



One Heart Lent Program

This Lent, you are invited to participate in the **One Heart Lent Program**, an effort to help feed hungry people in Lawrence, MA. The **One Heart Lent Program** offers this daily guide for Lenten reflections, as well as a unique opportunity to help feed some of our neediest brothers and sisters through our Lenten almsgiving.

LENT

Lent, the period of weeks leading up to Holy Week and Easter, is a unique gift from God. During Lent, we are invited to renew our relationships with God, turn away from sin, and experience reconciliation with God and others.

We traditionally embrace three disciplines during Lent: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. None of these is an end in itself. Instead, each discipline helps us better focus on God and on living God's love.

PRAYER

The goal of Lenten prayer is to dedicate more of ourselves to building our relationships with God. To make best use of this **One Heart Lent Program Guide**, you are invited to set aside some period of time each day during Lent (perhaps half an hour) to communicate with God through reflective prayer. Each day, you are invited to read in your bible the Gospel passage listed in this guide, and then to consider the reflections and questions for the day. If possible, it is very helpful to make notes after your reflections each day.

FASTING

Through fasting, we recall that God gives us all the gifts we have in life – not just food, but also breath, health, speech, thought, love, and every material good. By choosing to deny ourselves some food and drink during Lent, we gain a better perspective on all of the material blessings God gives to us. In addition to observing the Church's Lenten regulations for fasting (Ash Wednesday and Good Friday) and abstinence (from meat on Fridays), each of us chooses particular ways to fast during Lent.

ALMSGIVING

Almsgiving is our sharing the best of our treasure with people who are in need. All that we are and all that we have are gifts from God. It is tempting to grasp those gifts for ourselves, without considering God or other people. When we sacrifice the best of our gifts for people in need, we become better focused on God and others. We grow closer to God and all of our brothers and sisters by living God's generous love.

The **One Heart Lent Program** is a fantastic focus for Lenten almsgiving. The **One Heart Lent Program** raises money to help feed hungry people in Lawrence, MA. In Lawrence today, 75% of children are at risk for hunger. The **One Heart Lent Program** raises money to provide free, nutritious meals in Lawrence through the **Cor Unum Meal Center**. ("Cor Unum" means "One Heart" in Latin.) Cor Unum serves meals to hundreds of people every day, 365 days a year. **100% of the alms you contribute to the One Heart Lent Program will help provide food through Cor Unum. Every dollar you contribute will provide one full, nutritious meal at Cor Unum.**

To participate in the One Heart Lent Program, all you need is an open heart, the desire to grow in the Lord, and a jar.

ASH WEDNESDAY and the FIRST DAYS OF LENT

Wednesday, 2/22 (Ash Wednesday): Matthew 6.1-6, 16-18

Jesus Christ, through His passion, death, and resurrection, brought the full power of salvation to this fallen, sinful world around 2000 years ago. Yet look at the state of the world today. There is so much evil, injustice, violence, hatred, and unnecessary suffering. Much of what's wrong with the world is the result of our free choices to sin and to not live holy lives. Considering this, as a Christian, if you could make a wish for the world – an expression of your desire for the world that is both sincere and realistic – what would it be? Would your wish be for everyone in the world to stop sinning and pursue holiness? That's not realistic. It's not going to happen. Lots of people will always freely choose to sin and reject holiness. Would you wish that all Christians – all people who profess that they are disciples of Jesus – would make an effort to stop sinning and to grow in holiness? That is unfortunately also unrealistic. Many people who claim to be Christian love sin, and they're not all going to stop. How about a wish that the leaders of the Church – all bishops, priests, deacons, religious, Catholic school teachers, catechists, parents, and heads of parish groups – would try to turn away from sin and live authentically Christian lives for a limited period of time . . . let's say just six weeks? Unfortunately, that is also unrealistic. It's not going to happen. What COULD you wish that is realistic? You could wish that YOU – just you – would dedicate six weeks to turning away from sin and growing in faithfulness to the Gospel. That IS realistic. That actually COULD happen. In preparation for the holiest days of the year, which begin on April 6, if you wish to spend the next six weeks, one day at a time, actively repenting of your sin and working to live as a more authentic disciple of Jesus Christ . . . that is a superb and realistic wish. Today, reflect on this. At the end of the day, state your wish. You might express that wish as a petition, and offer it to God. It may be helpful to begin a written record of your reflections for your future reference during Lent.

ALMSGIVING!

To begin Lent, put a **One Heart Lent Program** wrapper on an empty jar. Place your jar in a location that is very visible to you, and each day during Lent place in it an amount of money that will be a reasonable daily sacrifice for you. Your sacrifice will help feed some of the neediest of our brothers and sisters through the Cor Unum Meal Center. **Every dollar you contribute will provide one full meal at the Cor Unum Meal Center.**

Thursday, 2/23: Luke 9.22-25

Today's Gospel passage includes one of Jesus' foundational teachings. He lays out three necessary conditions for discipleship that must be freely accepted by anyone who wishes to follow Him. Jesus does not force anyone to live these realities, but He makes absolutely clear that anyone who wishes to be His disciple MUST accept these realities: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." The basic meaning of these three conditions is clear. Whatever your current state of holiness/sinfulness, review these three conditions today and state clearly to yourself and Jesus whether you intend to freely accept these conditions each day during Lent. Be fully honest with yourself and with Jesus. (1) If you wish to follow Jesus this Lent, each day you must remove yourself from the center of your life and put Jesus there. You must. (2) If you wish to follow Jesus this Lent, each day you must accept whatever cross is involved in following Him – whatever passion, challenge, difficulty, and struggle is involved. You must. (3) If you wish to follow Jesus this Lent, each day you must follow Jesus. If you wish to follow Him you must follow Him? That means you must persist and persist and persist in trying to doing Jesus' will each day during Lent. You must. If you eagerly embrace these three necessary conditions of discipleship, that's wonderful. You might want to make a note to yourself about your eagerness, in case it wanes during Lent. If you are in any way hesitant about accepting these three conditions, do not be afraid. In your prayer, speak honestly to Jesus about your hesitance. With your limitations, are you willing to risk attempting to live Lent? If so, ask Jesus for the graces you think you need to do so. If we were perfect disciples, we would not need Lent.

