



# METANOIA

LENTEN PROGRAM 2025

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Thérèse is God's message to our present generation which has lost its faith in God's merciful love, because it has lost its sense of sin. *Christ cannot be Saviour when there is nothing left to be saved.*

## THE PASSION OF ST THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX

(for personal reflection)

with Msgr Graham Schmitzer

At each point in history, God gives the Church a guide to take us back to basics. To our sophisticated and board civilization, which has lost the sense of the infinite, God has sent a child. With the charm of her simplicity, Thérèse of Lisieux brings the world once more the eternal message of God's love—that God has created us out of love, and that his love is all the more passionate because we have deserted him. Like the deserted father in the parable of the prodigal son, God waits for us to return. All he wants is our love. He is not angry; rather he is full of pity because he knows we have lost our way. He wants us to let ourselves be loved by him.

Thérèse is renowned for miracles, but the greatest miracle is that an unknown girl, enclosed in a Carmelite convent, should in the space of a few years after her death become known throughout the entire Catholic world. Her *Story of a Soul*, written under obedience to her superiors, would influence the lives of millions. For this reason, on the centenary

of her death in 1997, John Paul II declared her a Doctor (or Teacher) of the Church. "The science of Divine Love, which the Father of mercies pours out through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, is a gift granted to the little and the humble so that they may know and proclaim the secrets of the kingdom, hidden from the learned and the wise," he wrote (*Divina Amoris Scientia*, 1).

This year marks the centenary of Thérèse's canonisation in the Holy Year of 1925.

In those days, Religious took a new name, and often, a title which would be the focus of their spirituality. Many are unaware Thérèse took a double title—of the Child Jesus, and of the Holy Face. Not only would she focus on the holy Child's simplicity, she would love him in his sufferings. It would prove to be prescient.

Thérèse grew up in a France racked by revolution and internal strife. God had become a God of justice, and his people were swamped by a sense of guilt. Devotion to the Sacred Heart, originally intended to honour Christ's love, became instead the focus of reparation (the reason for the building of Sacré

**"The science of Divine Love, which the Father of mercies pours out through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, is a gift granted to the little and the humble so that they may know and proclaim the secrets of the kingdom, hidden from the learned and the wise."**

POPE JOHN PAUL II  
*DIVINA AMORIS SCIENTIA*, 1



# DESERT

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT





## ARTWORK SPOTLIGHT

with Msgr Graham Schmitzer



## *Landscape with the Temptation of Christ (c. 1715)*

**Antonio Francesco Peruzzini (1643–1724) and  
Alessandro Magnasco (c. 1667–1749)**

Oil Canvas, 116.84cm × 95.89cm.

Los Angeles County Museum USA. Public Domain.

*Landscape with the Temptation of Christ* (c. 1715) is rather unique. It is the combination of two artists—Antonio Francesco Peruzzini, renowned for his landscapes, and Alessandro Magnasco, celebrated for his dramatic figure work.

Peruzzini has set the scene. He pictures a terrain wild and untamed with jagged rocks, twisted trees, and stormy skies. We can sense desolation and chaos, reflecting the inner turmoil faced by Christ. How subtle is the Evil One. We can rise from moments of prayer, even prolonged as in a retreat, feeling close to God, and then face reality. We do not yet live in paradise. Satan knows our weaknesses. It reminds me of a quote from Thomas à Kempis' classic, *The Imitation of Christ*: "I am accustomed to visit my elect in a double fashion, that is, with temptation and with consolation."

We never achieve true sanctity without a struggle. We have to believe that Christ really faced temptation, otherwise he can hardly be our model. "For the suffering he himself passed through while being put to the test enabled him to help others when they are being put to the test" (Heb 2:18).

And this is where Magnasco shows his brilliance. He depicts the devil, grotesque and menacing, as part of the landscape. This is the sinister nature of temptation. We often do not realise that we are being tempted to evil, for evil often presents itself in the guise of good. How does St John present evil in the Book of Revelation? As a dragon with seven heads—the seven deadly sins—but each crowned with a coronet (Rv 12:3). Christ survives this ordeal because of his perseverance in prayer. He becomes our imitation as we seriously enter Lent.

MSGR GRAHAM SCHMITZER

**VISIO DIVINA**

*(See Page 7 for instructions)*

# 9 MARCH 2025

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent

DEUTERONOMY 26:4–10

PSALM 90(91):1–2, 10–15

ROMANS 10:8–13

LUKE 4:1–13

## OPENING PRAYER

Host: Let us pause and call to mind  
God's presence within and  
among us, today and always.

