

**"I am the light  
of the world"**

– John 8:12

# Contents

Week 1: First Sunday of Lent.....	7
Week 2: Second Sunday of Lent.....	12
Week 3: Third Sunday of Lent.....	17
Week 4: Fourth Sunday of Lent.....	23
Week 5: Fifth Sunday of Lent.....	28
Week 6: Palm Sunday – The Passion of Christ.....	34



The Catholic Agency for Justice,  
Peace & Development

© Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand  
PO Box 12-193, Wellington 6144  
Aotearoa New Zealand  
[www.caritas.org.nz](http://www.caritas.org.nz)

## The New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Lent Appeal 2023

<i>English version:</i>	Sr Clare O'Connor, Fr Neil Vaney, Phil Brass, Isabella Gibney, Justine Delpport, Martin de Jong
<i>Editor:</i>	Martin de Jong
<i>Te Reo Māori translation:</i>	Piripi Walker
<i>Tongan translation:</i>	Langi Paasi
<i>Samoan translation:</i>	Puletini Tuala
<i>Te Reo Māori review:</i>	Deacon Danny Karatea-Goddard
<i>Samoan review:</i>	Mikaela Teofilo
<i>Design:</i>	Rose Miller

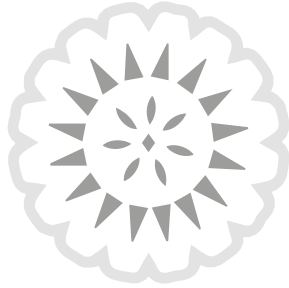
The Caritas Lenten Reflection Programme is available in English, Te Reo Māori, Samoan and Tongan versions.

ISSN: 2253-3370 (print)

ISSN: 2253-3389 (online)

ISBN: 978-1-99-105000-7 (print)

ISBN: 978-1-99-105001-4 (online)




# I am the light of the world

## Introduction

The main ideas for the Lenten Reflection Programme and Lent theme are prayerfully discerned from the Lent Gospel readings through Lectio Divina prayer and reflection at the annual Caritas staff retreat the year before. Key thoughts and ideas are then distilled and brought together at a further day of prayer and reflection with external advisors to develop the core text of the Programme. This is refined through further editing and consultation with staff and advisors.

This year's theme "I am the Light of the World" reminds us that Jesus brings light to a darkened world. A world darkened by disease, disaster, violence, lies and hypocrisy. Jesus' life and his proclamation of the truth is a challenge to each of us. But we are invited to a personal encounter with him every day, through the people we meet, the stories we hear, and through the Word that continues to echo down the ages, helping us meet the darkness of our times.



Lent provides a special time to deepen our encounter with the Light of the World through prayer, fasting and almsgiving – the three ‘weapons’ of Lent. The Caritas Lenten Reflection Programme is an opportunity to share and support one another on the journey to a deeper encounter with Jesus.

We remember also with great hope that Jesus promised that he would be living within each of us through the power of his indwelling Spirit, even to the end of time.



## **A Guide to using the Caritas Lenten Reflection Programme**

The Lenten season provides an opportunity each year to deepen understanding of our faith by reflecting on the Gospels. During Lent we are called both to turn away from things that encumber our faith journey and to turn towards God. Lent is a wonderful opportunity to open ourselves to changes that God wants to make in us, so that we can truly flourish.

### **LECTIO DIVINA**

Central to the Caritas Lenten Reflection Programme is shared reflection on the Gospels for the six Sundays of Lent in the style of Lectio Divina, a Latin term which means 'reading with God'. In this form of prayer, after the first reading of the Gospel, members of the group repeat a word or phrase which stood out to them. They may repeat several words or phrases each, as they feel so moved. The Gospel is then read again, after which there is an opportunity for sharing.

### **PRAYING WITH THE GOSPELS – THE YEAR A LITURGICAL CYCLE**

Each Lenten season we return to the three-year cycle of Lenten Gospels. Year A begins with Matthew's accounts of Jesus' temptation in the desert followed by his Transfiguration on the mountain before some of his followers. Then follow readings from John's Gospel, revealing Christ and his message in rich symbolism such as "living water," the "light of the world" and the "resurrection and the life."

We are called to examine the ways in which Jesus teaches us to act, think, and live with love for God and for one another – with repentance, mercy, and forgiveness. The season of Lent provides us with an opportunity to consider Jesus' teachings and make a new start in our own lives.



