



## 2026 OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES

### MARFAM THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY – MARCH and HOLY WEEK.



#### THEME: HUMAN RIGHTS ARE FAMILY RIGHTS - LENT part 2.

THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY are downloadable from [www.marfam.org.za](http://www.marfam.org.za), request [info@marfam.org.za](mailto: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.

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**YEAR OF ST FRANCIS.** In honour of the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of St Francis, 2026 from 10 January 2026 to 2027, has been declared the YEAR OF ST FRANCIS by Pope Leo. Special blessings, and a plenary indulgence can be obtained for undertaking the special devotions and conditions, i.e Visit a Franciscan church or shrine, Holy Communion and Confession. Check [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) details.

#### *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*

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- THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY are also in booklet form for the Year of St Francis. *LOVE IS HIS LAW, LOVE IS HIS WAY*. Cost R30
- Stations of the Cross for Families in English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Sotho, Tswana. R10
- Stations of the Cross for the widowed in English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Sotho, Tswana. R10
- Stations of the Cross for the Bereaved in English, and Sotho. R15
- *GOD'S PLAN OF LOVE, THE RESURRECTION STORY FOR CHILDREN*. R20.
- For more Lenten suggestions and activities for families go to <https://marfam.org.za/families-and-lent/>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**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.
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## MARCH THEME: HUMAN RIGHTS ARE FAMILY RIGHTS

**Brief overview.** The right to life should be paramount as it is in most Constitutions, e.g. the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Church's Charter of Family Rights. All human life, as individuals, but also as family units, is precious from the first moment of existence until natural death. Concern for animal and plant life has become a growing concern on the issue of biodiversity. A culture of life approach should focus on the perspective of justice, but also of love and positive relationships.

**Pope Francis:** *Families and homes go together. It is important to insist on the rights of the family and not only of individuals. Families have the right to count on an adequate family policy on the part of public authorities in every domain. LS 44. The rights*

to free enterprise and market freedom cannot supersede the rights of peoples and the dignity of the poor, or respect for the natural environment, to administer it for the good of all. FT 122. **Pope Leo:** From the beginning of Scripture, God's love is vividly demonstrated by his protection of the weak and the poor, to the extent that he can be said to have a particular fondness for them. "God's heart has a special place for the poor." DT17.

**Setting the scene.** The Thoughts for the Day this month are set in an imaginary parish with family groups for reflection and sharing. They are built on the scripture reading of the day and use the SEE- JUDGE-ACT approach.

**1 March. Lent 2A. Transfiguration. SEE.** Fr Fidelis asked himself if South Africans live with fear more than other people do. Security is one of the biggest industries in the country. He explained the Transfiguration story of Jesus being seen in a new glorious way as giving courage to the disciples. It is always used during Lent because Jesus wanted to warn them that he would be handed over to his enemies, to suffer and be put to death. Sometimes we need and are given signs to strengthen our faith as Jesus gave to the three apostles who were witnesses at the transfiguration. They saw Jesus glorified, as a sign of hope to deal with the troubled times that Jesus was warning them about.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** "He was transfigured before them, his face shone like the sun and his garments became white as light. A voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him. As they were coming down the mountain Jesus commanded them, "tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead." Matt 17:1-9. **Pope Francis:** Saint John Henry Newman came to the realization that his deepest encounter with himself and with the Lord came not from his reading or reflection, but from his prayerful dialogue, heart to heart, with Christ, alive and present. Dilexit Nos 26. **Pope Leo:** Love for the Lord is one with love for the poor. The same Jesus who tells us, "The poor you will always have with you" (Mt 26:11), also promises the disciples: "I am with you always" (Mt 28:20). We likewise think of his saying: "Just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine you did it to me." Dilexi Te 5.

**St Francis.** As we reflect on the life of St Francis we remember his overwhelming love of the Crucified Jesus, who gifted him with the stigmata, the five wounds of Jesus on his own body, to allow Francis, with great love, to share in Jesus' suffering. From **The Little Flowers of St Francis.** St Francis was praying before daybreak at the entrance of his cell, and turning his face towards the east, he prayed, "O Lord Jesus Christ, two graces do I ask of thee before I die; the first, that in my lifetime I may feel, as far as possible, both in my soul and body, that pain which thou, sweet Lord, didst endure in the hour of thy most bitter Passion; the second, that I may feel in my heart as much as possible of that excess of love by which thou, O Son of God, was inflamed to suffer so cruel a Passion for us sinners."

**REFLECT – SHARE- ACT – PRAY.** We all have fears and anxieties that we can share and bring them to Jesus knowing we can put our trust in him. Share too what gives us courage and pray for an increase?

**2 March. SEE. Discipline and punishment.** Addressing the parish sharing groups Matt spoke as a parent. "This month we're focusing on rights, but I believe rights need to be balanced with responsibilities too." Patricia laughed, "you and your families, and of all kinds. I know that my dog could be trained, and she certainly knows if she has been bad, but I wouldn't know about making all animals responsible for their actions." "That highlights the fact that humans should know better, doesn't it? We parents, and carers too, struggle with discipline, with finding suitable punishments for children's misbehaviour or knowing when to forgive. Promoting self-discipline is important and enforcing discipline, teaching moral values and right behaviour are rights and responsibilities for families. Are we sufficiently well equipped for that? Maybe we parents need to be disciplined for our failures too.

**From The Little Flowers of St Francis:** Brother Bernard, Francis's first convert was a very holy man who regularly conversed with God in prayer. One day Francis was searching for him and called him three times but Bernard did not hear. Francis was irritated, but then he himself prayed about this "evil thought." Feeling guilty, when he understood why Bernard could not hear, Francis went to him and demanded a punishment for his pride and to humble himself. He told Bernard, "Put your one foot on my neck and the other on my mouth three times."

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and merciful love with those who love him and keep his commandment, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from you. We have not listened to your servants the prophets who spoke in your name. To us belongs confusion of face. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness. Daniel 9:4-10. **Pope Francis:** We must not lose our ability to listen. Saint Francis heard the voice of God, he heard the voice of the poor, he heard the voice of the infirm, and he heard the voice of nature. He made of them a way of life. My desire is that the seed that St Francis planted may grow in the hearts of many. FT 48. **Pope Leo:** Throughout the world it is to be hoped that every community become a house of peace, where one learns how to defuse hostility through dialogue, where justice is practised and forgiveness is cherished. Peace Message 1 Jan. **REFLECT, SHARE, ACT, PRAY.** Discuss and share ideally as families on the issue of repentance, sin and punishment especially in parent-child relationships.

**3 March. SEE.** Mike was interested in justice and peace issues. "We all have a right and the responsibility to judge for ourselves who and what is right and wrong. Like who to vote for or should you pay your traffic fines and report water leaks as ecological wastage. We have to stand up for what we believe. It's no good complaining about the government and then still vote for them. Everyone knows the saying, 'Practise what you preach.'"

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture.** *The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practise and observe whatever they tell you, but do not do what they do, for they preach but do not practise. Matt 23:1-2. Pope Francis:* Freedom is something magnificent yet it can also be dissipated and lost. Moral education has to do with cultivating freedom through ideas, incentives, practical applications, rewards, examples and more. AL 267. **Pope Leo:** *In today's world, justice and human dignity are at an alarming risk amid global power imbalances. We need to encourage and support every spiritual, cultural and political initiative that keeps hope alive, countering the spread of "fatalistic terminology as if the dynamics involved were the product of anonymous impersonal forces or structures independent of the human will." We must promote self-awareness in civil societies, forms of responsible association, experiences of nonviolent participation, and practices of restorative justice on both a small and large scale. PM*

From **THE LITTLE FLOWERS OF ST FRANCIS.** The story of Francis and Brother Bernard has a sequel too. Having punished Francis, Bernard then wanted Francis to correct him too every time he displayed a fault. This worried Francis, who for a time avoided his friend, so he wouldn't have to pick on him for his faults.

**REFLECT-SHARE-ACT-PRAY.** Choose a particular issue where you do not practice what you preach. Share with others and decide how to do it better. Is it openness, being willing to forgive or about environmental behaviour?

**4 March. Evil in society.** Joseph made his contribution too. "Whether it is in the US with President Trump carrying on so irresponsibly, or our own ex-President Zuma defying Justice, one can also see how people sometimes deliberately choose to do what is morally wrong for their own selfish reasons. Corruption is rife and sabotage happens, undermining those who choose justice. In our world today there are false prophets and religious leaders cheating and deceiving people too, while genuine and honest prophets calling for justice and integrity are ignored and maligned. Fake news adds confusion to the pot and makes it more complicated to judge between right and wrong."

From **THE LITTLE FLOWERS OF ST FRANCIS.** It happened once that St Francis, in his concern for the brothers, became conscious of devils seeking to enter into the community. He saw that one brother, who was feeling offended by another, had let a devil tempt him to start thinking of ways to harm the other. St Francis addressed the issue with him and the brother humbly confessed and asked forgiveness. All the devils were chased away and harmony was restored.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *They said, come let us make plots against the prophet Jeremiah. Let us strike him with the tongue and let us not heed any of his words. Jer. 18:18-20. Pope Francis:* There are huge economic interests operating in the digital world, capable of exercising forms of control as subtle as they are invasive, manipulating consciences and the democratic process. FT45. *Prudence, good judgement and common sense are dependent not on purely growth factors but rather on a whole series of things that come together deep within each person. AL 262. 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." PM 1 Jan.

**REFLECT-SHARE-ACT-PRAY.** Do you sometimes deliberately choose to harm others or do something you know is wrong and harmful to others or to creation? Pray for conversion.

