

Ash Wednesday and Beyond: Meditations for Lent and Holy Week

Introduction: In our Bishop's address to Convention last year (2018), he called us to live more fully into our Baptism. Let us observe a holy Lent by examining ourselves through the lens of our baptismal covenant and our catechism. In our Baptismal Covenant, with God's help we promise to "persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever [we] fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord" (BCP, 304).

These Lenten meditations are arranged so that from Monday through Friday, we will reflect on how we have fallen into sin so that we may confess our personal and common failures to live fully into our Baptismal calling. Saturdays will offer an opportunity to reflect upon the major themes of the week. Sundays will offer an opportunity to reflect upon the themes from the preceding week from the opposite viewpoint: how have we lived into our baptism so that we can offer God our corporate life, both what we give thanks for and what we confess?

The meditations for Saturday and Sunday are designed to be used in community, such as Adult Forum discussions. (Be sure to have prayer books and bibles available.)

Most weekday reflections will contain four parts: an opening sentence appropriate to the season, a reflection upon a portion of the Ash Wednesday Litany of Penitence, a question or two for personal reflection, and a closing prayer drawn from the BCP. Using these meditations will give you an opportunity to explore the riches of the Book of Common Prayer.

Ash Wednesday

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

In many of our worshiping communities, last year's Palm Sunday branches were burned last night in preparation for today. Last year, those palms had been blessed to "be for us signs of Jesus Christ's victory" with the plea "that we who bear them in his name may ever hail him as our King and follow him in the way that leads to eternal life" (Liturgy of the Palms, BCP 271). The palms used in joy are now ashes used to mark us outwardly as those who seek to journey together on the "Way of Love."* In this season, we pray that these ashes will be "a sign of our mortality and penitence" (Ash Wednesday, BCP 265).

Mortality is not new to us: we know that our souls and bodies will be separated through death, whether through illness, accident, or old age. Penitence, however, is generally not part of our daily vocabulary. Penitence, according to our Catechism, is a kind of prayer that has three parts: confession of our sins, a desire to heal the wounded relationships that result from our sins, and an intention to change our way of life (Catechism: Prayer and Worship, BCP 857).

While we focus on our mortality today—to dust we each will return—and will spend Lent focusing on the penitential dimension of the "Way of Love", this sign of mortality and penitence doesn't leave us in doom and gloom. The prayer over the ashes comes to a close by stating the purpose of

our season of focusing on our mortality and our penitence: We ask God to use these ashes to remind us that eternal life (the cure for our mortality that has already begun!) is a gracious gift (Ash Wednesday, BCP 265). Palms that were blessed for celebrating Christ's victory now mark us for a season of penitence and reflection upon our own mortality in our journey together.

Every journey has a beginning. At some time in our personal journeys as Christians, we each sacramentally enter into Christianity through Holy Baptism. This ritual washing with water, whether we remember the day or not, whether we were baptized in the Episcopal Church or another Christian community, is the instrumental means "by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God" (Catechism: Holy Baptism, BCP 858). As people baptized into Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6:1-14), we are called to live more fully into the post-baptismal reality of our restored relationship with God (adopted children) with each other in mission (members of Christ's Body, the Church) into the assurance of ongoing relationship with God, each other, and the rest of creation (as inheritors of the kingdom of God). Just as those palm branches which are now ashes were used for celebrating and are now used for penitence, our baptism is a baptism into death and life.

As we journey together through Lent toward Eastertide, let us use the gritty smudge of last year's Palm Sunday pronouncement of Jesus as King of kings to reflect upon how baptism shapes our common life. Let us use these ashes to begin our journey of reflecting upon how our baptism is a baptism into death to old ways (the ways of sin and death) as well as a baptism into life in the Spirit.

How do the seemingly contradictory themes of mortality, penitence, eternal life, and baptism shape your thoughts and actions today?

Grant, Lord God, to all who have been baptized into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, that, as we have put away the old life of sin, so we may be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and live in righteousness and true holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

(Collect 7. For all Baptized Christians, BCP 252-3)

* For more on "Way of Love," see <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love>.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

"Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever."

In our baptismal covenant we renounce the ways of evil, pledge our allegiance to Jesus Christ, affirm our faith in our Triune God as outlined in the Apostles' Creed, and promise to live according to the pattern of Jesus's life as given to us by the church (Holy Baptism, BCP 302-305).

As creatures who learn and grow and make mistakes along the way, sometimes we persist in ways that are harmful to ourselves and our relationships. Our baptismal covenant reflects this reality when we are asked “Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?” (BCP 304). But before we can repent and return to the Lord, we first need to know for what we are examining ourselves. That is, what is “sin”?

Sin, according to our catechism, is “the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation” (Catechism: Sin and Redemption, BCP 848). Sin is a way of describing behavior way that betrays our allegiance to Jesus and the way of life to which he calls us.

God created us to be “free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God.” (Catechism: Human Nature, BCP 845). Sin reduces our liberty and destroys the harmony for which we were created.

The renunciations in our Baptismal Covenant (Holy Baptism, BCP 302) give us three more insights into what sin is. We renounce systems and forces that are in rebellion against God. We renounce anything that corrupts and destroys God’s creatures. We renounce desires that draw us away from God. Sin is anything that reduces our ability to love God, to love our neighbors, to live in harmony with creation, or the ability of others to love and live in harmony.

From our Confession we know that we sin “by our own fault in thought, word, and deed; by what we have done, and by what we have left undone” (BCP 267). *Enriching Our Worship Volume 1* provides us with the means of confessing that others sin on our behalf and that we are caught in a web of societal sin (EOW1, 19).

While we confess our sins weekly in the Eucharist and daily in the Daily Office, the Litany of Penitence in the Ash Wednesday service gives us another means of living into this season of penitence by examining our lives, individually and corporately, so that we can repent, seek to make amends, and return to a more nuanced expression of the baptismal life will help us do our part in having a holy Lent.

Through this season, we will explore how the Litany of Penitence helps us live more fully into our baptism. Monday through Friday meditations will focus on specific aspects of the Litany of Penitence, asking us to examine our personal lives and corporate life for ways that we have not fully lived into our baptism.

Before examining our lives over the next 47 days, let us rest assured that God loves what God has created and forgives those who seek to live in love and harmony. Consider 1 John 1-10 as we begin our Lenten meditations.

How you have experienced God’s mercy? How might trusting that God is merciful help you examine your thoughts, words, deeds, and things left undone for sin?

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and

make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

(Collect for Ash Wednesday)

Friday after Ash Wednesday

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

The Litany of Penitence begins with a confession that is a bit different from what we typically experience in Rite II Eucharist, Morning Prayer, and Evening Prayer. These differences are striking with respect to whom we confess:

Most holy and merciful Father:
We confess to you and to one another,
and to the whole communion of saints
in heaven and on earth,
that we have sinned by our own fault
in thought, word, and deed;
by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

Most holy and merciful Father: We confess to you: The litany begins with confessing our sins to God, which follows our typical pattern for confession. From the collect that the celebrant prayed on Ash Wednesday prior to the invitation to the observance of a holy Lent, we are assured that the God to whom we confess is merciful and this mercy includes giving a three-fold gift of penitence, which includes:

- minds that recognize the disharmony caused by sin,
- hearts that feel the weight of sins and express this sorrow as lament, and
- wills that desire to repent of our sins and change our way of living.

Penitence is the gift which leads to experiences of redemption, which is “the act of God which sets us free from the power of evil, sin, and death.” (Catechism: Sin and Redemption, BCP 849). This definition of redemption is communal – we are redeemed together.

We confess ... to one another: As a community of persons being redeemed together, we confess our sins to one another. Through baptism we are made members of Christ’s body, the Church. As members of the Church, we are members of each other (Romans 12:5). Our call as Christians is to grow toward maturity in Christ together (Ephesians 4). Our redemption is practiced and begins to be realized in our common life. By confessing our sins to one another, we grow into our baptismal life and the reality of the relationship we have to each other through baptism.

We confess ... to the whole community of saints in heaven and on earth: Our relationships as Church span time and extend beyond the boundaries of our local worshipping community, our diocese, and our denomination. Just as we continue to live out the consequences of the sins of the saints who came before us, our sins will have consequences beyond our lifetime. Because of the extent of our relationships as members of the Body of Christ, our individual and corporate sins not only affect our individual lives, but affect our worshipping community, our diocese, our denomination, and the universal church. As we come to live into the reality of our baptism, we have the opportunity to reflect upon how our lives are interrelated.

Our baptismal life calls us out of the individuality that our culture prizes into a network of interrelated lives that extends beyond the local worshipping community. We can begin experiencing redemption through our willingness to begin the work of reconciliation that starts with being honest with each other on how we struggle against sin and seek to be restored to harmony in community.

What does experiencing the gift of penitence in community look like in your home and in the life of your worshipping community?

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

(Collect for Ash Wednesday)

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Since Ash Wednesday earlier this week, we’ve embarked upon a diocesan-wide journey together to live more fully into our baptism. In our common meditation on the Penitential Litany of Ash Wednesday, we’ll take Saturdays to review our journey of the past week.

