

The
Fellowship
of Prayer



lenten season

1965

FOREWORD

They Also Saw Him is the general theme around which more or less consistently these Lenten devotions have been organized. The word "also" is important. The choice of daily topics deliberately ignores or treats with only passing reference some of those contemporaries of our Lord who are most frequently mentioned among his associates.

Many of the lowlier and less familiar figures are thus brought into the focus of our meditation and prayer. An effort has been made to reconstruct, often from only scant hints, some facet of their relationship to our Lord, and their reaction to him. In the contemplation of those whose experience of Christ is here lifted up, may our own relation to him be deepened, and his life and teachings take on new meaning for our own lives.

For any devout soul Lent could serve no higher purpose.

James E. Wagner

Vice-President, Ursinus College
Collegeville, Pennsylvania

Sequence of These Devotions

The succession of daily topics does not lend itself to neat weekly division, but can be roughly outlined as follows:

March 3-7	Eyewitnesses Many and Varied
March 8-14	Some Who Saw Him First
March 15-25	Those Who Sat in High Places
March 26	Midway Through Lent
March 27-April 3	People in Family Situations
April 4-10	Certain Women
April 11-16	Among the Unnamed
April 17	Two Who Buried His Body
Easter	Mary Magdalene

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The Fellowship of Prayer

lenten season 1965



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Eye-Witnesses

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life . . . we proclaim also to you. 1 John 1: 1, 3. Read 1 John 1: 1-4; Luke 1: 1-4.

Scholars generally agree that the earliest of Paul's letters was written around A.D. 50, the earliest of the Gospels (Mark) around A.D. 70, and the remainder of the New Testament by various writers at various times to the end of that first Christian century.

The sequence suggests that by a quarter-century after the death and resurrection of our Lord the stupendous significance of his life and teachings was beginning to be recognized by his followers. It must then have occurred to them that they should get some record of what he had done and said while there were those still alive who had known and associated with him more or less intimately.

What they remembered and recorded sometimes differed in details. They did not differ, however, on the great central fact of the impact his life had made on theirs. They were sure that in Jesus God had entered their lives with redeeming power. Their recorded recollections certify to us that in Jesus we have one who once walked the earth we live on, shared our common life, and demonstrated what God willed our life to be.

PRAYER: Thanks be unto thee, our Father, for him who demonstrated on earth what thou art like and what thou desirest thy children to be. Amen.

We believe in God, the Eternal Spirit, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, and to his deeds we testify.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, *United Church of Christ*

If someone knows a real story, do you believe that it can remain a secret?²

—RAINER MARIA RILKE

The Bible is food for wrestlers.—D. T. NILES

If you explore the life of things and of conditioned being, you come to the unfathomable; if you deny the life of things and of conditioned being you stand before nothingness; if you hallow this life, you meet the living God.

—MARTIN BUBER

T. S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday" is perhaps the chief Christian poem of our time.

—RANDALL STEWART

Lent is a fast to dole

Thy sheaf of wheat and meat

Unto the hungry soul.

It is a fast from strife, from old debate
and hate;

To circumcise thy life.

To show a heart grief-rent; to starve
thy sin, Not bin:

And that's to keep thy Lent.

—ROBERT HERRICK

He who loves not, lives not: He who lives
by The Life can never die.—RAYMUND LULL

To occupy oneself with God is not to be idle: it is the one occupation of all occupations.—ST. BERNARD

Thursday, March 4

We Would See Jesus

Now . . . some Greeks . . . came to Philip . . . and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." John 12:20-21. Read John 12:20-26.

It is worth noting that, as the narrative goes on, we never learn whether they actually got to see Jesus.

The word was passed along from Philip to Andrew to Jesus; and, responsive as our Lord so characteristically was to any appeal, it is strongly to be presumed that he found occasion to see them. We do not know.

But they *wanted* to see him, wanted to have something more than a passing glimpse, or they would not have needed to ask; in wanting to see him they typified what seems to have been the impulse of almost everyone in Palestine in those days. The way the crowds flocked to where it was rumored he would be, testifies to the interest—and hope—he had quickened in many hearts.

And these were Greeks. They must have been familiar with the lingering echoes of the old pagan faiths, and with the names of great philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Moreover if, as the scholars suggest, they were converts to Judaism, they must have been familiar, too, with what that faith then offered. Against that background, their wanting to see Jesus indicates that they had yet a hunger and an aspiration unsatisfied by anything they thus far had known.