**5 March. Ecological education. SEE.** Joseph continued sharing his thoughts, "It doesn't only happen in politics that people continue to side with corrupt leaders. It happens in business all the time and can happen at schools and in families too. We easily turn away from God, and become more and more materialistic. This applies to everyone, rich or poor and in between, particularly when economic times are tough. Well, practicing one's personal and family faith and prayer life still have to become a new way. Has enough been done to promote the family as a place for faith sharing, moral education and taking up environmental matters too? "

**The Franciscan way.** Those who follow Franciscan spirituality with its focus on all of creation are like Jeremiah's tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. St Francis had set out alone at first on his journey of conversion but gradually other men joined his way of poverty and fraternity. Women joined St Clare, who had been one of his very early followers when she rejected her family too, to choose the Franciscan way. It has become the choice of many millions of people over the last 800 years, as friars, brothers, priests, sisters and as secular lay people.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: Scripture:** *Thus says the Lord: Cursed is the man who trusts in man, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when heat comes. Jer 17:5-10." Pope Francis:* From our faith experience and from the wisdom accumulated over centuries, but also from lessons learned from our many weaknesses and failures, we, the believers of the different religions know that our witness to God benefits our societies. The effort to seek God with a sincere heart helps us recognize one another as travelling companions, truly brothers and sisters. FT274. *Regrettably many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a general lack of interest. LS14. Pope Leo:* In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in France, Saint Champagnat founded the Institute of the Marist Brothers of the Schools. "He was sensitive to the

*spiritual and educational needs of his time, especially to religious ignorance and the situation of neglect experienced in a particular way by the young.” Saint John Bosco began the great work of the Salesians in Italy based on the three principles of the “preventive method” — reason, religion, and loving kindness. DT7.*

**REFLECT-SHARE-ACT-PRAY.** Decide how you can give time to ecological and moral education in families, of all ages, as the first place where these are taught. This is one of the Laudato si goals.

**6 March. Favouritism. SEE.** Margi had asked her children, “Do you think that your father and I have favourites?” “Yes, no, I’m not sure,” were their replies. She continued, “favouritism has been a curse in many ways in families. In some cases an older child, a boy, or a girl has become the favourite of one of the parents, a grandparent or another relative causing resentment. Even taking sides in discussions and debates can show favouritism and doesn’t recognize everyone has equal rights. We all know the story of Joseph and his technicolour dream-coat. I don’t understand how Jacob could have been so stupid as to make Joseph a favourite and so make his brothers hate him. Any sensible parent should know better.”

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him. Read the story from Gen 17 – 28.*

**Pope Francis:** *As religious leaders we are called to be true people of dialogue, to cooperate in building peace not as intermediaries but as authentic mediators. Intermediaries seek to give everyone a discount, ultimately in order to gain something for themselves. The mediator on the other hand, is one who retains nothing for himself, but spends himself generously, knowing that the only gain is peace. FT284. Pope Leo: Peace be with you” ( Jn 20:19, 21) is his Word that does not merely desire peace, but truly brings about a lasting transformation in those who receive it, and consequently in all of reality. For this reason, the Apostles’ successors give voice every day throughout the world to the most silent of revolutions: “Peace be with you!” PM*

From *ST FRANCIS UNCENSORED*. St Francis, from his sick-bed acted as mediator between the bishop and the mayor of Assisi in their conflict. He sent a message “Praise be to you my Lord, through those who grant pardon for love of you, and bear sickness and trial. Blessed are those who endure in peace.” From *Canticle of the Creatures*. *They did make peace.*

**REFLECT-SHARE-ACT-PRAY.** Share on personal experiences of favouritism and maybe ask forgiveness. This concept can be applied to forms of acceptance or discrimination too.

**7 March. Justice and the Death penalty. SEE.** Andrew was part of the Catholic Students’ society at university. He shared, “We have been discussing the rights and wrongs of the death penalty, of prisons and pardons. I used the example of the woman Lisa Montgomery, who was executed in the US on January 13, 2021, the last woman to be executed under president Donald Trump in his first term. He did not agree to granting her clemency or pardon. Admittedly she had committed a very serious crime, killing a pregnant woman and cutting out her baby, but her own life story was equally horrific. She had been constantly raped, abused and beaten from childhood and throughout her life until she could hardly be considered capable of right judgement. Trump in this term, has pardoned a number of people, some friends and accomplices in political plans. Manipulation of the law in South Africa has been witnessed constantly during the Madlanga Commission, and State Capture has not been resolved. Where is true justice and when should it be tempered with mercy, as is possibly the case with granting parole?”

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in mercy. Micah 7:14-20. Pope Francis:* *The arguments against the death penalty are numerous and well-known. All Christians and people of good will are today called to work not only for the abolition of the death penalty, legal or illegal, in all its forms, but also to work for the improvement of prison conditions, out of respect for the human dignity of persons. A life sentence is a secret death penalty. FT 268. Pope Leo:* *The peace of the risen Jesus is unarmed, because his was an unarmed struggle in the midst of concrete historical, political and social circumstances. Christians must together bear prophetic witness to this novelty, mindful of the tragedies in which they have too often been complicit. The great parable of the Last Judgment invites all Christians to act with mercy in this awareness (cf. Mt 25:31-46). Message of Peace 1 Jan. Christians don’t have enemies, only brothers and sisters.*

**ST FRANCIS.** From *CARE FOR CREATION*. St Francis valued and protected all God’s creatures and all forms of life, living or non-living, recognizing their rights and seeing them all as symbols of God’s life and love. His biographer writes, “When he washed his hands he chose a place where the water wouldn’t be trampled underfoot. When he walked over rocks he walked with reverence out of love for Him who is called, ‘The Rock’.” St Francis had himself been a prisoner-of-war for a year and experienced harsh conditions at the time.

**REFLECT-SHARE-ACT-PRAY.** How can our family act in protecting justice in society? Should we demonstrate about acts of injustice and exploitation of the law in society in line with the Laudato Si environmental goal of community participation?

**8 March. SEE. 3rd Sunday of Lent A. SEE.** Having been active in the liberation struggle in South Africa Fr Fidelis was conscious of discrimination So he began by asking, “Should Jesus have spoken to the Samaritan woman? Today that might seem OK, but

in Jesus' day Jews did not speak to Samaritans, or men to women in public and certainly not women with a bad reputation. Jesus rejects norms and treats the woman with respect. Is it just to judge others who are different?

Let's face it there is all kinds of prejudice and discrimination in parishes and families. How should we handle that, with the community or the persons themselves? It can be towards the poor, or divorced people in church, or against LGBT+ persons whether they choose to form a same sex union or not. Other issues of discrimination are against a pregnant teenage girl, while young people bully and discriminate against one another on all kinds of grounds. In traditional cultures widows may suffer from discrimination by their in-laws. In some societies homosexuality is still regarded as a crime and punishment can be quite severe. Pope Francis has said this is unjust and cannot be seen as criminal.

**St Francis** included a chapter on mission to non-believers in his Rule, emphasizing peaceful co-existence as the foundation for every mission. His meeting with the Muslim Sultan in Damietta during the time of the Crusades still serves as a strong impetus and example for dialogue among peoples and religions today. Pope Francis and Pope Leo have done much in this area too.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *The woman said to him, "Give me this water that I may not thirst. Just then the disciples came. They marvelled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, "Why are you talking with her?" John 4:5-42. Pope Francis: Overcoming a legalistic perspective in Sacred Scripture, justice is essentially the faithful abandonment of oneself to God's will. FM20. A pastoral approach, towards those in a civil marriage, who are divorced and remarried or living together, gives the Church the responsibility to help them understand the teaching of grace and offering them assistance so they can reach the fullness of God's plan for them. The baptised who are divorced and civilly remarried need to be more fully integrated into Christian communities in the variety of ways possible, while avoiding any occasion of scandal. AL 298-9. Pope Leo: The poor are not there by chance or by blind and cruel fate. Nor, for most of them, is poverty a choice. Yet, there are those who still presume to make these claims, thus revealing their own blindness and cruelty. DT14.*

**REFLECT-SHARE-ACT-PRAY.** Prejudice is an attitude and discrimination a behaviour. Discuss and consider what attitudes and behaviours should be rooted out in your family? How do "the cry of the poor" and "the cry of the earth" speak to discrimination on various grounds?

**9 March. Compassion. SEE.** Prudence had been an AIDS activist. She compared the COVID-19 pandemic to HIV/AIDS and also to leprosy, which had historically been a serious scourge in Jesus' day and also at the time of St Francis. The stigma in such cases was almost as bad as the disease. She explained the Biblical story of Naaman a highly-placed foreigner, a proud and arrogant man, who suffered from leprosy and was seeking help from the prophet Elisha. The prophet at first treated him with some disdain, telling him to go and wash in the river Jordan.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:.** *Naaman was angry and went away, saying, Behold I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord. 1 Kings 5:15* But Naaman humbly listened to his servant's advice and did wash himself and was miraculously made clean. He came back to thank Elisha and acknowledged the greatness of the God of Israel. Jesus himself and St Francis had not treated lepers cruelly by keeping them at a distance, but had been caring and had healed them.

**Pope Leo message for World Day of the Sick:.** *In the parable of the Good Samaritan, he 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>*

From **THE LITTLE FLOWERS OF ST FRANCIS.** In one story about St Francis there was a patient in the leprosy hospital who was so insolent and rude to those who served him that they thought he was possessed by a devil and no one would attend to him. St Francis himself visited the leper and wished him peace. The man replied, "What peace can I look for from God who has taken from me peace and every other blessing and made me a putrid and disgusting object." Francis humbly asked how he could help and the man said, "wash me." That is what Francis did, washing the man with his own hands. His flesh was miraculously healed and the angry and bitter leper repented as his body and his soul were purified.

**Reflect, share, act, pray.** During Lent are we as kind and compassionate as we could be towards patients and families who are struggling with illness especially mental illness? Is this not also a form of "the cry of the poor?"

**10 March. Ecological conversion. SEE.** Joyce shared her thoughts, "The whole world was badly affected by the COVID-19 virus and health workers and families suffered many difficulties. More recently the invasion and wars in Ukraine, Gaza and elsewhere, have brought enormous hardship to all those affected. Economic and environmental issues are playing an ever greater role in social wellbeing, with peoples being affected by floods, droughts, heatwaves, and icy weather. Electricity and water supplies are affected too. Who is responsible and who is to blame? To what extent can we, each member of the population, consider ourselves accountable and make reparation?" She explained how the Israelites had been taken into exile

in Babylon because of their wicked ways. Some recognized their need for repentance and did pray with humility, acknowledging their guilt. Is that what we also need?