## **SOME OF THE PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY THE BISHOPS' LENTEN APPEAL**

This reflection programme accompanies the Bishops' Lenten Appeal which occurs in parishes during Lent. The giving envelopes distributed to parishes for the six weeks of Lent give examples of the work supported by the Catholic and wider community in New Zealand through the Bishops' Lenten Appeal.

The specific projects featured are chosen following Caritas staff members' own prayerful reflection on the Lenten Gospels. Participants may use this for personal background reading or incorporate it into their discussions and prayers. The aim is to assist people to pray meaningfully and to develop a deeper understanding of the Works of Mercy supported by our communities during Lent.

## **GOSPEL REFLECTIONS**

Participants have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the Scriptural context of the Gospels, in the light of Catholic Social Teaching and its application in the work of Caritas and in their daily lives.

This is a reflection and discussion programme, focused on faith development and sharing, rather than an academic study programme. Some participants have used the Lenten reflection programme as a starting point for further Scriptural and Theological study, for example, through courses offered by Te Kupenga – Catholic Theological College. Others have brought insights and material from Scriptural or Theological study to share with their group. Additional sources of material used in preparing the programme include: the practical experience of Caritas workers and our partners; our own reflection and sharing on the messages of the 2023 Lenten Gospels; and the insights of spiritual and religious advisors.



## **PRAYERS**

The programme offers suggestions for prayer, including Opening and Closing prayers. If your group has other prayers you wish to use or a preferred style of praying, please feel free to substitute these prayers. For example, you may wish to use formal prayers of the Church or forms of intercessory prayer. What is important is taking time to pray together.

## **BIBLE TRANSLATION**

The Gospel and Psalm readings are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Catholic Edition Bible translation. The NRSV translation is characterised by a more exact translation of original Hebrew and Greek texts, with additional consideration given toward the use of more inclusive language. It is intended to be more direct, plain, meaningful and easily understood, especially when read aloud. However, do feel free to read the Gospels from the Bible in another translation – for example, for people who are new to the English language, the Good News version could be helpful.

## **GROUPS FOR SHARED LENTEN REFLECTION**

Communities who use this programme include Catholic parishes, ecumenical groups, families, ethnic communities, religious communities, rest home residents, and groups in prison. A number of parishes organise their own day-time or evening groups. These meet in parish halls or in people's homes. The programme is used in other ways, for example, families who reflect and pray together for the six weeks of Lent or people who use it for individual prayer and reflection.

Please feel free to adapt the programme to suit your needs or the needs of your group or community.

## **LEADERS' GUIDE**

For guidance on leading Lectio Divina reflection, please see the note on Lectio Divina section above. The role of the leader or facilitator is to assist the group by providing focus, some structure to the session, keeping track of time, and to encourage all members to share and listen. This role can be taken by one person nominated for all the sessions or it can be rotated among group members.

All members of Lenten groups have their own life experiences and faith journeys, as well as different gifts and different insights. Each person has a significant contribution to make to the weekly reflections. A prayer focus – a lit candle, a Bible, flowers, other symbols – and appropriate music as a background can all be very helpful.

## **DISCUSSION SHARING AND FAITH IN ACTION**

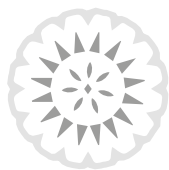
Through the discussion, sharing and the Faith in Action sections we are invited to deepen our understanding of the Gospels, and to allow God to transform us. A significant aim of our Lenten practice of prayer, fasting and almsgiving is, by God's grace, to change our patterns of behaviour and to respond with greater love to our neighbours, especially those most in need. Each session ends with an invitation and an opportunity to make a commitment to put our faith into action.

## **SESSION OUTLINE**

A session is generally expected to last approximately 60-90 minutes. Each group can determine its own timeframe. The following is a suggestion:

- Welcome, opening prayer and responsorial Psalm (10-15 minutes)
- Group sharing, Gospel reading using Lectio Divina (15-25 minutes)
- Gospel reflection and group discussion questions (30-40 minutes)
- Case study and Faith in Action questions (5-10 minutes)
- Closing prayer (5 minutes).





# WEEK 1: FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

*"Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."*



*Women at Tutu Rural Training Centre in Fiji: working together to promote human dignity and building the common good.*

## OPENING PRAYER

E te Ariki, Lord, as we gather today, we invite you to be with us. May your grace give us the courage to face the challenges and temptations we are confronted with. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Āmene.

## **Responsorial Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17**

**Response: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love.**

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;  
According to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin. **(Response)**

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.  
Against you alone have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight,  
So that you are justified in your sentence  
And blameless when you pass judgement. **(Response)**

Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And put a new and right spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from your presence,  
And do not take your holy spirit from me. **(Response)**

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
And sustain in me a willing spirit.  
O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.  
A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. **(Response)**

## **GROUP SHARING**


What are your hopes and expectations for Lent? For this reflection group?

