info@marfam.org.za for email, posted on facebook and whatsapp. **Abbreviations:** Pope Francis: LS = Laudato Si. LD – Laudate Deum AL = Amoris Laetitia. FT = Fratelli Tutti. DN= Dilexit Nos. EG= Evangelii Gaudium. MM = Misericordia et Misera. Pope Leo: DT= Dilexi Te. MP = Message for Day of Peace 1 January. For publications and Lenten suggestions contact toni@marfam.org.za

Short overview: FEBRUARY. Love gives Families life. God, the creator, is a lover and it is God's Trinitarian love, 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, sacramental marriage is the ideal love relationship. Love of nature and creation is a way to sustain life in its various forms. Life and love can be very vulnerable and the lifegiving theme in addition to the Franciscan focus 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 the care for creation. Caring for trees and rhinos while yet rejecting unborn human life and the needs of the destitute and poor is not being fully lifegiving. Every creature is the object of the Father's tenderness. LS 77. Pope Leo: Love for the Lord is love for them poor. Contact with those who are lowly and powerless is a fundamental way of encountering the Lord of history. In the poor he continues to speak to us. No Christian can regard the poor simply as a societal problem; they are part of our family, they are one of us. We are asked to devote time to the poor, give them our loving attention, listen with interest and stand by them in difficult moments, choosing to spend hours, weeks or years of our lives with them and striving to transform their situations, starting from them. We cannot forget that this is what Jesus himself proposed in his actions and by his words. DT 103.*

Setting the scene: The THOUGHTS are set in an imaginary parish with a number of family groups who reflect and share on the topic of the day, using the Synodal dialogue approach set out below. WORLD MARRIAGE DAY is celebrated on the 2nd Sunday of February. A special Mass focusing on marriage for everyone and blessing for couples can be held. THOUGHTS during Lent are focused on St Francis in the context of the YEAR OF ST FRANCIS initiated by Pope Leo XIV. The complete set for Lent and Easter are published in the newly revised MARFAM booklet *LOVE IS HIS LAW, LOVE IS HIS WAY*.

SYNODAL DIALOGUE. A Format and Process for family faith sharing. Openness to the Holy Spirit with Non-confrontational open sharing from the heart, attentive listening, acceptance, discernment and prayer are important in the process.

SEE – A LOOK AT LIFE. What is happening? Consider a life situation.

JUDGE - What does God say about it in scripture and church teaching?

ACTION AND PRAYER – What can I do? Conclude with prayer about the situation.

1 February. SEE: SUNDAY 4a. Fr George started his homily by playing devils advocate. He said, "I'm not sure but it seems to me that Pope Francis and Pope Leo have been too concerned about "the poor." I know that there are millions of poor people all over the world and we should love and care for them, but what about the rest of us? We here are not rich, but even rich people need to be loved by God. Does that sound wrong? Does "poor in spirit" also mean that we don't value possessions over everything else like relationships and should be willing to share? Aren't all the beatitudes Jesus' Mission statement which speaks about loving concern for others in different ways?" In fact I think that **Blessed Benedict Daswa** who was a respected school principal and married man is an excellent example of one who lived the Beatitudes fully. He was a father of eight children and his mother was part of the family. Benedict was stoned and then killed by fellow-villagers in Venda, remote part of South Africa on 2 February 1990. They were jealous of his success and resented his opposition to witchcraft which was still practised in the area. He was declared Blessed in 2015 and the Church hopes he will soon be canonised.

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are.... Matthew 5:1-12. 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. **Pope Leo:** *"I have loved you." This declaration of love, taken from the Book of Revelation, reflects the inexhaustible mystery that Pope Francis reflected upon in the Encyclical Dilexit Nos on the human and divine love of the heart of Jesus Christ. There we saw how Jesus identified himself "with the lowest ranks of society" and how, with his love poured out to the end, he confirms the dignity of every human being. Dilexi Te 2.*

ACT AND PRAY: Research the life of Bl Benedict Daswa and pray for the courage to be witnesses to God's love.

2 February. Presentation of the Lord. SEE: Mapitso explained that this feast commemorates the Jewish tradition of ritual purification after childbirth. As in African cultures there was a great reverence for blood as a seat of life in Jewish culture. The feast during which Joseph and Mary presented Jesus in the temple it was foretold by Simeon and Anna to Mary that “a sword will pierce your own heart.” This is the finally ending of the 40 days of the Christmas season, and is also called Candlemas reminding us again that Jesus is the Light of the World for everyone. A simple procession of light can be held in the parish or at home.

JUDGE, reflect and 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. EG1152. **Pope Leo:** There are some clues about Jesus' social status. First of all, he worked as a craftsman or carpenter. These were people who earned their living by manual labor. Not owning land, they were considered inferior to farmers. When the baby Jesus was presented in the Temple by Joseph and Mary, his parents offered a pair of turtledoves or pigeons, which according to the prescriptions of the Book of Leviticus (cf. 12:8) was the offering of the poor. DT20.

ACT AND PRAY. The value of rituals, traditions and customs in families can be a topic for family faith sharing.

3 February. SEE: St Blaise is said to have cured a young boy choking on a fishbone. From that a tradition grew up around a blessing of throats particularly of those suffering from diseases of the chest and lungs. Diphtheria and TB were life-threatening diseases in their day, TB and HIV/AIDS are still so today and COVID involved respiratory issues. Blessings and prayers about certain conditions remind us of God's care and concern for us in sickness. We do our bit by protecting ourselves and trust in God for the rest.

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *Jesus said to his disciples, “Go out into the whole world and preach the gospel. In my name. “They will cast out demons, they will speak in new tongues, they will lay hands on the sick and heal them”. Mk 16:15-20. 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. *“Suffering and illness have always been among the greatest problems. Christians feel and experience pain like all other people. Part of the plan laid out by God's providence is that we should fight against sickness and carefully seek the blessings of good health, so that we may fulfil our role in human society and in the Church” Catechism 1622. Pope Leo:* During the plague in Carthage St Cyprian reminded Christians of the importance of caring for the sick. *“This pestilence, which seems so horrible and deadly, searches out the righteousness of each one and examines the minds of the human race, to see whether the healthy serve the sick, whether relatives love each other with sincerity, whether masters have pity on their sick servants, whether doctors do not abandon the sick who beg for help. This is not simply philanthropic behaviour but ecclesial action through members touch the suffering face of Christ. DT 48*

ACT AND PRAY: Pope Leo lists the right attitudes towards the sick. How do we rate? Pray especially for the sick in war-torn areas where medical help is hardly available. Thank Doctors without Borders and such initiatives.