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *Scripture: In the midst of the fire Azariah opened his mouth, "We, O Lord have become fewer than any nation and are brought low this day in all the world because of our sins. And at this time there is no prince, or prophet, or leader, no burnt offering, or sacrifice, or incense, no place to make an offering before you. Yet with a contrite heart and a humble spirit may we be accepted as though it were with burnt offerings. Dan 3:2-10. Pope Francis: What all need is an ecological conversion whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential for a life of virtue. It is not an option or secondary aspect of our Christian experience. LS 217. Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely. FT258. In calling to mind the figure of St Francis we come to realise that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change. We need to experience a conversion, or change of heart. LS 218. Pope Leo: The peace of the risen Jesus is unarmed, because his was an unarmed struggle in the midst of concrete historical, political and social circumstances. Christians must together bear prophetic witness to this novelty, mindful of the tragedies in which they have too often been complicit. The great parable of the Last Judgment invites all Christians to act with mercy in this awareness (cf. Mt 25:31-46). In doing so, they will find brothers and sisters at their side who, in different ways, have listened to the pain of others and freed themselves inwardly from the deception of violence. PM*

**Reflect, share, act, pray.** Many environmental and social activists everywhere lobby and protest and make great sacrifices for their cause. During this Lenten season is there a cause each family person could adopt and be prepared to make sacrifices or risk our safety for? We pray for the courage needed to stand up for justice, especially environmental justice.

**11 March. Law and Morality.** Stephen was a lawyer with a particular interest in family law and explained, "South African law is an application of the Constitution which is the highest law of the land and was developed after 1994 to reflect the will of the people. When you look at it like that, you can see that these laws are not necessarily built directly on God's law, the 10 Commandments or the two great commandments, 'Love God and Love your neighbour as yourself.' Being a democratic country, some aspects of the laws derive from majority opinions, a vote in Parliament, a decision by Cabinet, or even from those with the loudest voice.

In 1997 abortion was legalized even though most citizens were against making it freely available. Laws about adultery, divorce, same-sex unions, land, even legalizing dagga, are not necessarily seen as morally just. Not everything is subject to legislation or binding regulations. We, citizens, are entitled to challenge laws but have to refer to the Constitution. Temporary regulations like banning of alcohol and cigarettes during the Covid-19 lock-down were frequently challenged as to their legality." David asked, "And traffic fines and e-tolls?"

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *What great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day. Only take heed and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, make them known to your children and your children's children. Deut 4:1-9. Pope Francis. Families have a right to be able to count on an adequate family policy on the part of public authorities in the juridical, economic, social and fiscal domains. It is important to insist on the rights of the family and not only those of individuals. AL44. St Francis lived in simplicity and harmony with God, with others, nature and himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace. LS 10. Pope Leo: We must continue to denounce the "dictatorship of an economy that kills," and to recognize that "while the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies that defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control. A new tyranny is being born, invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules." DT92.*

**Reflect, share, act, pray.** What cause could we support and adopt, individually or as a family that has to do with morality, legality and observance of the law?

**12 March. SEE. Promoting the common good.** Stephen added, "It is difficult to legislate for the common good and things like ecological conversion. It has been very interesting to see how much money and energy went into fighting the Covid virus. At that time climate change more or less disappeared off the public agenda even though it is even more urgent and serious in the long term. Because of the dramatic impacts apparent constantly today, as well as the lobbying of climate activists it is fortunately coming up, but much more needs to be done from a legal perspective too.

Activists and the popes have spoken about ecology as part of Catholic Social Teaching but it has not become a true mainstream issue in the Church. How many people have measured their carbon footprint? The common good is a humanitarian or human good that cannot be enforced but should be promoted. Pope Francis's *Laudato Si* on creation and *Fratelli Tutti*, on social friendship go beyond Catholic believers but call on all people "of goodwill." We humans are the only element of creation with the power to make decisions. We cannot expect the animal kingdom or the plant kingdom to do that.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *You shall call to them but they will not answer you. And you shall say to them, "This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the Lord, their God, and did not accept discipline, truth has perished, it is cut off from their lips. Jer. 7:23-28*

**Pope Francis:** *A journey of peace is possible between religions. Its point of departure must be God's way of seeing things. God's love is the same for everyone, regardless of religion. We believers need to find occasions to speak with one another and to act together for the common good and the poor. This has nothing to do with watering down our deepest convictions. FT 281-2. There is an episode in the life of St Francis that shows his openness of heart, which knew no bounds of differences of origin, nationality, colour or religion. His visit to the Sultan in Damietta in Egypt on a mission of friendship or fraternity entailed hardships, given his poverty, the distance, language, and culture. That journey undertaken at the time of the Crusades, demonstrated the breadth and grandeur of his love which sought to embrace everyone. FT3. **Pope Leo:** the Gospel message has to do not only with an individual's personal relationship with the Lord, but also with something greater: "the Kingdom of God (cf. Lk 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society. We are seeking God's Kingdom." DT 97*

**Reflect, share, act, pray.** When considering the Laudato Si goals what aspect of the common good is important to us as a family? Is it the poor, the earth, economics, human rights? Where does love feature in working for the common good?

**13 March.** *An initiative for this time promoted by Pope Francis is "24 Hours for the Lord" to be commemorated on Friday and Saturday before 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent with Eucharistic adoration, reflection and personal conversion.*

**Nature as a revelation from God. SEE.** Since her introduction to the Laudato Si Movement and Action Platform Judy had become much more active and aware of the natural beauty of nature and how often it is defaced by pollution, smog, smoke and lack of care for God's very extensive garden. She liked to quote the passage from *Laudato Si'* 85. *Nature is also a continuing revelation of the divine.* She shared, "I believe that the plant ecosystem is an important link in the chain of life. I think one day neglecting the plant kingdom will be considered a sin even if not a crime."

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *I will heal their faithlessness. I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be as the dew to Israel, he shall strike root as the poplar, his shoots shall spread out, his beauty shall be like the olive and his fragrance like Lebanon. Hosea 14:1-9. **Pope Francis:** "God has written a precious book whose letters are the multitude of created things present in the universe. From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine. LS 85. **St Francis** asked that part of the friary garden always be left untouched, so that wild flowers and herbs could grow there, and those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the Creator of such beauty. Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise. LS12. It is significant that the harmony which St Francis experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of the rupture of broken relationships with creation. Today sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable and attacks on nature. LS66. **Pope Leo:** The heart is the place where external reality has the greatest impact, where the deepest searching takes place, where the most authentic desires are discovered, where one's ultimate identity is found, and where decisions are formed. It is only by returning to the heart that a true ecological conversion can take place".*

**Reflect, share, act, pray.** Do you think you could fall in love with nature? If so, what aspect? Find out more about the Laudato Si Movement and the Action Platform in order to help you choose. This 24 hours can be commemorated in the parish but also with some time for prayer and reflection in a family, praying especially for peace in the home and the WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES.

**14 March. SEE.** Milly brought a school project she had worked on. "Loss of biodiversity is a very serious matter and I have discovered it is often neglected because of short-sighted approaches, like just looking at the economy and the cost of everything without even considering the right of the poor, the right to life and protection. Indigenous forests are bulldozed to plant nut trees, that mainly produce for the export market and make money for the farmers or developers, rather than protect the environment. Corrupt leaders and their police and armies buy off critics. Each year thousands of plant and animal species disappear due to our human activity, poaching, and reduction in their habitat for human livelihood needs. I was shocked when I read that of all the various ecosystems human beings are the only ecosystem that has grown and expanded in the last hundred years. Member of plant and animal ecosystems have decreased in numbers."

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. I have slain them by words of my mouth. For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, the knowledge for God rather than burnt offerings. Hosea 6:1-6. **Pope Francis:** Good ecosystems even require worms and insects to feed the soil and care for the plants. Because of us, these species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence. LS 33. **Pope Benedict XVI:** "The book of nature is one and indivisible and includes the environment, life, sexuality, the family, social relations. The deterioration of nature is closely connected to the culture which shapes human coexistence. The natural and the social environment have suffered damage due to an evil, the notion that there are no indisputable truths to guide our lives and that our human freedom is limitless. The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves." LS6. **Pope Leo:** 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. DT9

**From the Little Flowers of St Francis.** St Francis saw on trees by the wayside a great multitude of birds; and said to his companions, "Wait for me here whilst I go and preach to my little sisters the birds." He preached to the birds on the ground, and suddenly those on the trees came round him, and all listened. Brother Masseo observed how St Francis went among them, even touched them with his garments, and none of them moved. The sermon was, "My little sisters the birds, ye owe much to God, your Creator, and ye ought to sing his praise at all times and in all places, because he has given you liberty to fly into all places; and though ye neither spin nor sew, he has given you twofold and a threefold clothing for yourselves and your offspring. Two of all your species went into the Ark with Noah that you might not be lost to the world; and he feeds you. He has given you fountains and rivers to quench your thirst, mountains and valleys to take refuge, and trees for your nests. Your Creator loves you much. Beware, my little sisters, of the sin of ingratitude, and study always to give praise to God."

As he said these words, all the birds began to open their beaks, to stretch their necks, to spread their wings and reverently to bow their heads to the ground, by their motions and by their songs manifesting their joy to St Francis who rejoiced with them. He wondered at such a multitude and was charmed with their beautiful variety, their attention and familiarity. He devoutly gave thanks and having finished his sermon, St Francis made the sign of the cross, and gave them leave to fly away.

**Reflect, share, act, pray.** Lent is about repentance for evil and wrongdoing. An examination of conscience, possibly a family reconciliation service ( get from MARFAM) can examine sins against people and the environment. Reuse, reduce, recycle should be the approach to caring for creation. How can we adopt this more fully?