## **GOSPEL READING**

*Invite a member of the group to read the following passage aloud, from the Bible or from this booklet.*

### **A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 4:1-11**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God,



command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"


Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

*After the reading, pause for silent reflection. Then invite people to share a word or phrase that stood out for them. After a couple of minutes quiet reflection, invite another group member to read the Gospel passage aloud again.*

## **GOSPEL REFLECTION**

We journey with Jesus into the desert. As with Jesus, so with us. God speaks to us in times of hunger, trial, and challenge. How closely are we listening? It is easy to be tempted when things are difficult, but it can also be a time when we draw closer to God. The deepest truths can break through in times of severe struggle and pain – whether we are experiencing that as individuals, as families, as Church or society. The Church herself is currently going through key issues and challenges. It is important to stay focused on God even in times of challenge and change.



In the desert, we encounter temptation and the devil. Perhaps we see the lowest depths of ourselves, and are tempted to despair. But if we lean on God, in true and honest understanding of Scripture, rather than twisting Scripture to suit our own ends, we will come through.

The “self-denial” we are called to in Lent is not so much about denying ourselves some thing, but to deny, or negate, one’s self as the centre of our lives and preoccupations. In doing so, we struggle with our egos and self-importance. We need to “give up” not on things, but on the false images of who we are or of who God is; and respond instead to who God really is and who God is calling us to be. Love goes ever outwards, seeking the good of an “other”.


And though the desert sounds bleak, hard and lonely, there is hope at the end. If we persevere in and through Jesus, by relying on him, we will win out in the end. And we may find angels on the journey. God’s providence through or at the end of a trial is often God’s way of assuring us we are following his way, walking in his will.

### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

- What is our mission?
- How are we struggling with it?
- What helps us through temptation and trial?
- What has been our experience of ‘angels’ who have given us hope and spoken into our lives?

### **CARITAS CASE STUDY**

For many rural youth in Fiji who have left the formal school system, the village setting holds few meaningful work and life opportunities. Tutu Rural Training Centre has for over 40 years enabled rural Fijian youth to lead dignified lives by promoting sustainable self-employment using resources available from having access to customary land. Through a range of



training and mentoring programmes, Tutu staff lead with compassion and culturally appropriate skills to re-connect rural youth with their Vanua (land and culture), family and the wider community they are part of.

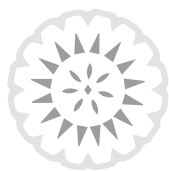
Caritas at work in Tutu is an example of love extending outwards and putting the Catholic social teaching principles of human dignity and the common good into action.

### **FAITH IN ACTION**

- Who will I reach out to and listen to this week?
- How will I be open to God's leading and providence this week?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

E te Ariki, Lord may we recognise and remember that you are with us at all times. Grant us the strength and the wisdom to be your presence in our encounters with others this week. Āmene.



## **WEEK 2: SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT**

*'Do not be afraid'*



*The massive Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano and tsunami on 15 January 2022 in Tonga pulled forth a huge response of love in action by Caritas on the ground and around the world – to meet people's needs for food, water, shelter and human compassion. Caritas Tonga organised local food collections to help those in need. The photo shows a collection from Lapaha parish on Nuku'alofa.*

## OPENING PRAYER

E te Ariki, Lord, in today's Gospel we go up the mountain with you. May we be fully present to you, Jesus, and to each other in our meeting and sharing today. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Āmene.

### **Responsorial Psalm 33: 4-5, 18-19, 20, 22**

**Response: Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

For the word of the Lord is upright,  
and all his work is done in faithfulness.  
He loves righteousness and justice;  
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord. **(Response)**

Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him,  
on those who hope in his steadfast love,  
to deliver their soul from death,  
and to keep them alive in famine. **(Response)**

Our soul waits for the Lord;  
he is our help and shield.  
Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us,  
even as we hope in you. **(Response)**

## GROUP SHARING

How has the last week been? What stayed with you from last week's discussion?

## GOSPEL READING

*Invite a member of the group to read the following passage aloud, from the Bible or from this booklet.*

## **A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 17:1-9**

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."


*After the reading, pause for silent reflection. Then invite people to share a word or phrase that stood out for them. After a couple of minutes quiet reflection invite another group member to read the Gospel passage aloud again.*

## **GOSPEL REFLECTION**

From the desert of last week, we climb the mountain to catch a glimpse of future glory. The glory of Jesus is revealed in both space and time. The mountain is a symbolic place where Jesus connects with two of his greatest spiritual tupuna – Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets. Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mt Sinai (Horeb), which is also where Elijah heard the still, quiet voice of God in a cave.

