

JUST LENT



**40 DAILY REFLECTIONS
FOR A JUST WORLD**

FROM SOUTH CARDIFF MINISTRY AREA

JUST LENT



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**‘They ask me for laws that are just,
they long for God to draw near’**

(see Isaiah 58:1-9)

WELCOME. This booklet of daily reflections is written as a companion to the Lenten journey, focussing on the many injustices which exist in our world, as we seek the Justice of God which Christ proclaimed, and for which he died and rose again.

Each reflection is based on one of the readings of Mass each day. In order to make this resource as universally useful and accessible as possible, we have used the readings of the Roman Catholic Lectionary which is almost identical to the Revised Common Lectionary, although there may be some slight differences. These reflections can be used for individual use and/or for use at the Mass each day as a homily or time of reflection. Also, we have used the readings appointed only for the days of Lent and not for any feast or solemnities which fall in any particular year.

This booklet forms part of a wider JUST LENT resource made freely available by South Cardiff Ministry Area and which explores Social Justice from a catholic perspective. These resources which includes a complete Course for small groups can be discovered at our website: www.southcardiffministryarea.co.uk and where you can also find ways to continue the conversation online.

ASH WEDNESDAY

‘Now, now—it is the Lord who speaks—come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, mourning.’

(see Joel 2:12-18)

What makes you angry? What makes you sad? Whilst anger is often thought of as a negative emotion, it can also stir us into action—if we are angry for the right reasons—so that we can bring change, and fight injustice and inequality.

Jesus himself was stirred with anger in the Temple when he overturned the tables of the money-changers and drove them out of the Temple. Perhaps, in that moment, he may have had in mind the time he was driven out of the synagogue in Nazareth as his angry listeners led him to the cliff top with the intention of throwing him off, so incensed were they about the prophecy he said was being fulfilled in himself. Love is led to the cliff top.

During each of these forty days of Lent we'll be exploring issues of social-justice. There is, we know, much injustice in the world, and many of these instances of injustice will make us angry and sad. We all have a part to play in creating a world where every human being is treated with dignity. Each of us, in some way, has failed to live up to God's designs for us and the world. Today, on Ash Wednesday, we engage in a corporate act of sadness and mourning for the ways in which we have spoiled God's world and strayed away from his designs. In turning back to God, we turn back to Love himself who experienced that cliff top moment of anger and death. We turn to him who, in Christ, has turned to us.

PRAY FOR *a just and holy Lent filled with care and compassion for the poor and vulnerable, conscious of our own wrongdoing but delighting in the dignity of every human being and all that God has created.*

22 FEBRUARY

JUST LENT

THURSDAY

**'I set before you, life and prosperity,
death and disaster.'**

(see Deuteronomy 30:15-20)

Decisions, decisions! We make them every day. In fact, research suggests we make 35,000 remotely conscious decisions each day. And, of course, as our level of responsibility increases, so does the myriad of choices we have to make.

We may not think that most of the decisions we take in life have very significant consequences but, if we stop and think about it, some of them will indeed have effects for good or for ill. Whether it's where we shop, how we spend our money, or how we treat someone - these all have consequences for us and for others. These days, many of us are aware of the need to cut costs when shopping but can all of us always justify cost over welfare, or pennies over unfair working conditions? Should someone be employed and treated badly or paid poorly so that we can have cheaper goods?

As God in the time of Moses offered his people a choice, so many of those 35,000 decisions we make each day may indeed be making a choice between life and prosperity or death and disaster. Agricultural workers throughout the world, for example, often have very few options for a sustainable livelihood. They may lack formal contracts or basic health and safety assurances or adequate wages, among so other challenges. Can we be more informed about the decisions we make? Can a sense of justice fuel our financial decisions?

***PRAY FOR** all workers to be treated with dignity and fairness,. May we make just decisions which bring life and prosperity*

JUST LENT



23 FEBRUARY

FRIDAY

**‘They ask me for laws that are just,
they long for God to draw near’**

(see Isaiah 58:1-9)

Laws are, of course, important for the safety and security of all and enable citizens to live responsibly. There are, though, still some rather outdated and maybe outlandish laws in the UK. For example, under an 1839 law it is illegal to knock on someone's door and walk away which puts a dampener on many childhood memories of those who indulged in such a game! And if you're ever visiting Parliament, don't wear a suit of armour. That's also illegal—as is beating your rug or carpet in a London street.

The laws of our country are not static and unchangeable and, over the years, many have been challenged and been changed in order to create a more fair and just community, reflecting our changing perceptions and lived experiences. Whilst some of us may still be uncomfortable with certain laws, there are many laws in countries throughout the world (not just our own) that prevent many people from flourishing in an extreme and unjust way

Some may think that the Christian Faith is simply full of things that you can and cannot do. However, at the heart of God's Kingdom is the Law of Love. This is the rule, the law, we are called to live by. It is the Law given to us by Christ. He has drawn near to us in love, and given us a way to live—justly.

***PRAY FOR** all leaders and governments, law-makers and law-enforcers that they may make just decisions to help all people flourish and grow.*

24 FEBRUARY

JUST LENT

SATURDAY

**'If you do away with the clenched fist, the wicked word,
if you give your bread to the hungry, relief to the oppressed,
your light will rise in the darkness.'**

(see Isaiah 58:9-14)

There is a growing number of Foodbanks in the UK. We hear so much about those who struggle with food poverty or of parents who go without food so that their children can eat. Many have to make the decision to 'heat or eat.' Responding to this need, churches and so many others of different backgrounds and religions give freely of their time, resources and energy to respond to the needs of those in crisis, to those who are experiencing dark and difficult times.

Food is a basic necessity of life but sometimes, for so many different reasons, there are people in our country who go hungry, and there are as many different stories to tell as there are people who access Foodbanks. Many may feel a sense of embarrassment at visiting a Foodbank but, in truth, their experience could so easily be our experience. Or perhaps you, at some point, may have received from the generosity of others as you experienced the need for help.

