



2026 OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES MARFAM THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY – APRIL + Holy Week.



THEME: GOD AND FAMILY .

THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY are downloadable from www.marfam.org.za, request info@marfam.org.za for email, posted on facebook and whatsapp. **Abbreviations:** Pope Francis: LS = Laudato Si. AL = Amoris Laetitia. FT = Fratelli Tutti. DN= Dilexit Nos. EG= Evangelii Gaudium. Pope Leo: DT= Dilexi Te. MP = Message for Day of Peace 1 January.

YEAR OF ST FRANCIS. In honour of the 800th 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 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

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

Brief overview April. God and Family. The Joy of Love is God's plan for all his creation. God, as Trinity is a family and every human family, not only as separate individuals but as a unit, is an image of God to mirror the love relationship of the Trinity. St Francis in his *Canticle of the Creatures*, praises God for all creatures, brother sun, sister moon, mother earth. These inanimate creations through their being offer their praise. Humankind is especially gifted with the additional power of understanding, to love, but also to hurt and to forgive because of love. Through bearing pain, in a unique way we offer honour and gratitude to the Trinity. **Pope Francis:** *The Joy of Love, experienced by families is also the joy of the Church. AL 1 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.*

A DAILY FAMILY PRAYER

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, blessed Trinity, you have shown us how to love to be God's Family.
We're sorry for the things we've done to cause another pain, make us willing to forgive and so be whole again.
Bless our family today, keep us in your care, old and young or sick or healthy, those no longer there.
Help us care for all the earth and all the things God made
His people, animals and plants, for them all Jesus paid.
We thank and praise you. God on high and and ask your blessings too
so we can love, and care and share and make God's dream come true. Amen

SETTING THE SCENE with SEE-JUDGE-ACT. The Thoughts for the Day are designed for an imaginary parish team to lead the reflections for parish families who can pray the Daily Family Prayer. The April focus is on God's place in all families, whether we are conscious of his presence or not. The Thoughts from Holy Week until Divine Mercy Sunday follow the scripture readings of the time. For the rest of April the Acts of the Apostles tell the history of the early Church to use as a route map for reflection and sharing. Mr Post told his children, "we already know a lot, mainly from the gospels, but we can build up a bigger picture too. The post-Resurrection stories in the 4 gospels have different endings. Matthew's gospel, used more often in 2026, has ended with the Ascension and the history continues in the Acts of the Apostles which is a continuation of the gospel of Luke.

These days, because of the conflicts and wars in the Middle East we hear names in the news of places where Christianity began like Jerusalem, Damascus, Syria, Lebanon, Antioch. Israel exists now as a country and many Jews do live there along with Palestinians who have lived there for centuries. Sadly, because much of the region has converted to Islam Christians have been decreasing in number. Since the time of **St Francis** the Franciscan order are the custodians of the holy sites in the Holy Land since the time when during the 5th crusade St Francis in 1221 visited Damietta in Egypt, met with the Muslim sultan and reportedly obtained permission for his Franciscan brothers to be present there. Fr David Neuhaus, a South-African born Jesuit priest, living in Israel has written much about the history of the area. Google his name to find out more. Pope Leo constantly addresses the need to pray and act for peace, "unarmed and disarming." Pray his prayer for the Year of St Francis.

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. Download these from www.marfam.org.za The Holy Week until Easter Monday Thoughts are published separately as part of the booklet *LOVE IS HIS LAW, LOVE IS HIS WAY. Eco-friendly family reflections for Lent and Easter 2026*

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 3rd 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. SEE. Bruce again introduced this reflection on a positive note, focusing on the example of St Francis and his passionate love and dedication to Jesus.

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. Tuesday of Holy Week. SEE. Bruce introduced the reflection for the day, which is possibly speaking about the people of Israel and a call for meekness and humility too.

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.*

1 April. Wednesday of Holy Week. Bruce introduced the reflection for the day. The servant humbly 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 about family life?*

2 April. Holy Thursday. SEE. Bruce introduced the reflection with the 2nd 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. SEE. 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 mayst 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. SEE. Bruce introduced the reflection from the Liturgy of the Word of the Easter Vigil.

JUDGE, reflect and share. 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 now 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. Cantic 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. "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 *Cantic of the Creatures*. (p81)

"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 our joys but also through bearing pain, in a unique way we can offer honour and gratitude to the Trinity. We need to ask ourselves "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, in our families and beyond to repair the damage and continue, as St Francis was called to do, to rebuild God's Church?