Now, on the top of a high mountain, God speaks to Jesus in a cloud. The cloud hides God, but God is revealed through it. At times in our life, we feel in a cloud – God and life are "hidden" from us. How do we cope when





difficult things happen, when we are faced with suffering, loss and death? As Jesus is about to undergo. Where is God, why aren't things clear?

Our response to God may not be the most appropriate, or what he wants. Peter wants to build three tents: he wants to capture and retain the moment – perhaps institutionalise it, this experience that can't be put adequately into words.


Sometimes when God does speak through the circumstances of our lives – sometimes pretty loudly – we can be afraid. But God encourages us and moves us on. “Get up and do not be afraid.” God speaks from the cloud, hidden from clear sight. The mystery of God and the future glory of Jesus Christ, is briefly revealed to these Apostles. And Peter, James and John are sworn to secrecy until the time is right.

### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

- Have I had mountain experiences where I've met Jesus? How have they touched my life?
- Have I recognised Jesus when he has appeared to me?
- How open am I to being transformed?
- What is it that makes me afraid?
- Are there things about God that make me afraid? Does God comfort me or frighten me?

### **CARITAS CASE STUDY**

When the massive Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano and subsequent tsunami devastated many parts of Tonga on 15 January 2022, it might have seemed that a super-natural event was taking place. Our partner Caritas Tonga provided practical, logistical and social support and assistance to households and communities most impacted since day one of this tumultuous event, while also having deep concern for their own families and fear that it was not yet all over.



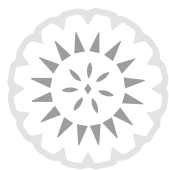
When it might be hard to see God through circumstances such as these, God will often speak to us through the words and deeds of others. Being at the forefront of responding to communities affected by this event, staff of Caritas Tonga have illustrated 'love in action' (Caritas) through their dual commitment to their faith and the communities they willingly and diligently serve.

### **FAITH IN ACTION**

- How can we take time to sit at God's feet and pray this week?
- How will we be more effective as messengers of God's love in action this week?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

E te Ariki, as we come down the mountain together, may we support one another as we seek to bring peace, justice and light into the communities we engage with this week. Āmene.



## **WEEK 3: THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT**

*“Worship in spirit and truth”*



*Jesus promises a spring of water welling up for eternal life. The women of Kiribati face challenges accessing healthy water and healthy food. Caritas partner Teitoingainga (Catholic Women's Alliance) is bringing women together for their mutual needs. They promote good nutrition through local food sources, and spread the word to the wider community.*

## OPENING PRAYER

E te Ariki, Lord, today we listen to the story of the woman at the well. Jesus, may we all receive your life-giving water and wisdom as we share with each other today. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Āmene.

### **Responsorial Psalm 95: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9**

**Response: If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

O come, let us sing to the Lord;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!  
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! **(Response)**

O come, let us worship and bow down,  
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!  
For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand. **(Response)**

O that today you would listen to his voice!  
Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,  
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,  
when your ancestors tested me,  
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. **(Response)**

## GROUP SHARING

How has the last week been? What stayed with you from last week's discussion?

## GOSPEL READING


*Invite a member of the group to read the following passage aloud, from the Bible or from this booklet.*

## **A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 4:5-15, 19-26, 39-42**

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."



Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world."

*After the reading, pause for silent reflection. Then invite people to share a word or phrase that stood out for them. After a couple of minutes quiet reflection invite another group member to read the Gospel passage aloud again.*


## **GOSPEL REFLECTION**

We are approaching the middle of our Lenten journey. On the level, Jesus, tired by the journey, sits down by a well. There is symbolism in both the water and the well.

Water is vital for life, but can also be life-threatening. Climate change is throwing up major challenges for sources and distribution of safe water for drinking and other needs. We are also seeing more extreme rainfall events and flooding, as well as severe drought.

But more than physical water is at stake in this story. Jesus points to a deeper, spiritual source of life-giving water. There is an intermixing and interweaving of cultures, and a clash of cultures over 'where' people are to worship.

Jesus takes a risk in talking with a Samaritan woman, who is even an outlier to her own community (she comes alone to the well in the middle of the day). Jesus cuts across the barriers of race, gender, and social standing to expose the truth, while respecting and upholding the woman's dignity. There is a mutuality and respect for each other in the exchange.