From the time of Isaiah to the time of Jesus and in every generation since then, we are called to feed the hungry and do away with the wicked words. We are called to offer support and encouragement to all who struggle, with no judgement. When we so this, our light will rise in the darkness.

***PRAY FOR** those who volunteer in Foodbanks throughout the UK and those who visit them with whatever needs they present*

JUST LENT



25 FEBRUARY

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

**‘Jesus was led by the Spirit
out into the wilderness
To be tempted by the devil.**

(Matthew 4:1-11)

This page is for you. It's for your own reflections, thoughts and prayers or even to make a fresh commitment. Maybe you have responses to what you have read so far, or that you've heard in a sermon today. Maybe there is something you've seen or heard in the News that stirs you to make connections with your faith. This page is for you.

26 FEBRUARY

JUST LENT

MONDAY

'When did we see you hungry and feed you?'

(see Matthew 25:31-46)

We spend much time and money on the worship of the Church, and maintaining the building and preparing the liturgical space because we want to offer our best to God, and to discover his presence in the beauty of worship. However, we know that God is not and can never be confined within the walls of our building. The Sacrament of the Eucharist is a beautiful gift to be honoured, treasured and valued, it is transformative, but we also discover Christ in so many different ways.

St John Chrysostom said, 'Do you wish to honour the Body of Christ? Then do not disdain him when you see him in rags. After having honoured him in church with silken vestments do not leave him to die of cold outside for lack of clothing. For it is the same Jesus who says, "This is my Body" and who says "You saw me in the hungry and did not give me to eat...The Body of Christ in the Eucharist demands pure souls, not costly garments. But in the poor he demands all our care...Give him then the honour which he himself has asked for, by giving your money to the poor. Once again, what God wants is not golden chalices but golden souls.'

The sacrament of the Eucharist should raise our hearts and minds to the presence of Jesus everywhere, and make us more attentive to his presence in the poor and those in need, strengthening and inspiring us to encounter him in both the riches and the rags.

PRAY FOR those in whom we are called to encounter Jesus today, and for those who lead lives of dedication and service to those in need.

JUST LENT



27 FEBRUARY

TUESDAY

‘Forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are against us.’

(see Matthew 6:7-15)

The prayer we know as ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ and learned by heart as a child, forms part of the staple diet of prayer for all Christians. It is prayed at times of joy and sadness, celebration and misery, and provides a momentum to our life—but it also packs a punch and, whilst we pray the words, the intentions of the prayer may at times be far from our heart, or difficult to believe for ourselves! The prayer is a profound challenge to the injustice of the world, and the part we play.

If you’re poor, you’ll often end up paying more for things. Living week by week or day by day, there may not be the luxury to buy in bulk or get those three for the price of two offers. Those whose financial circumstances demand they have a prepay metre for their gas or electricity will usually be on a higher tariff. And if you are scratching around to make ends meet, it is easy to fall into debt, to allow credit and loans to get out of control, to miss bills and then become susceptible to high interest loans.

Likewise, it’s reported that lower income countries spend five times more on debt than coping with the impact of climate change and reducing carbon emissions. Figures from Jubilee Debt Campaign showed that 34 of the world’s poorest countries are spending £21.4bn on debt payments a year compared with £3.9bn on measures to reduce the impact of the climate emergency.

PRAY FOR those who are struggling financially, and for poorer countries burdened with debt,, and for those who are able to reach out and make a difference.

28 FEBRUARY

JUST LENT

WEDNESDAY

**'This is a wicked generation;
it is asking for a sign'**

(see Luke 11:29-32)

We can sometimes look back on previous generations with a certain sense of alarm and smugness, blessed with hindsight, and think of ourselves as far more civilised and enlightened than they were! Similarly, we even look at the cultures and practices of other countries, of which we have little insight or understanding, and denounce them as strange or unacceptable to us.

However, in recent times, the UK has begun to look at itself differently. Following the death of George Floyd, the Black Lives Movement fed the desire to re-evaluate the way in which those involved in the Transatlantic slave trade were continued to be honoured in the public space through statues, buildings and place names, which also means re-evaluating the part that Britain played. Now, in many places statues and other physical reminders in the public sphere, have been removed or reconsidered, and a new narrative is being written which allows people of colour to have their voice, share their heritage, and their experience of the world.

No generation can or should have a feeling of self satisfaction that all is well. We need to be open to scrutiny, so that a truthful perspective can emerge. The Church, too, has made mistakes, and sometimes not stood up for the justice it proclaims. How can we be part of a changing landscape, and allow a new, inclusive story be told?

PRAY FOR those charged with re-evaluating and reconsidering the narrative being told, and for our own to the experience of others.

JUST LENT



1 MARCH

THURSDAY

‘As for me, give me courage.

put persuasive words into my mouth when I face the lion.’

(see Esther 4:17)

Fighting injustice and speaking out can lead us to a precarious place. Many individuals throughout history and in our time have faced danger and even death for standing up and standing out. The likes of Martin Luther King come to mind whose stance against racism in the US led to his death. In our own day, there are people such as Malala Yusafzai who spoke out about education for girls under a Taliban regime which led to her being shot in the head. Thankfully she survived and has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, as she continues with her campaign from the UK.

Whilst we may not live in such an extreme situation as experienced by Malala, we do witness injustice closer to home. Do we prefer to remain silent? ‘All that is needed for evil to triumph in the world is for good men to do nothing,’ is a quote attributed to the Irish statesman Edmund Burke in the 18th century.

We pray that, when faced by injustice we will have the courage to speak up and to make a difference, to proclaim God’s Kingdom of Love and Peace, to be a prophetic voice in the world, and to put our words into action.

PRAY FOR those girls and women in countries that do not allow them an education, and for the courage to speak up against injustice.