On this Family Day in SA 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. Praying the DAILY FAMILY PRAYER is one way to start.

A DAILY FAMILY PRAYER

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, blessed Trinity, you have shown us how to love to be God's Family.
We're sorry for the things we've done to cause another pain, make us willing to forgive and so be whole again.
Bless our family today, keep us in your care, old and young or sick or healthy, those no longer there.
Help us care for all the earth and all the things God made
His people, animals and plants, for them all Jesus paid.
We thank and praise you. God on high and and ask your blessings too
so we can love, and care and share and make God's dream come true. Amen

SETTING THE SCENE FOR THE WEEKS AFTER EASTER with SEE-JUDGE-ACT. The THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY until Divine Mercy Sunday follow the scripture readings of the time. For the rest of April families can use the Acts of the Apostles and the history of the early Church as a route map for their reflection and sharing. Mr Post told his children, "we already know a lot, mainly

from the gospels, but we can build up a bigger picture too. The post-Resurrection stories in the 4 gospels have different endings. Matthew's gospel, used more often in 2026, has ended with the Ascension and so the history continues in the Acts of the Apostles which is a continuation of the gospel of Luke.

April 7. Tuesday of Easter week. SEE. Young Magdalene liked the story how on Easter morning, while her name sake was weeping over the fact that Jesus' body had disappeared, she saw a strange man in the garden. She shared, "Once when I was quite little Mom told me that Jesus was everywhere and I must look around to see him. I didn't know what he looked like. It seems that Mary Magdalene also didn't recognise him. That made me wonder, how different does he look to different people and at different times. Would he be very attractive or at some other times disfigured from the beatings he had received?"

JUDGE. Scripture: *Supposing him to be the gardener Mary Magdalene said to him, "Sir if you have carried him away tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary". She turned and said to him, "Rabboni, Teacher." John 20:11-18. Pope Francis.* *Christ's flesh becomes visible in the flesh of the tortured, the crushed, the scourged, the malnourished and the exiled, to be acknowledged, touched and cared for by us. FM 5. Pope Leo:* *In a church that recognises in the poor the face of Christ and in material goods the instrument of charity St Augustine's thoughts remain a sure light. The poor are not just people to be helped, but the sacramental presence of the Lord. DT 48 &44. Reflect, share, pray, act.* Share on your favourite images of Jesus?

April 8, Wednesday of Easter week. SEE. "Hey, that's my story," Peter said. "Did you tell us all the same stories when we were little or maybe sometimes changed them a bit. Why did those two disciples that were walking to Emmaus not recognise him or why didn't they have names? Were they not important? I like to think that Jesus is there for me, even if I am not as important as Pope Leo or the bishop. Is that being "unhumble?" John said, "What I like is that there were a pair of them, together, maybe even a husband and wife, maybe with their kids and that Jesus took his time to walk and talk with them. Walk and talk, that is nice don't you think? We should do that too, all together."

JUDGE. Scripture: *Beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Luke 24:13-35. Pope Francis.* *We can be fully present to others only by giving fully of ourselves. Jesus is our model in this. AL323. In talking with his disciples Jesus would invite them to recognize the paternal relationship God has with all his creatures. With moving tenderness he would remind them that each one of them is important in God's eyes, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God." LS 96. Pope Leo:* *St Francis' poverty was relational. It led him to become a neighbour, equal to, or lesser than others. He did not found a social service organisation but an evangelical fraternity, His mission was to be with them. DT 63 Reflect, share, pray, act.* Consider doing an Emmaus walk with family or someone special.

April 9. Thursday of Easter week. SEE. Bryan seeing himself as a budding forensic pathologist wondered, "I am fascinated by Jesus and his resurrected body. How could he not be a spirit but appear and disappear at will? It must really have been very hard for the disciples to believe. Touching something does make it far more real, like sometimes when I feel I want to be loved. I suppose once you have crossed that barrier you can also take seriously what Jesus said."