PRAYER: Lord, grant that in these six-and-forty days till Easter dawns we may recapture our vision and understanding of Jesus and be ourselves recaptured by him. Amen.

For Further Meditation

I appeal to you, Lord, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob and Israel, you the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Infinitely merciful as you are, it is your will that we should learn to know you. You made heaven and earth, you rule supreme over all that is. You are the true, the only God.—IRENAEUS

There is within this world no gulf between higher and lower human beings; to each is the highest open, each life has its entrance to reality, each kind of man has his eternal right, from each thing does a way lead to God.

—MARTIN BUBER

No question of it, it is a great mystery we worship. Revelation made in human nature, justification won in the realm of the Spirit; a vision seen by angels, a mystery preached to the Gentiles; Christ in this world, accepted by faith, Christ on high, taken up into glory.³

—1 TIMOTHY 3: 16-17 (A. HAMMAN)

What a folly would it be to suppose that Christ, after his having finished his great work, overcame death, ascended into heaven, with all power in heaven and on earth, was become less a Savior and gave less certain and immediate helps to those that by faith turn to him now, than when he was clothed with the infirmity of our flesh and blood upon earth? Has he less power after he has conquered, than whilst he was only resisting and fighting with our enemies? Or has he less good will to assist his church, his own body, now he is in heaven, than he had to assist publicans, sinners, and heathens before he was glorified as the Redeemer of the world?—WILLIAM LAW

Friday, March 5

The Twelve, of Course

And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. Mark 3: 14. Read Mark 3: 13-19. Compare Matthew 10: 2-4, Luke 6: 12-16.

Although our meditations this Lenten season will be focussed on lesser known persons who had seen our Lord, we should recall that in the forefront of those who saw and heard him were *The Twelve*.

They were with him almost continuously from the beginning of his "public ministry." That was, in part, why they were chosen—"to be with him"—a fact which reflects the human-ness of Jesus in his desire and need for the intimate fellowship of trusted friends.

They were a varied lot—fishermen, a tax-collector or two, others doubtless of similarly humble callings. One of them, Simon the Zealot, in our day might have been classed as a member of the "extreme right" or "extreme left," depending on who was doing the classifying. One of them, John, was somewhat of a dreamer and poet. Another, Thomas, showed a skeptical bent of mind. One of them, for reasons good or bad, betrayed the Lord.

On each of them he left his mark. In his name they went out, their devotion suggested by the tradition that their dust now lies in lands as widely separate and far from the Jordan as India, Turkey, Italy, and Egypt.

PRAYER: In our remembering of the Twelve, teach us, O Lord, to shun any treason such as blighted the name of one, and strive for that deepening discipleship which marked the others. Amen.

For Further Meditation

He calls us into his church to accept the cost of joy of discipleship.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, *United Church of Christ*

I want to write a big book of devotions for modern people, bringing all the truths latent in the old religious dogmas into context with real life—a gospel of Shawianity, in fact.

—G. B. SHAW

At the beginning of the day let all distraction and empty talk be silenced and let the first thought and the first word belong to him to whom our whole life belongs. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." (Ephesians 5: 14).

—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Humanity is not something man simply has. He must fight for it anew in every generation, and he may lose his fight. There have been few periods in history in which a catastrophic defeat was more thundering than in ours. One need only look at the dehumanizing structure of totalitarianism systems in one half of the world, and the dehumanizing consequences of technical mass civilization in the other half.⁵

—PAUL TILlich

Human love is directed to the other person for his own sake, spiritual love loves him for Christ's sake. Therefore, human love seeks direct contact with the other person; it loves him not as a free person but as one whom it binds to itself. . . . It desires to be irresistible, to rule. . . . Spiritual love, however, comes from Jesus Christ, it serves him alone; it knows that it has no immediate access to other persons.⁴

—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

The Learned and the Powerful

Wise men from the East came. Then the whole company . . . brought him before Pilate. . . he sent him over to Herod. Matthew 2: 1. Luke 23: 1, 7. Read Matthew 2: 1-12; Luke 23: 1-12.