2 MARCH

JUST LENT

FRIDAY

**‘Leave your offering there at the altar,
and be reconciled with your brother.’**

(see Matthew 5:20-26)

Those who negotiate for peace carry a heavy burden indeed, and politicians, leaders and governments have to tread carefully upon fragile ground. There are always difficult decisions to make, particularly when dealing with a strong aggressor who seems intent on war or when negotiations no longer seem possible.

When we think of some of the situations in the world today and the association that certain past and present leaders have with war, the words of Henri Npwen are challenging but profound. “As a community of peacemakers it is our task first of all to recognize and affirm the great human gifts the warmakers carry within themselves. As much as we have to confess our own dark forces to each other, so much do we have to reveal the gifts of peace in those who lives and works we hope to change. We have to see them as caring, loving, concerned human beings, who, just as we, desire peace and freedom, even though they are for fighting their way to it.”

How can we apply this wisdom to our own lives? Part of the process of reconciliation is accepting our own fears and shortcomings, and trying to find shared ground upon which we can walk in peace, appealing to the peaceful and loving qualities of the person with whom we seek peace. The ground is fragile indeed. May God’s Love enable us to tread carefully.

PRAY FOR those who negotiate for peace, and those who make war that they may recognise their ability to create peace without aggression or force.

JUST LENT



3 MARCH

SATURDAY

‘Love your enemies and pray for those who hate you.’

(see Matthew 5:43-48)

Perhaps we find it easier to pray for those whom we love or like. Filling our prayers with those we find difficult or even those we hate or who may have hurt or harmed us in some way is not something that sits comfortably with many of us. So perhaps Jesus' command to love our enemies and pray for those who hate you is indeed challenging. And yet, as he hung upon the cross, accompanied by two convicted thieves, he speaks words of forgiveness, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Scarlett Lewis' son, Jesse, was killed in a 2012 School shooting in the US. At first, she said, she felt like her anger sapped all her strength and energy. She naturally harboured deep anger at the shooter and his mother for unwittingly arming him. Eventually made a choice to forgive. "Forgiveness felt like I was given a big pair of scissors to cut the tie and regain my personal power. It started with a choice and then became a process." At Jesse's funeral, she urged mourners to change their angry thoughts into loving ones, so that they might change the world.

For her, the act of forgiving was transformative. Whilst forgiveness is difficult, particularly in such extreme circumstances, it can challenge injustice in a way that is unique and long lasting. It is liberating and life-giving.

PRAY FOR those who have hurt or harmed you, or who are antagonistic or impatient with you, and for all who find it difficult to forgive.

4 MARCH

JUST LENT

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

**'This is my Son, the Beloved;
he enjoys my favour.**

Listen to him.”.'

(see Matthew 17:1-9))

This page is for you. It's for your own reflections, thoughts and prayers or even to make a fresh commitment. Maybe you have responses to what you have read so far, or that you've heard in a sermon today. Maybe there is something you've seen or heard in the News that stirs you to make connections with your faith. This page is for you.

JUST LENT



5 MARCH

MONDAY

**‘Be compassionate as
your Heavenly Father is compassionate.’**

(see Luke 6:36-38)

When we speak of justice, we often mean justice for someone who has been harmed or had a crime committed against them, which also means punishment for the person who has committed the crime.

It may be difficult for many people to think of those who have received a prison sentence for a crime they have committed as being vulnerable or deserving of compassion. However, half of prisoners are at or below the level expected of an 11 year old in reading, two-thirds in numeracy and four-fifth is witing. All the research suggests that the men and women in British prisons today are extraordinarily disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals. Compared with the general population, prisoners are thirteen times more likely to have been in care as a child, thirteen times as likely to have been unemployed ten times as likely to have been a truant at or excluded from school, and five times as likely to have been in receipt of benefits.

Society is always, quite rightly, keen for justice for the victims of crime but there must always be room for rehabilitation of the offender. How compassionate are we towards those released from prison? Are we as compassionate as our Heavenly Father is compassionate, as compassionate as Christ who died between two convicted criminals, and promised paradise?

PRAY FOR those in prison and for their families, for all who work in the Prison and Probation Services, and that we may show understanding and patience with those who are trying to rehabilitate their lives.

6 MARCH

JUST LENT

TUESDAY

‘Cease to do evil, learn to do good, search for justice, help the oppressed, be just to the orphan, plead for the widow’

(see Isaiah 1:10,16-20)

Our changing perceptions of the world can challenge us. Just think about how our use of language has changed, and continues to change, in order to become less offensive, more inclusive, and more fair. Some people may call it ‘political correctness gone mad.’ But, for us as Christians, it’s about recognising the dignity of every human being who has been made in the image of God.

In his book, *‘Jews Don’t Count,’* the comedian David Baddiel shares his perceptions and experiences of antisemitism. He explains that, on so many occasions amongst all the discriminations and racisms called out in society today, antisemitism is often overlooked. In an associated documentary of the book, Baddiel meets Jason Lee, a black footballer whom, some years ago, Baddiel portrayed in a way he now admits was racist. *‘What we lost sight of in those sketches was the human being on the other end,’* he told Lee. Baddiel apologised, and although the two didn’t part as friends, it was perhaps example of how we can learn from our mistakes. We can so often be unconsciously be biased or racist and forget the human being on the other end.

‘Cease to do evil, learn to do good, search for justice,’ is the call of Isaiah. Can we be willing to continue to ‘learn’ and to be open to having our perceptions and language changed, to listen to the lived experience of others, and so create a society where all feel included, respected and treated with dignity?

PRAY FOR an alertness to our own unconscious bias, and an eagerness and openness to listen to the lived experience of others.

JUST LENT



7 MARCH

WEDNESDAY

**‘Come on,’ they said,
let us concoct a plan against Jeremiah’**

(see Jeremiah 18:18-20)

Work is not just means to earn a living, it is also an opportunity to participate in God’s creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then so are the basic rights of workers. From the first pages of Scripture we see that work is an essential part of human dignity, and throughout Scripture there is a call for workers to be treated fairly, and to be paid a just and living wage, In the UK the Real Living Work campaign works to encourage employers to pay their workers a salary which relates to the cost of living rather than the governments version of the Living Wage.