Friday, 2/24: Matthew 9.14-15

In our Jewish spiritual tradition, fasting is an important discipline that helps faithful people bridge the gap between God and themselves. In today's reading from Matthew 9, people are surprised when they witness that Jesus' disciples do not fast. They ask Jesus the perfect question: Why do your disciples not fast? Jesus gives an answer that actually reveals his divine identity: While He is with them, His disciples do not fast (because, while they are in His presence, there is no spiritual gap between them and God!). Jesus says that in the future, when He is no longer physically with them, His disciples will fast. After Jesus ascends to heaven, His disciples do fast. If someone asked one of Jesus' original disciples ten years after His resurrection and ascension to heaven, "Why do you fast?", the disciple's response might be: "I fast to help spiritually bridge the gap between Jesus and me . . . as an act of repentance for my sins . . . as an expression of my gratitude for His love . . . as an aid to focus spiritually and to pray . . . as an instrument to put into perspective the abundance with which I have blessed . . . as a discipline that leads me to greater solidarity with and sacrificial action for people in need." The key question is not "How do you fast?", it's "Why do you fast?". The Church's official regulations for Lenten fasting and abstinence are extremely modest (two days of simple fasting and seven Fridays of abstinence from meat). Today, finalize and confirm in your prayer time with God your plans for additional, healthy, manageable elements of fasting you plan to pursue this Lent. Resolve the question of "How do you fast?" and get going with fasting. Remember today and throughout Lent, the key question is: "Why do you fast?".

Saturday, 2/25: Luke 4.1-13

In today's text from Luke 5, Jesus sees a tax collector named Levi sitting at the customs post and says, "Follow me." Levi leaves everything behind, gets up, and follows Jesus. Levi then hosts a great banquet for Jesus at his house, so that a large crowd of tax collectors (who are disreputable, presumably sinful people) and others are able to share close company with Jesus at table. When certain religious leaders are scandalized by this, Jesus explains why he eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners: "Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners." Levi is a sinner. When Jesus invites him to follow Him, Levi follows. Levi has some abundance of money. After he begins to follow Jesus, he sacrifices his money to make it possible for a large crowd of people – who are also sinners – to experience close company with Jesus. One of the traditional disciplines we embrace to support our spiritual conversion during Lent is almsgiving. Almsgiving is not meant to be tossing some change or a few dollars into a collection box (or jar). Authentic almsgiving involves sacrificing – giving up money we would prefer to hold or use for ourselves. Authentic almsgiving is the thoughtful sacrifice of money to do the work of God. Inspired by Levi, consider today whether the almsgiving you (a sinner) plan to do this Lent could be connected with assisting other people – all of whom are presumably sinners – to experience close company with Jesus. What might that involve?

THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

Sunday, 2/26: Matthew 4.1-11

On this First Sunday of Lent, we hear Matthew's version of Jesus' temptation in the desert. After He has been baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert, where He is tempted by the devil for 40 days. Jesus faces three fundamental temptations that are experienced by all people in all times and places (including us): to pursue pleasure, pride, and power apart from the will and plan of God the Father. Jesus experiences these temptations as deeply as any other human being. He ultimately decides not to pursue pleasure, pride, or power apart from the will and plan of His Father. Through His passion, death, and resurrection, Jesus has freed you from slavery to sin and death. The power of that salvation was fully breathed into you from the moment you were baptized. A person who is actively living Lent acknowledges that he/she has been saved by Jesus and is a sinner: Tempted on the journey of life, I have chosen to pursue pleasure, pride, power, and many other realities apart from the will and plan of God. In your prayer time today, speak directly with God about your intentions for this First Week of Lent. What are your sincere spiritual goals for this week? Describe them to God, and ask for the grace you believe you need to pursue those goals.

(If you want to effectively use this prayer guide for the First Week of Lent, do not read ahead in it. It is important that you read it only one day at a time.)

ALMSGIVING!

During the past few days, you hopefully have figured out how you will fast during Lent. This week, calculate the cost of the food from which you are fasting during Lent, and add that to your **One Heart Lent Program** jar. By doing this, you are both offering your fast to God and directly offering the equivalent of what you would have eaten to help feed the hungry. **Every dollar you contribute will provide one full meal at the Cor Unum Meal Center.**

Monday, 2/27: Matthew 25.31-46

Today's text from Matthew 25 is Jesus' most complete description of the details of His final judgment of humanity, which presumably is the same as the particular judgment we will experience if we die today. It surely lays out in detail how Jesus judges us every day of our lives on earth. Jesus judges us entirely on the basis of whether we choose to love. Jesus so completely loves you that He sacrificed His entire life to save you from sin and death. You choose – hour by hour, day by day – whether to return love to Jesus. He is very specific about what this means. When you recognize that another person who's "least" is hungry, you choose to feed or to not feed that person. That is your choice to love or not love Jesus. When you recognize that another person who's "least" is thirsty, you choose to give drink or to not give drink to that person. That is your choice to love or to not love Jesus. The revelation continues: When you recognize that another person who's "least" is a stranger, naked, ill, or in prison, you choose to meet or to not meet that person's needs. Those are your choices to love or to not love Jesus. On the straightforward basis of your free choices to love or to not love, Jesus judges you as worthy to inherit God's kingdom, or to go off to eternal punishment. In your reflection and prayer today, consider honestly: Are you entirely familiar with Jesus' uniquely important teaching in this passage? Do you accept that it is the truth? What impact, if any, does it have on your current daily life . . . on the choices you make about how you live in 2023? Let's say you have six weeks to live on this planet, and then will face final judgment. Based on today's reflection, would you make any adjustments in how you live?

Tuesday, 2/28: Matthew 6.7-15

In today's reading from Matthew 6, Jesus teaches His disciples what is commonly called the "Lord's Prayer" or the "Our Father". In the final part of this prayer, Jesus teaches us to say ". . . forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us . . ." Could there be a dimension of reciprocity in how God forgives us – meaning that God's forgiveness of our sins is somehow connected to how we forgive people who sin against us? Yes! Read carefully what Jesus teaches in the rest of the passage: "If you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions." That teaching is entirely clear. Whether you like it or not, you cannot erase it from the bible. Get to work with this passage today. Who currently trespasses against you? To what extent do you forgive the people who currently transgress against you? Be honest about this.