We began Lent with a few definitions and then started our journey through the Litany of Penitence with the beginning of the prayer:

Most holy and merciful Father:
We confess to you and to one another,
and to the whole communion of saints
in heaven and on earth,
that we have sinned by our own fault

in thought, word, and deed;
by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

Ash Wednesday: The themes of Lent—mortality, penitence, eternal life, and baptism—while seemingly contradictory, express some of the rich textures of our lives throughout the year. The smudge of ashes calls us to consider how our baptism is a death to old ways and a birthing into life in the Spirit. This baptismal journey doesn't end at the font, but continues throughout our individual lives and corporate life. Penitence, as a prayer form, has three parts that follow the baptismal motion of dying to sin in order to rise to life: confession of sins, a desire to be part of repairing the relationships damaged by sins, and an intention to live differently as a result of recognizing sin and its damaging ways. And while we focus on our mortality in the Ash Wednesday service, we do so in order to meditate on and live into God's gracious gift of eternal life.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday: Penitence is often portrayed as a somber and sorrowful posture of the heart and soul, but if we keep the end in mind, it need not be so. Our baptismal covenant calls us to take sin seriously, but to keep God's mercy and God's mission always in view. Sin disrupts relationships, causes disharmony, and reduces the liberty that we have in and through Christ.

Our liturgy calls us to confess our personal, corporate, and societal sins, including things that are done on our behalf without our permission or without our knowledge. But penitence is more than mere confession and striving to change. Penitence is grounded in trusting that God will meet us in our penitence with mercy and grace. Each time that God meets our confession and desire to change our lives in mercy, we learn more about God's love for us and for the world. The baptismal life is a life of penitence, but we repent with joy, knowing that God loves us and desires honest conversations with us about how we live out our baptism.

Friday after Ash Wednesday: Because sin is both personal and communal, the Litany of Penitence calls us to confess our sins to God, to one another, and to the whole communion of saints living and dead. This hard work of the baptismal life is not done in our own strength, but through the gift of penitence that works redemption into our whole being: our minds, our hearts, and our wills. The gift of penitence is one of the means by which God frees us from sin, evil, and death and redeems us together as a community. This gift is not for ourselves, but so that we can enter into God's work of reconciliation of all things.

Where do you see or feel disharmony in your life, in your worshiping community, or in the diocese? What might reconciliation and redemption look like in these situations? What could the three movements of penitence look like for these situations?

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness,

may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

(Collect for Ash Wednesday)

First Sunday in Lent

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

In our baptismal covenant, we promise, whenever we fall in to sin, to repent and return to the Lord. We do much the same thing in our human relationships. We may do something to hurt or anger a friend, and then experience joy when we apologize and make amends, and find the relationship deeper and stronger than before. Lent, as a season of preparation for Easter gives us all an opportunity to think about the strains in our relationships with God and with each other, and with God’s created world.

Today, and throughout the Sundays in Lent, you are invited to use the hashtag #livingmybaptism to share your reflections on social media.

Think of a time when you made or accepted an apology that enriched a relationship. Have you ever experienced something like that in your relationship with God?

Think of a time when someone in your worshiping community or our diocese made or accepted an apology that enriched a relationship. How has this affected your relationship with God?

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan; Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

(Collect for the First Sunday in Lent, BCP, 217)

Monday of Lent 1

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Today we begin exploring the second confession in the Litany of Penitence:

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

Our Lenten meditation on the Ash Wednesday litany continues with our admission that we have not lived into the two great commandments to love God with all of our being and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). “Love” in our confession of sin is more than just how

we feel (our emotions), but a way of speaking about our attitudes and values. From this confession we understand that loving God is a whole-person activity: we love with our heart, our mind, and our strength. The prayer over the newly baptized from our baptismal liturgy demonstrates part of what loving God with our whole person looks and feels like:

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon *these* your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised *them* to the new life of grace. Sustain *them*, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give *them* an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. *Amen.*

(BCP, 308)

In this prayer, the fullness of what it means to be human is blessed so that the baptized person is able to love God, self, and neighbor. This prayer gives us specific questions to ask ourselves in our Lenten examination. Pray this prayer over yourself by changing the words in italics to personalize the prayer. Then, consider the following list of questions. As you think and pray through these questions, chose one question that jumps out at you:

- In what ways have I not taken the time to inquire about your ways and your will, God? How can I practice a life of inquiry?
- In what ways have I been blinded to your ways and your will, God, so that I have not discerned your movements in our common life, the life of those around us, or the world?
- When and in what ways have I not been courageous to do or persevere in doing what I understand to be your will, God?
- How have I loved the prevailing culture instead of you, God?
- In what ways have I missed the spirit of joy and wonder by feeding my fears or worry?
- How can my living into these baptismal gifts help me to love you better, God?

Which of these questions caught your attention? From this question, how are you being called to love God more fully and, by doing so, to live more fully into your baptism? What do you need to confess and ask God to forgive, heal, and strengthen in you?

Grant, Lord God, to all who have been baptized into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, that, as we have put away the old life of sin, so we may be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and live in righteousness and true holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

(Collect 7. For all Baptized Christians, BCP 252-3)

Tuesday of Lent 1

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Yesterday, we looked at several questions that help us explore how we can live more fully into our baptism. Today, we will look at those questions again, but from a different perspective. But, before we get to those questions, let’s look back at that confession again ...

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

Note that the words “heart, mind, and strength” are singular and the personal pronouns (we, us) in the confession are plural. The litany is prayed together and our confession is on two levels: while we do need to be mindful of our own personal sin, this confession is about us as a community. We, the baptized community gathered together, Sunday after Sunday, are invited to ask ourselves anew how we, as a part of the Body of Christ, have sinned. We need to examine our common life as a worshipping community, as a diocese, as a denomination, and as a part of the universal church on whether we are living into these baptismal graces

Yesterday, we prayed through a series of questions from the blessing prayed over the newly baptized:

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon *these* your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised *them* to the new life of grace. Sustain *them*, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give *them* an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. *Amen.*

(BCP, 308)

Today, let’s think and pray through these same questions, only asking the questions not about ourselves individually, but about us as worshipping community and diocese:

- In what ways have we not taken the time to inquire about your ways and your will, God? How can we practice a life of inquiry?
- In what ways have we been blinded to your ways and your will so that we have not discerned your movements in our common life, the life of those around us, or the world?
- When and in what ways have we not been courageous to do or persevere in doing what we understand to be God’s will?
- How have we loved the prevailing culture instead of God?
- In what ways have we missed the spirit of joy and wonder by feeding our fears or worry?
- How can our living into these baptismal gifts help us to love you better, God?

Which of these questions caught your attention? From this question, how do you hear your worshiping community and our diocese being called to love God more fully and, by doing so, to live more fully into our baptism?

Grant, Lord God, to all who have been baptized into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, that, as we have put away the old life of sin, so we may be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and live in righteousness and true holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

(Collect 7. For all Baptized Christians, BCP 252-3)

Wednesday of Lent 1

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Today we continue to look at this second confession in the Litany of Penitence:

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. **We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.** We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

Recognizing that we are called to love God with our whole being as expressed in our emotions, attitudes, and values, the next part of the confession “We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves” takes on this same wider scope. Our baptismal covenant (BCP, 304-5) gives us clarity on what loving our neighbor looks like: “Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?”

“All persons”: this includes ourselves, people in our family, people in our worshiping community, people in our diocese, as well as all the other people who are in our lives, even for a moment. When we seek to discern Christ’s presence in ourselves, we begin to love ourselves rightly. By seeking Christ in ourselves, we begin to see how God is transforming us into Christ’s image so that we become the Body of Christ in the world. We need to love ourselves and each other rightly, not by the standards of our society that are pragmatic and consumer based (what do you do?, where do you work?, how much do you make?, where do you live? What kind of car do you drive?, etc), but by how are we expressing the grace given to us at baptism. The prayer over the newly baptized indicates how we are to look at each other and ourselves. As we pray this prayer today, listen for how God calling us to be more attentive to how we and our neighbors are being given the baptismal grace.

How might looking for these baptismal graces in ourselves and each other help us to love ourselves and each other better?

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon *these* your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised *them* to the new life of grace. Sustain *them*, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give *them* an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen.

(BCP, 308)

Thursday of Lent 1

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Today we will focus on the confession of withholding forgiveness:

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. **We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.**

Have mercy on us, Lord.

This section of the litany connects our affections toward God (love of God with our whole being) and our affections toward others (love of neighbor) with our will to act (forgiving others).

Forgiving ourselves and forgiving each other is the hard work of love. Loving ourselves and each other in Christ results in being at peace with ourselves and each other. As we live in community, we inevitably make mistakes and choices that result in harm. Sometimes, either in anger or frustration, we lash out at each other or withhold what we have to offer for the life of the community, resulting in injuries and a less than peaceful community life.

Part of seeking to live in peace includes learning how to forgive ourselves and each other. We can begin the movement of forgiveness from two ways: from the first two sentences of this part of the confession that we have been reflecting upon this week, or from the second part of this sentence in the confession: “as we have been forgiven.” Today, we will approach the movement toward confessing our lack of offering forgiveness to others from the first way. Tomorrow, we will look at the second way.

From the first two sentences in this part of the confession, we are invited to first confess that we have not loved God with our whole being. Then we are invited to confess that we have not loved our neighbor as ourselves. Loving our neighbor (and ourselves!) is the overflow of loving God as we seek to serve Christ in each other. Not forgiving ourselves, each other, or our neighbors, is another way of not exercising an attitude of love toward God. Loving God with our whole person is the foundation for all other love. As we open ourselves to loving God more and more because of who God is and for what God has done for us, we will experience God’s love for us all the

more. This love of God will then spill over into our love of our neighbor, not for what they can do for us, but because we can see Christ being formed in them. Then, as we see how Christ is being formed in them and in ourselves, forgiving each other (and ourselves) will become easier. Since we aren't fully formed into the image of Christ yet, forgiving is still hard work.

As we confess the individuals, the communities, and institutions that we are angry toward or hold hard feelings against, let us ask God to help us begin the hard work of becoming a people who offer forgiveness to each other and ourselves.