*Brief pause.*

**℟️ Heavenly Father, as we gather in this Lenten season, we thank you for the journey into the desert alongside your Son, Jesus. Help us to embrace this time of reflection and growth, recognising our vulnerabilities and the temptations we face. May we find strength in our weaknesses and draw closer to you through prayer and self-giving. Guide our discussion today, that we may learn to imitate Christ's humility and love and discover the grace that comes from facing our struggles. Amen.**

## RESPONSORIAL PSALM



PSALM 90(91):1–2, 10–15

**℟️ Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
and abides in the shade of the Almighty  
says to the Lord: "My refuge,  
my stronghold, my God in whom I trust!" **℟️**

Upon you no evil shall fall,  
no plague approach where you dwell.  
For you has he commanded his angels,  
to keep you in all your ways. **℟️**

They shall bear you upon their hands  
lest you strike your foot against a stone.  
On the lion and the viper you will tread  
and trample the young lion and the dragon. **℟️**

His love he set on me, so I will rescue him;  
protect him for he knows my name.  
When he calls I shall answer: "I am with you,"  
I will save him in distress and give him glory. **℟️**

## GOSPEL



LUKE 4:1–13

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days. During that time, he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf." But Jesus replied, "Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone."

Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, "I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been committed to me and I give it to anyone I choose. Worship me, then, and it shall all be yours." But Jesus answered him, "Scripture says:

You must worship the Lord your  
God, and serve him alone."

Then he led him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said to him "throw yourself down from here, for scripture says:

He will put his angels in charge of  
you to guard you, and again:

They will hold you up on their hands  
in case you hurt your foot against a stone."  
But Jesus answered him, "It has been said:  
You must not put the Lord your God to the test."

Having exhausted all these ways of tempting him, the devil left him, to return at the appointed time.

The Gospel of the Lord.

**℟️ Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

*Pause for silent reflection.*

with Fr John Corrigan

***Into the desert with Jesus***

Every Lent we accompany Jesus into the desert. Lent is not something we enjoy, but it is the best way for us to return to God. To re-convert. To practice *metanoia*. Jesus leads us down from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea: the lowest place on earth, 400 metres below sea level. Lent is a journey of great highs and lows. We start low, focusing on our weaknesses—our vulnerabilities.

In the spiritual life, we encounter three enemies: the devil, the world, and the flesh. The devil, a fallen angel, is no literary construct. He is a real entity who preyed on Jesus and preys on us. But temptation also comes from other people (the world), and from within (the flesh). Of the three, the flesh is our greatest enemy: “For it is from within, from men’s hearts, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a man unclean” (Mk 7:21–23).

We are our biggest enemy, which is why we need Lent. We head to the desert to spend time with Jesus—alone. In the desert, there are no distractions, no newsfeeds, no place to hide. We will see the enemy coming, and we can win more easily. If we stay close to Jesus this Lent, the enemy is outnumbered: two against one!

In the Lord’s Prayer, we ask God to deliver us from temptation. We ask for this because Jesus taught us to, but we make the prayer our own because we don’t want trouble. Yet trouble makes us stronger. Difficulties help us grow. God will allow us to be tempted, but at the same time, he gives us the grace to draw good from temptation. A successful Lent will reveal how weak we are. A good Lent will help us really know ourselves.

The devil tempts Jesus three times in this Sunday’s Gospel. We can imitate Jesus’ attitude amid our own difficulties and trials. While he was on earth, Jesus never sought the glory that belonged to him. “His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave” (Ph 2:6–7). As Christians, we confess that all glory is due to God alone. When we attract the praise of others, we

receive it humbly, with good grace. But we do not seek glory, and more than that: when we are unjustly overlooked or wrongly blamed, we want to feel grateful! Sometimes justice compels us to fight for what is right and correct the record, but even then, we strive to be detached from personal recognition or credit.

Jesus Christ is our model. Every day brings obstacles and demands, but in Lent especially, we throw ourselves into the struggle of self-giving and self-forgetfulness. If

Jesus allowed himself to be tempted, we have no cause to be discouraged by our own temptations. God does not lose battles. Our resolution this Lent must be to stay close to Jesus. He will turn even our defeats into victories. We do not seek moral perfection. Our goal is to love more, and to be humble. We want to know our weaknesses. We want to embrace our weaknesses. We want to be grateful for our weaknesses, which ensure we never wander far from Jesus.