Wednesday 3/1: Luke 11.29-32

In this passage from Luke 11, Jesus states to his contemporaries: "This generation is an evil generation. . . ." Many of the people around Him want Jesus to perform some sort of miraculous sign to prove He is of God. Jesus responds by saying of His generation: ". . . it seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it, except the sign of Jonah." In the Old Testament, Jonah is sent by God to the very sinful people of Nineveh to warn them of God's impending judgment of their sinfulness. Jonah announces to the people of Nineveh that God will destroy them in forty days because of their sin. In response to this "sign of Jonah", the people of Nineveh believe God, proclaim a fast, and turn away from their evil ways. God accepts the sincere repentance of the people of Nineveh, and God forgives them. One week ago on Ash Wednesday, you resolved to "Repent and believe in the Gospel" during Lent. During the past week, in what ways have you repented? From what evil ways have you thus far turned? Be specific.

Thursday, 3/2: Matthew 7.7-12

Spend some time reading through today's text from Matthew 7. After you've done that, consider the following: Very often, when we spend time with this passage, we begin reflecting on the reality and mystery of how God responds to our prayers of petition. Jesus assures us here that if we, who are sinful, know how to give good gifts to our children, God our Father will much more give good things to those who ask Him. We may ask ourselves questions about how this works – how and when does God answer our requests for things we believe are good? We certainly believe that God should give us what is good. When we reflect on this passage, many of us do NOT focus on its final verse: “Do unto others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets.” If we are basically balanced people, we want other people to do to us what is good – what God would have them to do us. We want other people to love us as God loves us. Jesus tells us directly here that WE should do to others what God would have US do to them. Instead of wondering today about how God answers your petitions for good, focus on the final part of the passage. To what extent are YOU willing to do good to ALL other people? You are likely to be the instrument through whom God answers other people's petitions for good. In what ways do you actually do unto others the good God wants for them? Where do your limitations come in?

Friday, 3/3: Matthew 5.20-26

In the today's passage from Matthew 5, Jesus says to His disciples (people who are actually trying to follow Him) that their righteousness must be deeper than certain religious leaders who may follow the letter of God's law, but do not necessarily live God's love. Jesus identifies specific situations His disciples must address: (1) when you are angry, dismissive, and insulting with another person, (2) when another person has a legitimate, unresolved, negative issue of which you are the cause, and (3) when you have an unsettled problem with your opponent. Today, write down these three categories and make a list of who falls into each in your life. Don't spend any extended time analyzing the situations connected with these people, and don't make a call to your therapist. Simply be honest and make the list. Toward the end of the day, review the list and answer this question in your prayer time: Who is most important to you: these people, yourself, or Jesus? Do not answer that question as you think it should be answered. Answer it honestly.

Saturday, 3/4: Matthew 5.43-48

In this text from Matthew 5, Jesus tells His disciples: “But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.” God creates all people because He wants them to exist now and eternally. God sustains the lives of all the people who are currently on this planet, because He wants them to exist now and eternally. God continues to love and sustains people who are good and just, as well as people who are bad and unjust. Ultimately – as was made clear by Jesus in the Matthew 25 passage on Monday – God judges people, based on their choices whether to love, for eternal life or eternal death. During the past week, your reflections should have drawn your attention to people who might be described as your enemies – people you inappropriately consider the “least”, people who trespass against you, people to whom you do not extend God's love, people with whom you are sinfully angry, people against whom you have sinned, and people with whom you have unsettled problems. As we conclude the First Week of Lent, today's reading minimally should push you to recognize that God wants you to grow in the reality of loving your enemies . . . as God does. Spend some time in prayer today speaking directly with God about your openness to that invitation to growth in God's love.

THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT

Sunday, 3/5: Matthew 17.1-9

Every year on the Second Sunday of Lent, we hear one or another gospel account (this year, from Matthew) of the transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus leads his close disciples Peter, James, and John up a high mountain by themselves. There, these disciples are given a vision of the full glory of Jesus. They witness Jesus' speaking with Moses and Elijah

– the great figures of the law and the prophets in the Hebrew scripture. The disciples experience a manifestation of the presence of God the Father, whose voice tells them: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.” In the scene of the transfiguration, we are not given a fanciful portrait of disciples who are perfect or who nearly fully understand Jesus. We are given a realistic portrait of disciples who have a relationship with Jesus, who are given a powerful new experience of grace from God, who are limited and afraid, and who have a long way to grow in fully understanding Jesus. Hopefully, you can relate to this. If you have a relationship with Jesus, have been actively living the grace of Lent, are limited, and recognize you have a long way to grow in fully understanding Jesus . . . you are on the right track spiritually! Today, speak directly to God about your desire to grow as a disciple by entering actively into this Second Week of Lent. If you intend to use this prayer guide for the Second Week of Lent, do not read ahead in it. Read it only one day at a time.

ALMSGIVING!

Most of the people who are helping feed the hungry through the **One Heart Lent Program** have heard about the project by word-of-mouth. This week, consider ways you might help expand the number of people sacrificing to help feed the hungry by telling other people about the project and encouraging them to get involved. For inspiration and images, you might visit the website of the Cor Unum Meal Center, **CorUnumMealCenter.org**. You might also join Cor Unum on social media and begin to share its posts with your friends and followers.

Monday, 3/6: Luke 6.36-38

In today’s text from Luke 6, Jesus tells His disciples to live in specific ways that are quite different from the ways in which they otherwise might live in this fallen, sinful world. Consider the four principal teaching of Jesus in this passage: (1) Be merciful – that is, extend love to other people beyond the strict limits of justice. (2) Stop judging – that is, stop sweepingly declaring the moral status of other people, which only God has the authority to do. (3) Stop condemning – that is, stop fundamentally writing off other people because of your negative judgments of them. (4) Give abundantly – that is, take what you have, and give it very generously to other people. If a person wants to be a disciple of Jesus, he/she must freely choose to work to live in these ways. These realities – being merciful, not judging, not condemning, and giving generously – are not necessarily valued in many parts of current American society. A person who lives these realities may therefore need to go against cultural norms, and perhaps face negative reactions, or at least a lack of support, from other people. Read through these four teachings of Jesus today, and reflect on each separately. Given the way you have been living your recent life, how do these hit you?

Tuesday, 3/7: Matthew 23.1-12

God creates every human being with the purpose of being great. Every balanced human being should desire greatness. In this passage from Matthew 23, Jesus states a fundamental principle of Christian discipleship: “The greatest among you must be your servant.” If a person accepts and pursues this truth, he/she must choose to embrace an understanding of self and a place in the world . . . and a daily life agenda . . . that is very different from common worldly standards. Living as a servant of other people, according to Jesus, is a very different way to live life than even the way of certain religious leaders, who preach God’s truth but do not serve other people. Spend plenty of time with this passage today, reflecting on the truths it includes: You are created to be great. You should be pursuing greatness in your life. If you want to be great, you must be a servant of other people. Be honest about how you have been recently living your life. How do you react to all of this?