Whom do we need to begin forgiving? For what do we need to forgive ourselves?

In the following prayer, consider replacing “these” and “them” with “us” as you pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon *these* your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised *them* to the new life of grace. Sustain *them*, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give *them* an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen.

(BCP, 308)

Friday of Lent 1

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Yesterday, we considered how we can begin the movement of love that is called forgiving others by starting with the first two sentences of this section of the litany:

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. **We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.**

Have mercy on us, Lord.

Today, we will begin at the end of this section of the litany: we are called to forgive others because we have been forgiven. Sometimes we withhold forgiveness because we have forgotten the experience of healing that comes from being forgiven.

God models for us what forgiveness looks like. “When our disobedience took us far from you, you did not abandon us to the power of sin and death. In your mercy you came to our help, so that in seeking you, we might find you.” (Eucharistic Prayer D, BCP, 373)

Forgiving others can begin from the position of recognizing that while the other person (or community or institution) does not deserve to be forgiven, yet forgiving is the way of love. We forgive others because we know the healing that comes from having been forgiven. In this way of working toward forgiving, we can start with reflecting upon how God has forgiven us. Have you ever confessed to God during the corporate confession of sin and felt a sense of pardon when the

priest pronounced the absolution of sin? Or consider a time when you needed to be forgiven by a family member or a friend and that person offered you forgiveness. How did you feel in that moment? A grudge is a heavy burden to carry.

Do you know someone that you need to forgive? Is there some past hurt you need to set down?

Maybe the hurt feels too deep to forgive just yet ... or maybe you have been trying to forgive someone for a while. Forgiveness is a process. Moving toward forgiving begins by acknowledging that you haven't completely forgiven yet. God's mercy endures forever and is available right now to us as we seek to begin the journey toward forgiving. Why not take the first step of talking to God about those who you haven't been able to forgive yet?

Whom do we as a worshiping community, a diocese, or as a denomination need to forgive? What old wounds, divisions, or schisms are holding us back from being the people God is calling us to be?

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

(Collect for Ash Wednesday)

Saturday of Lent 1

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

The second confession of the Litany of Penitence helps us connect our affections toward God (love of God with our whole being), our affections toward others (love of neighbor) with our actions (forgiving others). We are called to confess when our love of God and each other has not been as full and healthy as it could be or when we have chosen to not love well.

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

Monday of Lent 1: The baptismal life is characterized by loving God with our whole being: heart, soul, mind, and strength. This love is not just the emotional response to God's love for us, but about our attitude, our values, and our pattern of life. The prayer over the newly baptized (BCP, 308) provides a description of what it looks like to live into our baptismal call to love God with every part of our being. This prayer was used to develop a list of questions for examining our lives to see where we need to ask God to grant us the ability to confess and be transformed.

Tuesday of Lent 1: The Litany of Penitence, like all of our confessions, are corporate—we confess as a community because our common life is not only disrupted by our individual failure to live into the fullness of our baptism, but also by sinful patterns in our life together. How do we as worshiping communities, a diocese, a denomination, and as a part of the church, need to live more fully into our baptismal call to love God with our whole being?

Wednesday of Lent 1: Our call to the Way of Love is not just to love God with our whole being, but also to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Loving ourselves and loving others can be described as seeking and serving Christ in all persons. Learning to love each other well can begin within our worshiping communities as we look for the baptismal graces (discussed on Monday and Tuesday) to be formed in each other.

Thursday of Lent 1: Another way of exploring love is to consider that forgiveness is an act of love. Living in peace with each other and with God requires being willing to forgive each other as God forgives us. Forgiveness bubbles up out of the overflow of God’s love for us and the recognition that the Christ we seek in each other and ourselves has not been fully formed in any of us yet.

Friday of Lent 1: The call to examine when we have not forgiven someone comes out of a call to love as God loves. God’s merciful forgiveness of our sins is an expression of God’s love for us that we are to imitate in our relationships with each other. Our baptism is an expression of God’s transformative forgiveness for us. Living into our baptism calls us to learn how to offer this merciful love to others (and ourselves!).

In what ways have we (worshiping community, diocese, or as a denomination) not loved God with our whole being as worshiping community, diocese, or denomination? In what ways have we not loved ourselves or each other by forgetting to seeking and serving Christ in all people? When have we withheld forgiveness, forgetting that God does not withhold forgiveness to the penitent?

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Collect for Ash Wednesday)

Second Sunday in Lent

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Last week we explored how we have not loved ourselves and our neighbors in two ways: by not seeking to serve Christ in ourselves and in them and by not offering forgiveness to ourselves or to

our neighbor. So now on Sunday we ask the questions from the positive side. In what ways can we confess that we have loved God by loving ourselves, each other, and our neighbors well?

Consider a time when you have recognized Christ being formed within you. What did this look like and feel like? Offer thanksgiving to God for the work of the Holy Spirit within you.

Consider a time when, as worshiping community or as a diocese, we saw and served Christ in our neighbor. What happened? How was Christ served? Offer thanks to God for the work of the Holy Spirit among us!

Consider sharing your answers with others today at church. You can use the hashtag #livingmybaptism to share your reflections on social media.

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent, BCP, 218)

Monday of Lent 2

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

This week in our meditations, we continue to reflect upon specifics of how we haven’t lived into the fullness of our baptism together. Today and tomorrow we reflect upon how we have grieved the Holy Spirit by not being willing to hear and respond to God’s call to service:

We have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served us.
We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved
your Holy Spirit.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

Just as we reflected last Friday that God’s forgiveness of us gives us both the ability and the model for loving God and each other well, Christ’s service to us gives us both the ability and the model for serving each other. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus’s statement that he came not to be served, but to serve is in the context of replying to the desire of two of his disciples (and their mother) to have high ranking positions in his kingdom. In contrast to the expectations of the prevailing culture, Jesus said that his disciples are to focus on service. And, immediately after this teaching, Jesus compassionately healed two blind men (Mark 10, Matthew 20). In John’s Gospel, Jesus explains his focus on serving in the context of his last supper as he washed the feet of his disciples (John 13). Jesus has shown us self-giving service through how he lived and how he died.

At Jesus’s baptism, the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus for ministry (Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3). The Holy Spirit is the one who, through our baptism, empowers us to do the good works prepared in

advance for us (Ephesians 2:10). And the Holy Spirit calls us to these works of service. We grieve the Spirit when we close our ears to opportunities to serve or when we serve with the intention of getting ahead because of this service.

In what ways have you turned a deaf ear to the Holy Spirit's promptings to serve? What opportunities has your worshiping community or our diocese chosen to ignore? When have we used the gifts of the Spirit for our own advancement rather than means to serve?

Almighty God our heavenly Father, you declare your glory and show forth your handiwork in the heavens and in the earth: Deliver us in our various occupations from the service of self alone, that we may do the work you give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good; for the sake of him who came among us as one who serves, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

(24. *For Vocation in Daily Work, BCP 261*)

Tuesday of Lent 2

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Today we continue with our reflection on how we have not lived into our baptismal life of service.

We have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served us.
We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved
your Holy Spirit.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

In Philippians 2, we are called to demonstrate that we are being conformed to the mind of Christ through how we live our common life together. Through the work of the Holy Spirit that began shaping us in the baptism we share, we are empowered to be tender and compassionate toward one another. The Spirit calls us to put off ambition that is for our own benefit. Our common life is to be one characterized by serving each other and valuing the interests of others above our own. This common life of mutual love and care has no room for grumbling about each other. Arguments which seem to be all too common in public life should not characterize our worshiping community and diocesan life. And yet we struggle to be true to this description of the mind of Christ.

In what ways have we grieved the Holy Spirit by not living according to the mind of Christ by grumbling, arguing, serving ourselves rather than others, or putting our own interests first?

Almighty and merciful God, in your goodness keep us, we pray, from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready both in mind and body, may accomplish with free hearts those things which belong to your purpose; through Jesus

Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*
(*Proper 2 Week of the Sunday closest to May 18, BCP 228-9*)

Wednesday of Lent 2

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

When we enter into communion with God and each other through baptism, we are pronounced to be a member of God’s own people. According to our baptismal liturgy, we believe that each baptized person has been “sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever” (BCP 308). Each baptized person has been made a member of God’s household (BCP 309). How we live our lives together as God’s people is a reflection of how we experience God in our midst. The Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) is given to all of the baptized. Faithfulness is included as a fruit of the Spirit living within and among us.

The next confession in our Lenten walk through the Ash Wednesday litany has three sections that we will explore over the rest of this week, specifically looking at how we have not lived as members of God’s household who are characterized by being faithful to God’s character:

We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness: the
pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives,
We confess to you, Lord.

The first call to confession of our past unfaithfulness is an invitation to reflect upon our pridefulness. Pride, in this context, is not a healthy recognition of one’s accomplishments. Here, pride is one of the seven deadly sins, a perversion of self-love. Pride leads us to forget that we are made for one another, that we are dependent upon one another, and that our accomplishments should be for the building up of God’s kingdom for the sake of all of creation. Pride, as a sin, is when we forget that the gifts and opportunities to develop skills were given to us for the building up of each other (see Ephesians 4). Faithfulness calls us to put our accomplishments into the larger perspective of God’s mission. The Father’s love for all of creation, Christ’s self-giving love through which he gave up his place of honor to live and die as one of us (Philippians 2), the Holy Spirit’s ongoing work of glorifying Christ (John 16:12-15), and the mutual self-giving love between the persons of the Trinity (God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) show us how to live in community as faithful persons.