4 February. SEE: Many of the groups were following the proceedings in the news about the various commissions of enquiry into corruption, fraud and other wrongdoing. It is said that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Kings, presidents, leaders at any level, right down to families, are prone to wielding their power and controlling others. This can and does lead to conflict, violence and abuse, especially when there is resistance to power being abused, or call it whistle-blowing. Who is willing to acknowledge their wrongs, their guilt and sinfulness so that other innocent persons need not suffer? Why or why not?

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *David regretted having taken a census of the people. He said to the Lord, “I have sinned grievously in what I have done. Take away Lord your servant's guilt for I have acted very foolishly.” The Lord sent a plague over Israel, then David said to the Lord, “It is I who have sinned. It is I, the shepherd, who have done wrong. But these sheep, what have they done? Strike me and my father's family!” Read 2 Samuel 24. Pope Francis.* God who wishes to work with us and counts on our cooperation can bring good out of the evil we have done. The Holy Spirit, who possesses the infinite creativity of the divine mind of God, knows how to loosen the knots of human affairs. LS 80. **Pope Leo:** On the wounded faces of the poor we see the suffering of the innocent and, therefore, the suffering of Christ himself. At the same time, we should perhaps speak more correctly of the many faces of the poor and of poverty. There are many forms of poverty: the poverty of those who lack material means of subsistence, the poverty of those who are socially marginalized and lack the means to give voice to their dignity and abilities, moral and spiritual poverty, cultural poverty, the poverty of those who find themselves in a condition of personal or social weakness or fragility, the poverty of those who have no rights, no space, no freedom. DT 9

ACT AND PRAY: Honest discussion is needed to heal our society and includes prayer for integrity in our leaders. Where does moral and ethical education happen.

5 February. SEE: The groups considered quite a painful question, "In our day dying and death are often treated as taboo subjects or certainly with discomfort and sadness also rather than a celebration of a life. It is not often that an opportunity is created for final words and the wishes of someone about to leave this life? Although deep down the question is hanging there, 'What are the greatest legacies of my life that I as a parent can leave? Would it be material success in life or seeing wisdom, ethical behaviour and integrity in my children?'"

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *When David's time to die drew near he said to his son Solomon, "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, show yourself a man and keep the charge of the Lord, your God, walking in his ways, that you may prosper in all that you do. The Lord spoke concerning me, saying, "If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail to be a man on the throne of Israel. 1 Kings 2:1-12.*

Pope Francis: *the family is an agent of pastoral activity through its explicit proclamation of the Gospel and its legacy of varied forms of witness. in all families the Good News needs to resound. In good times and in bad, as a source of light along the way. All of us should be able to say, "thanks to the experience of our life in the family we come to believe in the love that God has for us" AL 29: **Pope Leo:** God will ask us if we have cultivated and cared for the world that he created for us and for future generations and if we have taken care of our brothers and sisters. What will be our answer? Laudato Si 10th anniversary Raising Hope Conference 2026.*

ACT AND PRAY: Discuss and pray about your answers to Pope Leo's question.

6 February. SEE: Some people might like to watch the film of Brother Sun and Sister Moon and listen to the song, but there are dozens of beautiful videos about St Francis. Beauty sent one youtube link to each one in her group and asked them to watch and listen or choose another one, but the idea was to share their responses with one another. "I have always loved St Francis and this presentation of his Canticle to Creation brought tears to my eyes," Audrey said. "I like the gentle, reflective background music behind the words and the beautiful images," Paul added. "Isn't art, with music and beauty a gift of God to us, to reflect on his creation? David certainly understood that, even 3000 years ago."

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *As the fat is selected from the peace offering, so David was selected from the sons of Israel. He played with lions as with young goats and with bears as with lambs. Did he not kill a giant and take away reproach from the people? He sang praise with all his heart and he loved his Maker. He placed singers before the altar to make sweet melody with their voices. He gave beauty to the feasts. The Lord took away his sons and exalted his power for ever. Sirach 47:2-11. **Pope Francis:** When we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them. This sentiment is expressed magnificently in the hymn of St Francis of Assisi, 'praise be you, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom you give us light..... and so it continues. LS 87. **Pope Leo:** Saint Augustine, referring precisely to singing in prayer, wrote in his Comment on the Psalms: "You must sing to Him, but not out of tune. He does not wish for His ears to be offended. Sing with artistry, O brethren." [3] How important in music are care, commitment, artistry, and, finally, the harmony that comes from them: it is truly a precious gift that God has given to all humanity." Address at Concert for the Poor. 2025.*

ACT AND PRAY: Watch a video or Youtube film about St Francis and learn more about him this February and Lent. Check out other hymns that refer to creation. Like John Rutter's *Look at the world*. Conclude with a song and prayer for care of creation.

7 February SEE: Leaders of today. A serious question for reflection, sharing and further discussion keeping in mind that the synodal dialogue expects open sharing from the heart and attentive listening to different views without rejecting others' opinions. Do we live in a post-Christian world, or a post-religious world today? Although when world leaders take the oath of office they may swear on the Bible or have some religious symbolism, when they gather at big meetings there is generally not even a semblance of spirituality even though some may come dressed in religious garb.

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *Solomon spoke to the Lord. "I am but a little child, I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people who you have chosen. Give your servant an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?" 1 Kgs 3:4-13.*

Pope Francis: *I am well aware that in the areas of politics and philosophy there are those who firmly reject the idea of a Creator, or consider it irrelevant and consequently dismiss as irrational the rich contribution which religions can make towards an integral ecology and the full develop of humanity. Others view religions simple as a subculture to be tolerated. **Pope Leo:** - I am convinced that the preferential choice for the poor is a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society, if we can only set ourselves free of our self-centeredness and open our ears to their cry. DT 7.*

ACT AND PRAY, For greater openness to the realities of today with an awareness of God and religions.