Jesus' message is for the individual: the woman at the well, but also her community – and the whole world. While Jesus says “salvation is from the Jews”, he hints that the Jews too will need to get beyond their present understanding of worship to something bigger: “the hour is coming ... God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

- Are there people, groups that we find difficult to accept or understand?
- Who are the outsiders in our community? (Church, school, neighbourhood, country)
- What helps me reach across these barriers as Jesus did?
- How is Jesus life-giving water to me?
- How can I be life giving water to others?

### **CARITAS CASE STUDY**

In New Zealand it can be easy to take access to fresh water for granted – in low-lying countries such as Kiribati a lack of rivers or streams and vulnerability to salt-water ingress mean life-giving water is increasingly becoming scarce, and healthy, nutritious food too expensive for families to afford. Through the Kiribati Health Champions Programme our Kiribati partner, Teitoingainga, works to reduce poor nutrition by teaching and mentoring on how to access and cook more-commonly available local produce. This work is helping to offset the rise of non-communicable diseases such as heart and lung conditions and diabetes and also restore traditional knowledge lost through modernisation and the importing of cheap, low calorific value food into the country.

### **FAITH IN ACTION**

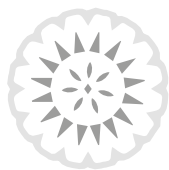
- Who will I reach out to this week that I wouldn't normally encounter?
- What can I do to uphold the sacredness of creation, especially life-giving water?



## **CLOSING PRAYER**

E te Ariki, Jesus, you cut across barriers and want all to experience your peace, truth and love. May we listen to others as we encounter people throughout our week. Āmene.





## **WEEK 4: FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT**

*“He opened my eyes”*



*Caritas Programmes Coordinator Rachel Harrison learns about shredding coconut from Hafoti group members based in Liquisa, Timor Leste.*

### **OPENING PRAYER**

E te Ariki, Lord, today we listen to the story of the blind man. Lord, open our eyes to the things you want us to see and give us wisdom in our discussion and prayer today. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Āmene.



**Responsorial Psalm 23:2-3, 4, 5, 6**

**Response: The Lord is my shepherd; , I shall not want.**

He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths  
for his name's sake. **(Response)**

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me. **(Response)**

You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows. **(Response)**

Surely goodness and mercy shall  
follow me all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
my whole life long. **(Response)**

**GROUP SHARING**

How has the last week been? What stayed with you from last week's discussion?

**GOSPEL READING**

*Invite a member of the group to read the following passage aloud, from the Bible or from this booklet.*


## **A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 9:1-3, 6-9, 13-17, 30-38**

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sin, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he,



sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

*After the reading, pause for silent reflection. Then invite people to share a word or phrase that stood out for them. After a couple of minutes quiet reflection invite another group member to read the Gospel passage aloud again.*


## **GOSPEL REFLECTION**

Jesus is walking along when he seeks to heal a blind man, not just for the man’s own sake but “so that God’s works might be revealed in him” and that he may be a witness to others, even the spiritually blind who refuse to see. When we allow Jesus to open our eyes, then we can see things as they are.

John is the most sacramental of the Gospels, and links physical things to the reality of who Jesus is. In this reading, water is linked to baptism; it also washes away sin, and the mud is linked to the creation of humans from the soil. In the beginning, God created light from out of the darkness, and created humanity from the dust of the earth.

Jesus also challenges the people of the day about the nature of sin and leads them to a growth in understanding. He says it’s not about the man’s sin or his parents. Sin is about being deliberately blind, not open to who Jesus is, not open to the truth. Jesus teaches that sin is in the world, but we can choose how we respond to sin and temptation by turning to and relying on Jesus Christ, who has walked this way before us. We are not destined to be a product or a result of the errors or mistakes of our ancestors.

The blind man speaks the truth plainly to the Pharisees, of what he has directly experienced. Very often, the poor may speak plainly about what they have experienced, and what is wrong in society. They can expose the falseness and hypocrisy of spiritual, religious and political leaders who may



seek to protect their positions, rather than work for the kingdom of God and for the common good.

### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

- What are the values to which our society is particularly blind?
- How can we be a sign of hope to others?