In what ways have we focused on our accomplishments at the expense of thinking about how our accomplishments are completed through God’s work in us or that these things were done for God glory and to serve others? In what ways have we falsely diminished our accomplishments and their value for others by a false humility?

O God, your unfailing providence sustains the world we live in and the life we live: Watch over those, both night and day, who work while others sleep, and grant that we may never

forget that our common life depends upon each other's toil;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*
(*a collect from Compline, BCP 134*)

Thursday of Lent 2

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

We continue today considering how we have lived without faithfulness to our baptismal covenant:

We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness: the
pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives,
We confess to you, Lord.

Hypocrisy is more than merely being inconsistent between what we say and what we do. Hypocrisy can be defined as using a different standard of judging others accomplishments or mistakes than we use in judging our own, usually (but not always) being easier on ourselves than on others.

God’s faithfulness is without hypocrisy: the Son became what we are, fully human in every way except sin. Not only does Christ Jesus know what it is like to be human, he knows what it is like to be tempted by sin and to suffer the effects of other people’s sins (Hebrews 2:14-18 and 4:14-16). While the Son continued to be fully God and in full communion with the Father, through his Incarnation he became fully what we are. Through the communion of the Trinity and the Incarnation of the Son, God’s faithfulness to us is both from the perspective of our Creator and as one of us.

The call of our baptismal life is to be authentic as we “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being” (BCP 305). We are to seek justice and peace for all, not just some. We are to respect the dignity of all, not just some. Inauthenticity, especially when it is hypocritical, can cause a stumbling block for those who most need to see God’s faithfulness extended to them through us.

When we realize that we are not seeking and serving Christ in everyone, we need to ask “why does this one get treated with respect but not that one?” This line in the litany calls us to examine our inner motivations and attitudes for hypocrisy.

In what ways have we (individually and communally) been hypocritical, holding some to higher moral standards than we are willing to hold ourselves to?

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you, bring the nations into your fold, pour out your Spirit upon all flesh, and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God,

now and for ever. Amen.
(16. For the Mission of the Church, BCP 100 and 257)

Friday of Lent 2

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

We continue today with our meditations over unfaithfulness defined as pride, hypocrisy, and impatience, focusing on our impatience:

We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness: the
pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives,
We confess to you, Lord.

In our fast-paced modern life, impatience is epidemic. We want faster internet speed, faster cars, faster phones and computers (at least according to the advertisements). The way of our society is to desire to be in the fastest check-out lane in the grocery store and to hope to not get caught in rush hour traffic or someone driving slower than we think they should. The world tells us that we have much to do and too little time in which to do it. One way of telling the beginning of the biblical story is that Adam and Eve may have been a bit impatient in their wanting to know how to tell good from evil and they didn't wait for God to give them this knowledge in God's timing (and there may have been a bit of pride involved since they wanted to know how to tell good from evil on their own, independent from God). We continue with this impulse toward impatience—wanting things done according to our timing.

Yet God's faithfulness is characterized by patience (which is often translated as longsuffering or forbearance). From Psalm 103:8 we are reminded that “The LORD is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great kindness” (BCP 103, see also Psalms 50, 78, 86, 103, and 145). God is patient with us as individuals and as a species. Jesus was patient with his disciples who sometimes seemed to be slow in understanding. He continued to patiently teach them when they had difficulties understanding what he needed them to know (see Luke 24:13-31).

As a fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit, the ability to become patient is cultivated in us (Galatians 5:22-23). Our society and our life together give us ample opportunities to reflect God's patient character. Slowing down in order to offer ourselves and others time to think, to move at their own pace, to become who God is calling us to be, and to wait for God's timing is hard work. The Holy Spirit works with us as we learn to reflect God's faithfulness in living patiently with each other, but it's often a daily struggle to live into this part of our baptismal life. Yet, it is in living patiently with each other that we demonstrate respect and dignity.

What does impatience look and feel like in your life and in the life of your worshipping community?

This is another day, O Lord. I know not what it will bring forth, but make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be. If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely. If I am to sit still,

help me to sit quietly. If I am to lie low, help me to do it
patiently. And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly.
Make these words more than words,
and give me the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.
(Prayers for use by a Sick Person: In the Morning, BCP 461)

Saturday of Lent 2

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

This week our journey through the Litany of Penitence has taken us through the following sections:

We have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served us.
We have not been true to the mind of Christ.
We have grieved your Holy Spirit.
Have mercy on us, Lord.

We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness:
the pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives,
We confess to you, Lord.

Living into our baptism looks like being transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit through our lives together so that we begin taking on the shape of Jesus’s life and ministry.

Monday of Lent 2: In our baptism, we are anointed and empowered for service to others. Just as Jesus Christ came to serve, God the Father has prepared good works for us to do and the Spirit gives us gifts to complete these works. Grieving the Spirit looks like ignoring these opportunities to serve others or using the gifts the Spirit has given to us for our own advancement.

Tuesday of Lent 2: The mind of Christ is demonstrated to us through his tenderness and compassion toward us. He became what we are so that he could live among us, show us how to live in harmony with others and God without grumbling or arguing, and serve us through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. When we resist the Spirit’s work to conform us to the mind of Christ, we grieve the Holy Spirit.

Wednesday of Lent 2: Our faithful God calls us and empowers us for faithful living through our baptism. This idea of faithfulness is another way of talking about having the mind of Christ. One mark of being conformed to the mind of Christ is to put aside the form of pride that is a perversion of healthy self-love. We are called to remember that our relationships, gifts, talents, and skills are from God for joyful service so that we can live as faithful people.

Thursday of Lent 2: A second mark of faithful living through our baptism is a life that is not marred by hypocrisy. Through the incarnation, the Son became everything that is essential to being human – he became one of us, but one of us without sin. Jesus’s sinless life was a life of authenticity that did not hold some people to different moral standards than others. One way of

describing a life that is without hypocrisy is to speak of respecting the dignity of every human being and striving for peace and justice for everyone.

Friday of Lent 2: A third mark of faithful living through our baptism is a life that is characterized by patience. Impatience, wanting things according to our schedule and preferences, is not the way that God treats creation or us. Patience is a gift, an aspect of the Fruit of the Spirit. Part of respecting the dignity of every person is living patiently.

In what ways have we not demonstrated the mind of Christ being formed within us? When have we turned away from opportunities to serve? When has our life and service been more shaped by pride, hypocrisy, impatience than faithful service that is humble, authentic, and patient?

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

(Collect for Ash Wednesday)

Third Sunday in Lent

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.” This past week, we explored how we have resisted having the mind of Christ formed within us in our life in our worshiping community and the diocese. Today, we reflect upon how we have experienced being conformed to the mind of Christ. We have been given good works to do as a worshiping community and as a diocese.

When have you seen these opportunities to serve and acted in a Christ-like manner? What did this feel like, from beginning to end? How were you, your worshiping community, and the diocese changed as a result of faithfully answering the Spirit’s call to serve?

Let us rejoice together at the way the Spirit is shaping us to live into our baptism so that we can see act in a more Christ-like manner! Share your reflections with others. Use hashtag #livingmybaptism to share your reflections on social media.

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all "adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy

Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*
(*Collect for the Third Sunday in Lent, BCP, 218*)

Monday of Lent 3

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

This week we examine how our baptismal life is lived out in the intersection of a healthy love of self and love of our neighbor.

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation
of other people,
We confess to you, Lord.

American consumerism seems to be built upon the assumption that we want what we want, when we want it, and we don't want to wait or think this hunger through. When our desires for self-gratification or for things beyond our needs keeps others from having what they need, our self-indulgent appetites and ways end up feeding into the exploitation of others.

Another way of speaking of self-indulgence is lack of self-control. Advertisements tempt our self-control, whether it's a commercial for that snack food that you really don't need or the car that may never be within your budget. The world of commerce wants us to hear that splurging is good for the economy and will make us feel better. We have a world of products and media at our fingertips, especially in our electronic age, but at what cost to our neighbor? When we choose to consume without regard for our actual needs and the needs of our neighbors, we run the risk of disrespecting the dignity of others.

The exploitation of others often is fed by another American consumer “virtue” of buying more for less. Sweat shops overseas are not the only way in which people are exploited. When materials used in construction are mined or harvested without due regard for the dignity of the workers, the workers are exploited. When food is grown and harvested by workers who are not treated with the respect due to them as those in whom the image of God resides, the workers are exploited. But it's not just the workers who are exploited in this system. When manufacturers take short cuts or use inferior materials and charge higher prices in order to make larger profits, the consumer is exploited.

Living into our call to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself” (Baptismal covenant, BCP 305) calls us to practice self-control. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23); as we seek to live more fully into our baptism, we can ask God to help us be satisfied with what we need rather than what we want.

In what areas of your life are you more easily tempted to act impulsively?

Almighty God, whose loving hand *hath* given us all that we possess: Grant us grace that we may honor *thee* with our substance, and, remembering the account which we must one

day give, may be faithful stewards of *thy* bounty, through
Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*
(38. For the Right Use of God's Gifts, BCP, 827)

Tuesday of Lent 3

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

In our fast-paced world, we seem to be called to do more in less time. This leads to frustration.

Our anger at our own frustration, and our envy of those
more fortunate than ourselves,
We confess to you, Lord.

According to this phrase in the Litany of Penitence, frustration is not the sin that we are called to confess, but our *anger* at our frustration. The difference may seem subtle, but this distinction is important to our spiritual health. Let's first look at what we are not confessing.

We are not confessing that we are frustrated in this line of the Litany. We have lots of opportunities to be annoyed and upset. Being aware of our frustration allows us to ask what we are frustrated with and why. We need to identify that feeling of frustration in order to do that analysis.