JUDGE. Scripture: *Jesus said to them, "Why are you troubled? See my hands and my feet that it is I myself. Touch me and see, for a spirit has no flesh and bones as I have. Luke 24:35-48. Pope Francis.* *Against a backdrop of love so central to the Christian experience of marriage and the family the virtue of tenderness stands out. In biblical texts we see a delicate and tender intimacy between mother and child, a babe sleeping in his mother's arms after being nursed. AL 28. Pope Leo:* *The Christian tradition of visiting the sick, washing their wounds, and comforting the afflicted is not simply a philanthropic endeavour, but an ecclesial action which which the members of the Church touch the suffering flesh of Christ. DT 48. Reflect, share, pray, act*

April 10. Friday of Easter week. SEE. Mom who loved picnics shared some thoughts. "It must have been a very strange breakfast picnic there on the shore of the sea of Tiberias. The disciples first were being skeptical about going out again in their boat after having caught nothing all night. Even at the end when they came with their 153 fish and Jesus was cooking breakfast for them they seemed uncertain. I wonder who said what in the end. I also sometimes don't know what to say to Jesus. Does anyone else feel like that? Maybe this synodality that is talked about these days will help us." "Synodality means journeying together as the People of God. It indicates a way of listening to each individual person, speaking openly as a member of the Church, to understand how God might be speaking to all of us. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, calling us and leading us to "communion, participation, mission."

JUDGE. Scripture: *They went out in the boat but that night they caught nothing. As day was breaking Jesus stood on the beach, yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. He said to them, cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some fish." So they cast it and now they were not able to haul it in. John 21:1-14. Pope Francis.* *St Francis helps us to see than an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. Just as happens when we fall in love with some, whenever he would gaze at the sun,*

the moon or the smallest of animals he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise, just as if they were endowed with reason. LS 11. **Pope Leo:** At times Christian movements or groups have arisen which show little or no interest in the common good of society and in particular the protection and advancement of its most vulnerable and disadvantaged members. We must never forget that religion cannot be limited to the private sphere. DT 111. **Reflect, share, pray, act.** Get involved in the journey of synodality in your own area.

April 11. Saturday of Easter Week. SEE. The two brothers were having an argument. Percy shouted, "How often have I told you, shown you, nagged you and how often are you so thick you just don't understand, or choose to understand." They hadn't really started their faith sharing yet and of course Percy would not have talked to his younger brother like that if they had. Aunt Norah was clever to use the opportunity to say that Jesus must also have felt frustrated and irritated at times with the "thickness" of the disciples. "Do we really always try hard enough to listen and understand what we are being told and especially what we need to know," she added.

JUDGE. Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalen and then to two others but the Eleven did not believe. Afterwards he appeared to the Eleven themselves as they sat at table and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. Mark 16:9-15 **Pope Francis.** When a family is welcoming and reaches out to others, especially the poor and the neglected, it is a symbol, witness and participant in the Church's motherhood. Social love is a reflection of the Trinity. The family lives its spirituality precisely by being at one and the same time a domestic church and a vital cell for transforming the world. AL 324. **Pope Leo:** Religion cannot be limited to the private sphere as if believers had no business making their voice heard with regard to problems affecting civil society and issues of concern to its members DT 111, **Reflect, share and act, pray.**

April 12. Easter 2A. Divine Mercy Sunday. SEE. Fr Joseph had been a keen supporter of the Divine Mercy devotion and he loved having an opportunity on this Sunday to share with the congregation. He held up the well-known Mercy picture and told the people. "St Faustina had received many visions of Jesus. He revealed to her a particular message of the mercy of God. He gave St Faustina three ways of showing mercy towards our neighbour: by deed, word and by prayer. Mercy towards others is proof of our love for Jesus and glorifies him. Can you see this important connection?" he asked. "Talk about this at home and discuss examples even small ones of how you have been able to show mercy." Patricia thought about what she wanted to share. "Flora, our domestic worker, is just like part of our family. The other day I saw she wasn't feeling well when she doing the ironing, so I offered to help her. She was so happy. But I didn't tell mom, I thought she might be cross."

JUDGE.. Scripture: "Put your finger here and see my hands and put your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless but believe." Thomas answered, "My Lord and my God." John 20:19-31. All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. Day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes they partook of food with glad and generous hearts. From Acts 4:42-47. **Pope Francis:** The Church is called above all to be a credible witness to mercy, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ. FM 25. **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. The parable of the Last Judgement invites us all to act with mercy in this awareness. PM 1 Jan. **Reflect, share and act, pray.** Consider the implications of mercy together with peace. Pray the Divine Mercy chaplet.

April 13. SEE. Evelyn posed a question that was bothering her. "Do we still believe in miracles today, or do we depend on our own powers, knowledge and expertise? Look at the reality of COVID-19, that raged for more than two years all over the world. Medical science had a field-day working tirelessly to develop vaccines, even in competition with one another, because it is a lucrative business. There has been very good work but also fraud, theft and misinformation. When it comes to prayer, trust and dependence on God's intervention how much was there? I often think we've become too independent of God." Others added, "God does work through the scientists, and the hands of those medical staff and carers, who sacrificed much for their patients.." "When people are infected and very sick, many prayers for healing are offered and when there is suffering and death people do turn to God and pray for consolation." "I'm still not convinced that we recognized God sufficiently."