Wednesday, 3/8: Matthew 20.17-28

In today’s reading from Matthew 20, Jesus says of Himself, “. . . the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.” During the past two weeks of Lent, many of us have been opening ourselves more to the teaching of Jesus because we want to repent of our sinful ways. Many of us have been more open to learning and living the greater truth of His love because we want to live more the way He wants us to live. We want to increase the ways in which we “do the right thing” with our lives as Jesus teaches us. Jesus Himself does not just live the truth because He wants to do the right thing. He lives the truth because He wants to give His life as a ransom for many. That is, Jesus chooses to live God’s truth in order to bring back to God the most horrible people in

the world, who are otherwise enslaved to sin and eternal death. Jesus lives God's love – even to the point of sacrificing His entire life – in order to ransom from sin and death the most evil, horrible people on this planet. In your prayer today, spend time reflecting about that truth about why Jesus lives God's truth. When you have that opened up in your mind and heart, how do you react?

Thursday, 3/9: Luke 16.19-31

In the parable Jesus offers in today's passage from Luke 16, the rich man has abundant material resources, lives in a house, dresses in fine garments, and enjoys abundant food. Lying at the rich man's door is Lazarus, who is economically poor, perhaps homeless, painfully ill, and hungry. What could the rich man choose to do for Lazarus? He could invite Lazarus into his home. The rich man could give Lazarus some money. He could give Lazarus some food – even the scraps that fall from his table. He could offer Lazarus some care for his illness . . . as do the dogs, who come and lick Lazarus' sores. The rich man could say hello to Lazarus (he knows Lazarus' name). What, in fact, does the rich man do for Lazarus? Absolutely nothing. The rich man chooses to completely ignore Lazarus. He does not even extend to Lazarus the instinctual care given to Lazarus by dogs. Imagine that Lazarus is the worst person on the planet: perhaps an abuser, or a war criminal, or a murderer, or the person who has done the worst possible things to the rich man. Might the rich man have a valid excuse for doing absolutely nothing for Lazarus? Spend time today with those questions, and try to answer them honestly. Do you ever behave like the rich man behaves with Lazarus? With whom? Whether you have no reason or understandable reasons for acting this way, re-read the entirety of the parable and recognize that it is addressed by Jesus directly to you. How do you react?

Friday, 3/10: Matthew 21.33-43, 45-46

In today's Matthew 21 text, Jesus introduces a parable in which a landowner sends his servants to his tenants to obtain the produce that they justly owe him. The tenants seize the servants, beat one, kill another, and stone a third. The landowner then sends a larger number of other servants to the tenants, but the tenants treat them in the same way. The landowner finally sends to the tenants his son, thinking that they will respect his son. When the tenants see the landlord's son, they conspire against him, seize him, throw him out of the vineyard, and kill him. This parable illustrates how God's people have in the past violently rejected the messengers sent to them by God (in the parable, the first two groups of servants), and how certain religious leaders and people treat Jesus (in the parable, the son). When we read this parable, we can marvel at the violent, hateful rejection our spiritual ancestors gave to God's prophets and Son – a violent, hateful rejection that included killing God's messengers, including the Son of God! Why would people behave this way? Would it not have been enough to ignore, dismiss, or treat in non-violent ways people whom they rejected? Today, we have freely chosen to create a culture in which we routinely treat one another in the same ways as the tenants in this parable: cancel culture. Today, speak directly to God about the ways that you participate in cancel culture. Do not make excuses for yourself.

Saturday, 3/11: Luke 15.1-3, 11-32

This passage from Luke 15 contains a critically important revelation from Jesus about the mercy of God our Father. In the parable, the father represents God our Father. The younger son rejects his father and wastes his inheritance, but when he hits rock bottom in life, he comes to his senses, returns to his father, confesses his sin against God and his father, and seeks to return to his father's house as a hired worker. The father watches for his son's return, runs out to greet him, immediately restores him to a place of honor, and throws a lavish party to celebrate his return. Jesus makes clear through this story the overwhelming, complete, merciful love of God our Father. In the parable, the older son resents his father's merciful love for his brother. In response, the father expresses his love for the older son, assures him of his full inheritance, and encourages him to join the celebration of his brother's return. However, the father does not water down or change his merciful love because of the older son's limitations. In your prayer and reflection today, consider whether you ever dislike the fact that God extends merciful love and forgiveness to any sinner who sincerely acknowledges his/her sin and asks God to return to His home. After that reflection, re-read the parable. It will not go away.

THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

Sunday, 3/12: John 4.5-42

In today's account from John 4, Jesus has an extended encounter with a Samaritan woman. The story might reflect various dimensions of our own personal encounters with Jesus today. There is mystery and revelation, a back-and-forth of questions and answers, increasing openness and trust, and eventually a significant spiritual movement on the part of the Samaritan woman. At any point in the encounter, the Samaritan woman is free to ignore Jesus, to not listen to His words, to dismiss Him, or to turn away from Him. She makes the free choice to remain engaged with Jesus, with all of the challenges this involves for her. At this point in Lent, if you are honestly trying to remain actively engaged with Jesus, you are on the right track spiritually! During the upcoming week, the daily scripture passages will offer us fundamental choices that Jesus shows His authentic disciples they can make every day, to see the world as He sees it, to interact with other people as He does, and to grow in the power of His love. Each of these fundamental choices of how to live may challenge us to grow beyond our current status quo. That's the purpose of Lent! In your prayer today, speak directly with God about your intentions and spiritual goals for living each day of the week ahead. If you intend to engage deeply in Lent this week, read this prayer guide only one day at a time.

ALMSGIVING!

In many cases, the economically poor and hungry must beg in order to live. Your almsgiving through the **One Heart Lent Program** makes it possible for more people to be given the food they need – not to have to beg for it. This week, would you be willing to stand in for your hungry brothers and sisters by asking some of your family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers to make contributions to your **One Heart Lent Program** jar? **Every dollar they contribute will provide one full meal at the Cor Unum Meal Center.** How many meals might you provide through your outreach this week?