### **CARITAS CASE STUDY**

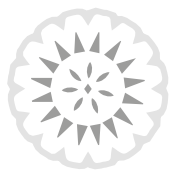
Responding to the terrible treatment of Timorese people, particularly women, by the Indonesian military until independence in 2002, our partner in Timor Leste, Hamahon Feto Timor (HAFOTI) was formed to provide an ‘umbrella for Timorese women’. HAFOTI has enabled many hundreds of rural women to find or regain dignified livelihoods over the past 20 years. It has helped develop their economic independence, social and community confidence and leadership qualities. Much of this work has revolved around adding value to what these women have available to them, such as access to land, crops or traditional craft knowledge, and enabling them to operate as small-business owners. Following an extremely dark period in Timor Leste’s history, HAFOTI are bringing light into the lives of Timorese women, their families and communities.

### **FAITH IN ACTION**

- Is there someone who has been on your mind that you feel it’s time to make contact with?
- How will I intentionally increase my awareness of vulnerable people in my neighbourhood and community?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

E te Ariki, Lord, give us clarity to see clearly the world around us. Reveal to us the needs of vulnerable people in our own community networks in this coming week. Āmene.



## **WEEK 5: FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT**


*"I am the way, the truth and the life"*



*Land titling work by Caritas partner Development and Partnership in Action in Cambodia brings new life to indigenous peoples on the edges of Cambodia – through security of land tenure for their traditional lands.*

### **OPENING PRAYER**

E te Ariki, Lord, today we share the story of Lazarus, and Martha and Mary. May we experience Jesus calling us back to life as active participants in his mission. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Āmene.



**Responsorial Psalm 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8.**

**Response: Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.**

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my supplications! **(Response)**

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,

Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with you,

so that you may be revered. **(Response)**

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,

and in his word I hope;

my soul waits for the Lord

more than those who watch for the morning,

more than those who watch for the morning. **(Response)**

O Israel, hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,

and with him is great power to redeem.

It is he who will redeem Israel

from all its iniquities. **(Response)**

**GROUP SHARING**

How has the last week been? What stayed with you from last week's discussion?

**GOSPEL READING**

*Invite a member of the group to read the following passage aloud, from the Bible or from this booklet.*

## **A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 32-45**


So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because





he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

*After the reading, pause for silent reflection. Then invite people to share a word or phrase that stood out for them. After a couple of minutes quiet reflection invite another group member to read the Gospel passage aloud again.*


## **GOSPEL REFLECTION**

Timing and God's glory is important in this Gospel. Jesus hears Lazarus is ill, but waits another two days before setting out, by which time Lazarus has died. Jesus brings life out of death, again pointing to a deeper reality beyond death and suffering. What is important is God's glory.

The humanity of Jesus is also revealed. He became human to experience this, to experience suffering. In his humanity, and that of faithful followers and believers – we see a deeply caring God. He cares about his friends and family. And no matter whether people suffer or die, he is there for us. Out of Jesus' love we see a greater sense of love and hope emerging.

At this stage in his life journey, Jesus has started to receive death threats. In bringing someone back to life he puts his own life in jeopardy. The idea of sacrifice and love come to the fore.

Martha and Mary's responses are very different according to their personality, (though both remonstrate with him: "Lord, if you had



been here, my brother would not have died.”) Each responds in a way appropriate to them – there is not necessarily a right or wrong way. Hospitable and busy Martha goes out to welcome Jesus. The more quiet, reflective Mary stays home with her grief. But when she meets Jesus, she draws out his compassion (“Jesus began to weep”) but also his strong, decisive action – and empowerment of people (even those who are dead) to believe in and do the impossible: “Take away the stone.” Then “Lazarus, Come out”. We too are called to put love into action – we need to be active participants in our particular mission, however small and humble it may be.

Jesus laid down his life as a consequence of his love for us. The voice of Jesus calls Lazarus, and all of us, back to life, no matter what we’ve done, and no matter how “dead” we may feel.


### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

- How have we experienced death and resurrection in our own lives?
- How do I experience Jesus’ personal love and care for me?
- In times of crisis, do I respond mainly with my head or my heart?
- How do I encounter Jesus in these moments?
- How has my faith helped me through a difficult time?
- How do I keep hoping in such a torn and broken world?

### **CARITAS CASE STUDY**

For many years, indigenous people in Cambodia (Khmer-Loeu people) have been unseen and unrecognised by the majority (Khmer) in this country. In a sense, they are ‘dead’ to the wider society around them, but still alive as remote communities within their own villages and communes on customary land near many of Cambodia’s borders.

Recognising the extraordinary knowledge of sustainable land and natural resource use many Khmer-Loue have developed to sustain their existence, our Cambodian partner, Development and Partnership in Action (DPA)



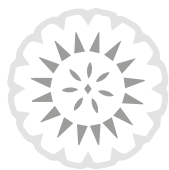
work with local and national authorities to secure legal land title for Khmer-loeu communities who are frequently at risk of losing everything to illegal loggers and land-grabbers. With their land secure, Khmer-Loeu people can continue to live and thrive without fear of loss of their traditional livelihoods or the land that has nurtured them for countless generations.