8 February, Sunday 5A, World Marriage Day. SEE: Mark and Joan shared, "One of the best things for us about our Marriage Ministry is the relationships we have developed with our fellow couples and the priests we have worked with very closely and how they are supporting one another. Marriage is our sacrament, but the priests are our partners, co-ministers, called to serve us, the people of God in a special way. We laughed when we were sharing our stories on the gospel of today. "Which of us is the salt, and which the light and how do we show this to others in the theme for today which is World Marriage Day. The theme used every year is, "Love one another as I have loved you." John 15.2. it is a commandment and speaks to us in a

simple but challenging way how to answer God's call in this prayer. Our Father's Call to a Couple: *Your being in love is my way to attract you to love. I say to you, you are wonderful, you are good. I want you to enjoy together the fullness of life, for which I sent My Son. Your closeness, your oneness, is the human experience nearest to how I live and love. Wherever you are, whatever you do in loving union brings Jesus in His Body, the Church, alive to all whom you touch. I call you to love each other in His name.* (Written by Fr Chuck Gallagher for couples preparing for marriage. Google for the complete prayer.)

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *Jesus said to his disciples, "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good. You are the light of the world, A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:13-16. Pope Francis: Marriage and the family have been redeemed by Christ and restored in the image of the Holy Trinity, the mystery from which all true love flows. AL 63*

ACT AND PRAY: A World Marriage Day Prayer for couples. *Father, as we celebrate today we thank you for your tremendous gift of the Sacrament of Marriage. Help us couples to witness to its glory by a life of growing intimacy. Teach us the beauty of forgiveness so we may become more and more One in Heart, Mind and Body. Strengthen our communication and help us become living signs of your love. Make us grow more in love with the Church so that we may renew the Body of Christ. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Brother. Amen.*

A World Marriage Day Prayer for the whole Church. *Father as we celebrate today the gift of the Sacrament of Marriage to the Church we thank you for the couples who are called to be your witnesses and signs of your love to us all. Bless them with intimacy and the openness they need for deep, true and honest communication as they grow to become one in heart, mind and body. Teach them the beauty and power of forgiveness and reconciliation for their own sake, for their children and for renewal of the Body of Christ, the Church as the Family of God. Amen*

9 February. SEE: God's Presence. After their youth group meeting Portia came home to the family with the question, "How can a person know that God is present somewhere?" "Mass, faith, prayer," were some of the answers. "The OT people believed God was there with them in a cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Jesus physically healed people, even when they just touched him. We seldom see such manifestations but there are many signs of a Creator in many different ways like in the beauty of nature. In relationships of love, e.g. a young couple or an old couple like some of you, we believe that God is present. Should we not make up a special way to honour God, build a temple or a shrine, or a little home altar and invite God to be there too?"

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *When the priests came out of the holy place a cloud filled the house of the Lord, and the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. Solomon said, 'I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in for ever.' 1 Kings 8:9-13 Pope Francis. To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God's love and hope." LS 85 We can say that alongside revelation in sacred Scripture, there is a divine manifestation in the blaze of the sun and the fall of night. Married couples shape with different daily gestures a God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the risen Lord. AL317.*

ACT AND PRAY: Look around and pray for the grace to see God's presence in your own life.

10 February, SEE: The oldies were discussing some of their TV habits and experiences. "Youtube is a blessing and a curse for me. I believe it can read my mind, which is scary, but then it selects all kinds of sites that it thinks I am interested in. Why does it use travelogues about remote eastern countries and focus on most beautiful images of ancient temples and mosques and calling them world heritage sites. What is it showing me about these religions on top of lots of Pope Leo? Sometimes I just want some quiet background music, but not much sport, as I'm not a great sporting fan." Others nodded wisely and smiled knowingly. They all had the same kind of issues.

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *O Lord my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer which your servant prays before you this day that your eyes maybe open night and day towards this house, the place of which you have said, "My name shall be there." 1 Kgs 8:22-23, 27-30. Pope Francis: When media and the digital world become omnipresent, their influence can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously. In this context the great sages of the past run the risk of going unheard amid the noise and distractions of an information overload. Media can become sources of new cultural progress for humanity and not a threat to our deepest riches. LS 47. Pope Leo: "New generations must be helped, not hindered, on their path to maturity and responsibility, especially when it comes to their relationship with new technologies and artificial intelligence. The ability to access vast amounts of data and information should not be confused with the ability to derive meaning and value from it, which requires a willingness to confront the mystery and core questions of our existence, even when these realities are often marginalized or ridiculed by the prevailing cultural and economic models." AI Conference*

ACT AND PRAY: Evaluate your use of technology and share and pray about its benefits and problems.

11 February. World Day of Prayer for the Sick. SEE: Fr Jeremiah was well aware of the search for healing of many of his parishioners. Some went on pilgrimages to Ngome or other shrines, some went to healing services in different churches. On this Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and the World Day of Prayer for the Sick he invited everyone to come together to celebrate Mass, to pray and also to seek inspiration, using the words of Jesus in the messages for the day from Pope Francis and Pope Leo.