**15 March. Sunday Lent 4A. Gaudete Sunday. SEE.** At first when they discovered that Yusuf was born blind Cornelia was worried. Had it been because of having measles when she was pregnant? But she learned to live with the reality. The family rallied around and little Yusuf grew up quite independent. When times were really bad they decided to put him on the street to beg. He agreed but found it degrading to be exploited. One day a car stopped and asked him about his condition. The driver said he might be able to help. "I couldn't believe my eyes," Yusuf laughed after the operation, "to think my world could be changed from darkness to light. I didn't even know that light could be so absolutely wonderful."

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *Jesus said, "it was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. I must do the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes when no one can work. I am in the world and the light of the world."* John 9:1-41. **Pope Francis:** *Jesus is the physician who heals with the medicine of love, for he takes upon himself our suffering and redeems it. 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 from Message for World Day for the Sick 2026 :** *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 touching the suffering face of Christ. DT 48*

**Reflect, share, act, pray.** How is your family dealing with disability as a form of poverty that demands constant support.

**16 March. The Social Action apostolate. SEE.** Joseph had been involved in social action programmes for a long time and their son Aubrey once asked, "Dad, why do some of the parishioners seem to be against what you do? In our youth group we also find that the guys pick on me, when I raise the subject of poverty and wealth. Sometimes even my sister doesn't agree with my thinking." Joseph answered, "Maybe they don't understand what true justice and love are, or maybe they're scared to get involved. Or maybe it is like it was with Jesus, when he went to his hometown and people there didn't accept him Maybe we need to get an outsider to give some talks, on the love of Jesus that is at the heart of our social action."

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honour in his own country. In Capernaum an official's son was ill He came to Jesus. Jesus said, " unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."* The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus said, "Go, your son will live." The son was healed and all his household believed in Jesus. From John 4:43-54.

**Pope Francis:** *In a world where everything is bought and sold, people's sense of their worth appears increasingly to depend on what they can accumulate with the power of money. We are constantly being pushed to keep buying, consuming and distracting ourselves, held captive to a demeaning system that prevents us from looking beyond our immediate and petty needs. The love of Christ has no place in this perverse mechanism, yet only that love can set us free from a mad pursuit that no longer has room for a gratuitous love. Christ's love can give a heart to our world and revive love wherever we think that the ability to love has been definitively lost. DN 215. **Pope Leo: Saint Francis'** life was one of continuous self-emptying: from the palace to the leper, from eloquence to silence, from possession to total gift. 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. 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. DT 64.*

**REFLECT-SHARE-ACT-PRAY.** Consider how important God's love is in social action. Is it doing good or welfare work? Are you?

**17 March. SEE.** Joseph and his son Aubrey continued their conversation. "Dad, in those old apartheid days, did you and your friends really do things that were against the law?" "Well we didn't go and blow up bridges but we did support what we believed was a just cause. Uncle Stephen became a conscientious objector and wouldn't do his military service, because he didn't want to fight for what he believed was unjust." Aubrey said, "But my friend Busi said that his dad was an activist too, and he did go and blow up things." "We activists tried to do what we believed was right."

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *Jesus said to the lame man, "take up your pallet and walk." The Jews persecuted him because he did this on the Sabbath. From John 5:1-6. Pope Francis: Doing what is right means more than "judging what is best" or "knowing clearly what needs to be done. We have to arrive at the point where what we know to be good becomes a thirst to do good, and that doing it is good for us here and now. AL 265. Pope Leo: Although many people today have hearts ready for peace, they are often overcome by a great sense of powerlessness before an increasingly uncertain world. St Augustine had already pointed out this paradox:" it is not difficult to possess peace; it is perhaps more difficult to praise it. To praise peace we may find that we lack the necessary talent; we search for the right ideas and weigh our words. But to have it is there, within reach and we can possess it without effort." PM*

**The common vision of St Francis and St Clare.** At a young age, Clare developed a deep spirituality and was drawn to the teachings and lifestyle of Francis. She met with him on a number of occasions until finally, at the age of 18 in the middle of the night after Palm Sunday, she left her parents' home and found her way to Francis and the brothers. There Clare made her commitment to God and to the poor and simple lifestyle that Francis preached. Even when her uncles came to try to remove her from the convent where Francis had placed her, Clare did not waver. She was happy when other women of nobility, including her younger sister, joined her. Like Francis, she cared for her followers, taught them by word and example, wrote for them a simple rule of life, modelled on that of Francis, except that the sisters were contemplative and did not leave their convent. She stood up to bishops and popes for the privilege of living the life to which she felt called. Her rule for her sisters was finally approved on her deathbed in 1253.

Followers of Francis and Clare can be found today in every walk of life and on every continent—still joyful, still seeking a simple lifestyle, still seeking to love and follow the God who lives in their own depths and in all of creation. Theirs remains a common vision: identification with the poor, care for creation as a sacred trust, embrace of each person in relationship as sister or brother. From Franciscan Media.

**REFLECT, SHARE, ACT, PRAY.** Spend some time on a common project together as a family. How well do we work together? At the same time we ask "Do we stand for justice and the common good, or self-interest which is largely economic?"

**18 March. SEE. Motherhood.** Elizabeth spoke up for the first time, on her favourite subject, motherhood. "I'm sure everyone will agree that when you think of our world, as a family of families, all kinds of motherhood examples come to mind. Even just with human mothers we have loving, nurturing and nasty, neglectful mothers, although I do believe that mothers do have an inborn mothering gene. You see it in women in their late 30s suddenly getting broody. Almost every single species in the human and animal kingdom has that quality, to bear and care for offspring, often at considerable cost. All the beautiful wildlife TV series show incredible examples, which even include mothering someone else's baby. Some insects, bees and termites have unusual mothering capacities, centering on a queen who rules the colony.

Can plants have anything like that instinct to reproduce? Reproduce yes, but nurturing probably is beyond their capability. For me, this reproductive aspect of creation should get a lot more emphasis. I also haven't come across anything in particular that St Francis had to say about mothering. I wonder why?" "That is not really fair," David responded, "We know that he had a great love for Mary and devotion to her." "And I think while his relationship with his father broke down it wasn't like that with his mother."

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *"Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even if these forget yet I will not forget you." Is 49:8-18.* This quotation presents a feminine side of God which is often its main focus when it is used, but with little emphasis on the value of the natural mothering ability. **Pope Francis:** *Your child deserves your happiness. Don't let fears, worries, other people's comments or problems lessen your joy at being God's means of bringing a new life to the world. AL 171. For many Christians this journey of fraternity also has a Mother, whose name is Mary. Having received this universal motherhood at the foot of the cross she cares not only for Jesus but also for the rest of her children. In the power of the risen Lord, she wants to give birth to a new world, where all of us are brothers and sisters and there is room for all those whom our societies discard. FT 278. Pope Leo: Let us not forget that "doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights. Even so, we constantly witness among them impressive examples of daily heroism in defending and protecting their vulnerable families." While significant changes are under way in some countries, "the organization of societies worldwide is still far from reflecting clearly that women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men.*

**St Francis and Mary.** According to a pious legend, one day St Francis had a vision in which he saw his friars trying to reach Christ by a ladder that was red and very steep. After climbing a few rungs they would suddenly fall back. Our Lord then showed St Francis another ladder, white and much less steep at whose summit appeared the Blessed Virgin, and He said to

Francis, "Advise your sons to go by the ladder of My Mother." From BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, Queen of the Friars Minor Capuchin.

**Reflect, share, act, pray.** In today's society the focus tends to be more on empowering women than on motherhood. How can we pay attention to the issue of motherhood and of Mary?

**19 St Joseph. "A father in the shadows." SEE.** Fr Fidelis explained, "speaking of those who remained in the background, during Covid-19, in December 2020 Pope Francis instituted a Year for St Joseph with his Apostolic letter *Patris Corde*, - *With a Father's Heart*. This was 150 years after St Joseph was declared to be patron of the universal Church. From the perspective of fatherhood Joseph is described in a number of beautiful ways; a beloved father, tender and loving father, obedient, accepting, creatively courageous, working, and finally as a father in the shadows. We must also not forget that apart from "father" he was also "Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary."

Often things in life happen that we do not understand. Our first reaction may be rebellion or disappointment. Joseph set aside his own ideas to accept the course of events and, mysterious as they seemed, embraced and took responsibility for them. Unless we are reconciled with our own history, we will be unable to go forward as we will remain hostage to our expectations and the disappointments that follow. Joseph's spiritual path accepts, not explains.

Many people wanted to join St Francis and adopt his vision of simplicity but because of their commitments of family and work could not join the friars or sisters. They could join the Third Order created for those who remained in the secular world, as many millions have done over time.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *Mary's husband being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame resolved to send her away quietly. As he considered this an angel appeared to him in a dream. Matt 1:16-24. Pope Francis: Joseph accepted Mary unconditionally. He trusted in the angel's words. "The nobility of his heart is such that he put charity above the law. Today, when psychological, verbal and physical violence towards women is so evident, Joseph appears as a respectful and sensitive man. Even though he does not understand the bigger picture, with God's help he made a decision to protect Mary's good name, her dignity and her life. Patris Corde.*

**Reflect, share, act, pray the Prayer to St Joseph from Patris Corde.** Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to you God entrusted his only Son; in you Mary placed her trust; with you Christ became man. Blessed Joseph, to us too, show yourself a father and guide us in the path of life. Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage, and defend us from every evil. Amen.