Monday, 3/13: Luke 4.24-30

In today's passage from Luke 4, Jesus has just spoken to His friends and neighbors in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth, dropping on them a bombshell interpretation of scripture suggesting that He is the Messiah. The people in the synagogue do not accept what Jesus says or Jesus Himself. Jesus does not back down. He explains to the people how they are behaving: the same way that people behaved when they rejected God's prophets in the Old Testament. The people in the synagogue react with murderous anger. They are filled with fury, rise up, drive Jesus out of the town, lead Him to the brow of the hill on which Nazareth is built, and intend to hurl down Jesus headlong. They so reject Jesus and what He has told them that they move to kill Him! Luke tells us that Jesus passes through the midst of the murderous crowd and goes away. Is this a miracle? That seems entirely doubtful, because Jesus has told the crowd that He will not perform presumably wondrous things they have heard he did at Capernaum. What seems to be happening is that Jesus is confident in the truth he speaks, not intimidated by nasty people who reject the truth, and strong enough to walk away from them. You are able to live your life this way if you chose. Do you try? Is there room here for growth?

Tuesday, 3/14: Matthew 18.21-35

In this text from Matthew 18, Peter asks Jesus what is the limit of how many times he must forgive the brother who sins against him. Jesus answers directly: There is no limit. Jesus' disciples must try without ceasing to forgive people who sin against them. This can be a challenging teaching. Jesus offers a parable to explain a major reason why His disciples must strive without ceasing to forgive others: because they have been forgiven by God the entire debt of their sin. Jesus also adds a clear warning about the negative eternal consequences if His disciples do not forgive their brothers and sisters from their hearts. Whether you welcome or like this important passage, it is entirely clear and understandable. Whether you welcome or like the prospect of trying to forgive without limit the people who have sinned against you, you certainly can live this way if you chose. Do you? Should you do more?

Wednesday, 3/15: Matthew 5.17-19

In these verses from Matthew 5, Jesus makes clear that in everything you say and do, you teach others how to live. When you choose to break God's commandments, you teach others to break God's commandments. When you choose to obey God's commandments, you teach others how to obey God's commandments. Some of us would prefer to imagine that how we choose to live has little or no impact on other people. That is not the case. Some of us prefer to imagine that our "private" sin does not affect other people. That is entirely untrue. However we choose to live our lives is ultimately witnessed by other people who encounter us – for good and for evil. God commands us how to live and how not to live. God blesses us by revealing laws of truth to follow. You are entirely capable of learning, understanding, and obeying God's commandments. You are fully able to live this way consciously and entirely openly in the world. To what extent do you live this way? How might you want to grow?

Thursday, 3/16: Luke 11.14-23

In this passage from Luke 11, Jesus performs a miracle: He drives a demon out of a man who is mute, and the man is then able to speak. Some people in the crowds who witness the miracle are amazed. Others respond by accusing Jesus of driving out demons through the power of the devil. On every level, this is an entirely ridiculous accusation. It would be understandable if Jesus is tempted to respond to these people by condemning them . . . or dismissing them. . . or ignoring them. In response to these people, Jesus might decide to "go private" – to detach from other people and live His life out of the public eye. Instead of these possible reactions, Jesus chooses to offer these false accusers multiple, detailed, logical explanations for why it is by the finger of God that He drives out demons. Jesus responds to these people with love, offers them logical explanations, and leaves them to do with those explanations what they choose to do. In our current society, many people reject God's truth with utterly false logic and entirely ridiculous accusations. In response, it can be tempting for any disciple of Jesus to condemn, dismiss, ignore, or go private. An authentic disciple of Jesus understands that he/she is responsible for helping other people – even those who act with profound ignorance and hatred – to understand the truth in love. Spend some time reflecting today on how Jesus speaks to His rejectors/accusers in this passage. You can live this same way. When do you, and when do you not? Is there room in your life for growth?

Friday, 3/17: Mark 12.28-34

In today's reading from Mark 12, Jesus is asked by a scribe which is the first of all the commandments in the Hebrew scriptures. Jesus responds by articulating the double love commandment: (1) "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" and (2) "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (which means as God loves us). The scribe – and we – receive the gift here of a very clear teaching from Jesus. The double love commandments expresses the fundamental truth of how God wants us to live each day. All of God's many other commandments flow from and should be understood in the light of the double love commandment. It is obvious that none of us perfectly lives either part of the double love commandment, so it must be that it is a reality into which we continually grow, rather than something that is completely achieved during our earthly lives. The double love commandment is a blessing from Jesus that is meant to set the agenda for each day of His disciples' lives: to go out and pursue love of God and neighbor, and to thus experience a life of constant spiritual growth. To what extent do you embrace and pursue the double love commandment as your guide and agenda in your daily life? How might you grow in all of this?

Saturday, 3/18: Luke 18.9-14

If you have engaged deeply in this Third Week of Lent, you have hopefully encountered ways in which you realize you could grow in living some of the fundamental perspectives and choices of an authentic disciple of Jesus. In the process, you must have realized some of your limitations. Today's parable from Luke 18 should be comforting and encouraging to you. In the parable, there is a Pharisee who recites for himself his good works, does not acknowledge his sinfulness, recognizes the sinfulness of a person near him, and does nothing to extend mercy in word, deed, or even prayer for the other person. Jesus explains that the Pharisee is not justified: that is, he is not in a proper relationship with God. The second person in the parable is a tax collector who stands at a distance from the holy area

of the temple, will not raise his eyes to heaven, beats his breast in penitence, and prays, “O God, be merciful to me a sinner.” Jesus teaches that the tax collector goes home justified: in a proper relationship with God. The Pharisee incorrectly and improperly exalts his spiritual status. The tax collector is correctly humble and turns to God to receive mercy. As you conclude this week, take a good look at these two characters. How can you relate to either or both of them? In your prayer time, speak directly to God about how this Third Week of Lent went for you. Be grateful for the graces you have received . . . and ask for the graces you believe you need to continue living Lent.

THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

Sunday, 3/19: John 9.1-41

This Sunday’s reading is chapter nine of the Gospel of John – the story of the man born blind from birth. Jesus enters into this man’s situation and initiates a series of great gifts. The man first receives the miraculous gift of sight. This is just the beginning. Tossed about by a succession of questions, challenges, and particularly the misguided opinions of certain religious leaders, the man eventually receives the ultimate gift – belief in Jesus. The man’s journey to belief is complicated and not easy. During it, he makes a series of simple but important decisions that help him grow in receiving the gifts that Jesus offers him. Each of these moments of decision turns out to be a critical moment: a moment in which his decision will lead him to growth in receiving Jesus’ gifts or lead him away from those gifts. In the week ahead, we will be presented with daily scripture passages from the Gospel of John that highlight straightforward, critical moments in which people in the gospels and we can make important decisions to grow in Jesus. You will be invited to spend time with each day’s passage and seriously, honestly consider the critical spiritual moments they present. In your prayer today, speak with God about your level of interest in entering into this spiritual exercise during the week ahead. If you intend to actively participate in this spiritual exercise during the upcoming week, read this prayer guide only one day at a time.

