

## Shaped by God's Love

"Lent is a season of grace in which the desert can become once more ... the place of our first love (cf. Hos. 2:16-17).

God shapes his people. God enables us to leave our slavery behind and experience a Passover from death to life.

Like a bridegroom, the Lord draws us once more to himself, whispering words of love to our hearts."

~ Pope Francis' letter, *Through the Desert God Leads us to Freedom*. Published for Lent 2024.



Let your love, God, shape my life with salvation, exactly as you promised; Then I'll be able to stand up to mockery because I trusted your Word.

Don't ever deprive me of truth, not ever - your commandments are what I depend on.

Oh, I'll guard with my life what you've revealed to me, guard it now, guard it ever; And I'll stride freely through wide open spaces as I look for your truth and your wisdom; then I'll tell the world what I find, speak out boldly in public, unembarrassed.

I cherish your commandments - oh, how I love them! - relishing every fragment of your counsel.

~ Psalm 119:41-48.

*Take some time to reflect on the above short readings before continuing.*

*You might like to go for a short walk in nature, in your backyard, or in the gathering room - wherever you are situated.*

Pope Francis suggests that we should ask: "Where are you?" and "Where is your brother?" He answers these questions by focusing on prayer, almsgiving and fasting. "Prayer, almsgiving, and fasting" he says, "are not three unrelated acts, but a single movement of openness and self-emptying, in which we cast out the idols that weigh us down, the attachments that imprison us." Prayer, almsgiving, and fasting, like the Ten Commandments, are "thoroughfares to freedom." Through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting, "we become brothers and sisters, more sensitive to one another: in place of threats and enemies, we discover companions and fellow travellers. This is God's dream, the promised land to which we journey once we have left our slavery behind." This is the meaning of allowing God to shape us.

Lent 2024 is an invitation to allow God, as Pope Francis says, "to whisper words of love into our hearts." It is an invitation to be shaped by love of God who now reveals God to us on the cross. I am proposing that the questions that guide us through Lent 2024 are:

"Am I willing to be shaped by God?"

"Where are you?" and "Where is your sister or brother?"

*Prepared by NSW Mercy Associates Network Facilitator, Christine Convery. Lent 2024*

## **Prayer:**

God of all wholeness, heal our hearts of all that prevents us responding to our sisters and brothers excluded by poverty and prevented from living a full and healthy life.

This Lent, may we implore justice through prayer, stand in solidarity through our fasting, and reach out through our giving.

Send your life-giving power to revive the weary, restore the broken and renew the face of the earth.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

+ In a letter to Elizabeth Moore, Catherine McAuley wrote, *“There has been a most marked Providential Guidance which the want of prudence - vigilance - or judgement has not impeded - and it is here that we can most clearly see the designs of God.”*

In all the seasons of her journeying, Catherine retained a deep faith in the guidance of God, in being shaped by God’s Love. +

## **Reading: The Seed of Truth**

*We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into God who is the head, into Christ. ~ Ephesians 4:1-4*

*Take a few moments to reflect on the above readings and prayer.*

*You may like to quietly read them again in a contemplative spirit.*

*Write down your thoughts and share them with your group.*

## **Final Reading:**

“Because she loves Me.” says the Lord. “I will rescue her: I will protect her, for she acknowledges My name.” ~ Psalm 91:14

## **Final Prayer:**

Jesus, you have freed me this month, in both small and large ways.

I feel grateful for this new freedom, in particular for .....

Spirit, release me from my shell. Empower my seeds to push, to burst forth, reaching for your light.

Creator, send your renewing love to those I have prevented from flowering by my selfish habits, in particular .....

Amen.