**20 March. SEE. Wisdom. Jesus and Father.** Family members, especially in larger families can live separate lives, even if they are in the same house. Time to talk, to pray and share is always a challenge. Different members grow in different ways in their faith and some can even become a challenge to others when they try harder to grow spiritually. Conflicts and power struggles arise over many issues, large and small. As recommended by Pope Francis Fr Fidelis had promoted the 24 hours with the Lord on 4th Sunday of Lent. There was an opportunity for confession for Catholics but Fr was strongly encouraging families to put aside time for reconciliation in the family using a Family Reconciliation service he had provided.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *Ungodly men reasoned unsoundly. Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions. Thus they reasoned but they were led astray for their wickedness blinded them and they did not know the secret purposes of God. Wisdom 2:1-22. Pope Francis: True wisdom demands an encounter with reality. Today everything can be created, disguised and altered. A mechanism of selection then comes into play, whereby I can separate likes from dislikes. We must not lose our ability to listen. FT48. St Francis did not wage a war of words aimed at imposing doctrines he simply spread the love of God. "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God." In this way he became a father to all and inspired the vision of a fraternal society. St Francis heard the voice of God, he heard the voice of the poor, he heard the voice of the infirm and the voice of nature. FT 48*

**Pope Leo:** *Many today call "realistic" those narratives devoid of hope, blind to the beauty of others and forgetful of God's grace, which is always at work in human hearts, even though wounded by sin. St Augustine urged Christians to forge an unbreakable bond with peace, so that by cherishing it deeply in their hearts they would be able to radiate its luminous warmth around them. He wrote, "If you wish to draw others to peace, first have it yourselves, be steadfast in peace yourselves. To inflame others, you must have the flame burning within." PM*

**Reflect, share, act, pray.** How well do we know how to listen to God, God's word and to one another as Pope Leo proposed for Lent. Practise some listening activities and conduct a simple reconciliation moment .

**21 March. Human Rights Day.** Zanela shared, "Today we commemorate Human Rights Day in South Africa. It commemorates an ugly and a sad incident in our political history. In Sharpeville in 1960, in one of the earliest anti-apartheid demonstrations, police fired on a crowd killing some and wounding up to 250 people. In commemorative speeches on many such occasions it is so often said, "Never again." And yet other incidents like this continue over the years and human life at times appears to be too cheap. Political and relationship conflicts deny the right to life to men and women, to strangers, foreigners and those close to us, a most basic human right. I believe that in speaking of human rights we should consider the rights of families as units not only as individual people. Look how many families are struggling at this time to access services, like water which should be a basic free and clean as a most basic right for everyone."

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *At that time when they heard the words of Jesus, some of the people said, "This is really the prophet." Others said, "This is the Christ." There was division among the people over him. Some of them wanted to arrest him but no one laid hands on him. John 7:40-53. Pope Francis:* *In this Encyclical, Laudato Si I will point to a number of important questions: the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected, call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature and the need for forthright and honest debate. LS 16. If we accept the great principle that there are rights born of our inalienable human dignity, we can rise to the challenge of envisaging a new humanity. We can aspire to a world that provides land, house and work for all. This is the true path of peace which will only be possible in the event of solidarity as the whole human family. FT 127 Pope Leo: Eight centuries ago, Saint Francis prompted an evangelical renewal in the Christians and society of his time. Wealthy and self-confident, the young Francis was taken aback and converted by his direct contact with the poor and outcast of society. The story of his life continues to appeal to the minds and hearts of believers, and many non-believers as well. It "changed history." DT6.*

**Prayer of St Francis:** *Make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred let me sow love, where there is injury pardon, where there is despair hope. Reflect, share, act, pray* about the importance of harnessing the power of love on the journey to human and family rights. "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 THE PHENOMENON OF MAN.

**22 March. Sunday Lent 5A. SEE.** Fr Fidelis started his homily by saying, "Wasn't that story of Lazarus and his sisters a very long one but a nice one about Jesus and his very good friends. Lazarus was ill but Jesus didn't go there until later when Lazarus had died and the two sisters were mourning and grieving, while there are many visitors in the house too. It is Martha who says to Jesus, "I know you can ask God to raise him up, but I also know that he will rise at the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said, "I am the Resurrection and the life". He then went to the tomb and in the name of the Father called Lazarus to come out. So this long story is used to teach something about Jesus, about the Father and also the promise of new life."

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God? 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me, I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that you have sent me.' John 11:1-45. Pope Francis:* *The New Testament does not only tell us of the earthly Jesus and his tangible and loving relationship with the world. It also shows him risen and glorious, present throughout creation by his universal Lordship. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things. LS100. Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father. Jesus of Nazareth by his words, his actions and his entire person reveals the mercy of God. FM 1. Pope Leo: The Encyclical Fratelli Tutti presents St Francis as a model of an awakening of conscience and critical thought. "In the world of his time bristling with watchtowers and defensive walls, cities were a theatre of brutal wars between powerful families, even as poverty was spreading through the countryside. Yet there Francis was able to welcome true peace into his heart and free himself of the desire to wield power over others. PM*

**St Francis Canticle:** *PRAISED BE YOU, my Lord, through our Sister bodily Death, from whom no one living can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin. Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm. "What we see in the life of Jesus and the song of Francis is that God does not create for death, annihilation, or frustration but rather to perfect his creatures into the full body of Christ. From Care for Creation (p90-91)*

**Reflect, share, act, pray.** It is painful to speak about death, that of our loved ones or even our own. This Sunday and this season of Lent for repentance and reconciliation could be a helpful opportunity to air the subject.

**23 March. Susanna.** Beauty, like any typical teenager, enjoyed the story from the book of Daniel of Susanna and the randy, lascivious lying judges being caught out. Susanna, a beautiful woman was quite innocently bathing in her husband's garden when two old men tried to seduce her and when she refused they falsely accused her, saying they saw her lying with a young man. The people turned against her until Daniel, quite a young man, was inspired by God to intervene, and was able to turn the tables in the case and prove the old men guilty. Even the boys were fascinated by the story and the family discussed how this type of situation is as old as the hills. What is the answer to gender violence for our generation? How often are people of standing in the community guilty of such abuse and able to get away with it? Gender-based violence is clearly as old as the hills. Women, and men too, march and demonstrate regularly as plans are proposed and interventions presented such as the "National Strategic Plan on Gender-based Violence and Femicide. 2020-2030." Very recently gbv was declared a national crisis. It is essential to address the family as a unit, not just support the victims and punish the perpetrator separately. This is part of the holistic vision of our MARFAM focus and family project. "

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *Susanna would go into her husband's garden to walk. The two elders used to see her every day, going in and walking about and they began to desire her. After the men falsely accused her the Lord God aroused the holy spirit of a young lad named Daniel, and he cried with a loud voice, "I am innocent of the blood of this woman. Are you such fools? Have you condemned a daughter of Israel without examination and without learning the facts? You have borne false witness against her." From Daniel 13. Pope Francis:* *The word of God constantly testifies to that sombre dimension already present at the beginning, when, through sin, the relationship of love and purity between man and woman turns into domination. AL19. History is burdened by the excesses of patriarchal cultures that considered women inferior. AL 54. Pope Leo: Let us not forget that "doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they*

are frequently less able to defend their rights. Even so, we constantly witness among them impressive examples of daily heroism in defending and protecting their vulnerable families. The organization of societies worldwide is still far from reflecting clearly that women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men. We say one thing with our words, but our decisions and reality tell another story," DT 12.

**The Little Flowers of St Francis:** In his Rule Francis forbade his brothers to visit the sisters in their convent. However the special close friendship between Francis and Clare was treasured by them both. "Yet again and again they restrained themselves and refrained from seeing each other although they shared inspiring occasions of deep communion."

**REFLECT, SHARE, ACT, PRAY.** Discuss with others in the families and groups, how can these human life and relationships be valued and treated with greater mutual respect?

**24 March. SEE. Healing.** Dane did research on the interesting story from the Old Testament of Moses and the bronze serpent. He checked out its connection with the symbol for medicine which is a rod with a snake, related also to the ancient Greek symbol, the rod of Asclepius. He explained, "There is probably a common history. During their time in the desert, because the people disobeyed God again, their punishment was a plague of fiery serpents. When Moses pleaded with God he was told to make a bronze serpent, put it up on a pole for the people to see and be healed." George asked, "So in the gospel where Jesus talks about being raised up he is referring to this story of healing?"

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *The people said, "We have sinned because we spoke against the Lord. Pray that he take away the serpents. Moses prayed and the Lord said, "Make a fiery serpent and set it up as a sign." So Moses set up a bronze serpent and if anyone was bitten there could be healed. Numbers 21:9. Pope Francis: There is a risk that a single scientific advance will be seen as the only possible lens for viewing a particular aspect of life, society and the world. Researchers who are expert in their own field yet also familiar with the findings of other sciences are in a position to discern and become open to a more comprehensive and integral knowledge. FT204. Jesus is the physician who heals with the medicine of love, for he takes upon himself our suffering and redeems it. 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. DT 48*

**St Francis.** "At the time of Covid-19 were we sufficiently aware that God remains the true healer although he used the various elements and people of his creation. There is a story told about St Francis and his suffering from a very painful eye condition. One treatment to which he submitted required the painful use of fire. Francis addressed Brother Fire and asked him not to hurt him too much, which reportedly was the case."

**REFLECT, SHARE, ACT, PRAY.** Consider and share on your attitudes and beliefs about healing and God's healing power.

**25 March. Annunciation. SEE.** Justine shared some of her insights into the Annunciation with the youth at one of their sessions. "Mary, a young girl, betrothed to be married, had her life turned upside down by the invitation she received through the angel Gabriel to be the mother of the Messiah. She rightly questioned the angel, asking how this could be but her 'yes' to God was unconditional. From that moment on she devoted her life to her Son. This was an unplanned pregnancy and at that time it would have been as problematical as it has been for many other young women until our day as, according to custom, she could have been stoned and killed. Joseph also responded positively to God's request in a dream, and accepted and treasured Mary as his wife and Jesus as his son. Unwed mothers in different cultures have had very difficult experiences. A shocking report disclosed how unwed mothers and babies were being ill-treated in institutions in Ireland, because of the judgmental attitudes of the Church, the community and their families." Justine invited the youth to share on the question, "Although abortion is sinful as the killing of an unborn human being is it too commonly chosen as a solution because it is legal in South Africa. Should other support for pregnant girls, women and their families be more available? What about the rights of the unborn?"