ALMSGIVING!

If you have been pursuing the almsgiving possibilities offered during recent weeks, you are doing much to grow in union with God and to be more connected daily with your brothers and sisters in need. This week, consider whether there are other material areas of your life that you might like to redirect toward doing God’s work for the economically poor. If those areas are near at hand, consider redirecting the treasure involved to your **One Heart Lent Program** jar.

Monday, 3/20: John 4.43-54

In today’s reading, Jesus is in the town of Cana in Galilee. He encounters a royal official whose son is gravely ill in the town of Capernaum. The royal official asks Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son, who is near death. Imagine what is going on inside the royal official in this terrifying situation: his child is near death and he clearly has no natural means that he hopes will save his son. Jesus responds to his request: “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe.” Imagine what the royal official may feel and think when Jesus says that to him! The royal official responds to Jesus: “Sir, come down before my child dies.” Jesus says to him: “You may go; your son will live.” This is the critical moment in the story in terms of the royal official. How will he respond to Jesus’ statement that his son will live, and to Jesus’ instruction for him to leave? Surely his thoughts, questions, and emotions have not miraculously cleared away. The scripture tells us how the royal official responds: he believes what Jesus says to him and leaves. The next day, the royal official learns that his son will live, and that his son’s recovery began the day before at precisely the time Jesus told him “Your son will live.” Go back to the critical moment for the royal official: he believes what Jesus says to him and leaves. What does “believe” mean here? The answer to that question involves a substantial amount of content. Spend time today reflecting on and answering that question: What does it mean in this passage that the royal official “believes” Jesus?

Tuesday, 3/21: John 5.1-16

In this passage, Jesus miraculously heals a man who has been ill for 38 years. The man is amidst a large crowd of people who are ill, blind, lame, and crippled, gathered at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem, hoping for healing from the water in the pool. Jesus speaks with him, and then tells him to rise, take up his mat, and walk. The man immediately becomes well, takes up his mat, and walks! Because this healing takes place on a sabbath day, certain people who are offended by Jesus' not conforming to their understanding of religious law interrogate the man about the healing. Read the passage carefully and spend time imagining yourself in the man's place. Consider what he thinks and feels when he first speaks with Jesus . . . and then when he experiences the healing . . . and then when he encounters the people who question him about his interaction with Jesus. This is not nearly the end of the story. After all of this takes place, Jesus finds the healed man in the temple area and says to him: "Look, you are well; do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may happen to you." This is the critical moment for the healed man. Consider what Jesus has told him in the temple area. He has been physically healed. That is a wonderful but temporary experience. The much greater healing Jesus offers him is when He tells him " . . . do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may happen to you." Why is this an offer of much greater healing? What might the man choose to do to accept this offer from Jesus? Be sure you dedicate significant consideration to this today, and that you answer the questions. There is no evidence in the scripture whether the man makes a good decision in this critical moment.

Wednesday, 3/22: John 5.17-30

In this text from John 5, Jesus states that God the Father, the Creator of the universe, is Jesus' own, personal father. Jesus also claims here to be equal to God. He says that He has been sent to the world by God the Father. Jesus states that He possesses God's entire life and does what God the Father does. He declares that all people may honor Him just as they honor God the Father. Jesus tells His listeners that God the Father has handed over to Him, Jesus, the power of all judgment over the living and the dead. Jesus claims to be God . . . and claims to be the judge of everything every person does – good deeds and wicked deeds – with current and eternal consequences. When people hear these claims from Jesus, the critical moment is how they choose to respond. The scripture writer tells us how many people who originally hear these claims from Jesus respond in this critical moment: they try all the more to kill Jesus. For you, the critical moment connected with this text is today. This single day. Read through the passage, grasp its basics, and decide how to respond. At the end of today, honestly review how you have responded to this critical moment.

Thursday, 3/23: John 5.31-47

In this section of John 5, Jesus speaks about the many people who reject Him. He loves these people. He is straightforward about His complete, detailed understanding of the many reasons people reject Him, including the many errors they make. One of the most penetrating lines in this passage is when Jesus asks: "How can you believe, when you accept praise from one another and do not seek the praise that comes from the only God?" Two thousand years ago, Jesus here tells His listeners that they care very much how other people respond to them, but they do not care how God responds to them. In our current age, particularly because of social media, many of us care inordinately about how other people respond to us. Some of us principally measure ourselves by the number of online friends, followers, and likes we have. The sobering question from Jesus is: When we accept praise from one another and do not seek the praise that comes from the only God . . . *how can you believe?*" Could Jesus be suggesting here that a person – whether 2000 years ago or today – could be so caught up in the praise of other people, and so detached from the praise of God, that the person effectively cuts himself/herself off from the likelihood of believing in Jesus? Spend some time today considering that question. If getting overly focused on the praise of other people is such an active spiritual danger, what would be critical moments of daily life decision to avoid this real danger? Do you recognize such moments in your recent life?

Friday, 3/24: John 7.1-2, 10, 25-30

In this passage from John 7, people in Jerusalem are speaking about Jesus. They know that some people think Jesus may be the long-awaited Messiah (the Christ). They are familiar with a tradition that suggests that when the Messiah comes, people will not know his origins. They believe they know the geographical origins of Jesus, so they think He is

not the Messiah. For these people, an important moment is when they allow their limited understanding of the circumstances of the coming of the Messiah to outweigh their openness to the possibility that Jesus is the Messiah. That moment is important, but not critical, because Jesus reaches out to them in their limitations and errors. Jesus challenges them to reconsider the limitations of their knowledge and understanding of His origins. This is the critical moment: Will they open themselves to Jesus' challenge and open their minds to the truth, which is beyond their limited understanding? Unfortunately, they will not. In fact, their response to Jesus' challenge is to try to arrest Him. In your recent life, can you see ways that your limited knowledge about God and the truth, which you might have consciously or unconsciously considered complete, has been challenged by the teaching of Jesus? How have you – and how might you – choose to live in those critical moments?