Scripture reminds us that work and economics is not profit and production but the dignity of the human being. Workers also have the rights to form associations for their own interests and protection which we know as trade unions.

There are many ways in which workers have been exploited by the rich. Many of these came to light in the Industrial revolution when workers were paid with low wages and worked long hours or in dangerous circumstances. But this also continue in many ways in our on day, throughout the world and in our own country. There may be examples, too, when individuals are discriminated against with unfair treatment or dismissal, or where bullying takes place in the workplace. All of this undermines the dignity of what it means to be human.

PRAY FOR all employers, that they may treat their workers with justice and fairness, mindful of their needs and dignity

7 MARCH

JUST LENT

THURSDAY

‘At his gate there lay a poor man called Lazarus, who longed to fill himself with scraps that fell from the rich man’s table

(see Luke 16:19-31)

The gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow. Globally, the richest 10% of the global population currently take home 52% of the income. The poorest half of the global population earn just 8 per cent.

And what of the UK? Well, the gap that exists in the UK has been amongst the worst in Europe. Poverty was on the rise before the Covid-19 crisis hit the UK. Between 2020 and 2021 the income of the UK’s poorest fifth of the population dropped by two per cent. In the last decade, the average income of the richest fifth of the population increased by more than nine percent, The average income of the poorest fifth of the population remained the same.

Behind every statistic is a real lived experience of a human being. In the story Jesus tells to illustrate his point he gives the poor man a name, Lazarus. The story colourfully illustrates the inequalities which exist in the world, and how each of us has an opportunity to respond to need and to work for change. The story takes us through the circumstances of rich and poor in this world and comes to a climax in eternity. As Christians, we set our heart on the life of Heaven and eternity, which guides and moves how we live here on earth. But to quote the strapline used by Christian Aid, ‘We believe in life before death.’ We have a duty of care for all.

PRAY FOR the affluent and the rich, and for those who have the power and position to make change, and for all who struggle financially.

JUST LENT



8 MARCH

FRIDAY

**'It was the stone rejected by builders
which became the keystone.'**

(see Matthew 18:18-20)

Famously, Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for a total of 27 years. He became President of South Africa in the early 1990s, winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 for bringing apartheid to an end. *'I have fought against white domination, and have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It's an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.'* His was indeed a *'long walk to freedom.'*

Jesus experienced for himself acts of injustice, imprisonment, deep pain and death, rejected by those he came to save. He was the suffering servant, who came to serve not to be served and to give his life as a ransom for many. He laid down his life for his sheep.

The long walk to freedom is fraught with pain and difficulties but the dream of Mandela was realised. The world is not perfect, and there are still many injustices to fight, globally and locally. But if we trust in God's justice, we too can play our part for standing up for what is right, and realising God's Kingdom of justice, love and peace.

PRAY FOR those who fight against racism on a political and institutional level, and for our own courageous response to injustice in the world.

7 MARCH

JUST LENT

SATURDAY

‘Lead your people to pasture. As in the days when you came out of Egypt grant us to see wonders.

(see Micah 7:14-15, 18-20)

In a memoir called, *‘In the Wars,’* Dr Waheed Arian, tells the story of his childhood caught up in the war in Afghanistan, finally fleeing to the UK where he trained as a doctor and where he works today in emergency medicine as well as pioneering an international medicine charity which changes lives around the world. He recalls how one day, as a child, his father had told him of their new plans. *‘We are going on a journey, Waheed,’ he told me. ‘To a peaceful place where we can all be safe together. “Where is it?” [I asked.] He put his arm around my shoulders and pointed to a distant peak, ‘Do you see that mountain over there?’ I nodded. ‘Just beyond that mountain.’* The journey was fraught with danger. It was a journey that many people didn’t make, but Waheed and his family finally arrived at that place of safety, although it was by no means the end of their journey. More danger lay ahead. Perhaps, for them, there was always a place, just beyond the mountain.

Millions of people are displaced by war, seeking sanctuary – sometimes by any means possible to them. Many are moved by traffickers who take a fee. For many the route is dangerous, and can even lead in death. May we create a culture of welcome and concern for all those who leave their homes behind in search of safety and peace. May they be treated with understanding and compassion by governments and communities. The family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph took refuge in Egypt, so may all come to a place of safety and love.

PRAY FOR all displaced by war and danger, and for a compassionate response from governments and communities

JUST LENT



8 MARCH

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

**‘Anyone who drinks the water that I shall give
will never be thirsty again:
the water I shall give
will turn into a spring inside him,
welling up up to eternal life.**

(see John 4:5-42)

This page is for you. It's for your own reflections, thoughts and prayers or even to make a fresh commitment. Maybe you have responses to what you have read so far, or that you've heard in a sermon today. Maybe there is something you've seen or heard in the News that stirs you to make connections with your faith. This page is for you.

9 MARCH

JUST LENT

MONDAY

**'I tell you solemnly, no prophet is ever
accepted in his own country.'**

(see Luke 4:24-30)

In what turned out to be a humorous exchange between an MP and the Archbishop of Canterbury At the end of 2022, as bishops preached about the decision of the UK Government to send refugees to Rwanda, a Tory MP said that Bishops shouldn't be preaching from the pulpit and reminded them to stay out of politics. The Archbishop of Canterbury thanked him for his feedback and said "I look forward to advice on what we should be doing in the pulpit" followed by, "Just to confirm we'll be continuing to preach the Gospel of Christ."

This is a common response of some politicians when the Church speaks out, confirming their belief that Christians and the Church have no right to comment, have an opinion or challenge. This is a foreign concept to us and illustrates a narrow minded view of what our Faith is all about. We are not simply people who gather together for nice services, say our prayers and read the Bible. Our faith in God affects the whole of our lives and how we live in the world. Worship and serving, prayer and action go hand in hand.