### **FAITH IN ACTION**

- What action will I take this week to bring someone back to life?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

E te Ariki, Lord Jesus, you are not afraid to demonstrate your unconditional love for people and to take risks. May our faith in you motivate us to show love for one another in a torn and broken world. Āmene.



## **WEEK 6: PALM SUNDAY - THE PASSION OF CHRIST**

*"Truly, this was the Son of God"*



*Walking the road together: Caritas Senior Programmes Coordinator Phil Brass accompanies Brother Sefo at the Tutu Rural Training Centre in Fiji, training and mentoring young men and women in climate-resilient agriculture and life skills.*

## OPENING PRAYER

E te Ariki, Lord, may we follow you, Jesus, in this week of your passion. May the voices we listen to lead us to be generous people of compassion in a world where compassion and love are needed. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Āmene.

### **Responsorial Psalm 22: 8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24**

#### **Response: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**

“Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—  
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”  
Yet it was you who took me from the womb;  
you kept me safe on my mother’s breast. **(Response)**

I can count all my bones.  
They stare and gloat over me;  
they divide my clothes among themselves,  
and for my clothing they cast lots. **(Response)**

But you, O Lord, do not be far away!  
O my help, come quickly to my aid!  
Deliver my soul from the sword,  
my life from the power of the dog! **(Response)**

You who fear the Lord, praise him!  
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;  
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!  
For he did not despise or abhor  
the affliction of the afflicted;  
he did not hide his face from me,  
but heard when I cried to him. **(Response)**

## GROUP SHARING

How has the last week been? What stayed with you from last week's discussion? How are you feeling about your Lenten journey as we go through Holy Week?

## GOSPEL READING

*The full account of the Passion of Christ (Mt 26:14-27:66) is read on Palm Sunday. A short excerpt has been chosen below for this programme, but you can choose to use a different passage from the Passion or read the entire Passion Gospel from a Bible. Invite a member of the group to read the chosen passage aloud, from the Bible or from this booklet.*


### **A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 27: 45-54**

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.

Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"



*After the reading, pause for silent reflection. Then invite people to share a word or phrase that stood out for them. After a couple of minutes quiet reflection invite another group member to read the Gospel passage aloud again.*

## **GOSPEL REFLECTION**


The beginning of Holy Week is an invitation to partake in the Passion of Christ, his ultimate love for us. We listen for the authentic voice of God, the challenge to trust the voice we know we need, free from distractions and people who would influence us in ways that “are not God’s ways, but man’s”. How will we follow Christ this week?

In the Gospel, the time is dark, people mock and do not believe in Jesus, Pontius Pilate is swayed by the crowds and God is dead. But revelation breaks through in the darkness and even in Jesus’ silence before his accusers.

All is fulfilled: the highest peak of salvation history, when all that has been anticipated and promised is to be fulfilled. Yet after all of this, it is a non-Jew, the centurion, who says ‘Truly, this was God’s Son!’. This is not the death of a criminal but of God himself – for us.

What happens to the Light of the World in this journey? We see how Jesus holds onto his life and dignity. He is in control of the situation. Whereas he had so much to say before, now is the time for silence. He accepts this as an inevitable part of his journey, and at the end, he “gave up his spirit”.

But even Jesus needed Simon of Cyrene to help him carry his cross, and sometimes we are called to be ‘Simons’. There is a mutuality in being a follower of Christ, a recognition that though each of us walks an individual journey and sometimes faces trials alone (as Jesus did, deserted by his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane) in some way, “we are in this together” and need to support one another.



We meet lots of different people in the Passion readings and Holy Week. Jesus connects with and engages with all of them, in ways appropriate to them, even in his silence or short, curt answers to Pilate. Will we risk following Jesus, taking the risk worth taking? or follow the shouts and demands of the crowd to “crucify him”?

### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

- Who do I most identify with in the Passion? (it could be an individual or a group)
- What am I prepared to sacrifice? What is God calling me to sacrifice this Holy Week and Easter?
- Who do I have faith in and follow?
- What are the values I believe in that I might be prepared to suffer for (as Jesus did)?
- Do I let people in to help carry my cross? Do I offer to help carry theirs?

### **FAITH IN ACTION**

- How will I embody compassion in my conversations this week?
- How will I apply what I have learnt this Lent to promote love in action beyond Easter?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

E te Ariki, may the compassion of Jesus motivate us. May we be present to those around us who are suffering, who may be lonely, and struggling to make sense of the world around them. God of compassion hear our prayer. Āmen.