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *"Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word." From Luke 1:26-382. Pope Francis: The Church has been present for centuries throughout the world. All things human are our concern wherever councils come together to establish the rights and duties of humans we are honoured to take our place among them. This journey of fraternity also has a Mother, whose name is Mary. She cares not only for Jesus but also for the rest of her children. She wants to give birth to a new world, where all of us are brothers and sisters. FT 278. At her side is St Joseph her husband who cared with tender devotion for the Holy Family as they too were exiles in Egypt. LS 241.*

**Pope Leo:** *"Authentic Marian spirituality brings God's tenderness, his way of 'being a mother,' to light in the Church, Whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves. Devotion to Mary leads to action and social transformation, without losing compassion." An Augustinian devotion is to Our Lady of Good Counsel.*

**St Francis and Mary.** St Francis chose Mary as the patroness and Queen of the Friars, because of his great inexpressible love for her, "for it was she who made the Lord of majesty our brother." Francis often reflected on her courage in accepting the

challenges she had to face by responding, "Your will be done. Francis composed a litany of her special qualities and exhorted his friars always to possess a true and living devotion to her.

The *Little Flowers of St Francis* contains some accounts of Marian experiences. Brother Peter witnessed how Brother Conrad implored the Virgin Mary to obtain from her Blessed Son that he might experience some of the sweetness which Simeon experienced on the day of the Purification when he held Jesus in his arms. The Virgin Mary responded and as Queen of Heaven appeared in great splendour with her Blessed Son in her arms and approaching Brother Conrad placed the Holy Child in his arms. He received him most reverently and clasped him to his breast, his heart overflowing and burning with divine love and consolation.

**REFLECT, SHARE, ACT, PRAY.** How can we and our family invite Mary in our families to help us support the right to life from birth until natural death. This right can extend from humans to conservation projects in the wild? Such causes often receive very little support.

**26 March. SEE. Glory.** Grandmother Josie took her turn. "I would like us to go to what Jesus said about himself in John's gospel, chapter 8. He disputes with the Jewish leaders about God, his own relationship with his Father, his work of glorifying God and how God glorifies him. This was one of the main reasons for the conflict with the leaders. They saw this as blasphemy and a reason to do away with him. How did they understand this concept or term of "glory" and how do we understand it? Is it the same as praise or honour or blessing? I do have rather a problem with that, but I do know that self-glorification is not a good thing."

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: Scripture:** *If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing, it is my Father who glorifies me, whom you say that he is your God. But you have not known him. I know him and keep his word. John 8: 54-55. Pope Francis: The mission Jesus received from the Father was that of revealing the mystery of divine love in its fullness. FM 8. Pope Leo: St John Chrysostom wrote, "The body of Christ on the altar does not need cloaks, but pure souls; while the one outside needs much care. Let us therefore learn to think of and honor Christ as he wishes. For the most pleasing honor we can give to the one we want to venerate is that of doing what he himself desires, not what we devise. So you too, give him the honor he has commanded, and let the poor benefit from your riches. God does not need golden vessels, but golden souls."* DT41

**St Francis:** While at the beginning of his conversion process, out walking one day he came to a small derelict church and heard a voice from the crucifix "Francis, go and rebuild my church, as you can see it is falling into ruin." He got down to work but came to realise that his call was not for a building of stone but for the people and Church leaders, right up to the Pope. He then chose a new way of life of prayer, poverty and humility.

**REFLECT. SHARE. ACT AND PRAY.** Reflect and share on the Canticles of St Francis.

Canticle 1. *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. Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks, And serve Him with great humility*

**27 March. . Human Rights and a Throw-away World. SEE.** Zandile and George were veterans of the liberation struggle and during this time of the year often spoken of those days. "It is interesting to see how the scripture readings as we approach Holy Week describe violent protests that are building up. The prophet Jeremiah experienced it, and he warned the leaders against their wicked ways and so did Jesus. Jeremiah however was calling on God for vengeance.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *"The Lord is with me as a dread warrior, therefore my persecutors will stumble, they will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed. Jer 20:10-13. At that time the Jews took up stones to stone Jesus. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father, for which of these do you stone me?" Again they tried to arrest him but he escaped from their hands. John 10:31-42.*

**Pope Francis:** *Justice and mercy are not two contradictory realities but two dimensions of a single reality that unfolds progressively until it culminates in the fullness of love. Jesus goes beyond the law and affirms that the rule for life must place mercy at the centre. FM 20. We see protests including pro-democracy protests all over the world. Some economic rules have proved effective for growth but not for integral human development, in practice human rights are not equal for all. (FT 21-22) War, terrorist attacks, racial or religious persecution and many other affronts to human dignity are judged differently depending on how convenient it proves for certain, primarily economic, interests. These situations of violence, sad to say, have become so common as to constitute a real "third world war" fought piecemeal. FT25. The harmony which St Francis experiences with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture caused by sin. This is a far cry from our situation today where sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable and attacks on nature. LS 66. Pope Leo: Throughout the world it is to be hoped that "every community become a 'house of peace,' where one learns how to defuse hostility through dialogue, where justice is practiced and forgiveness is cherished." Now more than ever, we must show that peace is not a utopia, by fostering attentive and life-giving pastoral creativity. PM*

**REFLECT, SHARE, ACT, PRAY.** Discuss and share on the topic "Human rights are family rights." How can we promote this aspect of rights as a neglected area in our own environment and the wider community? It can apply to nature too, as families in ecosystems rather than individuals and their rights.

**28 March. Ecumenism. SEE.** Jan and Annabi normally kept in the background and seldom shared their thoughts. As the groups were now approaching Holy Week Jan decided to share something that was deep in his heart. "The way I was brought up in the Dutch Reformed Church in my childhood years gave me a different spiritual insight into some of the Bible passages. In particular the passages from some of the prophets about Israel being God's people had significance for us. Israel was a small nation often threatened by other big powers and at times overrun, almost destroyed, and taken into captivity. The role of the prophets was to keep them true to their God and challenge them when they sinned and followed other gods. We, as the Afrikaner nation, saw ourselves too like a chosen people, like the Israelites. I have discovered that where we sinned was in oppressing others, certainly not recognizing them as having equal dignity on a truly human level. Now, in very recent times, the attitude of Pope Francis is very much that everyone belongs together, we should all be one people, even if we worship God in different forms. *'Fratelli Tutti. Brothers all.'*" It has been a very long learning journey for me."

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *I will make a covenant of peace with them it shall be an everlasting covenant with them, and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. They shall be my people and I shall be their God. Eze 37: 21-28* **Pope Francis:** *In his simple and direct way, St Francis expressed the essence of a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives. Francis felt himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh. Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters. FT 1-2. A journey of peace is possible between religions. Its point of departure must be God's way of seeing things. It follows that we believers need to find occasions to speak with one another and to act together for the common good and the promotion of the poor. FT 281-2. In his ongoing contact with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb Pope Francis follows the famous example of St Francis who made the dangerous journey to Damietta in Egypt to meet with Sultan Malik-el-Kamil in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.*

**Pope Leo:** *An essential service that religions must render to a suffering humanity is to guard against the growing temptation to weaponize even thoughts and words. The great spiritual traditions, as well as right reason, teach us to look beyond blood ties or ethnicity, beyond associations that accept only those who are similar and reject those who are different. Believers must actively refute above all by the witness of their lives, these forms of blasphemy that profane the holy name of God. Therefore alongside action it is more necessary than ever to cultivate prayer, spirituality and ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as paths of peace and as languages of encounter within traditions and cultures. PM*

**REFLECT, SHARE, ACT, PRAY.** how are we able to reflect and share about beliefs of fellow Christians and how can we relate to those of other religions like Muslims, Hindus and others? Interreligious dialogue about common and shared values leads to a greater sense of human fraternity and acceptance? What can our particular religious family do?

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**Holy week.** Some of the reflections this week are built on the Songs of the Servant of the Lord from the prophet Isaiah which are part of the liturgy of the days of Holy Week. Some parishes hold a Paschal Meal at this time. Families can do so too, or in a simpler format as a Family Prayer Meal. A Family Reconciliation Moment can also prepare for Confession.

**29 March. Palm Sunday. SEE:** Bruce, the parish scripture scholar offered to facilitate the reflections. Starting with an extract from one of the Songs of the Servant, he explained that it is not known for whom they were originally composed. It could have been Israel or a person of the time but in New Testament times they are most often applied to Jesus. For meditation purposes they can also be applied to others like St Francis, who was himself deeply engrossed in meditating on aspects of the life and the passion of Jesus Christ at this time.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: From the 3<sup>rd</sup> Song of the Servant of the Lord.** *The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. I gave my back to those who struck me and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard. I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God helps me. Isaiah 50:4-7*

**From The Little Flowers of St Francis of Assisi.** St Francis and his companions responded to a calling from God to carry the cross of Christ in their hearts, to practise it in their lives, and to preach it by their words. They were truly crucified men both in their actions and in their works. Out of love for Christ they sought after shame and contempt, rather than the honours of the world, the respect and praise of men. They rejoiced to be despised, and were grieved when honoured. Thus they went about the world as pilgrims and strangers, carrying nothing with them but Christ crucified; and because they were of the true Vine, which is Christ, they produced great and good fruits in many souls they gained to God.

In the beginning of the Order St Francis sent Brother Bernard to Bologna, to accomplish many good works, according to the grace which God had given him. So Brother Bernard, in the name of holy obedience, set out but when he arrived in that city, the little children in the streets, seeing him dressed so strangely and so poorly, laughed and scoffed at him, taking him for a madman. All these trials Brother Bernard accepted for the love of Christ, with great patience and with great joy, and seeking to be despised yet more, he went to the market-place, where, having seated himself, a great number of children and men gathered round him, and taking hold of his hood pushed him here and there, some throwing stones at him and others dust. To

all this Brother Bernard submitted in silence, his countenance bearing an expression of holy joy, and for several days he returned to the same spot to receive the same insults.

Now, patience being a work of perfection and a proof of virtue, a learned doctor of the law, seeing such virtue and constancy in Brother Bernard, who had endured such contempt and such injuries without losing his temper, said within himself:

“Without doubt this man must be a great saint”; and going up to him, he asked who he was, and whence he came. Brother Bernard put his hand into his bosom, and taking out the Rule of St Francis, gave it to him to read. The doctor, having read the Rule, was struck with wonder and admiration at the sublime perfection described, and turning to his friends, he said: “Truly this is the most perfect state of Religion I have ever heard of, and this man and his companions are the holiest men I have met in all the world; guilty indeed are those who insult him; we ought, on the contrary, to honour him as a true friend of God.”