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *The parable of the Good Samaritan. Lk 10:25-37*. **Pope Francis:** *"Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). "They point to the mysterious path of grace that is revealed to the simple and give new strength to those who are weary and tired. These words of Christ express his solidarity with all those who are hurt and afflicted. On this XXVIII World Day of the Sick, Jesus repeats these words to the sick, the oppressed, and the poor. For they realize that they depend entirely on God and, beneath the burden of their trials, they stand in need of his healing. Pope Leo: theme for 34th World Day of the Sick. The compassion of the Samaritan: loving by bearing another's pain. Extract: We live immersed in a culture of speed, immediacy and haste – a culture of "discard" and indifference that prevents us from pausing along the way and drawing near to acknowledge the needs and suffering that surround us. In the parable, when the Samaritan saw the wounded man, he did not "pass by." Instead, he looked upon him with an open and attentive gaze – the very gaze of Jesus – which led him to act with human and compassionate closeness. The Samaritan "stopped, approached the man and cared for him personally, even spending his own money to provide for his needs... Above all he gave him his time." Jesus does not merely teach us who our neighbor is, but rather how to become a neighbor; how we can draw close to others. Saint Augustine teaches that the Lord did not intend to show us who that man's neighbor was, but rather to whom he should become a neighbor. No one is truly a neighbor until they freely draw near to another. The one who became a neighbor was the one who showed mercy. Love is not passive; it goes out to meet the other. Being a neighbor is not determined by physical or social proximity, but by the decision to love. <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/sick/documents/20260113-messaggio-giornata-malato.html>*

ACT AND PRAY: Noel and Lebo shared on healing. "We've been there. We know what it feels like. We did feel Jesus' loving touch when our baby was so ill. That is why we have decided to become part of the parish ministry to the sick," Pray with Pope Leo's prayer for the day: *Sweet Mother, do not part from me. Turn not your eyes away from me. Walk with me at every moment and never leave me alone. You who always protect me as a true Mother, obtain for me the blessing of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

12 February. SEE: Bruce continued with the story of King Solomon. "Having considered wealth and prosperity and God's expectations what happens when these are not met? In King Solomon's case it was his wives who turned him away from his God, by having him build temples and make sacrifices for their foreign gods. Does that kind of love give life? How common is such a situation today where people begin to love and worship "idols," or foreign gods in different forms? Today's idols are possessions, habits that can become addictive, sex, even work or sport can become obsessions that turn us away from our God and one another. Will God turn away and punish us as he did the Israelites from that time, 700 years before Christ, possibly even until today? Do we see our misfortunes or the disasters around climate change as a punishment from God? "

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *The Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord. God said, "since this has been your mind and you have not kept my covenant I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant." 1 Kings 11:4-13. Pope Francis: The rich and the poor have equal dignity, for the Lord is the maker of them all. He himself made both small and great and he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good. This has practical consequences. If we make something our own it is only to administer it for the good of all. If we do not, we burden our consciences with the weight of having denied the existence of others. LS94-95. Pope Leo: Love for the Lord is one with love for the poor. Jesus said, "just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me." This is no human kindness but a revelation: contact with those who are lowly and powerless is a fundamental way of encountering the Lord of history in the poor, where he continues to speak to us. DT 5*

ACT AND PRAY. Decide on possible appropriate action. Conclude with prayer.

13 February. SEE: When I mentioned MERCY SHIPS to my paramedic grandson he admitted he had not heard about it. I had seen this mission promoted on TV and related it to the work of paramedics, or anyone willing and interested to help the sick or disabled people. Medical science has made enormous strides in all fields. Blindness and deafness have been around for centuries. Clearly a cure would be ideal but degrees of healing are helping to improve the quality of the lives of those of all ages who suffer. Many medical scientists and health workers see this as a vocation, others as a job, but it certainly needs a helping attitude. Those who volunteer to work on MERCY SHIPS or other voluntary projects are true neighbours, sharing in God's loving care for the suffering and the poor.

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *At that time they brought Jesus a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech and the begged him to lay his hand upon him And taking him aside from the multitude he put his fingers into his ears and he spat and touched his tongue and looking up to heaven he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is "be opened." And his ears were opened and his tongue released and he spoke clearly. And Jesus charged them to tell no one. Mk 7:31-37.*

Pope Leo: *The shared mission of caring for the sick. "To be one in the One" means truly recognizing that we are members of a single Body that brings the Lord's compassion to the suffering of all people, each according to our own vocation. [9] Moreover, the pain that moves us to compassion is not the pain of a stranger; it is the pain of a member of our own Body, to whom Christ our Head commands us attend, for the good of all. In this sense, our service is identified with Christ's own suffering and, when offered in a Christian spirit, hastens the fulfillment of the Savior's prayer for the unity of all.*

ACT AND PRAY: Decide on possible appropriate action. Conclude with prayer.

14 February St Valentine. SEE: As a fun activity to commemorate Valentine's Day the Jackson family at home decided to play a game listing their 5 best "I love.....statements. George explained they had to be real loves, not just passing likes. How do you know? One way to identify what one loves is by considering how much time, effort and care one spends on it and for how long. As George said, "I have loved my wife for 52 years. It wasn't always roses, sometimes thorns too." Young people of course chose romantic love objects, some chose a hobby or chocolate, and some an important issue they were really passionate and really cared about, like health or animal welfare. In the end did they discover what love really is or is love still always a mystery?

St Valentine's Day possibly did originate in stories of Christian martyrs in the early church. One story is about a priest who married soldiers as they were banned while on active duty. Another story is of healing, from blindness of his judge's daughter and then signing a farewell letter "Your Valentine" before his execution. The day is not any longer a religious feast but is recognised as a very real cultural, partly religious but very much a commercial celebration of love, "luv" and romance.

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. John 12:24-26. Pope Francis:* *I think of St Valentine's Day: in some countries commercial interests are quicker to see the potential of this celebration than are we in the Church! Pastoral initiatives aimed at helping married couples to grow in love also help their children by preparing them for their future married life. Traditional practices like St Valentine's Day should not be underestimated. Commercial interests are quicker to see the potential than we are in the Church. AL 208*

ACT AND PRAY. Decide on possible appropriate action around the really important aspect of Valentine's Day. Conclude with prayer.