Our anger at our own frustration eats away at our patience and perseverance. Anger prevents us from listening to sources of our frustration and incites us to force our way of doing things on others. In anger, our vision for how we can participate in God's work of redemption is limited. When this anger is turned inward, it's harder to see Christ being formed within us.

This part of the litany calls us to confess when, in frustration, we have become angry when things didn't go as we planned. We confess when we become angry with one another and our neighbors when they don't meet our expectations. We confess when we become angry over our frustration when the pace of change in our homes, our worshiping community, our diocese, the church, and the prevailing culture is slower than we think it should be.

What or who frustrates you? Under what circumstances does this frustration lead to anger?

O Lord our heavenly Father, whose blessed Son came not to be ministered unto but to minister: Bless, we beseech thee, all who, following in his steps, give themselves to the service of others; that with wisdom, patience, and courage, they may minister in his name to the suffering, the friendless, and the needy; for the love of him who laid down his life for us, the same thy Son our Savior Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

(Collects for Various Occasions, 22. For Social Service, BCP 209)

Wednesday of Lent 3

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Yesterday we looked at the first half of this part of the Litany of Penitence and the need for us to confess our anger at our own frustrations. Today, we explore the second half:

Our anger at our own frustration, and our envy of those
more fortunate than ourselves,
We confess to you, Lord.

Envy, in the Catechism questions on the 10 Commandments, is the opposite of “rejoic[ing] in other people’s gifts and graces” (BCP 848). When we are tempted to envy, we have shifted our view from our neighbor as one in whom Christ dwells to the view that our neighbor has something that we do not have that we think we should have. Our focus is split and our vision is distorted. We don’t see the possibility of our neighbor’s gifts, skills, or things as a blessing for the life of the community. Rather, we think that what they have is something that we must have as well; we feel we are deficient until we have what they have. Our neighbor’s goods have become the means by which we judge ourselves. With this split focus, we are inappropriately diminished, our neighbor is inappropriately elevated, and we judge ourselves as lacking. Then, we find ourselves thinking that we can be elevated to the same place as we have lifted our neighbors if only we had what they have. In the end, envy leads us away from loving ourselves as the unique persons that we are as we are led away from loving our neighbors for who they are.

Envy is not just a personal sin, but can infect us as worshiping communities when we look at other worshiping communities and their ministries and compare ourselves in ways that damage our view of ourselves and our relationships with each other. Likewise, it is possible to envy another diocese rather than rejoice in their work or material goods.

What things, gifts, and graces do you see in others that tempt you to envy? What ministries in other worshiping communities do you use as a standard to judge your own worshiping community as lacking?

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to thee, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our Prayers wills, that we may be wholly thine, utterly dedicated unto thee; and then use us, we pray thee, as thou wilt, and always to thy glory and the welfare of thy people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

(61. A Prayer of Self-Dedication BCP 832-3)

Thursday of Lent 3

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Today, we move to the next phrase in the Litany which continues our exploration of our relationships with material goods and comforts:

Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and
our dishonesty in daily life and work,
We confess to you, Lord.

The Litany of Penitence calls us to examine how we use and how we respond to the things of this world. We are not expected to remove ourselves from the goods and comforts of the world, but to maintain control over ourselves. The focus on Monday was on examining where our lack of self-control or temperance results in the exploitation of our neighbors. Today, the focus is on how our intemperance for things results in our love being misplaced from the right love of ourselves and enjoying the world around us to inordinate love of material things.

Advertisements seem to be tempt us with vacations, luxury items, new technology to make life easier, and delicacies that are not necessary for our health and well-being. While the advertisements want us to think that we deserve or need these things, the goal seems to be to get us attached to the thing or comfort. Ethically produced and sourced comfort foods and items, vacations, luxury items, new technology, etc., are probably not bad in themselves unless they tempt us to love them more than we love ourselves and our neighbors. When these things become the goal in life rather than loving God by living into our baptismal covenant, then we have fallen into the trap of intemperate love of things that won't bring us the peace that we desire.

What luxuries or comforts do you desire? When are you tempted to splurge on worldly goods and comforts in ways that are not healthy for you? What luxuries and comforts do you, as a worshiping community, desire and how might these desires prevent you from living into your baptism?

Almighty God, whose loving hand hath given us all that we possess: Grant us grace that we may honor thee with our substance, and, remembering the account which we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of thy bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(38. For the Right Use of God's Gifts, BCP 827)

Friday of Lent 3

"Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever."

As we continue our exploration of this phrase in the Litany, we are asked to examine how our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts tempts us toward dishonesty in our daily life and work.

Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and
our dishonesty in daily life and work,
We confess to you, Lord.

Dishonesty at work, such as using work time or work resources for non-work-related activities, taking credit for other people's work, or doing team-work on your own and giving others credit when they didn't get a chance to offer their skills in the work, are ways in which we seek to serve ourselves instead of serving others. Dispositions and habits that we learn in the work place spill

over into the rest of life just as habits and dispositions that we practice at home find their way into work.

Often the motivations for dishonesty are found in the other themes this litany has taken us through this week: self-indulgence, envy, and “intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts.” We want more, and these desires lead us into temptation to take ethical short-cuts.

Collect 24 (Various Occasions, BCP 261) provides us with an insight on the problem with dishonesty in daily life and work: we are given work to do and lives to live that are for the sake of being done “in truth and beauty and for the common good.” When we do our work or live our lives for our own gain, then we are missing opportunities to live into our baptismal covenant. As baptized people—members of the Body of Christ—we are called to seek and serve Christ in others, to strive for justice for all persons, and to resist the pull toward evil in whatever ways that it confronts us. If everyone seeks to serve each other, then all will be served.

As you think back through this past week, when have you been tempted to be less than honest in your work or dealings with others? What was your motivation for not acting or living as honestly as you might have?

Almighty God our heavenly Father, you declare your glory and show forth your handiwork in the heavens and in the earth: Deliver us in our various occupations from the service of self alone, that we may do the work you give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good; for the sake of him who came among us as one who serves, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(24. For Vocation in Daily Work, BCP 261)

Saturday of Lent 3

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

This week, we have been journeying through this litany’s call to confession of how we have not loved ourselves well and how this has spilled over into all of the relationships in our lives.

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation
of other people,
We confess to you, Lord.

Our anger at our own frustration, and our envy of those
more fortunate than ourselves,
We confess to you, Lord.

Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and
our dishonesty in daily life and work,
We confess to you, Lord.

Monday of Lent 3: Our baptismal covenant vow to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself” (Baptismal covenant, BCP 305) calls us to think about how our culture’s consumer-driven life-style can exploit our neighbors and ourselves. When we choose to indulge in self-gratification without thinking about the workers, the industry that makes or supplies, or appetites for things and foods, we run the risk of not living as fully into our baptismal covenant as we might.

Tuesday of Lent 3: Our baptismal covenant vow to “seek and serve Christ in all persons” also calls us to love ourselves well. When we turn anger at our frustrations inward, it’s hard to seek and serve Christ within us. This anger blinds us to the source of our frustration, which, if we are able to be patient and examine it, might contain a vision of how we can better love our neighbors and ourselves.

Wednesday of Lent 3: “Loving our neighbor as ourselves” is a way of positively stating the commandment of “don’t covet” (Exodus 20:17). When we envy what our neighbor has, our vision is split between looking at what our neighbor has with inappropriate longing and looking at ourselves in judgment. Our baptismal call to “seek and serve Christ in all persons” calls us to love each other regardless of what others have that we don’t in order to rejoice in the gifts God has given to each of us.

Thursday of Lent 3: When we are tempted to buy into our culture’s call to a life of luxury beyond what is necessary for our health and well-being, we run the risk of believing that things or comforts will bring us the peace and joy that we desire. When we love these comforts more than our neighbor or our own wholeness, we will struggle to love God and our neighbor with our whole being.

Friday of Lent 3: Envy, self-indulgence, or an “intemperate love of worldly goods” can lead us to be tempted to take dishonest short-cuts in our life and work. Yet we are given work to do, whether it is paid work or volunteer work, and lives to live for the common good. When we lose sight of living for the sake of others so that all might live, it’s easy to stumble into the temptation to be dishonest. And once the first dishonest action is done, the next time is easier.

In what ways have we been lured into self-indulgence or an inappropriate love for things and pleasures? When have we been tempted to envy others? What causes us to lose our patience with ourselves? How has our life been more shaped by envy and anger rather than rejoicing with others and seeking to find solutions to those things that frustrate us?

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever

and ever. Amen.
(Collect for Ash Wednesday)

Fourth Sunday in Lent

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Last week, we explored how not loving ourselves well spills over into every relationship in our lives. Yet the Spirit has been at work within us and among us and we need to give thanks for when we have cooperated with the Spirit’s energies and directions. Our focus this week was on how we have not lived into “seek and serve Christ in all persons” and “loving our neighbor as ourselves”. Today, we look at how we have lived into these two aspects of our baptism.

When have you, your worshiping community, or the diocese recognized that we need to change how we do things so that we are not participating in the exploitation of others through our own self-indulgence? What changed? What does it feel like now to have lived through these changes together?

When have you, your worshiping community, or the diocese recognized that actions were being born out of anger or envy rather than love? What changed? How did this change come about?

When have you, your worshiping community, or the diocese recognized that we were focused on worldly goods and comforts and as a result were not honest in how our life together could be? How did this change come about? What changed?

Let us rejoice together at the way the Spirit is shaping us to live into our baptism so that we can see Christ in us! Share your reflections with others. Use hashtag #livingmybaptism to share your reflections on social media.