JUDGE. Scripture The disciples prayed, "Now Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." When they had prayed, the place was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. Acts 4:23-31. **Pope Francis:** The weakening of faith and religious practice in some societies has had an effect on families, leaving them more isolated amid their difficulties. One symptom of the great poverty of contemporary culture is loneliness arising from the absence of God in a person's life and the fragility of relationships. AL43. **Pope Leo:** Our love and our deepest convictions need to be continually cultivated and we do so through our concrete actions. Remaining in the realm of ideas and theories will eventually causes even our most cherished hopes and aspirations to weaken and fade away. DT 118. **Reflect, share, pray and act.** How have we grown in our faith through this recent Lent and Easter time?

April 14. SEE. Jason had a turn to lead the sharing. “Be honest everyone, “he said “are you all prepared to not only share your things within our family but for us to sell what we have and be prepared to share with everyone in the whole world. Isn't that pretty excessive? I think it is.” It was a very big challenge for all of them to consider. “I don't think that even Pope Leo would expect us to go that far, but I know and believe that there are still people like the missionaries and other religious who have given up all their possessions.” “But they don't have kids to send to school.” So they threw the idea around. “It is being of one heart and soul that means feeling for one another that is important and not letting other people go hungry. Then, what about the beggars on the street corners?” “That would be a start for us at least,” was the conclusion. “Let's also look at a current reality. There are horrific wars going on right now, in Ukraine, the Middle East and parts of Africa. Millions of people are dispossessed and becoming refugees has highlighted the horrors of war but also how incredibly hospitable and generous people can be when a serious need arises. Natural disasters, earthquakes and cyclones call on us too to be hospitable and generous.”

JUDGE. Scripture *The company of those who believed were of one heart and soul and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. There was not any one needy among them. Acts 4:32 - 37.*
Pope Francis. *Led by the spirit the family circle is not only open to life by generating it within itself, but also by going forth and spreading life by caring for others and seeking their happiness. Some find particular expression in hospitality. AL 324.*
Pope Leo: *Christians must not abandon almsgiving. Whatever form it takes it will touch and soften our hardened hearts DT 118*
Reflect, share and act. *Consider becoming an eco-friendly families, taking care of the earth and the poor.*

April 15. SEE. Gloria continued the sharing from the day before. “You can see that not everyone thought like those followers, willing to give up everything. What intrigues me is that the Jewish leaders were jealous that those people were so committed to their beliefs and to each other that they were prepared to give up what they owned. I wonder if the leaders had a guilty conscience because they were not living the way they should. I can learn something from that too. I must admit, that in a strange way, I do feel resentful or even jealous sometimes when I see really good committed people.”

JUDGE. Scripture: *Filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in prison. At night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, 'Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.'* Acts 5:17-19. **Pope Francis.** *The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us, he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the earth as the home which we share. LS13.* **Pope Leo:** *A Church that sets no limits to love, that knows no enemies to fight, but only men and women to love is the Church that the world needs today. DT 119* **Reflect, share and act, pray.** How do we feel about how active our family is in this regard?

April 16. SEE. Sandra was a nurse working in a public hospital. She shared a real concern. “I wonder what would happen if I refused to do some procedures that are against my religion, like performing an abortion. If I say, 'I must obey God rather than men,' will I lose my job? I know some nurses who did get fired and then it's not easy to get another post. Plus abortion is a big worry with one's own children.” Mrs Adams added, “It is a real dilemma in quite a few professions, I know. Somehow we need to pray for courage to obey our conscience, because after all we're answerable to God. You can discuss it with Father if you want to, or with another priest. I can relate to what Pope Francis had to say.”

JUDGE. Scripture. *Peter and the apostles said to the council. “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him. We are witnesses of these things. From Acts 5:27-33.* **Pope Francis:** *We find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful who often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences not to replace them. AL 37.* **Pope Leo:** *Our prosperity can make us blind to the needs of others, and even make us think that our happiness and fulfilment depend on ourselves alone. DT 107* **Reflect, share and act, pray.** *Consider issues around conscience together.*

April 17. SEE. “You know what happened in our prayer group?” Ma Jozie asked when she got home. “These two women started arguing about whether a divorced and remarried woman should be allowed to go to communion It really got quite vicious as if both of them really thought they were right. Mr Percival said this was one of the questions the Church considered at length in the Synods of the Family. Strictly speaking according to the rules it is not allowed, but Pope Francis and others have said that the Church should also practise mercy.”