15 February. Sunday 6A. SEE: Having read the scripture passage of the day Jock felt called to share his own experience. "Family conflict and feuds are not uncommon. There may be issues between siblings, even adult siblings that cause a complete break. The strains and stresses of marriage and of their own busy lives can cause a rift between spouses. When we do not feel loving, we may consider the marriage over. In such situations another man or woman may seem particularly attractive, and we may be open to looking for another partner or respond to or turn to another person. This can start and progress from a response to a need, an attraction, a temptation, adultery, or lead to a marriage breakdown. I thank God that he saved me from the greater evil of adultery. I admit I was tempted but just at the appropriate time my wife and I were invited to experience a programme for troubled marriages. We genuinely rediscovered our love was not dead, and, at the same time, neither were my relationships with my brothers. "

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *You have heard it said, "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go first to be reconciled to your brother. You have heard that it was said, "you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5: 17-37. Pope Francis:* *Among the causes of broken marriage are unduly high expectations. Once it becomes apparent that the reality is more limited and challenging than one imagined, the solution is not to think quickly and irresponsibly about separation but to come to the sober realization that married life is a process of growth in which each spouse is God's means of help the other to mature. AL221 Pope Leo:* *The contrast between darkness and light is not only a biblical image describing the labor pains of a new world being born; it is also an experience that unsettles us and affects us amid the trials we face in our historical circumstances. In order to overcome the darkness, it is necessary to see the light and believe in it. This is a call that Jesus' disciples are invited to live in a unique and privileged way; yet it also finds its way into every human heart. Peace exists; it wants to dwell within us. It has the gentle power to enlighten and expand our understanding; it resists and overcomes violence. Peace is a breath of the eternal: while to evil we cry out "Enough," to peace we whisper "Forever." Message of Peace for January 1.*

ACT AND PRAY: Decide on possible appropriate action around peace in the home and beyond. Conclude with prayer.

16 February. SEE: Paula shared, "I remember in the "good old days" parish missions focused strongly on sin, hell and damnation and the need for repentance. We would even be quite fired up to mend our ways. Recently when my husband and

I attended the parish mission we talked about how interesting it was that it now it was much more about joy. Joy is something Pope Francis keeps on talking about constantly, even joy in your trials. I like that idea but it is certainly not easy so with Lent coming up soon we decided to make a point of looking for joy everywhere, especially in the world around us.

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *Count it all joy my brethren when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:1-11. Pope Francis:* *Loving another person involves the joy of contemplating and appreciating their innate beauty and sacredness which is greater than my needs. This enables me to seek their good even if they cannot belong to me. AL127. Pope Leo:* *Education has always been one of the highest expressions of Christian charity. "Yours is a mission full of obstacles as well as joys, a mission of love, because you cannot teach without loving. For the Church teaching the poor was an act of justice and faith. DT 67.*

ACT AND PRAY: Decide on possible appropriate action in seeking the joy of mission. Conclude with prayer.

17 February. SEE: Jonathan raised a matter that also worried others. "Hey, doesn't this passage in James' letter, 'He himself tempts no one' conflict with what we say in the Our Father, 'Lead us not into temptation?' I must say that has been bothering me." James replied, "I know, even Pope Francis found that confusing and said that in fact that sentence can be a mistranslation in English of the original meaning and God's action. It is reported that a debate in the different languages' liturgical commissions does exist about that. The Pope approved a new Italian translation but there is no approval for an English language change. So I'm afraid we are still confused."

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I was tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one, but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. James 1:12-18. Pope Francis reportedly:* *"It is not a good translation because it speaks of a God who induces temptation. A father doesn't do that; a father helps you to get up immediately. It's Satan who leads us into temptation, that's his department." He would prefer instead of "Lead us not into temptation," "Do not let us fall into temptation." Pope Leo:* *I share the desire of my beloved predecessor that all Christians come to appreciate the close connection between Christ's love and his summons to care for the poor. I consider it essential to insist on this path to holiness for in this call to recognise him in the poor and the suffering we see revealed the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices, which every saint seeks to imitate. DT 3.*

ACT AND PRAY. Decide on possible appropriate action. Conclude with prayer.

LOVE IS HIS LAW, LOVE IS HIS WAY is MARFAM'S LENTEN booklet adapted for the YEAR OF ST FRANCIS 2026. St Francis, his life and legacy are the main focus for this programme of THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY from Ash Wednesday to Easter Monday. The THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY are posted as usual on the website, by email and on social media. The full programme is published in booklet form. Cost R30. Available from MARFAM +27 825521275 and www.marfam.org.za/shop

LENTEN THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY – February Part 1. with St Francis, Pope Francis and an eco-friendly family focus.

From LOVE IS HIS LAW, LOVE IS HIS WAY by Toni Rowland

Introduction. A family group discussed, "a sacrifice is essentially something offered to God. It can mean taking up, doing, making, give extra time for the benefit of others but offered to God." Jack added, "I have seen that often during Lent time is taken for churchy things, but not much for the churchy things of the home. This Lent we can make up our own Family Lenten calendar, build in eco-family-friendly actions and prayers. We can even pray the Stations of the Cross for Families at home as well as at church." Mom added, Why not a Family Paschal or Prayer Meal and Reconciliation Service as well as Confession?"

Pope Francis: *The spiritual stature of a person's life is measured by LOVE which remains the criterion for a human life's worth. All of us believers need to recognize that LOVE takes first place and must never be put at risk. FT 92.*

Pope Leo: *Dear brothers and sisters, may the example and spiritual legacy of this Saint, strong in faith, steadfast in hope and ardent in active charity towards his neighbour, inspire in everyone the importance of trusting in the Lord, of living a life faithful to the Gospel, and of accepting and illuminating every circumstance and action of life with faith and prayer.*

In this Year of St Francis, a Year of Grace, I wish to offer you a prayer, that Saint Francis of Assisi may continue to instil in all of us perfect joy and harmony:

Pope Leo's Prayer for the Year of St Francis.

Saint Francis, our brother, you who eight hundred years ago went to meet Sister Death as a man at peace, intercede for us before the Lord. You recognized true peace in the Crucifix of San Damiano, teach us to seek in Him the source of all reconciliation that breaks down every wall.

You who, unarmed, crossed the lines of war and misunderstanding, give us the courage to build bridges where the world raises up boundaries.

In this time afflicted by conflict and division, intercede for us so that we may become peacemakers: unarmed and disarming witnesses of the peace that comes from Jesus Christ. Amen

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.
O 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 loved.
For it is in giving that we receive, in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and in dying to self that we are born to eternal life. Amen

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Eco-friendly Lenten Acts of Love and Sacrifice to do or develop for Families at Home. “Cry of the earth, cry of the poor.”