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

(Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Lent, BCP, 219)

Monday of Lent 4

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

This week, we look at the intersection of our relationship with God and each other that begins in prayer and worship.

The Litany of Penitence continues with:

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to
commend the faith that is in us,
We confess to you, Lord.

In the baptismal covenant, we promise to “continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers” (BCP 304). We can do all four parts of this promise at corporate worship: during our weekly worship we gather together as a community to acknowledge God’s holiness, hear Scripture read, pray, and celebrate the sacraments (Catechism, BCP 857). Our weekly worship together can provide a structure for our daily prayers. Our daily prayers, whether structured through the Daily Office (BCP 37-135), Daily Devotionals for Family Devotions for Individuals and Families (BCP 136-140), or some other form of prayer, center us daily in our relationship with God, each other, and the world, and prepare us for our corporate worship times.

Sometimes, for reasons beyond our control, we aren’t able to be present in corporate worship. When this happens for too long, our personal daily prayer and worship times are diminished. We are made for community worship life.

Sometimes, it’s hard to enter into either prayer or worship for a variety of other reasons: the press of the world upon us, problems in our relationships with one another, or problems in our relationship with God. And, as a result, we neglect our part of tending to our relationships with God and each other: our worship of God and our prayers to God for the world, each other, and ourselves. Participating in corporate worship is the normal means for refreshing and rejuvenating our daily prayer and worship life. But sometimes even that is hard work and we forget that our prayers and our corporate worship are not just for ourselves, but for the sake of the world.

Our baptismal covenant calls us to stand firm with one another, in both prayers and in worship, against a culture that too often tells us that we can be completely independent, that we don’t need community life, and that we don’t need to be in relationship with God and each other to be whole and healthy.

What distracts you from prayer or worship? What keeps you from praying in church or in other places? What keeps you away from corporate worship?

Almighty God, you have revealed to your Church your eternal Being of glorious majesty and perfect love as one God in Trinity of Persons: Give us grace to continue steadfast in the confession of this faith, and constant in our worship of you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; for you live and reign, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

(Collects, Various Occasions, 1. Of the Holy Trinity, BCP 251)

Tuesday of Lent 4

[failure to commend the faith that is in us]

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Today, we continue our examination of our prayer and worship life and how our relationships with God and each other are affected by our common life:

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to
commend the faith that is in us,
We confess to you, Lord.

What is this “faith that is in us”? Faith can have two meanings in this context: faith as trust in God and faith as apostolic tradition passed along to us through scripture and church tradition. And both of these meanings of faith come to us in two ways: faith is a gift from God directly and through the church, and faith is something that we cultivate and grow. The gift is to individuals as well as through community and growing is also done by each of us personally and in community.

Faith as the content of the apostolic tradition as it has been formed through the ages is given to us through our baptismal covenant (the affirmations as well as the Apostles’ Creed, see BCP 302-310). This faith is built upon trust in God who is one God in three persons—one of whom became incarnate and lived, died, rose, and ascended, and one of whom was sent to empower us to live into this faith. This trust in and of God is both personal and communal, present and built upon the past.

Faith as trust is a personal matter—we come to have faith in someone through personal encounters and through reflections upon past deeds. We come to trust each other in our families, worshiping communities, and the diocese through our common life together. In much the same way, we come to know God as trustworthy through reflecting upon how others describe God’s actions in the past and how we experience God moving through us and in us today.

But what is this “commending the faith that is in us”? To commend something means to entrust it to another, or to recommend it, or to praise it. We commend the faith that is in us when we entrust ourselves to one another, which is part of our baptismal covenant. We also commend the faith that is in us when we invite others to trust us. When we live in such a way that others can see that we are trusting in God and living according to God’s ways rather than the ways of the world (see 1 Peter 3:15), we are recommending our faith as a joyful way of living. Another way that we commend the faith in us is to be able to explain how God is working through our baptism to make the world a better place. Each of the promises we make when we renew our baptism (BCP 304-5) describes a way to commend the faith in us. Commending the faith in us requires us to reflect upon how the faith is being formed within us, how we are trusting God, and entrusting our lives to God. We most often do this reflection together in worship.

When we are negligent in our prayers and worship, we don’t receive the gift of sharing in the faith of those who have gone before us and those who are walking alongside us today.

What does “commending the faith that is in us” look like in your life, in the life of your worshiping community, and in the life of our diocese? When have you (as an individual or as a worshiping community) neglected to commend this faith? When have we as a diocese missed opportunities to commend the faith in us?

As you pray the following prayer, replace “these your servants” and “them” with “us” and replace “their” with “our”:

Almighty God, we thank you that by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ you have overcome sin and brought us to yourself, and that by the sealing of your Holy Spirit you have bound us to your service. Renew in *these* your *servants* the covenant you made with *them* at *their* Baptism. Send *them* forth in the power of the Spirit to perform the service you set before *them*; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*
(BCP 309)

Wednesday of Lent 4

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

In this portion of the Litany of Penitence, the prayer shifts from confessing our sins to asking God to accept our repentance over these sins. Repentance, as a synonym for penitence, has a three-fold movement of recognizing and confessing sin, desiring to heal the wounded relationships that this sin caused, and intending to live differently from now on (Catechism: Prayer and Worship, BCP 857). While the prayer shifts in rhythm, the theme of the litany continues.

Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done:
for our blindness to human need and suffering, and our
indifference to injustice and cruelty,
Accept our repentance, Lord.

Today and tomorrow, we look at how we miss opportunities to bring the pain of the world around us to God for healing. In this phrase of the prayer, we name two dispositions through which we wrong others: blindness and indifference of heart. Today, we look at our blindness to human need and suffering.

In our culture, it seems as if we have three kinds of blindness to the sufferings and needs of others: there's the blindness that comes from truly being oblivious to the situations of others, there is the blindness due to being conditioned or trained to not look at certain situations that others find themselves in, and then there is the blindness that is the willful looking away.

Overcoming the blindness that comes from being oblivious requires a heart that is teachable and empathetic. We begin our repentance over this form of blindness with the gasp of “I never knew!” from a broken heart.

When have you experienced repentance over being made aware of the suffering or needs of others?

Our culture teaches us to be blind to the needs and sufferings of certain others by silencing portions of our nation's history of systemic prejudice that catches generations of people in poverty or suppression. In other situations, we are blind to the needs of others because we are taught to look away from those who are different or who have needs that make us uncomfortable.

Recognizing those needs and this suffering comes with a bit of shame ... shame that we saw and shame that we don't know what to do about the fact that we saw. Yet these are real needs and sufferings that should break our hearts as well.

What forms of suffering or needs have you been taught to ignore? Why?

And then we experience times where we intentionally look away ... from the homeless, the beggar, the advertisements about helping the starving children in war-torn countries or those experiencing natural disasters. Our hearts may break but we give ourselves one of a myriad of reasons to turn away. Yet the suffering continues and the need is still there.

What forms of suffering or needs have you habitually turned away from? Why?

Our baptismal covenant calls each of us to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself” (BCP 305). Whether we were previously unaware, were trained to ignore, or have long since tried to steel ourselves against seeing these sufferings and needs, harm is being done. We are doing wrong by blinding ourselves: we wrong those who are suffering or in need and we wrong ourselves. We miss opportunities to pray and to serve, wronging those in need. We harden our hearts when we blind ourselves, and wrong ourselves by this self-inflicted wound so that we are less likely to respond in love the next time.

To what forms of suffering or need do you typically blind yourself? What forms of suffering or need does your worshiping community choose not to see? What kinds of suffering or needs do we as a diocese ignore?

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. Amen.

(Collect from Evening Prayer, BCP 124)

Thursday of Lent 4

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Today we continue with the wrongs done by indifference to injustice and cruelty:

Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done:
for our blindness to human need and suffering, and our
indifference to injustice and cruelty,

Accept our repentance, Lord.

In our baptismal covenant we are asked: “Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?” (BCP 305) Whether it's because of the way our news is reported now or whether there is an actual increase in cruelty, it seems it's impossible to read or listen to the news without hearing about cruelty to people or animals. Injustice, whether through corruption or mistakes, results in an offense against the dignity of another person. Cruelty and injustice are clearly wrongs. But what we repent of in this part of the litany is not our

active participation in these wrongs, but in the disposition of no longer caring that these wrongs are happening.

Our indifference to injustice and cruelty, like our blindness to human need and suffering, comes from a variety of reasons: compassion overload, despair because we feel or are powerless to prevent or repair these wounds to our society, or being overwhelmed by the amount of horrible things that we see being done each day. But as we grow indifferent to these injustices and cruel acts, we risk losing a part of ourselves that is central to who we are as baptized people: we risk losing the ability to grieve with God that things are not as they should be. As we grow numb to injustice and cruelty, we risk losing hope—and we need to retain the hope that God can bring the perpetrators of cruelty and injustice to repentance as well as the hope that God can work through us to change these present systems of injustice.

To what forms of injustice or cruelty have you grown indifferent? What forms of injustice or cruelty are not discussed in your worshiping community or our diocese?

Look with pity, O heavenly Father, upon the people in this land who live with injustice, terror, disease, and death as their constant companions. Have mercy upon us. Help us to eliminate our cruelty to these our neighbors. Strengthen those who spend their lives establishing equal protection of the law and equal opportunities for all. And grant that every one of us may enjoy a fair portion of the riches of this land; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

(36. For the Oppressed, BCP 826)

Friday of Lent 4

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us,
Accept our repentance, Lord.

This week we have been exploring what seems like a downward spiral: neglect of prayers and worship leads to a weakening of our ability to commend the faith within us; blinding ourselves to the sufferings and needs of others and not caring about injustice or cruelty prevents us from taking these very concerns to God who cares deeply about alleviating suffering and meeting needs because God is just and loving. Today we continue this trajectory ...