# Lent Action Plan

*Bring a little light into the world!*

<b>WEEK 1: CHALLENGE   HE WERO</b>	<b>WEEK 2: TRANSFORMED   KUA WHAKAHOUTIA</b>	<b>WEEK 3: LIVING WATER   TE WAI ORA</b>
Find someone in your community who has family in Fiji and ask them to share about challenges they've experienced.	Try to be like Jesus. Do three things today that Jesus would do that are different from what you normally do.	Every time you enjoy fresh water, give thanks, and pray for people around the world who are hungry and thirsty.
Sponsor a student on the Caritas Challenge and make a difference for people in Fiji who have faced hard times recently.	Make a "Pray" sign. Hang it somewhere where your family will see it to remember to pray everyday.	Create a worship song play list and then share this with others so that they can enjoy and be blessed by it.
Make a sacrifice and give up a luxury item until the end of Holy Week. If you save any money, add this to your Caritas koha box.	Watch a video from Caritas' school resources to see how lives are being transformed in Fiji. (Visit <a href="http://www.caritas.org.nz/lent-schools">www.caritas.org.nz/lent-schools</a> )	Look around you and find five good things that God has made. Take time to pause and thank God for each of these blessings.
Organise an intergenerational discussion on Lent. Based on our different experiences of Lent – how do we make it relevant today?	Make someone's day and surprise them by doing something special to show that you care.	Complete a chore or kind act for your family or community without being asked e.g. clean your room without being reminded, wash the dishes etc...
How will you help others overcome their challenges? – Add your own ideas.	How will you transform the lives of others? – Add your own ideas.	How will you be life-giving water to others? – Add your own ideas.

# Lent Action Plan

*Bring a little light into the world!*

<b>WEEK 4 RESTORED   KUA WHAKAORANGIA</b>	<b>WEEK 5 NEW LIFE   HE ORANGA HOU</b>	<b>HOLY WEEK HOPE   TE TŪMANAKO</b>
Make something creative that shows both light and darkness and highlights Jesus' words, "I am the light of the world."	Take a walk and look at nature. Then read Matthew 6:25-34. How does God take care of his creation? How does he take care of you?	Hold a special liturgy for your class or school using the Caritas Stations of the Cross slides. Invite your community to join you.
Pray that rangimārie and tūmanako will be restored in places experiencing conflict.	Put a gold coin in your Caritas koha box to help provide support to people who need a fresh start.	Think about what you've learnt during Lent and write a final reflection to show how you will continue to be light in the world.
Help restore creation by increasing the number of ways you re-use, reduce and recycle.	Reflect on the words you speak each day to make sure you bring peace and light to others.	Pray for leaders in New Zealand and worldwide that they will make decisions that promote tika, tūmanako, rangimārie and aroha.
Appreciate your family and friends by finding creative ways to thank them for the way they support you.	Think about justice and pray for those who are being treated unfairly in our world today.	Be creative and make an Easter card to give someone in your family to remind them about the joy and hope of Easter.
How will you help to restore others? – Add your own ideas.	How will you bring light into others' lives? – Add your own ideas.	How will you bring hope to others? – Add your own ideas.



## **Actions/Commitments**



# Feedback Form

## CARITAS LENTEN REFLECTION PROGRAMME 2023

Caritas appreciates hearing from participants about how the Lenten programme was used, what you liked about it and suggested changes. Your feedback helps us to improve it for next year.

Name (optional):

---

Name of Parish/ group/ or community:

---

---

Time and day your group met:

---

What was positive about the programme?

---

---

---

On a scale of 1-5 (5 being excellent) how do you rate the quality of the Lent booklet resource? (please circle your answer below)

**1    2    3    4    5**

What can be improved?

---

---

---



How did participating in the programme affect you and the group you were part of during Lent?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

On a scale of 1-5 (5 being substantial change) to what extent did participating in the Lent reflection bring about change in your life?  
(please circle your answer below)

**1    2    3    4    5**

If you have any additional comments, please write them here:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Please return to: c/- Lent Reflection Programme - Feedback,  
P O Box 12193, Thorndon, Wellington 6144. Or email: [caritas@caritas.org.nz](mailto:caritas@caritas.org.nz)





AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

The Catholic Agency for Justice, Peace & Development

**ADDRESSING THE CAUSES OF POVERTY**

**ADVOCATING AGAINST INJUSTICE**

**RESPONDING TO DISASTER**