JUDGE. Scripture. *Gamaliel a teacher of the law said, “in the present case I tell you let these men alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men it will fail; but if it is of God you will not be able to overthrow them. From Acts 5:34-42.* **Pope Francis.** *“I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion. But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who*

while clearly expressing her objective teaching always does what good she can even if in the process her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street. AL 308. **Pope Leo:** Our era is marked by rapid changes which make it necessary, even more than ten years ago, to give particular pastoral attention to families, to whom the Lord entrusts the task of participating in the Church's mission of proclaiming and witnessing to the Gospel. [6] I have decided to convene the presidents of the Episcopal Conferences from around the world in October 2026, in an effort to proceed, in mutual listening, to a synodal discernment on the steps to be taken in order to proclaim the Gospel to families today. *Amoris Laetitia* 10th anniversary. **Reflect, share and act, pray.** Pray for openness to the pastoral needs of families.

April 18. SEE. After listening to the reading of the day the women of the sodality looked a little perplexed. Mrs Ndlovu said, "Yes, I believe that each person should have a designated role to play in working in the community, but why does it speak of men to serve at table? Isn't that women's work?" "Never mind whose work, the important thing for us is to teach our children to do their chores as something to be valued for the common good." "I have a problem with making the teaching and preaching a "higher" activity than serving one another. Is love and service not our first goal? And aren't the church leaders meant to be servants of the servants? Isn't all this what this new Synodality Synod is talking about?"

JUDGE. Scripture. It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. Acts 6: 1-7. **Pope Francis.** The triune God is a communion of love and the family is its living reflection. Saint John Paul II shed light on this when he said, "our God in his deepest mystery is not solitude, but a family, for he has within himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is love. AL 11. **Pope Leo:** Saint Basil the Great in his Rule saw no contradiction between monks' life of prayer ad contemplation and their work on behalf of the poor. Hospitality and care for the needy were an integral part of monastic spirituality even after having left everything. DT52. **Reflect, share and act, pray.** Consider the priorities in your family.

April 19. Easter 3A. SEE. Fr Fidelis started by saying, "The Emmaus story must be a favourite for many people and there are so many little nuances. There was Jesus walking with the two persons, were they men or maybe even a couple, their not recognising him at first and their excitement when they did, his remaining to share a meal with them and being their teacher. I suggest that maybe in your own families when you read this story you could share what it is that each of you found most meaningful. For me personally it is Jesus himself being their teacher. He must have been an amazing teacher and family catechesis invites us all to work at this, in, by and for the family."

JUDGE. Scripture. While the two were talking Jesus himself drew near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. They said, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures. Luke 24:13-35. **Pope Francis.** Parents have a serious responsibility for this work of education as the Biblical sages often remind us. Children for their part are called to accept and practise the commandment "Honour your father and your mother." AL 17. The Church offers herself as a family among families open to bearing witness in today's work, open to faith, hope and love for the Lord and for those whom he loves with a preferential love, to build bridges, break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation. FT 276. **Pope Leo:** Pope Francis recalled that education has always been one of the highest expressions of Christian charity. Yours is a mission full of obstacles as well as joy. A mission of love because you cannot teach without loving. DT 87 **Reflect, share and act, pray.** How is our own family catechesis? Is God a real part of our family life?

April 20. SEE. "Why are we in our day not like those early Christians, so full of fire?" Brent had often thought about this. "I see other churches talking about miracles and wonders but we Catholics are quite skeptical about that and are more inclined to say prayers than share enthusiastically. Do miracles really happen or can they?" They decided to consult with the prayer group in their parish and were told, "Yes, miracles are still supposed to be a sign of God's care and presence, but our faith and understanding may not be strong enough. Instead of arguing and disputing should we not be praying to the Holy Spirit for an increase in faith, love and commitment to God's way and how we live our relationships?" "That is what synodality is all about, isn't it?"

JUDGE. Scripture. In those days, Stephen full of grace and power did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some arose and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. From Acts 6:8-15. **Pope Francis.** Keeping our missionary fervour alive calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit. There is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills. EG 280. **Pope Leo:** Peace is a breath of the eternal: while to evil we cry out "Enough" to peace we whisper "Forever." Peacemakers continue to resist the spread of darkness, standing as sentinels in the night. PM 1 Jan **Reflect, share and act, pray.**

April 21. SEE. Ernest said, "You know, that scripture story about Stephen from yesterday and today is a big challenge. He did great wonders because of his faith and also verbally really attacked the leaders because of their lack of faith and acceptance of

Jesus and the Holy Spirit. So should we be doing?" His brother replied, "I don't want to get killed but I do wish I had more courage. It's frightening what some of the terrorist groups, ISIS or Boko Haram people, are doing nowadays, taking hostages and killing people, not even because they are stating their Christian belief, but just because they are other than they are themselves, Christians, or Jews it doesn't seem to matter. Religious bigotry and violence hasn't ended has it?"