One of today's stories comes from the babyhood of our Lord, the other from the day before his death. To consider in one brief meditation such diverse figures as the wisemen and those petty, provincial rulers, Pilate and Herod, is to be reminded again of the lowly beginnings of the Christian religion.

Even a generation later Paul would be writing (1 Corinthians 1: 26), "Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth."

The wisemen, according to the story, came on what must have been a long and exhausting journey, knelt and offered their gifts, and then went home.

Pilate and Herod, on the other hand, confronted the grown-up Jesus about whom they could not escape making a decision. Each in his own way made the same decision, a decision which numberless thousands have made since then: *they decided not to decide but to leave the deciding to others.*

Here is a peril which ever threatens the learned and those in positions of power: the wise rest in proud or detached neutrality and the powerful give way to expediency.

PRAYER: O Thou who didst give thy *self*, grant that, wherever our work, and leisure, and living go on from day to day, we may not withhold the giving of our selves. Amen.

Man, no longer supported by a living tradition, must do deliberately for himself what in previous ages had been done for him by family, custom, church, and state . . . namely, the choice of the principles and presuppositions in terms of which he can make sense of his experience.—W. H. AUDEN

Through the religious and secular movements of our time, God is leading mankind to perceive the true meaning of the new creation in Jesus Christ.⁶—PAUL DEVANANDAN

Not individuals but institutions are the enemies, and they most afflict the disciples who the most generously serve them. They insinuate their tyranny under a hundred guises and pompous names, such as Polite Society, the Family, the Church, Sound Business, the Party, the Superior White Race; and the only defense against them . . . is unembittered laughter.—SINCLAIR LEWIS

I had never known the dignity of my nature, hadst Thou not esteemed it: I had never seen or understood its glory, hadst Thou not assumed it.—THOMAS TRAHERNE

The Christian is the man who . . . knows that "home" is Christ and that to be "in him" is to lay himself open, not to the benign indifference, but to the divine agape (Love) of the universe, to feel it so like himself, so brotherly. For that, in the last analysis, is what it means to be convinced of the personality, of the Christ-likeness, of God.⁷

—JOHN A. T. ROBINSON

Ordinary Every-day People

The great throng heard him gladly. . . . Seeing the crowds. . . . he opened his mouth and taught them. Mark 12: 37; Matthew 5: 1-2. Read Mark 12: 13-37; Matthew 5: 1-16.

It is literally precise and correct to translate these phrases "the great throng" and "the crowds." Doing so is, however, a good example of how, in the work of translation, literal accuracy sometimes sacrifices meaningful overtones which the context fully warrants.

An older translation of the Bible which reads "seeing the multitudes" suggests something of the countless differing hopes and yearnings, fears and anxieties, which must have possessed any group of persons who gathered around Jesus.

Similarly, in Mark 12 the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees, the scribes—the socially elite, proper, established, powerful few of that day questioned our Lord and found themselves being answered with courage and clarity, and with fresh and unconventional insights.

This "just wasn't done," and that Someone had the conviction and competence to do it is what accounts for the fact that by-standers, "common people," listened with gladness. It is the responses of such people that we shall be exploring in the days ahead.

PRAYER: Lord, if the comfort and prestige of our present circumstances, or the seeming security of our future, tend to make us calloused toward others or complacent toward thee and thy claims on us, deliver us, O Lord. Amen.

We thank thee, our Father, for life and love, for the mystery and majesty of existence, for the world of beauty which surrounds us, and for the miracle of our conscious life by which we behold the wonders of the universe.

We thank thee for the glimpses of nobility in human life which redeem it from sordidness and reassure us that thy image is in the heart of man. We are grateful for the ties which bind us to our fellow men; for our common toil in industry and marts of trade; for our joint inheritance as citizens of this nation; for traditions and customs hallowed by age through which our passions are ordered and channeled; for the love of beauty and truth and goodness by which we transcend the chasms of race and nation; for the faith of our fathers by which we claim kinship with the past and gain strength for the present; for the love of dear ones in our homes and for the enlarging responsibilities and sobering duties of family life; for the serenity of old people who redeem us from fretfulness; and for the faith and courage of youth through which we are saved from sloth.

