

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

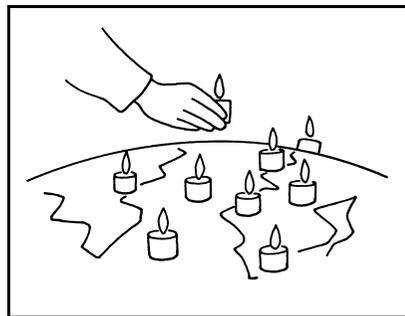
1. How do you respond to the questions that Pope Francis has raised about the culture in which we live?
2. What are the main burdens that are weighing people down in our community?
3. What are we already doing to help those who are struggling? What more could we do?
4. How is our parish community supporting families, especially those with different structures or difficult experiences? Are there other ways we could help?

Practical Evangelisation

Have a conversation this week with someone whose experience is very different from your own. Ask them what weighs them down and what gives them hope.

Prayer

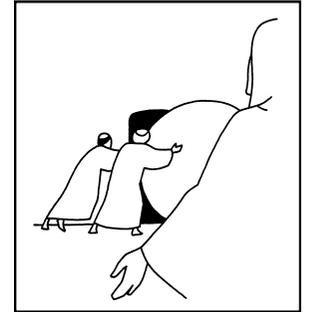
God of life,
at times we experience death
not only within ourselves
but in the world around us.
Give us courage to be vessels for life to flow
within us and through us.
Give us strength to stand as witnesses for life
and fill us with compassion for those who
struggle to find life in the midst of death.
May we always be mindful of the invitation
to unbind and let go free
those who have experienced the darkness
of poverty, pain and heartache,
that they may find the joy of the Gospel.
Amen.



The Joy of the Gospel

Walking through Lent with Pope Francis

Fifth Sunday of Lent: The Raising of Lazarus



On arriving in Bethany Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Martha said to Jesus, 'If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you.' 'Your brother' said Jesus to her 'will rise again.' Martha said, 'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said: 'I am the resurrection. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 'Yes, Lord," she said 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.'

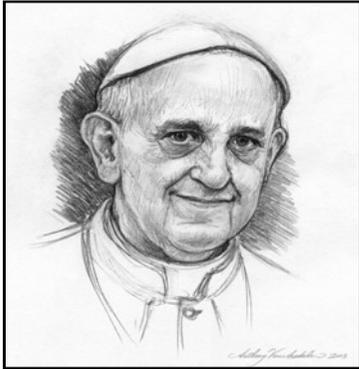
Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, 'Where have you put him?' They said, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept; and the Jews said, 'See how much he loved him!' Still sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, 'Take the stone away.'

Then Jesus cried in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, here! Come out!' The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them 'Unbind him, let him go free.'

John 11:1-45 (shortened)

Through death, Lazarus had been cut off from his family and friends, bound like a mummy and buried. Jesus brought him out of the tomb, restored him to his family and spoke words of liberation: 'Unbind him, let him go free'.

Pope Francis has described ways that people can be robbed of life and the Church's sense of mission can die. He has named some features of our world which diminish life, things we must oppose to uphold life.



To ponder: The way our global economy has developed has consequences for people’s lives.

Pope Francis reflects on an economy of exclusion and inequality:

Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving?

This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape. Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a “throw away” culture which is now spreading. [53]

Question: How does the global economy impact on me and the people I know? Are there choices I could make to resist its negative effects?

To ponder: Our lifestyle affects others.

Pope Francis reflects on a lifestyle that excludes:

Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us. [54]

Question: How conscious am I of those who produce the goods I consume? How does this awareness affect the choices I make?

To ponder: People can be oppressed by financial structures.

Pope Francis reflects on a new idolatry of money:

One cause of this situation is found in our relationship with money, since we calmly accept its dominion over ourselves and our societies. The current financial crisis can make us overlook the fact that it originated in a profound human crisis: the denial of the primacy of the human person! We have created new idols... man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption. [55] 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. [56] Money must serve, not rule! [58] Today’s economic mechanisms promote inordinate consumption, yet it is evident that unbridled consumerism combined with inequality proves doubly damaging to the social fabric.[60]

Question: What part does money play in my life and in my decisions? How carefully do I think about what I choose to consume?

To ponder: The gospel is about relationships and community, but the bonds that unite us can be weakened by our culture.

Pope Francis reflects on a crisis in relationships:

In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children. [66] The individualism of our postmodern and globalized era favours a lifestyle which weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds. Pastoral activity needs to bring out more clearly the fact that our relationship with the Father demands and encourages a communion which heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds. [67]

Question: How strong are the relationships in my life? What sort of pastoral activity in my parish is strengthening family and community life?