Saturday, 3/25: John 7.40-53

In this section of John 7, people in the crowd in Jerusalem are debating whether Jesus is the Messiah. There is once again detailed debate about the expected geographical original of the Messiah and of Jesus' geographical origins. Certain religious leaders are increasingly opposed to Jesus and become angry when guards in their employment not only do not arrest Him, but are moved by His words. These religious leaders say that the crowd who may be open to Jesus "is cursed" and react angrily to the guards. One person among the religious leaders, Nicodemus, who has previously visited Jesus, has the strength to speak out and asks: "Does our law condemn a man before it first hears him and finds out what he is doing?" The other religious leaders dismiss Nicodemus and repeat definitively that Jesus is not the Messiah. In this scene, the critical moment is when Nicodemus, despite the contemptuous and threatening attitude of the religious leaders who hate Jesus, makes the decision to raise an intelligent question that challenges the error and ignorance of the powers-that-be. Nicodemus is powerfully alive in God. We live in a time and place in which many of the powers-that-be in the United States – especially in academia, government, entertainment, and the popular media – fiercely and contemptuously reject Jesus and anyone who stands with or for Him. Very often, these people threaten punishments for anyone who opposes the status quo they believe they control. Do you have moments in your current life in which you can relate to Nicodemus? These are critical moments.

THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

Sunday, 3/26: John 11.1-45

This section of John 11 describes Jesus' miraculously raising from the dead his friend Lazarus. After the miracle, Lazarus, Martha, Mary, and everyone else who witnesses the miracle have to make decisions about how they will live their lives moving forward. They have seen clearly that Jesus has the power of eternal life. They have heard Jesus' call to follow Him as His disciples, putting into practice His teachings in their daily lives. The question now is what they will decide to do. Will they make permanent decisions to commit their lives to growing as authentic disciples of Jesus . . . to say "Yes" to the path of salvation? During the upcoming week, as we move closer to the Easter Triduum, we will be offered daily passages from the Gospel of John that reveal critical choices that can be made to say "Yes" to the reality of life in Jesus. You will be invited to reflect on these decisions. In your prayer time today, consider honestly the extent to which you plan to actively live the upcoming week of Lent. If you intend to participate in these spiritual exercises during the upcoming week, read this prayer guide only one day at a time.

ALMSGIVING!

This week, as you continue your pattern of Lenten almsgiving, assess what you've been doing. Take a look at your **One Heart Lent Program** jar. All the money you've collected in there will help feed the hungry. How do you feel about that? What are your thoughts about the material sacrifices you've been making? Are you better off having made them? When Lent comes to an end, will you want to continue any of these sacrifices? How do you view your experience of telling others about this effort, and of asking others to sacrifice for the poor? Are those experiences you would like to be permanent parts of your life?

Monday, 3/27: John 8.1-11

In this passage, a woman has been caught in the act of committing adultery. Certain religious leaders bring her to Jesus, affirming that, according to their understanding of Old Testament law, she should be stoned to death because of her sin. Putting aside the issue of the law, it is critical for you to recognize that this woman has committed a grave sin – adultery – that can bring with it spiritual death: the cutting off of her relationship with God on earth and the possibility of living eternally in hell. In the passage, when the woman encounters Jesus, she experiences clearly His not wanting her to die for her sins, and His removing from her life the threat of death for her sins that that's proposed by the religious leaders. When the woman experiences first-hand that Jesus does not want her to die for her sins and that He removes the threat of death for her sins, she makes a profound choice: to accept Jesus and to remain with Him. Her choice is entirely different from the religious leaders' choice: They choose to reject Jesus and walk away from Him. If you are an authentic Christian, you should understand that through His passion and death, Jesus has made it absolutely clear that He does not want you to die for your sins now or eternally, and that He has removed the threat of death for your sins now and eternally. Spend time today considering the scene of the adulterous woman and reflecting on the direct connection described here between her experience and yours. Do you understand this? If you do, how does it impact your choice whether to accept Jesus and remain with Him?

Tuesday, 3/28: John 8.21-30

In this section of John 8, Jesus tells certain religious leaders, "You belong to what is below, I belong to what is above. You belong to this world, but I do not belong to this world." When Jesus refers to "what is below" and "this world," He means realities of human life that are sinful and not of God. When He refers to "what is above," Jesus means realities of human life that are holy and of God. Jesus knows the state of everyone's soul, including the people to whom He speaks in this passage. Jesus states clearly here that He has been sent to the world by God the Father, and that He tells the world what He has heard from God the Father. Jesus declares: ". . . I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me . . . I always do what is pleasing to Him." At this point in life, you should be able to grasp what Jesus says in this passage. If you do, you necessarily must choose how to respond. At this point in Lent, you should be maximally honest and clear about your response to what Jesus says here. Your response certainly has to do with your thoughts and feelings, but it most deeply has to do with your will and behavior. How do you choose to respond? Jesus knows the state of your soul. You should, as well.

Wednesday, 3/29: John 8.31-42

Jesus reveals the truth – the fulness of God's truth – to anyone who encounters Him. In these verses from John 8, He tells some people who believe in Him, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." An authentic disciple of Jesus accepts His teaching, puts it into practice, and remains in Him. That authentic disciple thereby knows the truth and experiences true freedom by living the truth. The rest of Jesus' teaching here may surprise His listeners: "Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin." These are not necessarily welcomed words! A slave belongs to someone else. Jesus states here that when we sin, we are slaves of sin: We belong to sin. Many of us would prefer to imagine that when we sin, we make poor choices, fall into error, and perhaps offend God. Consider accepting on face value what Jesus actually teaches: Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. It's five weeks since Ash Wednesday. This passage should be fairly or very understandable to you at this point. If you understand it, you have an obvious choice to make: (1) Do you choose to be a slave of sin? or (2) Do you choose to live as a true disciple of Jesus, knowing the truth and being set free? You need to choose one or the other. In your prayer time today, speak directly to Jesus about this. How do you choose to live, and what does that specifically mean in your life?

Thursday, 3/30: John 8.51-59

In this central text, Jesus clearly identifies Himself as, "I AM", which is the name reserved exclusively for God in the Hebrew scripture. He makes clear to the crowd that whoever believes this and keeps His word will live eternally. This is Jesus' ultimate revelation of Himself to the world: He is God. Any person who actually chooses to live as Jesus' disciple will be led through whatever passion is experienced during this earthly life, and will ultimately be led

through earthly death to eternal life. All of us have many difficulties in life, including many times when it is challenging to choose to live as an authentic disciple of Jesus. If you accept the truth that Jesus reveals in this passage, your life choices should be entirely re-dimensioned. In any situation, including the most difficult situation, if you choose to do the will of Jesus, He will give you His life on this planet. Even when your earthly life is threatened with destruction, if you choose to do the will of Jesus, He will give you His life eternally. Jesus repeats in this passage: “. . . whoever keeps my word will never see death . . . Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.” These words can be repeated for you as many times as you like. What matters is your choice of how to respond. Focus on this in your prayer today. How do you respond?