JUDGE. Scripture Stephen said, "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did." When they heard this they were enraged. Stephen full of the Holy Spirit said, "Behold I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." They cast him out of the city for blasphemy and stoned him. From Acts 7:51-8:1a. **Pope Francis.** If the music of the Gospel ceases to resonate in our very being, we will lose the joy born of compassion, the tender love born of trust, the capacity for reconciliation that has its source in our knowledge that we have been forgiven and sent forth. If the music of the Gospel ceases to sound in our homes, our public squares, our workplaces, our political and financial life, then we will no longer hear the strains that challenge us to defend the dignity of every man and woman. FT277. **Pope Leo:** Those who truly love peace, also love the enemies of peace." St Augustine advised not to burn bridges or persist in reproach but to prefer listening and where possible engaging in discussions with others. PM 1 Jan **Reflect, share and act, pray.** Have we experienced or showed bigotry?

April 22. SEE. Jocelyn was studying Church history and their assignment was to study persecution from the early days until today. "More stories of death and persecution. Saul who had been a so-called righteous Jew, was in the forefront of the persecution before his conversion when he became known as apostle Paul. How much harm has been done in the world and the Church too because of religious narrowness. I'm learning a lot. It's interesting that nowadays Pope Leo preaches peace and diplomacy constantly without actually judging persons." she said to the family. Prince added, "St Francis had the same attitude of tolerance, unity and peace."

JUDGE. Scripture Devout men buried Stephen. But Saul laid waste the Church and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. From Acts 8:1b – 8. **Pope Francis:** It pains me greatly to discover how some Christian communities can tolerate different forms of enmity, division, calumny, defamation, vendetta, jealousy and the desire to impose certain ideas at all costs even to persecutions which appear as veritable witch hunts. Whom are we going to evangelise if this is the way we act? EG 100 When in the name of an ideology there is an attempt to remove God from a society that society ends up adoring idols and very soon men and women lose their way, their dignity is trampled and their rights violated. You know well how much suffering is caused by the denial of freedom of conscience and of religious freedom and how that wound leaves a humanity which is impoverished because it lacks hope and ideals to guide it. FT274. **Pope Leo:** Christ our peace who has conquered death and broken down the walls of division that separate humanity continues to shine through the perseverance of many witnesses. PM 1 Jan. **Reflect, share and act, pray.** Discuss the popes of our time and offer special prayers for Pope Leo.

April 23. SEE. "How many women go to Bible Study sessions and how many men or young people?" Before they started their session the group considered this question. "Doesn't everyone need some sort of guidance to understand scripture or do we just like to read and share a thought or two without really grappling with the context and deeper meaning?" "We could use a study guide and see what that does?" "But then will it become too much of an intellectual exercise?" Who is the saint that said, "Balance in all things!" "Was it St Ignatius or St Thomas Aquinas?"

JUDGE. Scripture: Phillip ran up to the eunuch in the chariot and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "do you understand what you are reading?" "How can I, unless someone guides me." From Acts 8:26-40. **Pope Francis:** The same Spirit who inspired the Gospels and who acts in the Church also inspires the preacher to hear the faith of God's people and to find the right way to preach at each Eucharist. Just as all of us like to be spoken to in our mother tongue, so too in the faith we like to be spoken to in our "mother culture" our native language. EG 139. **Pope Leo:** John XXIII was the first pope to advocate integral disarmament which can only be achieved through renewal of the heart and mind. It much reach peoples' very souls. It is impossible to stop the arms race or to reduce armaments unless there is cooperate in banishing fear and expectations of war. PM 1 Jan. **Reflect, share and act, pray.** Discuss the relevance of preachers in our time. Do some of the charismatic Protestant prophets attract more followers than Catholic priests?

April 24. SEE. Conversion experiences was one of Marie's favourite topics and she had written a whole little booklet about them. Some were life-changing ones, like Saul's others were more like a process of change. Some men and women feel called to join a religious congregation. Turning away from an addiction to drugs, alcohol or gambling can be a conversion too. "Many of us have small conversion experiences, possibly during a special church season or a personal event. The call to conversion is a constant companion in life, in marriage relationships as well as families. That's what I have discovered," Marie shared.