- **Study and read.** Spend time together discovering St Francis, Pope Francis and Pope Leo writings, especially on poor. Share and pray.
- **Do.** A family project or activity, nature walk, plant, bird watch. Check carbon footprint. Clean-up, sort and donate for poor. Fast. Visit.
- **Save, reuse, recycle.** Water & electricity – no waste. Save money by fasting. Support projects – food garden, security, charity,
- **Care for others.** Elderly, sick, poor, lonely, share.
- **Pray.** Meet, share and pray also with other religions for peace & our earth. Pray Stations of the Cross for Families
- **Church.** Mass. Reconciliation/confession. Stations of the cross, Rosary.

THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY

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

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

While out walking, in a small derelict church he heard a voice from the crucifix, “Francis go and rebuild my church, as you can see it is falling into ruin.” He started repairing the structure but came to see that his call was not about the building of stone

but for the people and Church leaders. He chose a new way of life of prayer, poverty and humility. Soon friends and other men converted to his way. A while later Clare, a daughter of a noble family in Assisi, who was captivated by his vision, asked to join. Francis was no highly educated theologian and never became a priest. He intensely experienced God's love in the Incarnate and Crucified Jesus. While travelling, preaching and teaching his growing community of friars and Clare's community of sisters, Francis lived a life of ongoing conversion, humbly and in peace with every person and all creatures. He came to see everything as his family, called elements of creation by name as Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Mother Earth, also Brother Wolf, Sister Dove.

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *"Even now," says the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping and mourning." Joel 2:12-18. "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." From the blessing with ashes. Pope Francis:* *Our sister, Mother Earth, cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods that God has endowed her with. We forget that we ourselves are dust of the earth; our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and receive life and refreshment from her waters. LS2. St Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and an integral ecology, lived out joyfully and authentically. He loved and was deeply loved for his joy, generous self-giving and his open-heartedness. LS11. Pope Leo: Francis' poverty was relational: it led him to become neighbor, equal to, or indeed lesser than others. His holiness sprang from the conviction that Christ can only be truly received by giving oneself generously to one's brothers and sisters. DT63*

ACT AND PRAY. As family members share what you particularly admire in St Francis. What is God calling you to do at this starting moment of Lent? Review the Lenten Actions Suggestions to choose one of Laudato Si goals for a good understanding.

19 February. SEE: "Road rage is a horrible thing, an evil, but surely it is so often brought on by someone breaking the law, or being selfish in the traffic," Mohale said. "Taxis are the worst on the road," Gordon added. Joyce said, "Load shedding and traffic lights not working has really messed up the traffic flow, multiplied our anger and frustration and the accident rate on the roads no end. I just heard of a horrific accident involving a school transport taxi and a truck that took the lives of 13 young learners. What a devastating blow to those families, but an evil in the form of disregard of traffic laws. How can this type of behaviour as an evil be dealt with in the most "life-giving" way."

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

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *Moses said, "see I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments then you shall live. From Deut 30:15-20, Pope Francis: Let us say to the Lord, "I am angry with this person. I pray to you for him. To pray for a person with whom I am irritated is a beautiful step forward in love, an act of evangelisation. Let us do it and not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal of fraternal love. EG 101 Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection. Each is willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things. Pope Leo: Social sin consolidates a "structure of sin" within society, and is frequently "part of a dominant mindset that considers normal or reasonable what is merely selfishness and indifference. This then gives rise to social alienation." It then becomes normal to ignore the poor and live as if they do not exist. DT93*

Act, pray. How can we repent of our choices of evil instead of good? What does Moses, in speaking of life and death, tell us about being life-giving and preserving creation?

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

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

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *"Thus says the Lord God, "Behold in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure and oppress all your workers. You fast only to quarrel and to fight. Is not the fast that I choose to loosen the bonds of wickedness, let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor*

into your house, when you see the naked to cover him and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Isaiah 58: 1-9. **Pope Francis:** Social love is the key to authentic development. In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural - must be given renewed value and become the constant and highest norm for all activity. LS 231. **Pope Leo:** This Christocentric and deeply ecclesial perspective of St Augustine leads us to affirm that offerings, when born of love, not only alleviate the needs of one's brother or sister, but also purify the heart of the giver, if he or she is willing to change. Indeed, in the words of Pseudo-Augustine: "almsgiving can be beneficial to you in erasing past sins, if you have amended your ways." DT 45

ACT AND PRAY. Do you consider St Francis' fasting to be excessive? How can we as a family practise doing penance by fasting? Reflect on the Laudato Si goal of "sustainable living." See suggestions for eco-family friendly sacrifices.

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

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

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

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

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

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *If you take away the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire with good things, make your bones strong and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose waters do not fail. Is 58: 9-14.* **Pope Francis.** God, who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way. In the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much is always present. He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward. Praise be to him! LS 245. **Pope Leo:** These orders, such as the Franciscans, as well as Dominicans, Augustinians and Carmelites, represented an evangelical revolution, in which a simple and poor lifestyle became a prophetic sign for mission, reviving the experience of the first Christian community (cf. Acts 4:32). The witness of the mendicants challenged both clerical opulence and the coldness of urban society. DT62

ACT AND PRAY. Explore which of the teachings of St Francis appeals to you and how you can include it in your own Lenten journey. Consider how they relate to the Laudato Si goals.

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

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

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *The serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “God knows that when you eat of the tree your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Gen 2 – 3. At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. From Matthew 4:1-11. Pope Francis:* *the creation accounts suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships; with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible these vital relationships have been broken, outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. It is significant that the harmony which St Francis experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture. LS 66.*

ACT AND PRAY. Read and study parts of Pope Leo's *Dilexi Te*, and the concept of God's love being the reason for the Incarnation.

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

JUDGE, reflect and 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.” Leviticus 19:11-18. Pope Francis:* *In the Judeo-Christian tradition the word creation has a broader meaning than nature, for it has to do with God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, while creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion. LS 76. Pope Leo:* *Francis did not found a social service organization, but an evangelical fraternity. In the poor, he saw brothers and sisters, living images of the Lord. His mission was to be with them, and he did so through a solidarity that overcame distances and a compassionate love. DT63*

ACT AND PRAY. In addition to the beauty, in reality how are the relationships within our family and the families of creation as we see them in practice. Gender-based or domestic violence is a declared national crisis in SA. The SACBC has called for a family-centred approach to addressing the matter. Support by prayer and action.