FR JOHN CORRIGAN

**Our resolution this Lent must be to stay close to Jesus. He will turn even our defeats into victories. We do not seek moral perfection. Our goal is to love more, and to be humble.**

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS***(See Page 18)*

## Keeping God company

**M**etanoia, in part, means *a change of heart*. Some people's hearts are changed dramatically, but for most of us, it happens slowly—bit by bit. One day we suddenly realise our hearts have been changed and we can't quite pinpoint when that might have occurred.

Let me tell you a true story. We have our meals in silence, and for the main meal we listen to either some profitable reading or a podcast. It helps us to stay focused in prayer for the sufferings of the world. One of those podcasts came from a retired Presbyterian minister, Miriam Dixon. She spoke about a visit she made to her parents who were both in nursing care. One day she went to see them, and her father said, "Darling your mother and I have something to tell you." Rather apprehensively, Miriam sat down. "Your mother has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease." The shock value was huge, and it reduced her to silence. Her parents wondered why she wasn't saying anything and finally her father said, "Mimi, as you know, we have always been friends of Jesus. Everything we have ever done we have done with him. He has been the centre of our lives together. So now he is giving us a very lovely invitation. He is walking into Alzheimer's, and he is asking for our company. How could we say 'no' to him or complain?"

Their decision spoke volumes, not just to Miriam, but to the entire community who witnessed the benefits daily. Miriam's parents were able to make that choice because, each day, in countless small ways, they walked with Jesus—and their hearts were transformed. He did the changing, and they let him. I would go further and say to you, that "metanoia" is what happens when we accept the invitation to keep God company.

That is really what we are doing this Lent. Imagine seeing life's hurts, sorrows, difficulties, challenges,

injustices, and rejections as a means of keeping Jesus company. It's truly a "win-win"—Jesus is never alone in his suffering because we share it with him, and we aren't alone either. In this shared journey, we are being transformed.

In our Gospel account today, Jesus is seemingly on his own facing excruciating mental and physical agony, but he isn't really—even if it felt like that. You may have read the book *The Shack*. The main character, Mac, tells God the Father that God had abandoned him in his pain over his daughter's horrific death, and that he had also abandoned his Son, Jesus, on the Cross, too. God replied in the novel: "I didn't abandon Jesus, and I didn't abandon

you. Just because it felt like that, didn't mean I had."

Jesus didn't face the devil or the pain alone—his Father was with him. Likewise, in all that happens

to us, we are never truly alone—God is with us. But we won't fully understand this until we intentionally choose to walk with Jesus through whatever life brings. Until we can say, "He's already been there; I will follow, too. Perhaps he will feel less alone," and in doing so, we discover that we are the ones who feel less alone.

It really makes all the difference. We can actually face whatever temptations in the desert befall us. Try it, I promise it works. Somehow the load is bearable all because we kept company with God as he walked our road.

MOTHER HILDA SCOTT OSB

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

(See Page 18)



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

### GOSPEL REFLECTION

1. Lent is a journey into the desert where we confront our weaknesses. What vulnerabilities or weaknesses do you feel God is calling you to acknowledge during this Lent? What fruit might acknowledging them bear in your life?
2. God allows us to be tempted but also provides grace to draw good from those temptations. Can you recall a time when a difficult situation or temptation ultimately led to your personal growth or a deeper understanding yourself?
3. Jesus faced temptations without seeking glory for himself. How can we apply Jesus' example of humility and self-forgetfulness in our daily lives, especially during this Lenten season?
4. Fr John emphasises the importance of embracing our weaknesses to remain close to Jesus. How can you cultivate a sense of gratitude for your weaknesses this Lent, and how might this shift in perspective impact your relationship with God and others?

### SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

1. Mother Hilda tells us, "In all that happens to us, we are never truly alone—God is with us." When we go through periods of loneliness, temptation or despair, why do you think it is so difficult to believe that God is with us?
2. Considering your own life and the difficulties you are facing at this time, complete this sentence, "Jesus is walking into \_\_\_\_\_ and he's inviting me to join him." How does that make you feel? How might this change your approach and attitude to the difficulty?
3. As we consider the shared journey of suffering with Jesus, how can we support one another in our community to ensure that no one feels alone in their struggles, and how can we be a source of comfort and companionship for each other?

### CLOSING PRAYER AND INTERCESSIONS

Host: Gracious God, as we gather in prayer, we open our hearts to you and invite those of us present to share any intentions, trusting in your loving presence and attentive ear.