JUDGE. Scripture: Saul journeyed to Damascus and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Acts 9:1-20. **Pope Francis:** In some marriage cases one of the spouses is not baptised or does not want to practice the faith. This can make the other's desire to live and grow in the Christian life difficult. Still some common values can be found and these can be shared and relished. AL 228. Believers themselves must constantly feel

*challenged to live in a way consonant with their faith and not to contradict it by their actions. They need to be ever open to God's grace and draw constantly from their deepest convictions about love, justice and peace. LS200. **Reflect, share and act, pray.***

April 25. SEE. Death in the family is a reality for everyone. It is always sad when older persons pass on, but when a parent of a younger family is taken ill and dies it is more traumatic. The death of a child, especially through suicide, can be particularly traumatic. Zola, a psychologist and one of the parish family leaders listened to the group sharing of their experiences. Later she offered her professional experience to those dealing with some of the difficult losses. "We can't expect miracles, like bringing someone back to life, to happen today. We so often wish they did, isn't that so?" she asked. "Dealing with death is a painful and difficult process which takes its own time to process the stages of grieving. It needs loving support along the way."

JUDGE. Scripture: *Peter put all the widows outside and knelt down and prayed: then turning to Dorcas' body he said, "Tabitha rise." And she opened her eyes and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and lifted her up. Acts 9: 42*
Pope Francis: *At times family life is challenged by the death of a loved one. We cannot fail to offer the light of faith as a support. To turn our back on a grieving family would show a lack of mercy and mean the loss of a pastoral opportunity and effort at evangelisation. AL 253. Pope Leo, particularly during the current and recent wars involving Israel and the US has constantly expressed his dismay and sadness over the unnecessary deaths and the brutalising effects on families and called on prayers for peace.. **Reflect, share and act, pray.** Ask ourselves, "Are there any widowed or bereaved people that need our support, especially some affected by violence?"*

April 26. 4th Sunday of Easter. Good Shepherd and Vocations Sunday. SEE. Fr Fidelis asked families to share. "I wonder if other mothers or fathers feel like I do about this business with the sheep. I really do love Pope Francis but can't easily relate to his saying that we should smell like the sheep. That's not a decent thing for me, and I rather hope not totally necessary for my vocation, or yours! But what he really means of course is that we should imitate Jesus, the shepherd, and be close to one another, intimate and part of one another's lives, especially within families. Is that what a good life means to you, one of abundance?" Mrs du Plooy shared, "For me, life in abundance is a nice home, job, enough money at least not to be constantly stressed about it. Is that unreasonable?" Others commented, "It is also about good relationships, feelings of satisfaction and belonging and spiritual fulfillment and gratitude too." "Parents thought about "life in abundance" for the future of their children. Let's ask them how they see it." Jack asked, "Does abundance not apply to all aspects of nature too, for our sakes, but for all God's creatures abundance is God's plan and something for which we are even responsible."

JUDGE. Scripture: *I am the door for the sheep; if anyone enters by me he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. John 10: 9-10. **Pope Francis:** it is a profound spiritual experience to contemplate our loved ones with the eyes of God and to see Christ in them. This demands a freedom and an openness which enable us to appreciate their dignity. AL323. **Pope Leo:** The Good Shepherd who gives his life for the flock and has other sheep not of this fold is Christ our peace who has conquered earth and broken down the walls of division that separate humanity. His presence, his gift and his victory continue to shine through the perseverance of many witnesses becoming more visible and radiant in the darkness of our times. PM Jan 1. **Reflect, share and act, pray.** Have a family celebration in thanksgiving for the abundance in our midst.*

April 27. Freedom Day SA. SEE. The speaker began, "What does freedom mean to you as an individual and a member of a family and community? It can even mean different things in these different contexts. On this holiday celebrating and commemorating the day in 1994 when the first fully democratic election was held in South Africa we do celebrate freedom and commemorate the new constitution. Freedom is precious. It was and always is hard-bought and should be greatly appreciated. But it is not for free. It was bought at a price and still costs for many people. We, as families, can consider the cost of freedom and it is necessary and important to discuss the history of the day with those too young to remember the past."
Reflect, share and act, pray. The packed hall applauded his speech. Would they go and do what he asked and even more, to bring about peace built on freedom and unity in diversity in our troubled times across the world?

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

A PRAYER FOR SOUTH AFRICA based on the Peace Prayer of St Francis.