As Jesus challenged injustice and reached out to the poor and vulnerable, so he calls us to do the same. We believe the world belongs to God, for he made it. Not only does the Church have a right to speak out, it has an obligation to do so. We are called to stand alongside the poor and vulnerable, to love as Jesus loved, to stand up for justice.

PRAY FOR the courage to be a prophetic Church, mindful too of our own shortcomings and sinfulness, but working together to create a strong and loving society.

JUST LENT



10 MARCH

TUESDAY

‘We have no leader, no prophet, no prince.. no place where we can offer you the first fruits and win your favour.’

(see Daniel 3:25,34-43)

Freedom of Religion of belief is a human right which has been guaranteed under international law since 1966. Article 18 of the UN *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted in 1948, states that ‘everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religions.’ And yet, in many countries throughout the world this is not a given right, and many people of faith receive threats, imprisonment or even death for their faith.

Over 360 million Christians suffer persecution and discrimination around the world. They follow Jesus, no matter the cost. The most dangerous places include Afghanistan, North Korea, Somalia, Libya and Yemen. 15,898 Christians were murdered for their faith in 2022 reports the Charity, *Open Doors*.

In the Book of Daniel, Shadrach, Meschah and Abednego refused to worship the idol fashioned by King Nebuchadnezzar on pain of death, and remained faithful to their God and religion. In all countries, including our own, all people should have this freedom of religion, and each of us has a responsibility to protect the freedoms of others, and to expect the same consideration in return.

PRAY FOR freedom of religion throughout the world, for persecuted Christians and peoples of all faiths, that we may live in a country and a world safe from fear.

11 MARCH

JUST LENT

WEDNESDAY

‘Do not forget the things your eyes have seen. Rather tell them to your children, and your children’s children.

(see Deuteronomy 4:1,5-9))

In a 2022, in a BBC documentary about the identity of Wales, called *‘Who do We Think We Are?’* the broadcaster Huw Edwards, interviewed Gaynor Legal, a Butetown resident and the first Black Councillor in the country. She was being asked about the multicultural community that had been built up in the historic Tiger Bay area of Cardiff. ‘Is it fair to say that the heritage you represent has not been properly recognised?’ he asked. ‘I think it was totally ignored,’ she replied, ‘the powers that be saw it best to bury it, they didn’t see it as asset... the history of this area has been totally erased with the developments.’

There is a well known phrase, that “History is written by the Victors.” History often tells a one sided view, forcing the victor’s narrative on the people, and even eradicating the experience, history and heritage of others. Moses reminded the people to remember, value and pass on for generations to come all the things they have seen and heard, so that the narrative of faith and the heritage of a whole people will continue to exist, be valued and passed on. Each of us has a story to tell, and the experiences of whole communities are an important part of the narrative. It is their story to tell and an important one to hear.

PRAY FOR those who work to collect social history, and for a free and open telling and cherishing of a narrative that is truly representative of all people.

JUST LENT



12 MARCH

THURSDAY

**'He who is not with me is against me;
and he who does not gather with me scatters.'**

(see Luke 11:14-23)

There is a saying, favoured by Citizens UK, a Community Organising group, that goes, 'If you don't have a seat at the table then you're probably on the menu.' Citizens UK is made of local chapters with member groups from all walks and areas of life to create an Alliance for change in their local communities. It is built upon relational power, forging links of common interest between community members and those in power.

There are many occasions when people's voice and experience is overlooked, and well minded (and sometimes not so well-minded) politicians and others may make decisions without consultation or any insight into the lives of those they will affect.

Jesus gathered and created a community of people, and in challenging so many injustices experienced in the world, he tore down walls, crossed boundaries, and welcomed the outcast, raising up the poor. The Church is involved in working with others in the community, of all faiths and none, to address need and strengthen community life so that the lives of all can be enriched, and all people can flourish.

PRAY FOR those involved in Community Organising throughout the country, and for strong and resilient communities here and everywhere so that all may flourish

13 MARCH

JUST LENT

FRIDAY

**‘Love your neighbour
as yourself.**

(see Mark 12:28-34)

These days, far more people are aware of (and are open and honest about) Mental Health. There have been so many campaigns encouraging people to talk about their feelings, and offering many ways in which we can improve our mental health and become more emotionally resilient. With far more public understanding, the stigma of poor mental health is slowly being eradicated although we still have some way to go, and there is much need for more investment in Mental Health Services.

Sometimes, the smallest gesture can help. Perhaps simply asking someone how they are, and being willing to listen. Likewise, we shouldn't feel embarrassed by asking for help ourselves. As the beautiful book, *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* by Charlie Mackesy,' says, 'Asking for help isn't giving up. It's refusing to give up.' Having a care for ourselves is as important as caring for others. The two go hand in hand. How can we love our neighbour as ourselves if we don't love ourselves very much?

When Jesus stooped to wash his disciples feet in an act of loving service, Peter refused at first. Sometimes, we may find it difficult to seek help, or may be too proud or too embarrassed. Likewise, we may not recognise the voice of those crying for help but there are opportunities each day to make a difference.

PRAY FOR a true care and love of ourselves so that we can care and love for others, and for better understanding of those with poor mental health.

JUST LENT



14 MARCH

SATURDAY

**‘Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,
but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.**

(see Luke 18:9-14)

‘Kevin Maxwell was a dream candidate for the police force—passionate, hard-working and keen to serve his community. And, as a gay black man from a working class family he could easily have been a poster boy for the Force’s stated commitment to equal opportunities. Instead he came up against entrenched prejudice, open racism and homophobia.’

In his book, *Forced Out*, his last paragraph goes, “As I began rebuilding my life after being forced out and the devastation that followed, and find a place where I can be at peace with this world, with who I am and what I am, and write the next chapter of my story, I say to all those fighting for a better world: never waver in your absolute belief that you can and will triumph.’