*Pause for intentions.*

✠ **Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of metanoia—the slow and beautiful transformation of our hearts. Help us this week to recognise your presence in our struggles, and**

**to accept the invitation to walk with Jesus through our own challenges. May we embrace the sorrows and difficulties of life as opportunities to keep you company, knowing that in doing so, we are never alone.**

**Let us carry the lessons learned today into our daily lives, allowing your love to change us bit by bit. May we continue to seek you in every moment, sharing in both the joys and sufferings of this world. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.**

Ash Wednesday

## WEDNESDAY 5 MARCH 2025

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JOEL 2:12–18

PSALM 50(51):3–6, 12–14, 17

2 CORINTHIANS 5:20–6:2

MATTHEW 6:1–6, 16–18

**Come back to me with all your heart.** JL 2:12

In the ancient Greek language in which the New Testament was written, there are two words usually translated as repentance. The first is *metamelomai*, which refers to a sincere regret for something done. It is the word used to describe the sorrow and regret that Judas experienced when he realised that his betrayal would lead to the condemnation of Jesus (Mt 27:3–5). But whilst Judas was genuinely sorry for what he had done, bearing in mind that he acknowledged his sin as he returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, his sorrow did not lead to him turning back to God. Instead, he gave up. In all fairness to Judas, it is quite possible that the lack of mercy and forgiveness shown to him by the chief priests and elders led to him giving up on God's mercy also.

The second Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*, which literally means a change of mind, or change of heart. It is different to *metamelomai* in that it involves not just a sorrow for the wrong we have done, but it also involves a turning back to God. It involves not just regret for past sins, but a genuine desire to change our ways and to avoid those sins in the future. It begins with sorrow, but it does not stop there.

Often, we are genuinely sorry for our sins, but it does not always lead to a change of ways in that we continue to confess the same old sins over and over again. It is as if we are caught up in the *metamelomai*, whereas we need to move towards *metanoia*, not just sorrow, but a turning back to God with our whole heart.

*Lord, help me to turn back to you with my whole heart. Amen.*

FR ANTONY JUKES OFM

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

## THURSDAY 6 MARCH 2025

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DEUTERONOMY 30:15–20

PSALM 1:1–4, 6

LUKE 9:22–25

**Choose life, then, so that you ... may live in the love of the Lord your God.** DT 30:19–20

Here we are on the second day of Lent, and many of us are already finding it difficult to fulfil our resolutions. I think God allows this early difficulty precisely to remind us of the essence of Lent: to humbly and simply return to our first love—God, who is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8).

We imitate Jesus' 40 days in the desert by putting aside distractions and comforts. With just a little less food, a little less pleasure, a little less coffee or screen time or noise, we quickly realise how much those things have been getting between us and God—and how hard it can be to remain peaceful without them.

Now is the perfect time to renew our trust and dependence on God because we know that he loves us more than we can even imagine. We so easily forget this. God chose to bring us into existence and guide our every moment for no other reason than love. For many of us, it's easier to believe that God loves everyone except ourselves, but he says to us today—to each of us individually—“Live in the love of the Lord your God, obeying his voice and clinging to him.”

Now this doesn't mean that life will always be easy. There will be crosses to carry. But we can carry them by resting in his unfathomable, eternal, personal love for us.

*Lord, I so easily forget the greatness of your love; help me return to you today, my First Love. Amen.*

SR ANASTASIA REEVES OP

St Joseph, husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
**WEDNESDAY 19 MARCH 2025**

2 SAMUEL 7:4–5, 12–14, 16  
PSALM 88(89):2–5, 27, 29  
ROMANS 4:13, 16–18, 22  
MATTHEW 1:16, 18–21, 24

**You are my father, my God, the rock who saves me.** PS 89:26

Our parish's mission is to be a vibrant community that actively accompanies people to encounter Jesus. As we grow into our mission, it is becoming clear that when people experience belonging, love, and security within a community of disciples, their hearts become more open to the knowledge of God's love for them; their relationship with God becomes dynamic and exciting.

St Joseph was all these things for Jesus, and so, like all the saints of the last 2,000 years, he points the way for us. St Joseph shows us that we belong to one another and to God, not through perfect family lines, or perfect liturgy, but through love and honour.

One of my earliest memories was as a four-year-old waiting for Dad to get home from work. I'd wait with growing anticipation on the front porch for his car to turn into the driveway, and celebrate with joy as he opened the door to greet me—he was truly my rock and a reflection of the relationship between Joseph and Jesus. Perhaps we could go so far as to claim that St Joseph's love for his foster child was a perfect reflection of God's love for us, and became the formative experience for Jesus' future claim that God was "Abba"—the rock who saves him.