False judgments and uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors are the opposite of loving our neighbors as ourselves. Our culture which blames quickly and often, refuses to allow for repentance and growth, and refuses to admit mistakes. That makes it easy for us to harbor false judgments about others. Our ability to discern the motivation of others is incredibly flawed; most of the time it's hard even to discern our own full motivations. When we jump to judge before

getting as much information as we can (which seems to be a growing social trend these days), we are even more likely to make a false judgment.

Uncharitable thoughts towards others is the ugly twin of false judgments. Typically, when we make mistakes in discerning the motivation of the actions or words of others, it's because we are not giving that person the benefit of the doubt. We forget to think about the life circumstances that may have led to an out-of-character response.

When we judge falsely and think poorly of others, we are not treating them as we would want to be treated. Maybe more important, when we think unlovely things about someone, we are not treating them as God treats us and as God treats them. When we seek to serve Christ in the other, we are given the opportunity to step back, reassess our thoughts, and try to approach the person with love.

Under what circumstances are you most likely to misjudge someone's actions? What typically causes you to have uncharitable thoughts about others?

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Collect for Proper 25, The Sunday closest to October 26, BCP 235)

Saturday of Lent 4

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to
commend the faith that is in us,

We confess to you, Lord.

Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done:
for our blindness to human need and suffering, and our
indifference to injustice and cruelty,

Accept our repentance, Lord.

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our
neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those
who differ from us,

Accept our repentance, Lord.

This week we looked at the intersection of relationships and prayer and worship.

Monday of Lent 4: in baptism, we promise to continue in the prayers and worship of the church. When we neglect those two foundational aspects of our private and corporate life, we put our baptismal life at risk. In worship, we remember who we are and whose we are. In prayer, we bring the life of the world as well as our own lives to God for transformation.

Tuesday of Lent 4: we commend ourselves to one another and to God in our prayer and worship. This relationship of trust allows us to live faithfully in the world, and to invite others to join in the fullness of life which God intends for all. In this way, we commend the faith that is in us. When we neglect this regular pattern of prayer and worship, we deny ourselves a share in the faith of those who have gone before and those who walk alongside us.

Wednesday of Lent 4: when we become blind to the need and suffering of others, we miss opportunities to bring those before God in prayer so that we can discern our response as an individual, as a worshiping community, and as a denomination. Blinding ourselves to these needs may prevent a few tears for us now, but we risk losing part of our hearts by doing so.

Thursday of Lent 4: just as blinding ourselves to the need and suffering of others damages our ability to live into our baptism, growing indifference to cruelty and injustice also prevents us from fully living into our baptismal call to strive for justice for all persons and to respect the dignity of every human being. Becoming indifferent, like blinding ourselves, may seem convenient in the short run but ultimately will cost us part of our humanity.

Friday of Lent 4: getting caught up in the lies of the ugly twins of false judgment and uncharitable thoughts towards others can prevent us from loving our neighbor as ourselves by seeking to serve Christ in the other. When we judge wrongly and don't approach the other with love, we miss opportunities to live into our baptism and grow into the fullness of who God is calling us to be as a church.

How has a judgment of others, uncharitable thoughts, being blind to the suffering or needs of others, or being indifferent to present or past injustices led to missed opportunities to live into our baptism? How has the neglect of prayer and worship caused us to stumble rather than commend the faith?

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Collect for Ash Wednesday)

Fifth Sunday in Lent

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

This past week, we confessed how our negligence in prayer and worship and our failure to commend the faith within us has led to wrongs done through blindness to human suffering and need, to indifference to cruelty and injustice, to false judgments and uncharitable thoughts, and to

prejudice and contempt for those who are different from us. But today we explore together how God has changed us through our attention to prayer, worship, and commending the faith within us.

What does being attentive to prayer, worship, and commending the faith look like in your life, in the life of your worshipping community, and in the life of the diocese?

How has the ongoing, slow transformation through our worship of God and prayer life enabled us to commend the faith within us?

How has our common life of prayer and worship opened our eyes to human suffering and need? What have we done, either as a worshipping community or as a diocese, in response to these new insights?

How has our common life of prayer and worship shaken us into concern over cruelty and injustice? What have we done in response?

How has our common life of prayer and worship helped us to stop, question what we are hearing or thinking about each other or our neighbors, and respond in love?

Let us rejoice together at the way the Spirit is shaping us to live into our baptism so that we can respond with Christ's love for others! Share your reflections with others. Use hashtag #livingmybaptism to share your reflections on social media.

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.
(Collect for the Fifth Sunday in Lent, BCP, 219)

Monday of Lent 5

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

This week we continue to ask God to accept our repentance. The Litany of Penitence continues with:

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us,
Accept our repentance, Lord.

God has created all humans to partake of one nature and spirit. In modern terms, we might want to say that we all share all but the tiniest fraction of our DNA in common. God loves variety, as we can see from the multiplicity of creation (see Genesis 11:1-9). However, we are socialized into

our understandings of reality. We receive language, thought patterns, and categories from our social environment. In our formative years, those people closest to us shape the way we see the world. As humans, we are often afraid of what we don't know, and so we fear those who experience the world differently than we do, those who fall outside our immediate social circle. In our fear, we are often trained to think in terms of scarcity; if another group has something, there may not be enough for us. We constantly compare ourselves to others, seeking out their weaknesses, while denying our own. "Where do the conflicts and where do the battles among you come from? Is it not from there – from the pleasures waging war in your members? You desire and do not have; you murder and covet because you are not able to obtain; you fight and wage war; you do not have because you do not ask; You ask and do not receive because you ask in an evil fashion, so that you might spend on your own pleasures." (James 4:1-3, tr David Bentley Hart).

Why might God desire diversity in creation? What have you learned from those with life experience different from your own? When has fear of the other gotten in your way?

Look with pity, O heavenly Father, upon the people in this land who live with injustice, terror, disease, and death as their constant companions. Have mercy upon us. Help us to eliminate our cruelty to these our neighbors. Strengthen those who spend their lives establishing equal protection of the law and equal opportunities for all. And grant that every one of us may enjoy a fair portion of the riches of this land; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

(36. For the Oppressed, BCP 826)

Tuesday of Lent 5

"Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever."

For our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us,

Accept our repentance, Lord.

The creation stories tell us that God has created us to serve as stewards of creation. In Genesis 1:26, God creates humankind in the divine image and then gives humankind 'dominion' over the earth. The word that we translate as dominion has the same root in Hebrew as husband. What God granted us was husbandry over the earth. God gives us the seeds of seed-bearing plants, the fruits of the trees, and later in Genesis, the flesh of animals for our food. We are co-creators with God. When we put bread and wine on the altar for eucharist, we do not put grain and grapes – the raw gifts of God – but bread and wine, the results of our care and use of God's creation, on the altar. We ask God to bless that bread and wine as revelatory of the divine life. When we misuse creation, we can only ask God to bless our bread and wine with a pledge to repent and work toward a more just and creation-caring economy. The whole created order, under our care, and with God's blessing, reveals the image of God.

The growing pollution of our world is an urgent problem, and it can seem that there is little that one person can do, but if, for example, everyone stopped using plastic bags, corporations would have to follow our lead. Think about where your food comes from. Can you change the sourcing

of even some of your food toward sustainable habits? Have we accepted our society's definition of our worth in terms of stuff?

What would it mean to see ourselves in the image of God, rather than as society judges us?

O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(19. For Rogation Days III. For Stewardship of Creation, BCP 259)

Wednesday of Lent 5

[lack of concern for those who come after us]

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

For our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of
concern for those who come after us,

Accept our repentance, Lord.

We live in a single-use, throw-away society. We want instant gratification. With the click of a mouse, we can order anything we want, and with Amazon Prime, have it delivered in two days. We even have modular buildings that we can put up almost overnight. Think of the grand cathedrals of Europe that took over a century to build. Those who began the work knew they would not live to see its completion. In the Old Testament, the care of the land was a similar project – land provided sustenance for future generations. Our economy is geared toward the next quarterly report, and consumes resources without thought given to when they run out.

What legacy are we building for future generations? In our households? In our churches? What trees are we planting?

Give us all a reverence for the earth as your own creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor and glory.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

(Prayers of the People, Form IV, BCP 388)

Thursday of Lent 5

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Restore us, good Lord, and let your anger depart from us;

Favorably hear us, for your mercy is great.

We tend to think of God's anger as judgmental wrath. What if, instead, we thought of it as impatience with our blindness? We turn our attention away from God, and in our shortsightedness make a mess of things. By concentrating on creation rather than the Creator, we

act as if we are in charge. God's love and God's anger go hand in hand. God is angry at the mess we've made, but unwilling to leave us in the mess, and so sent the Son to be Incarnate in Jesus to restore us to the divine image. In the eucharist, we offer our whole selves, individually, as a Church, and as humanity to God to be blessed. We offer the gifts of creation – grain and grapes – and our whole economy that produces bread and wine, and ask God to bless them. God does and makes them again revelatory of the divine image. Week after week, what we offer is transformed into the very life of Jesus for our nourishment and restoration, and week by week, we go out to try to make that a reality in the world. In the eucharist, we are made the Body of Christ, and participants in the life of the Trinity.

When you think about your offering on the altar, what do you wish you could change? How have you been transformed by baptism and eucharist? What hurts and angers can you set aside in eucharist this week?

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
(Collect for the Second Sunday of Easter, BCP 224)

Friday of Lent 5

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

Accomplish in us the work of your salvation,
That we may show forth your glory in the world.