In the face of so many injustices in our world, one can feel like giving up altogether, believing that those in power will always win. Jesus was quite clear about power and leadership, and for him it was underpinned by the promise that those who are humbled will be exalted. His Kingdom of Justice is so often in contradiction with many of the values and experiences of the world—and also of the Church, which is not immune itself to being unjust. May we listen to the oppressed, challenge the powerful, and be alert to our own bias and discrimination.

PRAY FOR those who suffer racism, homophobia or transphobia, and all who have had their freedoms taken away, and for a true recognition of our own personal biases.

15 MARCH

JUST LENT

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

**'You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord:
Be like children of light, for the effects of the light are seen
in true goodness and right living and truth.**

(see Ephesians 5:6-14)

This page is for you. It's for your own reflections, thoughts and prayers or even to make a fresh commitment. Maybe you have responses to what you have read so far, or that you've heard in a sermon today. Maybe there is something you've seen or heard in the News that stirs you to make connections with your faith. This page is for you.

JUST LENT



16 MARCH

MONDAY

**‘Now I create a new heaven and a new earth,
and the past will not be remembered.**

(see Isaiah 65:17-21)

‘There is no Planet B’ say many placards on environmental demonstrations organised by groups such as Extinction Rebellion and so many others. The words were also waved in the air when school children from all over the world walked out in demonstration, following the example of Greta Thurnberg to campaign for a more robust and realistic political response to the environmental crisis.

The damage that has been done to the planet is obvious, and each of us has played our own part in this through the way we live, shop and work. But there is also an urgent requirement for countries around the world to take the urgent call seriously.

As Christians, we have a particular view of the natural world. St Charles Foucauld prayed *“Give me the grace to see nothing else but you, nothing but you in all created things; never to be arrested by them, never to see the natural or spiritual beauty that is in them as being born of themselves, but only as being part of you.”* If we believe that the world is not simply created by God, but reveals something of God, and is part of God, then how does that change the way we treat the beautiful gift of God’s Creation.

PRAY FOR a true care for God’s Creation, that we may live responsible lives, and that leaders and governments may respond effectively and quickly to the environmental crisis.

17 MARCH

JUST LENT

TUESDAY

'Along the river, on either bank, will grow every kind of fruit tree with leaves that never wither and fruit that never fails.

(see Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12)

Forests still cover about 30 percent of the world's land area, but they are disappearing at an alarming rate. Since 1990, the world has lost 420 million hectares or about a billion acres of forest, mainly in Africa and South America. About 17 percent of the Amazonian rainforest has been destroyed over the past 50 years, and losses recently have been on the rise. It was reported that the Amazonian destruction rose by 21 percent in 2020, a loss the size of Israel.

The coming of God's kingdom offers us a new vision. Through Christ, we see a new world. He opens our eyes to all that God is doing, which should fill us with a joy that cannot be contained. The prophecy of Isaiah uses the familiar image of creation as a means of expressing the life God gives, as we imagine a world of health and healing, with trees restored, bringing life.

With such mass deforestation of our planet, human beings are ransacking the diversity and sustainability of the planet, destroying habitats, and ripping out the lungs of the earth. How can our choices make a difference? What can we do to increase a gratitude and appreciation of the created order, and care for the earth to which we belong.

PRAY FOR a more responsible care of the planet, and for leaders, governments and businesses to live and work in a more environmentally sustainable way.

JUST LENT



18 MARCH

WEDNESDAY

**‘Some are on their way from afar,
others from the north and west.**

(see Isaiah 59:8-15)

In his selection of poems *‘On the Move: Poems about Migration,’* Michael Rosen writes, *“Everyone comes from somewhere / Everyone has a past / Everyone is somewhere first / Everyone is somewhere last.”* There are occasions when some may criticize the welcoming of so many refugees believing that money and resources could be spent on more pressing needs. The reality is that the UK welcomes fewer refugees than some countries in Europe and around the world.

The family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph took refuge in the land of Egypt to escape terror and death threats, and we can only imagine their experience of fleeing to a foreign land. Each person who leaves their home for somewhere safe, has their own story and experiences to share. Some have left behind family and friends and possessions, and many people will have experienced the death of a loved one along the way.

The recent decision by the UK Government to send refugees from here to Rwanda caused moral outrage and challenge from many areas, and reignited the debate of the passage that refugees are forced to take. Wherever we are, and whatever contact we have with refugees, may we work to create a supportive and welcoming environment, treating each person with dignity and respect, sensitive to their past, and offering a place to call home where they can be somewhere at last.

PRAY FOR those who work to welcome and support refugees and asylum seekers, and for a compassionate government here and around the world.

19 MARCH

JUST LENT

THURSDAY

**‘They have made themselves a calf of molten gold
And have worshipped it and offered it sacrifice.’**

(see Exodus 32:7-14)

In an article published on *The Guardian* website (31 December 2022), addressing the Cost of Living, Rowan Williams writes: “The cost of living crisis is in fact an example of costs being transferred from the powerful to the powerless – from ambitious speculators, market fundamentalists (in and out of government), naked profiteers and, in the past horrendous 10 months of war in Ukraine, foreign dictators, to a population pushed with increasing aggressiveness into debt, housing, food and energy poverty, and insecure working conditions.”

It is so easy for human beings to be treated as commodities, and where profit is more important than people, when riches are more relevant than lives. Rowan Williams continues, “It is a sign that we have once again forgotten the “covenantal” character of community. It was repeated often enough during the pandemic that no one is safe unless everyone is safe: have we really not noticed that this applies to our economic as much as to our medical wellbeing?”

Through Moses, God entered into a covenant with his people which they quickly forgot, as they turned to a calf of molten gold. For Christians, Jesus established a new covenant for all, created through his death. To recognise the dignity and importance of community is important in caring for all, and ensuring that those who are poor and powerless do not pay the price for the challenges and difficulties we face.

PRAY FOR strong and resourceful communities, and for a fair distribution of wealth.

JUST LENT



20 MARCH

FRIDAY

‘They say, with misguided reasoning, “Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law.”’