We are not worthy of the rich inheritances of our common life. We confess that we have profaned the temple of this life by our selfishness and heedlessness. We have sought to gain advantage of our brothers who are bound to us by many different ties. Have mercy upon us, that we may express our gratitude for thy many mercies by contrition for our sins and that we may prove our repentance by lives dedicated more fully to thee and to the common good; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.—REINHOLD NIEBUHR

Monday, March 8

Mary—His Mother

But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. Luke 2: 19. Read Luke 1: 26-35; 2: 15-24.

Mary's story (what little we know of it)—is familiar enough. Consider just one moving aspect of it, her perplexity as to what to make of all that happened. There were the circumstances surrounding his birth; the incident when he was twelve and found himself so much at home in the temple hearing and asking questions of the great teachers; that day (Luke 4: 16-30) when he read the lesson in the synagogue at Nazareth; another day (Matthew 12: 46-50) when, caught up in the surging momentum of his public ministry, he seemed to disavow his family ties as secondary to a new and different kinship.

But at the beginning, when this young mother first glimpsed her infant son, two thoughts must certainly have crossed her mind. First (as babies are to mothers the world over), this surely is the sweetest child! And second, like every Jewish mother since the hope of a Messiah had been born in that people's mind, perhaps—but with Mary the "perhaps" would have been dissipated—this son of mine is destined to be the saviour of his people.

PRAYER: O God, who art the source of life and hope, bless all mothers and fathers, we pray thee, that none may fail to be aware that the child entrusted to their care may be one of those whom thou hast destined to lead and save this generation. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Remember the guest we have within us.⁸

—DOUGLAS V. STEERE

Only the Christian can greet the radically profane with faith (says Mircea Eliade) for only the Christian believes in a Christ who is in some sense Creator and Redeemer at once. Let the Christian rejoice that only Christendom has given birth to a radically profane consciousness; for the 'dark night' of profane existence is our way to Christ: the Christ who is Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End, Darkness and Light—the Christ who is Darkness and Light at once!⁹ —J. J. ALTIZER

O Friend, I knew not that-of-God in me
Until entwined with that-of-God in thee.

—MARTIN COBIN

The man whom God loves is the onion with a million skins. To shed the first layer is painful beyond words; the next layer is less painful, the next still less, until finally the pain becomes . . . an ecstasy. And then there is neither pleasure nor pain, but simply darkness yielding before the light. And as the darkness falls away the wound comes out of its hiding place: the wound which is man, man's love, is bathed in light. The identity which was lost is recovered. Man walks forth from his open wound, from the grave which he had carried about with him so long.¹⁰ —HENRY MILLER

He promises to all who trust him . . . his presence in trial and rejoicing.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, *United Church of Christ*

Tuesday, March 9

Joseph—Husband of Mary

Her husband Joseph, being a just man . . . did as the angel of the Lord commanded him . . . and he called his name Jesus. Matthew 1: 19, 25. Read Matthew 1: 16-25; Luke 2: 1-5.

The theologians may continue to argue just what precise place Joseph should be given in the story of Jesus. Probably, however, none would disagree that if the Son of God were to have been born by the usual physiological processes and to have had an "earthly" father, no one could have fitted the role more worthily than did Joseph.

He was a good man. Perhaps he was much older than Mary; perhaps, as our Roman Catholic friends would say, he had been married once before and in that marriage fathered the family of four sons and at least two daughters mentioned in Mark 6: 4.

The journey to Bethlehem suggests that he was the kind of solid citizen who submits to the established order and goes about doing an honest day's work year in, year out. Not the kind who initiates and presses for reforms, but the kind who, it must not be forgotten, provides the undergirding of industry and integrity on which a stable social order depends.

Joseph, who must have taught our Lord the carpenter's trade, must also in his own way have contributed to the advance of Jesus "in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man."

PRAYER: Gratefully we now recall the holy family in which our Lord was nurtured, and pray that in the family circle to which we belong, thy will may be done. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Cheered by the presence of God, I will do at the moment, without anxiety, according to the strength which he shall give me, the work that his providence assigns me. I will leave the rest; it is not my affair.—FRANCOIS FENELON

The first word any man writes when he has found himself, his own rhythm, which is the life rhythm, is Yes. Everything he writes thereafter is Yes, Yes, Yes—Yes in a thousand million ways. No dynamo, no matter how huge—not even a dynamo of a hundred million dead souls—can combat one man saying Yes!¹⁰—HENRY MILLER

Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
Oh, no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never
shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his
height be taken.
Love's not time's fool.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

—SHAKESPEARE

Without discipline, affirmation of life becomes the rigid overemphasis of a fraction of life or the formless indulgence in one's latest whim. Awareness is reduced to a few fragments of knowledge understood and appreciated only by a small group of equally lazy people. . . . The very thought of suffering causes panic. Without discipline, a man ceases to be a man.¹¹—FRANCIS O. AYRES

Wednesday, March 10

The Innkeeper

There was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2:7. Read Luke 2: 1-7, 39.