O God of justice and love bless us the people of Southern Africa and help us to live in your peace.
Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, Where there is hatred let me sow love;
where there is injury let me sow pardon, where there is discord let me sow harmony.
Divine master grant that I may not so much seek to be understood as to understand,

To be loved as to love, to receive sympathy as to give it.
For it is in giving that we receive, in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in forgetting ourselves that we shall find unending peace with others. Amen
Your servants in Christ, The Bishops of Southern Africa

Pope Francis: *There is a general feeling of powerlessness in the face of sociocultural realities that often times end up crushing families. Families often feel abandoned due to a lack of interest and attention on the part of institutions. AL 43. What is most needed today: God's saving love which precedes any moral and religious obligation on our part; it should not impose the truth but appeal to freedom and be marked by joy, encouragement and balance. EG 165. St Francis saw the world not as a problem to be solved, but as a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise. LS 12. Pope Leo: Love is above all a way of looking at life and a way of living it. DT 119*

April 28. SEE. Fr Fidelis gave everyone the question to share, "What does it really mean to be called a Christian? Is it because one is a regular churchgoer, a committed follower of Jesus, studying his way, encountering him? It seems that, like in the book of Revelations in the early days, now too people may be lukewarm and not burning with passion. Is that a sign of the times today? But then how come people are passionate about soccer players or singers and actors? How can we tease out what it is that makes for a really passionate Christian?" The application of faith to life, the role of laity, women, youth and the elderly too was a good discussions topic for an adult family, but even the youth in confirmation classes had some contributions to make.

JUDGE. Scripture: *Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul and when he had found him he brought him to Antioch. They met with the Church and taught a large company of people. And in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians. From Acts 11:19-26. Pope Francis. Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour! EG 109. Pope Leo in Lebanon, December 2025 before renewed attacks by Israel in March 2026. "Despite the difficult situations many people face in their daily lives, Christians must always cultivate an attitude of praise and gratitude, for faith and family."*
Reflect, share and act, pray, *For the families everywhere that are broken and wounded by war.*

April 29. SEE. Groups were considering, "Nowadays there are thousands of Christian churches or denominations. Each one may claim to have their right answer and be the true followers of Jesus. Some use the bible as the ultimate literal truth, but even in the Bible there are passages that contradict on another as the writers come from a different age or context. Catholics base their religion on Scripture and Tradition and claim the right to interpret the scriptures. This can be a contentious issue in families, especially where there are more religions. The ideal is to be tolerant and open in sharing our beliefs and reflections, However Jesus himself could be contentious too as when speaking to the scribes and pharisees."

JUDGE. Scripture. *The Holy Spirit said, "set apart for me Barnabas and Sa8ul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. When they got to Salamis they preached in the Jewish synagogue. Acts 12:24-13, . Pope Francis. Develop the habit of giving real importance to the other person. This means appreciating them and recognising their right to exist, to think as they do and to be happy. Never downplay what they say or think, even if you need to express your own point of view as well. AL 138. Pope Leo. We sometimes forget to really listen. We listen to music and our ears are constantly bombarded with noise, but do we listen with our hearts, to what God is saying, and to our family members when we share. Reflect, share and act, pray. As families begin to practise synodality as family dialogue, remember the rules for listening and sharing.*

April 30. SEE. Joan said, "Why are there so many floods all over the world these days? Hurricanes, cyclones, monsoons have got stronger, bigger and more destructive. Climate change is blamed on our human destructive actions towards the environment. It makes me think of Noah's ark times, when innocent animals also had to suffer, because of the wickedness of the people. There are actually many stories like The Flood in other cultures too. But history also repeats itself, and we know that it was necessary for God to intervene again, and so God eventually sent the Messiah. I'm still looking into the message and ask, "isn't history repeating itself again today, but still on a growing scale, with the most vulnerable members of creation suffering the effects the most?"

Reflect, share and act. Scripture. *Paul stood up and said, "Men of Israel, and you that fear God, listen. God chose our fathers and made the people great. He led them out of Egypt. He bore with them in the wilderness, gave them their land, kings and prophets. Of this posterity God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus. From Acts 13:13-25. Pope Francis: The lack of historical memory is a serious shortcoming in our society. A mentality that says, "then was then and now is now" is ultimately immature. Knowing and judging past events is the only way to build a meaningful future. AL193. Pope Leo, Reflect, share and act, pray Pope Leo's prayer for the Year of St Francis. Saint Francis, our brother you who 800 years ago went to meet Sister Death.....*