(see Wisdom 2:1, 12-22)

The *News International* phone hacking scandal was a controversy involving the now-defunct *News of the World* and other British newspapers owned by Rupert Murdoch. Employees of the newspaper were accused of engaging in phone hacking, police bribery, and exercising improper influence in the pursuit of stories. They targeted celebrities, politicians, members of the Royal Family but also the phones of murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler, relatives of deceased British soldiers, and victims of the 7 July 2005 London bombings. The public outcry led to several high-profile resignations.

The media has a significant and responsible role to play in society which means that, whilst it has a duty to report news, it also needs to act in a moral and sensitive way. If the search for stories means unfairly encroaching on people's privacy and their difficult situations, and treating them without respect and dignity then it is failing.

We too, in any narrative that we tell, and any news we pass on to others must be mindful of the effects of our words. It can be very easy to delight in the downfall of others. How can we contribute to a narrative that is good and fair, and share news that is honest?

PRAY FOR those who work in the media, and for a considered reporting, a careful use of words, and for our own responsibility in being gentle with our words.

21 MARCH

JUST LENT

SATURDAY

‘Nicodemus said, “Surely the Law does not allow us to pass judgement on a man without giving him a hearing and discovering what he is about.”’

(see John 7:40-52)

On September 3, 1952, father of three, Mahmood Hussein Mattan was taken from his cell at Cardiff prison and executed for a murder he did not commit. He was the last person to ever be hanged in Cardiff and the final innocent person to be hanged in Wales. Born in Somalia in 1923, Mahmood Mattan was a sailor which brought him to Wales. He was convicted for the murder of Lily Volpert, a local shopkeeper. He was told by officers at the time that he would die for Miss Volpert’s murder “whether he did it or not”, and was described in court as a *‘semi-civilised savage.’*

Sadly, this miscarriage of justice and discrimination is not uncommon in the UK, and there have been a number of significant cases where people have been wrongly convicted after unfair investigations by the Police. In John’s Gospel, Nicodemus stands up for Jesus who is being treated unjustly, and reminds others that they must give him a fair hearing before passing judgement. Whilst it is difficult for institutions to accept that they may be institutionally racist or, for example, misogynistic, it is important that there is proper scrutiny acceptance and transparency, and to listen to the voices of those who have been discriminated against. This applies not just to secular organisations but also to the Church. How much do we really value and stand up for justice?

PRAY FOR a Justice system which is fair for all and free from discrimination, and for all who support both victims and the accused.

JUST LENT



22 MARCH

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

‘Jesus said,

“I am the resurrection and the life.

**If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live,
and whoever believes in me will never die.**

Do you believe this?”’

(see John 11:1-45)

This page is for you. It's for your own reflections, thoughts and prayers or even to make a fresh commitment. Maybe you have responses to what you have read so far, or that you've heard in a sermon today. Maybe there is something you've seen or heard in the News that stirs you to make connections with your faith. This page is for you.

23 MARCH

JUST LENT

MONDAY

‘Has no one condemned you?’

Neither do I condemn you.’

(see John 8:1-11)

Although played out in a different place and in a different time, the incident of the woman caught in adultery in the gospel according to John, has much to say to us today. We can focus on the compassion of Jesus and the power of his forgiveness. Or how Jesus treats this unnamed woman with dignity, or we can learn the lesson of not pointing the finger when we are less than squeaky clean. But we can also explore how women have been portrayed and regarded in many different cultures, including our own, even to our own day.

There is, of course, no mention of the man who was also involved in an adulterous relationship. He seems to have avoided the scrutiny and stones of the crowds even those they have been caught in the very act of adultery. Perhaps she is even half clothed or even naked. We can only imagine the scene. But it's the woman who is portrayed as the villain and to whom violence and death is threatened. Her dignity has gone.

From 2021, police forces in Wales and England are now required by the UK government to record misogyny as a hate crime. It was announced just days after an outpouring of grief at a vigil following the murder of Sarah Everard. For many, the new requirement was hailed as a victory in the campaign to tackle violence against women. What can we do to challenge and bring change?

PRAY FOR an end to violence against women, and that all women be treated with dignity, respect and equality.

JUST LENT



24 MARCH

TUESDAY

‘Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? We are sick of the unsatisfying food’

(see Numbers 21:4-9)

In a report commissioned by the Trussell trust in 2021 (the largest study in hunger in the UK) it was reported that almost two in three of the people of working age who were referred to a food bank in early 2020 were disabled while single parent families were more likely to be forced to a food bank. Almost 19% of households referred during the pandemic were lone parents - more than twice the rate in the general population.

One main reason people had such low income which brought them to a Foodbank was due to social security payments failing to cover the cost of living. This was often due to weaknesses in the system, including the five-week wait for a first Universal Credit payment and low levels of payments.

Whilst in the wilderness and on the run—as people on a journey seeking asylum from slavery, and with the promise of a new land—the people of Israel suffered hunger and unsatisfying food. They grumbled against God who responded by providing them with ‘Manna from Heaven.’ Today, in the UK, there are many grumbles as people struggle to put food on the table. An immediate response to this is the growth of Foodbanks throughout the country but this just respond to the presenting need, s important as that is. There is a further need to prevent this from happening in the first place.

PRAY FOR those who work in our food banks, and for a situation that prevents people from slipping into poverty and need.

25 MARCH

JUST LENT

WEDNESDAY

‘If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free.’”

(see John 8:31-42)

Martin Luther King Jr said *“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.”* The civil rights leader Frannie Lou Hamer also said that ‘Nobody’s free until everybody’s free.’