The Catechism says that the mission of the Church “is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ” (Catechism, “The Church,” BCP 855). This is God's purpose in Christ Jesus. Salvation looks like a restored unity between Creator and creation. In our baptism, we are grafted on to Jesus' human nature, and so taken up into the divine life in his divine nature. In our eucharist, we grow ever more into the likeness of Christ as we offer ourselves week by week, and our gifts are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. As we seek to bring our lives into line with God's purposes as revealed in the Church, we begin to live that unity here and now with each other and with God. The eucharist is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet to which all the peoples are invited. The way we live together in the Church provides a model for how we finite, error-prone, messy human beings can participate in the divine life. Our life together shines forth to the world as what God intends for the world.

What difference did Church make in your life this week? How have you been restored? How would someone visiting your Church for the first time know that the life of this motley group is what God hopes for all humanity?

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you, bring the nations into your fold, pour out your Spirit upon all

flesh, and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

(16. For the Mission of the Church, BCP 257)

Saturday of Lent 5

“Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. His mercy endures for ever.”

This week, we have completed confessing our wrongs and asking God to accept our repentance and now turn to ask for restoration:

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us,
Accept our repentance, Lord.

For our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us,
Accept our repentance, Lord.

Restore us, good Lord, and let your anger depart from us;
Favorably hear us, for your mercy is great.

Accomplish in us the work of your salvation,
That we may show forth your glory in the world.

Monday of Lent 5: God created all of humanity with one nature and spirit yet with incredible diversity. In this world of diverse ways of thinking, speaking, and organizing societies, we too often choose the path of making distinctions rather than learning from difference.

Tuesday of Lent 5: God’s creation reveals the divine life and we were given the role of husbandry over the earth. Yet rather than seeing ourselves as God’s image-bearers in the world, co-creators with God who have been given the responsibility to lovingly tend to the earth and its creatures as revelatory of the divine life, we have bought into our society’s understanding of nature as something to be exploited.

Wednesday of Lent 5: In our society’s emphasis upon instant gratification, we have become a single use, throw-away society. Our economy has become focused on profit margins, capital gains, and dividends rather than recognizing our role as those who tend to creation on behalf of God, working to preserve, conserve, and prepare the world for future generations.

Thursday of Lent 5: Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, restores God’s image in us through our baptism and in our weekly participation in the eucharist. Our eucharistic participation in the divine life nourishes and restores us as the Body of Christ. Our common worship life gives us a vision of reality that we are called to work out in the world; God’s anger might be best seen as impatience with our blindness.

Friday of Lent 5: The work of salvation is restoring unity between Creator and creation; we participate in this restored unity through our baptism, the eucharist, and our ongoing living into this transformative participation in the divine life.

The purpose of our salvation is to show forth God's glory in the world. By living into our baptism, nourished regularly by the eucharist, we, as the Body of Christ, are called to participate in God's redemption of the world. We don't participate in our own strength, but through God's sharing of the divine life with us through these sacraments. But our culture continually strives to undo and distract us from our calling and purpose.

Our corporate worship life is meant to take the created order into the divine life. Have we shortchanged the world by focusing too much on individual salvation and "getting into heaven" rather than being the glorious Body of Christ in the world?

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

(Collect for Ash Wednesday)

Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday [giving thanks for living into our baptism through prayer, worship, seeing and responding]

Accomplish in us the work of your salvation,
That we may show forth your glory in the world.

As we enter into a week of worship and prayer, beginning today with Palm/Passion Sunday, then continuing through the Triduum of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil, we can both look back at our baptism as our initiation into a life of prayer and worship that has formed us and look forward to prayerfully entering again into the retelling of the centerpiece of the baptismal and eucharistic life we share.

Just as Jesus' earthly life was grounded in the rhythm of prayer and worship, so too should be ours. Think back upon your, your worshiping community's, and the diocesan rhythm of prayer since last Easter.

How has this rhythm of worship transformed you this past year? How has God opened your and our eyes to the needs and sufferings of others? Have you and your worshiping community become increasingly aware of cruelty and injustice around us and in us? Has God revealed patterns of false judgment and uncharitable thoughts and given you a way forward to healthy relationships?

In what ways have worship and prayer shaped your, your worshiping community, and our diocese's responses to those things and systems which damage God's creation and prevent others from flourishing? How have you, your worshiping community, and our diocese responded to the call to respect the dignity of every human being? How have we shown forth God's glory in the world?

Let us rejoice together at the way the Spirit is shaping us to live into our baptism so that we are part of God's glory being revealed in the world! Share your reflections with others. Use hashtag #livingmybaptism to share your reflections on social media.

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Collect for the Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday, BCP, 219)

Monday in Holy Week

Accomplish in us the work of your salvation,
That we may show forth your glory in the world.

Holy Week is a particularly appropriate time to reflect on all that God has done for us to redeem us from sin and death. We tend to focus almost exclusively on Jesus' death as the content of the atonement, but God's purposes embrace a much wider view of Christ's saving work. God created the world to share in the divine life and love. God poured out the divine being in order that we might have existence, and pour ourselves out in love toward God and each other. Our sin is to turn exclusively toward ourselves, our own tribe, or nation. This focus on self distorts the beauty of creation and leads to suffering. To bring us back from the brink of death, God, in the Second Person of the Trinity, chose to enter God's own creation, in order to restore it to union with the divine life. Jesus walked our way of suffering, and through his death, resurrection, and ascension, took our nature back into the life of the Trinity. In our baptism, we come to share in Christ's human nature, in union with Christ's divine nature.

Almighty God, whose dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Collect for Monday in Holy Week, BCP 220)

Tuesday of Holy Week

Accomplish in us the work of your salvation,
That we may show forth your glory in the world.

Our fear of death prevents us from living with joy and for others. Because we see our life as finite and limited, we try to get as much as we can. We buy things we don't need, for fear that we won't ever have enough. We grab as much pleasure as we can for fear that we won't taste it all before we die. We forget that only what we give away as gift is really ever ours. We forget that we exist only by God's gift of the divine self in our creation. We forget that we live in a world of the abundance of grace.

We contemplate Jesus' death on the cross, because here, more clearly than anywhere else, is the proof of the cost God is willing to bear to share the gift of love with us. The world may see it as shame to share ourselves with others, but that giving is at the very heart of the life of the Trinity. When we are baptized, we die to a world of scarcity and are raised into a life of abundant grace. The cross of Christ reveals God's glory and ours, a life of joyful gift.

O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*
(Collect for Tuesday in Holy Week, BCP 220)

Wednesday of Holy Week

Accomplish in us the work of your salvation,
That we may show forth your glory in the world.

We sometimes think of God as an abusive Father, sending his Son specifically to die to take the punishment due us, and thereby appease God. Instead, we can think of how the world became distorted through human sin, so that violence and suffering are part of the human condition. God desired so much to restore us to the glory intended, that God, in the Person of the Son, entered into that human condition. Christ accepted that violence, and by taking it into the divine life, overcame it. In our baptism, we share in Christ's sufferings – we die to sin, and to the violence and distortion which result from sin. We can then live in confidence in the present because we participate already in the glory of Christ's resurrection and ascension, carrying our human nature into the divine presence.

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time confident of the

glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

(Collect for Wednesday in Holy Week, BCP 220)

Maundy Thursday

By the cross and passion of your Son our Lord,
Bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.

Through our baptism, we participate in the human nature of Jesus Christ, and its union with the divine nature of the Incarnate Son. In his human nature, Christ shares in the suffering and distortion that are part of the human condition due to sin. He suffers the worst that human beings can do to one another. He died because of our sinfulness. In the eucharist, Christ shared with us his Body and Blood, those tokens of the suffering of his human nature. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, we also share in Christ's divine nature in its union with his human nature. Christ did not suffer in our place, but shared with us in our suffering. Through our union with him in baptism, and the sharing of the bread and wine, we share in his exaltation to God's right hand. He became one with us that we might become one with him.

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood:

Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

(Collect for Maundy Thursday, BCP 221)

Good Friday

By the cross and passion of your Son our Lord,
Bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.

By his Incarnation and his willing obedience, Christ accepted full union with the human family. The union of the divine nature with his human nature restored all of human nature to its proper relationship with God. To carry that union through to its end, and to overcome the separation between Creator and the created caused by human sin, Jesus was willing to surrender his life to the results of our sin. His act of obedience restored the kinship of the human family torn apart by our disobedience. Even on the cross, Jesus was concerned to establish a new kinship, saying to the disciple whom he loved, "Behold your mother," and to his mother, "Woman, behold your son." Since his death was the cost of establishing this new kinship, we can have confidence that God will regard this family with supreme tenderness.

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*
(*Collect for Good Friday, BCP 221*)

Holy Saturday

By the cross and passion of your Son our Lord,
Bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.

In our baptism, we are buried with Christ in his death, and in this life we await our resurrection into his presence with God. In the Easter Vigil, we complete our journey of penitence and preparation with the joy of the resurrection. We hear the whole story of God's redeeming action, and are assured of our place in that story. In a sense, we are lying with Christ in the tomb, waiting to burst forth from that womb into the new and larger life of restored union with God. This is the joy of Easter. If we have died with Christ in a death like his, we know that we shall also rise with him into a life in union with God. Our life together as the Church in the world, as the Body of Christ, participates in the union of the two natures of Christ, even now, but we know that we shall share that life in even closer union in the life to come.

O God, creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*
(*Collect for Holy Saturday, BCP 221*)

Easter Sunday

“Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.”

From the Diocese of Missouri Task Force on Baptism, Episcopal Diocese of Missouri.