24 February. SEE: Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Sister Water, Mother Earth. Bruce, the group's scripture scholar noted, “Scripture does contain a number of accounts or references to creation in different contexts. As in Genesis 1 and 2, details differ about the order of creation but the central message is the wisdom, power and goodness of God and our dependence on him for sustaining and providing for all of creation. Creation is mentioned in other books, the Psalms, in Job, Daniel and more.”

St Francis. “Each morning the planet turns towards the sun, soaking in its warmth and suckling its life energy. Every second our great generous sun offers up four million tons of itself, transformed into radiant light and energy, for all life to use. Green plants absorb it, convert it into food and energy which too is provided for all life, human, plant and animal. All life depends on energy, and all energy has the sun as its ultimate source. With St Francis we revel in the miracle of Brother Sun, whose life-giving energy courses through our bodies, warming our hearts, as it ignites our dreams, our fuel and our work. “ From *Care for Creation*. p 58.

When considering the solar system as a whole, the moon and the stars, we can ask, “Is the universe still seen as a source of amazing wonder and beauty, or as another element to be colonized and appropriated for our use? Today in spite of the harm we humans have done to creation, in particular during the last 200 years, - global warming, CO2 emission, air and plastic

pollution, - the elements are still beautiful and precious. We need to go out into the world of nature, to observe and reflect on this to fully appreciate their beauty and value. Science has studied creation in much more depth and we now know so much more about the universe. As we reflect on the beauty as well as the destruction in creation can we become conscious of the link with the incarnation? Jesus, God's Word of love is present and as Crucified Lord bears the imprints of the wounds we have inflicted on the elements of our world.

From St Francis Cantic of All Creatures.

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

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

Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour, of You Most High, he bears the likeness.

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *Thus saith the Lord, "as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth. It shall not return to me empty, but shall accomplish that which I intend and prosper in the thing for which I sent it. Isaiah 55: 10-11* **Pope Francis:** *We need to grasp the variety of things in their multiple relationships. We understand better the importance and meaning of each creature if we contemplate it within the entirety of God's plan. LS 86.*

ACT AND PRAY. As family members, research, read up and share on references to God and creation in the Bible and the world. Are the sun, moon and stars recognized for their beauty and for giving glory to God? How can this relate to the Laudato Si goal of "the cry of the earth"? Pray the portion of the Cantic of the Creatures.

25 February. SEE: The Cantic of the Creatures. Mrs Beatus continued her sharing about St Francis and his life of ongoing conversion. "St Francis made this three-fold Lenten practice of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, his daily mission and way of life." "It is reported in *Care for Creation* (p81) that at a time, a year before his death, when he was suffering from his painful eye condition, as well as effects of the stigmata, he was reflecting on his troubles and he prayed to God for help. He heard a voice which told him that his troubles were in fact a great treasure securing his entry into God's kingdom. After that conversion moment he felt so close to God that he said he wanted to sing, and that is when he composed the major portion of *The Cantic of the Creatures*. It is a hymn of praise to God for creation and some of its elements. It consists of three parts:

1. The inanimate elements, sun, moon etc, of creation giving praise to God.
2. A short section, mentioning people and included with reference to a conflict between the mayor and the bishop in Assisi in which Francis was mediating. Due to his health he was unable to be present but sent a challenging reflection and call for peace. *Praise be You my Lord through those who grant pardon for love of you and bear sickness and trial with peace.* The outcome of this was a reconciliation between the two men.
3. The statement "*Praised be You, my Lord through Sister Death*, as a tribute to death, was composed shortly before his own death in 1226. He speaks about a first and second death and those who endure the first death – dying to self - will not be harmed in the 2nd bodily death.

What does this mean? All of Francis' life was a death" because it involved continual repentance and letting go for the sake of the other, a constant, "dying to self" so that Christ might live in him. From *Care for Creation* P90-91.

The Cantic of All Creatures

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord, All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour and all blessings. To you alone, Most High, do they belong, and no mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your Name.

Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, Who is the day through whom You give us light.

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

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, In the heavens you have made them bright, precious and fair.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, and fair and stormy all weather's moods, by which You cherish all that You have made.

Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water, So useful, humble, precious and pure.

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, producing varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

Praised be You my Lord through those who grant pardon for love of You and bear sickness and trial. Blessed are those who endure in peace, By You Most High, they will be crowned.

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

Blessed are they she finds doing Your Will. No second death can do them harm.

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

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *Jonah began to go into the city and cried, "yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." The people believed God, they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth. Tidings reached the king and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. He made a proclamation. "Let neither man*

nor beast taste anything, let them not feed or drink water and let them cry to God, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may yet repent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we perish not.” God repented of the evil he had said he would do.” Jonah 2:1-10. **Pope Francis:** *The bishops of Brazil have pointed out that nature as a whole, not only manifests God, but is also the place of his presence. The Spirit of life dwells in every living creature and calls us to enter into relationship with him.* LS88.

ACT AND PRAY. With St Francis pray and reflect on what this Canticle of the Creatures can mean to you as you focus on the LS goal of ecological spirituality.

26 February. SEE: St Francis, Fire and Water. Mrs Beatus continued her sharing about St Francis. *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.* Both water and fire are gifts of creation without which there would be no life on earth and yet they are dangerous hazards as well. Scripture describes their positive qualities and also how they were used by God as punishment, as found in the stories of Noah and the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah. In the context of our current reality with climate change and the extreme weather we have experienced in recent times, resulting in floods and wild fires, their positive and negative properties play a very significant role to keep in mind.