**REFLECT – SHARE – ACT – PRAY.** *How does this story speak to you?*

**30 March. Monday of Holy Week.** Bruce again introduced this reflection on a positive note. **JUDGE, reflect and share.**

**Scripture: From the First Song of the Servant of the Lord.** *“Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights. He will bring forth justice to the nations. A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench. The islands wait for his law.” Thus saith God, the Lord who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it. “I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” Is 42:1-7.*

**From The Little Flowers of St Francis of Assisi.** St Francis, one day of the Carnival, was near the Lake of Perugia, in the house of one of his devout followers, with whom he had spent the night, when he was inspired by God to go and pass the time of Lent in an island on the lake. St Francis begged his friend, for the love of God, to convey him in his boat, to an island uninhabited by man, during the night of Ash-Wednesday, so that none might know where he was. The friend, because of the great devotion to St Francis, agreed and conveyed him to the island, St Francis taking with him naught but two small loaves. When they had reached the island, his friend left him; the saint earnestly entreating him to reveal to no one where he was, and not to come and fetch him before Holy Thursday.

St Francis being left alone, and there being no dwelling in the island in which he could take shelter, entered into a thick part of the wood all overgrown with brambles and other creeping plants, and forming a kind of hut, there he began to pray and enter into contemplation of divine things. And there he passed the whole of Lent without drinking or eating save half of one of the small loaves he had taken with him, as we learned from his friend who, going to fetch him on Holy Thursday, found one of the loaves untouched and the other only half consumed. St Francis ate this half out of reverence for our Blessed Lord, who fasted forty days and forty nights without taking any material food; for by eating this bit of bread he put aside the temptation to vainglory, and yet fasted forty days and forty nights. In later times God worked many miracles on the spot where St Francis had fasted so wonderfully.

**REFLECT – SHARE – ACT – PRAY.** *How does this story speak to you?*

**31 March. April 4. Tuesday of Holy Week.** Bruce introduced the reflection for the day, possibly about the people of Israel.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: From the Second Song of the Servant of the Lord.** *The Lord said to me, “You are my servant Israel, in whom I will be glorified. But I said, “I have laboured in vain. I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity, yet surely my right is with the lord, and my recompense with my God.” Is 49:1-6.*

**From The Little Flowers of St Francis of Assisi.** St Francis spoke to Brother Masseo about himself, “Wouldst thou know why all men come after me? Know that it is because the Lord, who is in heaven, who sees the evil and the good in all places - because, I say, his holy eyes have found among men no one more wicked, more imperfect, or a greater sinner than I am; and to accomplish the wonderful work which he intends to do, he has found no creature more vile than I am on earth; for which reason he has chosen me, to confound all strength, beauty, greatness, noble birth, and all the science of the world, that men may learn that every virtue and every good gift cometh from him, and not from any creature, that none may glory before him; but if any one glory, let him glory in the Lord, to whom belongeth all glory in eternity.” Then Brother Masseo, at such a humble answer, given with so much fervour, was greatly impressed, and learned of a certain that St Francis was well grounded in humility.” St Bonaventure, St Francis’ biographer, in a sermon preached in Paris in 1255 noted the importance of the virtue of meekness in the life of St Francis of Assisi. He writes, “We ought to learn meekness, which is utterly necessary, from St Francis. He cherished meekness not only toward other people, but also toward dumb animals. Even wild animals came running to him as their friend and companion. (There is a famous story of St Francis communicating with and taming a hungry wild wolf who was threatening the people of the town of Gubbio.) Meekness is necessary to the pursuit of truth both in those learning and those who teach; it is necessary for the inward and outward practice of virtue, to make right judgements, for without it others are not corrected but destroyed. Meekness is necessary to attain eternal life. The meek person does not create favouritism towards persons, but will care for both the lesser and the greater. The meek person is simple. He should possess only what is necessary for his needs. He should be someone who comforts the afflicted. *O sublime humility, o humble sublimity! The Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God so humbles Himself that for our salvation he hides himself under an ordinary piece of bread.”*

**REFLECT – SHARE – ACT – PRAY.** *How does this reflection speak to you? Pray especially for the people Israel at this time.*

## THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY. APRIL THEME: GOD AND FAMILY

**Brief overview. God and Family.** God, as Trinity is family and every human family, not only as individuals but as a unit, is an image of God and mirrors the relationship of the Trinity. St Francis in his *Canticum of the Creatures*, praises God for all creatures, brother sun, sister moon, mother earth. The inanimate creations through their being offer their praise. Humankind is especially gifted with the additional power of understanding, to love but to hurt, to forgive, because of love. Through bearing pain, in a unique way we offer honour and gratitude to the Trinity. **Pope Francis:** *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. The Trinity has left its mark on all creation. LS 238.* **Setting the Scene.** The THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY are presented through an imaginary parish team to lead the reflections for parish families.

**1 April. Wednesday of Holy Week.** Bruce introduced the reflection for the day. The servant submits to the insults of those who do not listen.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: From the Third song of the servant of the Lord.** *The Lord has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. I turned not backwards. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard. I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God helps me. Is 50:4-9.*

**From The Little Flowers of St Francis of Assisi.** The humble servant of Christ, St Francis, having already assembled and received many brothers into the Order, was much troubled and perplexed in mind as to what he ought to do; whether to give himself entirely to prayer, or now and then to preach the Word. Through his great humility, he had no opinion of himself or of the virtue of his prayers; and, wishing to know the will of God, he sought to learn it through the prayers of others. Wherefore he called to him Brother Masseo, and thus addressed him: "Go to Sister Clare, and bid her from me to set herself with some of the holiest of her sisters to pray the Lord that he may show me clearly whether he wills that I should preach or only keep to prayer. Then go to Brother Silvester, and ask of him the same favour." Now Brother Silvester was so holy, that whatever he asked of God was granted to his prayer, and often he held converse with the Lord; so that St Francis revered him greatly. Then Brother Masseo did as St Francis had commanded him; first to St Clare, and then to Brother Silvester, who set about praying immediately. and, having received the answer from the Lord, returned to Brother Masseo, and said to him: "The Lord says, go and tell Brother Francis that he has called him to this state not to save merely his own soul but that he may produce fruits in those of others, and that through him many souls be saved." Brother Masseo returned to Sister Clare, to ask what she had learnt from God; and she told him that she and all her companions had received from God the same answer as the Lord had given to Brother Silvester. Brother Masseo hastened to St Francis to bring these answers; and St Francis received him with great charity, washing his feet, and serving him at dinner. When the repast was over, he called Brother Masseo into the forest, and, kneeling down before him, put back his hood; and crossing his arms on his breast, said to him: "What answer dost thou bring me? what does my Lord Jesus Christ order me to do?" Brother Masseo answered: "The Lord Jesus Christ has revealed to Brother Silvester and to Sister Clare, that it is his will thou shouldst go about to preach; for thou hast not been called for thyself alone, but the salvation of others."

Then St Francis, having received the answer, and knowing it to be the will of the Lord Jesus Christ, arose saying, "Let us go in the name of God." Taking with him Brother Masseo and Brother Angelo, both holy men, he let himself be guided by the Spirit of God, without considering the road he took. They soon arrived at a town called Savurniano, where St Francis began to preach and convert many to the faith, founded the Third Order, preached to the birds, and reduced to silence the swallows in the field.

**REFLECT – SHARE – ACT – PRAY** *How does this reflection speak to you?*

**2 April. Holy Thursday.** Bruce introduced the reflection with the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading from the Mass of the Last Supper which he linked with the spiritual meal shared by St Francis and St Clare.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture:** *"I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the chalice saying "This chalice is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this chalice, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." 1 Cor 11:23-26.*

**From The Little Flowers of St Francis of Assisi. How St. Clare ate with St Francis and his companions at St Mary of the Angels.** St Clare, having a great desire to eat once with him, often begged him to grant her this request; but the saint would never allow her this consolation. His companions, therefore, being aware of the refusal of St Francis, and knowing how great was the wish of Sister Clare to eat with him addressed him: "Father, it seems to us that this severity on thy part in not granting so small a thing to Sister Clare is not according to holy charity." St Francis answered: "It seems to you, then, that I ought to grant her this request?" His companions made answer: "Yea, father, it is meet that thou grant her this favour and this consolation." "But I will that the meal do take place in front of St Mary of the Angels, because, having been for so long time shut up in San Damiano, it will do her good to see the church of St Mary, wherein she took the veil, and was made a spouse of Christ. There, then, we will eat together in the name of God."

When the appointed day arrived, St Clare left her convent with great joy, taking with her one of her sisters. She arrived at St Mary of the Angels, and having devoutly saluted the Virgin Mary, before whose altar her hair had been cut off, they conducted her to the convent, and showed her all over it. In the meantime St Francis prepared the meal on the bare ground, as was his custom. The hour of dinner being arrived, St Francis and St Clare, with one of the brethren of St Francis and the sister who had accompanied the saint, sat down together, all the other companions of St Francis seated humbly round them. When the first dish was served, St Francis began to speak of God so sweetly, so sublimely, and in a manner so wonderful, that the grace of God visited them abundantly, and all were rapt in Christ.

Whilst they were thus rapt, with eyes and hearts raised to heaven, the people of Assisi and all the country round about, saw St Mary of the Angels as it were on fire. It seemed to them as if the church, the convent, and the woods were all enveloped in flames; and the inhabitants of Assisi hastened with great speed to put out the fire. On arriving at the convent, they found no fire; and entering within the gates they saw St Francis, St Clare, with all their companions, sitting round their humble meal, absorbed in contemplation; then knew then of a certainty, that what they had seen was a celestial fire, not a material one, which God miraculously had sent to bear witness to the divine flame of love which consumed the souls of those holy brethren and nuns; and they returned home with great consolation in their hearts, and much holy edification.

After a long lapse of time, St Francis, St Clare, and their companions came back to themselves; and, being fully restored by the spiritual food, cared not to eat that which had been prepared for them.