If we let it, this feast of St Joseph can become a transformative moment in our capacity to love. Every baptised person has been given the commission to make disciples. This begins by exercising the virtues of love and honour, and like St Joseph, becoming a rock of love for others.

*Lord, help me to recognise your infinite love and mercy. Amen.*

**FR JOSHUA WHITEHEAD**

Thursday of the 2nd week of Lent  
**THURSDAY 20 MARCH 2025**

JEREMIAH 17:5–10  
PSALM 11:1–4, 6  
LUKE 16:19–31

**Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to the bosom of Abraham..** LK 16:22

One way of praying with Scripture is to imagine ourselves as one of characters. Today's Gospel is one such example. At a casual glance, we might not think that we are like either character. That is, we know we are not a beggar, and secondly, we may not see ourselves as hardening our heart to the poor.

Lent is a time of conversion, and we can only genuinely convert if we are truly honest. In other words, we can't turn away from something unless we know what we are turning away from. This is where imagining ourselves as one of the characters can help. For example, if we pray like the rich man, we can ask the Holy Spirit to reveal whether there are any people we treat as lepers or outcasts—unworthy of our time or resources.

By allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal where our hearts have hardened, we can turn to God and ask him to give us the grace to love those we might view as unworthy of affection.

*Lord, thank you for this time of Lent and the opportunity to grow in love of you and others. Amen.*

**KATE ATKINS MGL**



GENESIS 37:3–4, 12–13, 17–28  
PSALM 104(105):16–21  
MATTHEW 21:33–43, 45–46

**When they heard his parables, the chief priests and the scribes realised he was speaking about them.** MT 21:45

Whether it's a parable like the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, or another passage or verse, I often find myself thinking, "Once again, God is speaking to me through this story." Frustratingly, I'm never the great character, the holy character, the one who gets everything perfect. I'm always the running prodigal son, the jealous older brother, or the priest who walks past the injured Samaritan. It turns out, after all these years, I'm not yet the disciple I'm called to be.

In today's Gospel, it might seem that the sin at the heart of the story was the refusal to give the vineyard's produce to the landowner. We see in Jesus' lesson at the conclusion that this is not the case. He says, "The kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Mt 21:43). So, it's not just that they would not hand over the produce, it's that they were not even fruitful for God in the first place. I'm beginning to see myself again.

God wants us to be fruitful for his kingdom, but he's not a dragon sitting on mountain of gold. Rather, he is a loving father who wants the best for his children. After all, the kingdom is our inheritance—the good we produce is ultimately our joy. So often, faced with my own shortcomings and sinfulness, I'm quick to lash out at others. "Don't you dare reveal me to myself," my heart says, but our tender, loving God wants to help us, not hurt us. Will we let him?

*Lord, you see me and you love me. Help me to let you. Amen.*

**PETER GILMORE**

MICAH 7:14–15, 18–20  
PSALM 102(103):1–4, 9–12  
LUKE 15:1–3, 11–32

**The Lord is kind and merciful.** PSALM RESPONSE

Have you ever stopped to think of the joy it gave Jesus to craft the world's most perfect story about the goodness of his Father? Jesus, who is truly the only begotten Son of the Father, who dwells in the very heart of the Father (*qui est in sinu Patris*), burns with the desire to reveal the Father to us.

In his classic work, *Christ the Life of the Soul*, Blessed Columba Marmion beautifully ponders Christ's mission to extend God's paternity toward us, "Making us by grace what he is by nature, sons of God." Every moment Christ spent on earth was directed toward this one goal of drawing us all into the house of the Father. In this one parable of the prodigal son, there are so many touches highlighting the Father's goodness that we have each pondered over the years. See how he respects the freedom of the sons. There is no force or overbearing presence. The elder son's claim to have "slaved" for the Father does not square with reality. Having been wronged, see how he is the first to seek out the lost, setting aside the dignity of his old age to run out after his son. See his superabundant mercy, lavishing gifts and dignity on his repentant son. See also his patience and generosity to the older son, who, being in his house and heir to all his goods, remains closed and aloof from him.

Perhaps today, as we reflect on the familiar parable of the prodigal son, we can find the key to our conversion of heart in cultivating an openness to recognise the goodness of the Father, inspiring us to desire both to be with him, and to become like him.

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Amen.*

**SR MARY HELEN HILL OP**