Water is absolutely essential for life throughout creation and has been throughout the earth’s history. In bygone days large herds of animals would migrate, following the water sources known to them. Although most desert locations appear devoid of plant life, with even a small amount of rain, the land surface will suddenly become green. Plants that have been dormant or seeds that have lain ungerminated will spring to life. Water is found in the great oceans covering 2/3 of the planet, in natural streams, rivers, lakes, manmade dams and canals. Glaciers and snow-capped mountains hold water while ice-caps cool the poles. The water cycle draws water into the atmosphere and circulates it in the form of rain. The bodies of humans and animals consist of 70% water. Devastating floods result from climate change but many parts of the world are water-scarce affecting sustainable life for all the families of nature, plant, animal and human. Safe drinking water is a universal right that should not be restricted or privatised. The poor are most often the ones deprived of access to safe water, for drinking and sanitation, while a large amount of water is wasted. Water has a powerful symbolic significance in all cultures.

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *At that time Jesus said to his disciples, “Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. What man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone, or if he asks for a fish will give him a serpent? If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?”* Matthew 7:7-12. **Pope Francis:** *Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right since it is essential to human survival and a condition for the exercise of other human rights. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to water because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity. The problem of water is partly an educational and cultural issue, since there is little awareness of the seriousness of water issues in the context of inequality of peoples.* LS 30. *“Someday after mastering the winds, the waters, the tides and gravity we shall harness for God the energies of love and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.”* T de Chardin from *The Phenomenon of Man*.

ACT AND PRAY. Examine how access and use of water and fire are manipulated today. What role can we as eco-friendly families play to lobby and advocate for equal rights in a spirit of sustainable living for all. Pray in thanksgiving and for rights, dignity and responsible action.

27 February. SEE: Family relationships, human, animal and plant. Bruce mused over the types of relationships in creation as portrayed in the Bible and described by Pope Francis. He shared with the group, “Adam and Eve broke their relationships of perfect harmony with God. In the story of their sons, Cain and Abel, this breach continues. It was envy that led Cain to murder his brother. Can that be any worse than murdering a stranger? Should the special family relationships place greater guilt on the act? God accosts Cain and asks him, “Where is your brother?” Cain answers, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” That question echoes across the centuries still. It is applied to other human relationships, but is there not a natural and special significance where the intimacy of family is involved? And if we were to treat all others as family should there not be less violence in society?

How would this attitude apply in animal life? What are types of relationships between different animal families, or within families? *Elephant Dawn* by Sharon Pincott is an interesting and moving book giving details of large group of elephants, their extended and intergenerational family units, their care and their grieving for the loss of members. Although they were meant to be protected poaching and killing for their tusks happened all too frequently. David Attenborough in *The Trials of Life* describes how different animals have different male-female levels of commitment. Some mate for life while mother-child relationships are often the primary ones. Much can be learned from a study of animal behaviour. Plant behaviour towards kin is another area for discovery. We are beginning to accept that our human relationship with the earth has been harmed by distorting or misinterpreting our understanding of the mandate of “dominion” over the earth and all other creatures.

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *Scripture: If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go, first be reconciled with your brother and then come and offer your gift. Mat 5:20-26. Pope Francis: The joys and sorrows of each of its members are felt by all. That is what it means to be a family. If only we could view our political opponents or neighbours in the same way that we view our children, our spouse, mother or father. How good that would be. Do we love our society or is it still something remote, something anonymous that does not involve us, something to which we are not committed? It is important to insist on the rights of the family and not only those of individuals. The family is a good which society cannot do without. AL44*

St Francis' response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual or economic. His disciple St Bonaventure tells us that from reflection on the primary source of all things, he would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of brother or sister. If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on our immediate needs. LS 11.

ACT AND PRAY. Starting with our own pets and even small garden creatures how can we grow in appreciation of creation in our closest families of nature and what special care is required from us. Make family prayer and faith sharing on creation an important family practice.

28 February. SEE: Creation and Evolution. Bruce, the scripture scholar reminded the groups. "Something that appears to be forgotten frequently when considering creation is the dynamic process of evolution. It is now widely recognized that creation was not a one-off six day event but a very long, and still ongoing process. One very important aspect of creation, also seen from our particular family perspective, is the wonderful ability of sexual reproduction, as the way to sustain and multiply members and species. This was a command of God in the biblical account of creation. The term reproduction creates the impression of a more mechanical act of mating or fertilization in plants but, when termed sexuality, a more sensitive and emotional quality can be embedded in the concept, especially for us human beings."

A time-line of creation. Here is an interesting account of creation as a process over time, borrowed and adapted from a website on <https://biomimicry.net/sexual-reproduction-how-nature-creates-complexity-diversity/>

Imagine compressing the age of earth i.e. 4.5 billion years into one calendar year. All the major developments could be noted as a date on the calendar, beginning with January 1. Life first appeared on earth in the form of a single-celled organism on February 25. These organisms simply replicated themselves like carbon copies. It was easy and it was fast. In March, photosynthesis evolved as a development in plant life. Much later, from 2 billion to 1.3 billion years ago, around 17 September on the Earth calendar, something new evolved. It began with bacteria exchanging genetic material after which gradually genetic mutation occurred. Sexual reproduction included mixing genes and so evolution continued, paving the way for the great diversity we see today. Clearly in sexual reproduction organisms need to find a mate in order to reproduce. It would have been slow and tedious but hugely important, as current generations allow future generations to do more than their parents. Only in the last few hundred years is evolution being studied scientifically. Even without taking into consideration the psychological and emotional aspects, sexuality and reproduction still remain one of the great mysteries of creation.

Imagine, If you compress earth's 4.5 billion year-long history into 1 year, today would be at less than 1 minute to midnight on 31st December. How does that make you feel?

JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: *So God created man in his own image, male and female he created them. And God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion.... God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good. Gen 1:26-31. Pope Francis. The Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God's image and likeness of immense dignity and not just something, but someone. Humankind is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. LS65. Frequently when certain species are exploited commercially little attention is paid to studying reproductive patterns in order to prevent their depletion and the consequent imbalance of the ecosystem. LS 35.*

REFLECT, SHARE, ACT AND PRAY. Reflect and share on the creation and evolution of sexuality as both a mechanical and relational matter.

NOTE: The Lenten programme continues in THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY in March and is also available in full in booklet form as **LOVE IS HIS LAW LOVE IS HIS WAY.**