**REFLECT – SHARE – ACT – PRAY.** *How did this reflection speak to you? In what way can it be seen as a “paschal meal?”*

**3 April. Good Friday.** Bruce introduced the reflection and noted how Christ was the true fulfillment of this passage (read it in full) which also finds an echo in the experience of St Francis.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: From the Fourth Song of the Servant of the Lord.** *“Behold my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up and shall be very high. As many were astonished at him – his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrow, yet we esteemed him stricken, struck down by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions he was bruised for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that made us whole and with his stripes we are healed.” Is 52:13 – 53:12.*

**From The Little Flowers of St Francis of Assisi.** The day before the Feast of the most Holy Cross, as St Francis was praying secretly in his cell, an angel of God appeared to him, and spake to him thus from God: “I am come to admonish and encourage thee, that thou prepare thyself to receive in all patience and humility that which God will give and do to thee.” St Francis replied: “I am ready to bear patiently whatsoever my Lord shall be pleased to do to me”; and so the angel departed. On the following day - being the Feast of the Holy Cross - St Francis was praying before daybreak at the entrance of his cell, and turning his face towards the east, he prayed in these words: “O Lord Jesus Christ, two graces do I ask of thee before I die; the first, that in my lifetime I may feel, as far as possible, both in my soul and body, that pain which thou, sweet Lord, didst endure in the hour of thy most bitter Passion; the second, that I may feel in my heart as much as possible of that excess of love by which thou, O Son of God, was inflamed to suffer so cruel a Passion for us sinners.” And continuing a long time in that prayer, he understood that God had heard him, and that, so far as is possible for a mere creature, he should be permitted to feel these things.

St Francis began to contemplate most devoutly the Passion of Jesus Christ and his infinite charity; and so greatly did the fervour of devotion increase within him, that he was all transformed into Jesus by love and compassion. On that same morning he beheld a seraph descending from heaven with six fiery and resplendent wings; and this seraph drew nigh unto St Francis, so that he could plainly perceive that he bore the image of one crucified; And when St Francis beheld it, he was much afraid, and filled at once with joy and grief and wonder. He felt great joy at the gracious presence of Christ, who appeared to him thus familiarly, and looked upon him lovingly, but, beholding him thus crucified, he felt exceeding grief and compassion.

It was revealed to him that he might understand that, not by martyrdom of the body, but by a consuming fire of the soul, he was to be transformed into the express image of Christ crucified. Then did all the Mount Alvernia appear wrapped in intense fire, which illumined all the mountains and valleys around and shepherds who were watching their flocks in that country were filled with fear. Christ spoke to him certain high and secret things, “Knowest thou,” said Christ, “what I have done to thee? I have given thee the stigmata which are the insignia of my Passion, that thou mayest be my standard-bearer; and as on the day of my death I descended into limbo, and delivered all the souls whom I found there, so do I grant thee that every year on the anniversary of thy death thou mayest go to Purgatory, and take to the glory of Paradise the souls of others whom thou shalt find there, who have been especially devout to thee.”

Then that marvellous vision disappeared, leaving in the heart of St Francis an excessive fire and ardour of divine love, and on his flesh a wonderful trace and image of the Passion of Christ. For upon his hands and feet began immediately to appear the figures of the nails, as he had seen them on the Body of Christ crucified, who had appeared to him in the likeness of a seraph. And thus the hands and feet appeared pierced through the midst by the nails. In like manner, on the right side appeared the image of an unhealed wound, as if made by a lance, and still red and bleeding, from which drops of blood often flowed from the holy breast of St Francis, staining his tunic.

**REFLECT – SHARE – ACT – PRAY.** *How does this reflection speak to you?*

**4 April 8. Holy Saturday.** Bruce introduced the reflection from the Liturgy of the Word of the Easter Vigil.

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Scripture: Scripture:** *"Your maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name and the Holy One of Israel is your redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off. For a brief moment I forsook you but with great compassion I will gather you. With overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting mercy I will have compassion on you says the Lord, your Redeemer."* Is 54: 5-14

**The Little Flowers of St Francis of Assisi.** Now although these sacred wounds, which had been impressed upon him by Christ, gave great joy to his heart, yet they caused unspeakable pain to his body; so that, being constrained by necessity, he made choice of Brother Leo, for his great purity and simplicity, to whom he revealed the whole matter, suffering him to touch and dress his wounds on all days except during the time from Thursday evening till Saturday morning, for then he would not by any human remedy mitigate the pain of Christ's Passion, which he bore in his body, because at that time our Saviour Jesus Christ was taken and crucified, died and was buried for us. And it came to pass sometimes that when Brother Leo was removing the bandage from the wound in the side, St Francis, because of the pain caused thereby, would lay his hand on Brother Leo's breast, and at the touch of that holy hand Brother Leo felt such sweetness of devotion as well-nigh made him to fall fainting to the ground.

St Francis, having completed the Lent of St Michael the Archangel, prepared himself to return with Brother Leo to St Mary of the Angels. and calling to him Brother Maseo and Brother Angelo, and blessing them in the name of Jesus crucified, he suffered them, at their earnest prayer, to see, touch, and kiss his sacred hands adorned with those holy, glorious, and sacred stigmata; and so leaving them in great joy and consolation, he parted and came down from the holy mountain.

**REFLECT – SHARE – ACT – PRAY** *How does this reflection speak to you.*

**5 April. Easter Sunday. SEE.** Michelle said, "Francis was only 45 when he died and he did so much." Jackson added, "and we have heard so much about different parts of his life. His death seems to have been quite joyful. Is that not strange?"

**JUDGE, reflect and share. Canticle 9. PRAISED BE YOU, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no one living can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin. Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm. Scripture: Christ our Paschal Lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival not with the old leaven of malice and evil but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 1 Cor 5:6-8, Pope Francis: If we accept death, we can prepare ourselves for it. The way is to grow in our love for those who walk at our side, until that day when death will be no more. AL258. We direct our gaze to the end of time, when the Son will deliver all things to the Father so that God may be everything to everyone. Thus the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated are now imbued with his radiant presence. LS 100**

**From Care for Creation. (p81)** "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 a great treasure securing his entry into God's kingdom. After that he felt so close to God that he said he wanted to sing. That is when he composed the major portion of the *Canticle of the Creatures*.

"The tribute to death calling it sister was composed shortly before his own bodily death in 1226. He speaks about a first and second death. What does this mean? All of Francis' life was a "death" because it involved a continual letting go for the sake of the other, a constant, "dying to self" so that Christ might live in him. The first death is a death to the self-centred ego which wants to exert itself through power and control over others. This self must die to open oneself to the true self, a web of life, and the family of creation, with the death of the body, the second death. What we see in the life of Jesus and the song of Francis is that God does not create for death, annihilation or frustration but rather to perfect his creatures into the full body of Christ. *Care for Creation* (P90-91).

In **St Francis UNCENSORED** Noonan heads this chapter "The Jovial Death of Francis." As mentioned above Francis was ready and close to God. He made his final preparations, his own personal liturgy, and asked the brothers to join him in singing his *Canticle*. He blessed and granted forgiveness to them and in a Last Supper-like gesture shared bread with those present. He wanted to be laid naked on the earth and sprinkled with ashes, a final salute and acknowledgement of Christ, naked and crucified on the hill of Calvary. He died, singing the final verse of his *Canticle of the Creatures*, knowing death would do him no harm.

From *The Care of Creation*. "The death of Jesus was not the annihilation of creation but its radical transformation through the power of God's life-giving Spirit. Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of the transformation of the world and this includes the world of nature. This is the ultimate message of the Incarnation. God created, was present and continues to be present in his love, throughout the life of Jesus, his resurrection and the final transformation of all creation, as foretold in the gospels and the book of Revelation. The human spirit surrenders its limited bodily structure and becomes open toward the universe and in some way a true brother and sister to the elements of the universe. Relationship is the key to the beauty of the universe. Since all reality is good, then my relationship with others, human and non-human ought to promote goodness."

**REFLECT – SHARE – ACT – PRAY.** *How does this reflection speak to you?*

**6 April. Easter Monday, Family Day. SEE.** Mrs Adams shared, "These last few years with a much greater focus on sickness, war, life and death, has probably made us more aware of our vulnerability and the possibility of death. Fear and anxiety have been common experiences. "I know that we did not have a Covid-19 death in our immediate family, but the reality and possibility of death due to a whole variety of reasons has certainly become part of life. I think that is ultimately a good thing. What do others think?"

**JUDGE, reflect and share. St Francis.** The book *Care for Creation – a Franciscan spirituality* continues to reflect on death and eternal life. "Francis' praise of death is a return of love for love. In his own way he tells us that the world is not blindly hurtling into extinction but is moved by Christ to Christ that God may be all in all. What happened in the death of Jesus anticipated the future of humanity and the cosmos itself. The death of Jesus was not the annihilation of creation but its radical transformation through the power of God's life-giving Spirit. Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of the transformation of the world and this includes the world of nature." This is the ultimate message of the Incarnation."

God, as Trinity is family and every human family, not only as individuals but as a unit, is an image of God and mirrors the relationship of the Trinity. Remembering that OUR WORLD IS A FAMILY OF FAMILIES every family, animal and plant too, mirrors God in their own unique way. St Francis praises God in these words: *WE PRAISE YOU LORD FOR ALL YOUR CREATURES, for 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.*" And the last canticle: *Canticle 10. PRAISE AND BLESS MY LORD, and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility.*

The inanimate elements of creation through their being offer their praise. Humankind is especially gifted with the additional power of understanding, to love but to hurt, to forgive, because of love. Through bearing pain, in a unique way we offer honour and gratitude to the Trinity. How has the image of the Trinity been disfigured as fire, water and wind have now become such destructive forces? How have we contributed to this? Are we ready to do our part, repair the damage and continue, as St Francis was called to do, to rebuild God's Church?

At the same time may we join St Francis, Pope Francis and Pope Leo in a celebration of praise, thanksgiving, peace and joy remembering that each of our families is a mirror of God's love in our own unique and special way.

TR MARFAM LENT AND EASTER. YEAR OF ST FRANCIS 2026.