The debate which Jesus had with the religious leaders in John’s gospel is about freedom of a specific kind—one of slavery to sin, rather than the freedom which comes from living as children of God. In recent years, we have been more alert to the terrible issue of human trafficking and slavery throughout the world—and in our own country too. Today, there are still many people enslaved by wicked regimes or abusive relationships. People are moved across borders like a product and a commodity to be used and exploited. They may be put to work in abusive conditions in forced labour to make a profit for those who enslave them. Some of these people may live in our own communities or even next door to us. As a hidden crime it often goes unnoticed. In 2018, the *Global Slavery Index* estimated there were 136,000 victims of human slavery in the UK.

We believe that each person is made in the image of God, and no one should be treated with disregard for their own rights or freedom to live and flourish as God intended them. How alert are we to the living conditions of others?

PRAY FOR victims of human trafficking and slavery, and for more alertness to the issue in our own communities.

JUST LENT



26 MARCH

THURSDAY

‘I will make you father of a multitude of nations.

I will make you most fruitful.’

(see Genesis 17:3-9)

In his book, *‘The Boy with Two Hearts,’* Hamed Amiri tells of his family’s struggles as they escape war torn Afghanistan to seek refuge in the UK, eventually settling in Cardiff as their home. Their journey was made all the more difficult by the heart condition of his older brother, Hussein. In his book, after describing his brother’s death some years later, he writes *‘Love is a strange thing, especially when it’s felt between total strangers. In my life with Hussein and through writing this book, I can now see that love crosses borders. It crosses religions and families and can occur between people who’ll never see each other again. It brings hope, even in the darkest moments you face.’*

We are part of the same human family and although there are many differences between us we have so much in common. When the MP Jo Cox was murdered, her words that *“We have more in common than that which drives us apart”* fuelled a new campaign in her name to bring people together, rejoicing in what we have in common. The promise of God to Abraham that he would make him father of a multitude of nations, not only reminds the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, that we all have something in common as children of Abraham, it is a reminder and a call to us that we can and should be able to live alongside people who are different from us. We are part of the same human family, walking the same earth and breathing the same air. As Hamed Amiri reminds us, ‘Love crosses borders.’

PRAY FOR those who build friendships between people of different faiths and beliefs, and for those who seek to create friendship rather walls.

27 MARCH

JUST LENT

FRIDAY

**‘From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came to his ears.**

(see Psalm 17:2-7)

The voice of the psalms is filled with both joy and heartache, misery and relief. There is a sense of relief in the verse chosen, for God has recognised the psalmist's voice' God has heard his cry.

In the summer of 2022 at the age of 18, Hashi Mohamed, who would become the UK's first black barrister, experienced homelessness for a year. He ended up at Centrepoin in Soho, the hostel for young homeless people. In trying to gain accommodation he recognised the difficulties which the system created, and realised many of his fellow young people were also struggling. In his book, *People Like Us*, he writes, *"I learned an important lesson about the importance of language, the often random advantages that dictate who gets listened to and who gets ignored—and the power of knowing how to use your voice effectively."* Once he had managed to arrange his own accommodation, he set about helping others.

This sound of ones voice can create a prejudicial response from the listener because of the speaker's lack of language, vocabulary, education or confidence, or simply having a certain accent. "Language skills are not shared out equally in our society," wrote Mohamed as he speaks about he 'language gap' which exists between the most deprived people and communities and the most affluent. How do we respond to the 'sound' of others?

PRAY FOR teachers and others working with children and young people deprived areas, and for self-awareness of our own prejudices.

JUST LENT



28 MARCH

SATURDAY

‘I shall make them into one nation in my own land and on the mountains of Israel.’

(see Ezekiel 37:21-28)

The average age of death for people experiencing homelessness is 46 for men and 42 for women. People sleeping on the streets are almost 17 times more likely to have been victims of violence. More than one in three people sleeping rough have been deliberately hit or kicked or experienced some other form of violence while homeless. They are over nine times more likely to take their own life.

The reasons for such extreme homelessness are varied, ranging from social causes, such as lack of affordable housing, poverty and unemployment as well as life events which push them into homelessness. It could be leaving prison, fleeing domestic violence, a break down, losing a job, mental and physical health problems or substance misuse. But homelessness is preventable and can be ended.

The prophecy of Ezekiel speaks about God uniting his people, providing one land for them to live in, where God will dwell with them. Those who are homeless may very well be regarded as living outside the community, or their plight be a forgotten problem. But we are united with them, we are part of the same human family, a part of our community, and we have a responsibility to respond to their need and work towards the end of homelessness altogether.

PRAY FOR all who are homeless, and all who respond to their need, and for a compassionate and real response from churches and others.

29 MARCH

JUST LENT

PALM SUNDAY & HOLY WEEK

They spread their garments on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. '

(see Matthew 21:1-11)

We have come to the end of these forty days of reflection and today we embark upon Holy Week, as we begin our celebration of the Paschal Mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. Through the twists and turns of this Great Week, and through the liturgies of the Church we can experience anew the Justice of God whose purposes are pure Love. We see the demands and cost of Love, but also the power of Love.

Over the last few weeks, we have only skimmed the surface of some of the injustices which exists in our world and in the church. There are many more which could have been included or perhaps you had wished had been explored. But these reflections are intended to inspire and move and open our eyes and hearts to what God may be calling us to do, so that his Kingdom of Justice can be proclaimed and experienced. They have been offered with humility, acknowledging that all of us are guilty at times of contributing to an unjust world, and conscious that the Church, in its many different traditions, has not always got it right despite its prophetic calling.

Perhaps through this week, if you are able to participate in the sacred liturgies, you can make your own new connections between what we celebrate within our church buildings, gathered at the altar, and the world out there? Soon, we shall celebrate the glorious Easter Sunday when Christ rose from the tomb, a sign of his victory over sin and death. Despite the challenges facing us, nothing is insurmountable.

JUST LENT



30 MARCH

JUST LENT

God of Justice, Love and Peace,
you made us in your image,
and gave us the dignity
found only in Christ.
You looked upon us
and saw the face of your Son.
May we respect the dignity of all people
and every living thing
as flowing from you and part of you.
May your Kingdom of Justice come,
through lives obedient to your
loving design for the world.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