Friday, 3/31: John 10.31-42

In this passage from John 10, Jesus is speaking to people who want to kill Him because He has identified Himself as God. He urges them to look at the many good works that He has done. Even if they do not accept His words about who He is, if these people look honestly at the works Jesus does – His actions in the world – they should recognize that the power of God works uniquely, completely through Him. The works that Jesus does can only be done by God. If you make the choice to live as a disciple of Jesus, you need to make the fundamental choice to always keep your eyes open to the many good works He currently does in this world and through the Church. It is only easy to recognize what is wrong with this world and the Church . . . and an authentic disciple of Jesus is mandated to help change everything that is wrong. We are also called to recognize and help promote all the ways that Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is working today in the world and through the Church. This does not come automatically. It involves concrete choices of how we focus our attention, time, and energy. If much of your time and attention is not directly connected with the work Jesus currently does in this world, how would you expect to know and see things as He wants you to know and see them? Focus on all of this in your prayer today. What fundamental choices do you recognize are related to this passage for you?

Saturday, 4/1: John 11.45-56

In this section of John, Jesus has just raised His friend Lazarus from the dead. Some people who witness this astonishing miracle begin to believe in Jesus. When certain religious leaders see this, they have the opportunity to find out more about Jesus, and potentially to come to learn about who He is and the salvation He offers them. One of these leaders, Caiaphas, tells the others: “You know nothing, nor do you consider that it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish.” What Caiaphas says is absolute nonsense. It is entirely illogical. It is in no way based on fact. It obviously comes from Caiaphas’ hatred of Jesus. And yet, the scripture reports how Caiaphas’ listeners respond to his utterly ridiculous statement: “So from that day on they planned to kill him.” In this crowd of religious leaders, the false words of Caiaphas foster the killing of the Son of God. We are about to enter Holy Week. Jesus will be triumphantly welcomed into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday by a crowd of people. A few days later, He will be condemned to death in Jerusalem by a crowd of people. When it comes to choosing how to live one’s life in response to Jesus, one should be acutely cautious of crowds. At this point in your life and at this point in Lent, are you?

HOLY WEEK

Sunday, 4/2: Matthew 26.14-27.66

As we begin Holy Week, we are invited to listen to the account of Jesus’ passion and death in the Gospel of Matthew. Through His passion and death, Jesus brings salvation to this fallen, sinful world. Through His passion and death, Jesus also reveals to us how we must choose to live if we are to be His authentic disciples. Spend time today reading through Matthew’s passion account. As you do so, ask the following two questions, and continue to ask these two questions when you enter into the Triduum later this week: What is happening? What is Jesus doing?

Monday, 4/3: John 12.1-11

In today's passage from John 12, one of Jesus' twelve disciples, Judas Iscariot – the one who will betray Jesus – professes to be offended when Jesus' friend Mary (the sister of Martha and Lazarus) anoints the feet of Jesus with costly perfumed oil. Judas says: "Why was this oil not sold for three hundred days' wages and given to the poor?" The gospel writer explains that Judas says this not because he cares about the poor, but because he holds the money bag for Jesus and steals the contributions from it. Judas is a person who lies to Jesus, lies to his fellow disciples, and lies to the people around them. To have a vibrant relationship with Jesus, you always need to be honest with Him. During Lent, have you grown in your honesty with Jesus – both in terms of not lying to Him and in terms of openly sharing your interior life with Him? In your prayer time today, speak directly with Jesus about this, and about any intentions or commitments you may have in this area for how you plan to live after Easter.

Tuesday, 4/4: John 13.21-33, 36-38

In this text from John 13, Jesus knows that Judas Iscariot intends to betray Him. Jesus says to Judas, "What you are going to do, do quickly." While the scripture writer notes Judas' plans and states that Satan has entered him, Judas is still a free person. He has full freedom to change his plans, reject Satan, and not betray Jesus. What will Judas decide to do? The scripture writer tells us: "Judas took the morsel and left at once. And it was night." During Lent, you have hopefully been able to reflect extensively about the reality of freedom, and the dynamics of your free choices to either turn away from Jesus or remain with Him. Perhaps you have insights into sinful patterns of behavior into which you now feel more confident of not falling. Like Judas, when faced with familiar possibilities for sin, you always have full freedom to change your plans, reject Satan, and not betray Jesus. Today, speak with Jesus about this, and tell Him whether you have any specific intentions or commitments you may have in this area for how you plan to live after Easter.

Wednesday, 4/5: Matthew 26.14-25

In our final Lenten passage from Matthew 26, Judas Iscariot makes the decision to hand over Jesus to His enemies for thirty pieces of silver. Judas chooses to abandon Jesus in exchange for a specific amount of money that he desires more than he desires his relationship with Jesus. During Lent, you have hopefully grown in your recognition of ways in which you choose to abandon Jesus in exchange for realities that are more attractive or valuable to you. As we conclude Lent and enter into the Easter Triduum, are there ways have you grown as a person who will make conscious decisions not to abandon Jesus for realities that are more attractive or valuable to you? Speak to Jesus directly about this in your prayer today, and once again share with Him any specific intentions or commitments you have in this area for how you plan to live after Easter.

YOUR JAR!

After this Wednesday, we begin the observance of the holiest days of the year, the Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

Your helping to feed the hungry through the **One Heart Lent Program** is a wonderful gift for God and the neediest of our brothers and sister. Please remove the money you've collected in your **One Heart Lent Program** jar. Count it, then put it in the form of a check or money order and mail it to **One Heart Lent Program, 118 South Broadway, Lawrence, MA 01843**. One hundred percent of the money you have collected will be used to feed hungry people through the Cor Unum Meal Center!

For all of the hungry people whose lives you have changed through your sacrifice for the **One Heart Lent Program**, many thanks! We hope that you will stay in touch with the **Cor Unum Meal Center** in the months and years ahead. Link to Cor Unum's social media accounts via **CorUnumMealCenter.org!** **God bless you!**