The innkeeper's name has been one of reproach, though actually he is nowhere mentioned in the story. His presence, and more so his alleged heartlessness, is only inferred.

Other inferences might be made about him. Perhaps he just had no space to crowd in two more guests. Bethlehem was presumably overflowing for the same reason which brought Joseph and Mary there. Perhaps, with some intimation of what was about to happen, he had offered Joseph and Mary the manger as a place where some quiet and privacy would be theirs through the next delicate and difficult hours.

Perhaps also—and this is admittedly pure speculation, but no more so than the opprobrium which history has attached to the innkeeper's name—perhaps he continued to provide either the cave or some other place for them to stay during the six weeks until “they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord. . . . [and] returned into Galilee.”

Like many others serving the public, whose doings and motives easily lend themselves to being misconstrued, the innkeeper may really have gone far beyond what could have been expected of him to meet the emergency in which Joseph and Mary found themselves.

PRAYER: Remind us, O Lord, that those who serve us this day, and all with whom we shall work and associate, are thy children, worthy of the patience and forbearance we ask for ourselves from others—and from thee. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Love penetrates to the possibilities.

—GEORGE SANTAYANA

All my heart this night rejoices As I hear,
Far and near,
Sweetest angel voices. “Christ is born,”
their choirs are singing,
Till the air Everywhere Now with joy is
ringing.

Hark! a voice from yonder manger,
Soft and sweet, Doth entreat:
“Flee from woe and danger! Brethren, come!
from all doth grieve you,
You are freed; All you need I will surely
give you.”

Come, then, let us hasten yonder!
Here let all, Great and small, Kneel
in awe and wonder!
Love him who with love is yearning!
Hail the star That from far Bright with
hope is burning!—PAUL GERHARDT
(tr. Catherine Winkworth)

This day, God be in my eyes and in my seeing,
in my ears and in my hearing,
in my heart and in my loving,
in those to whom this day
I am sent
and in our responding to
him and to each other.
—Adapted from St. Patrick

When God takes away a man's freedom,
can that man see it as a special honor and
mission? Jonah, no. Jesus, yes. And I?

Thursday, March 11

The Shepherds

The shepherds . . . went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. Luke 2: 15-16. Read Luke 2: 8-20.

Suppose that the nucleus of fact in the shepherds' story was only that, word having got to them of a baby's birth in a cave not far from where they watched their flocks, they went to the scene, partly from curiosity but willing to help if they could, and came away silenced by what they had seen.

This bare minimum of the story would remind us that there are those who have not quenched in themselves the distinctively human capacity for wonder.

That capacity is not confined to the unlearned. It is to be found also among those who are learned enough to have been humbled by what they know they do *not* know, and wise enough to have discerned that life, and truth—and God—are greater than we can think.

They, and the true poets, and many a clerk, cab driver, stenographer, farmhand, teacher, housewife and others busy in the workaday world, rebuke us by their unlost sense of awe.

Not one of the shepherds re-appears in the record of our Lord's life. But they, and others who had a reverent expectancy toward things and events, helped to sustain the climate in which men would feel the impact of God in Christ.

PRAYER: Preserve us, O Lord, from losing the capacity for wonder and reverence, that in all things we may discern thy presence, purpose, and power. Amen.

For Further Meditation

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord, he has come to us and shared our common lot.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, *United Church of Christ*

We call prayer in the pregnant sense of the term that speech of man to God which, whatever else is asked, ultimately asks for the manifestation of the divine Presence, . . . The single presupposition of a genuine state of prayer is thus the readiness of the whole man for this Presence, simple turned-towardness, unreserved spontaneity. . . . He who is not present perceives no Presence.—MARTIN BUEER

I am open to subtle intimations of a presence beyond the world of space and time and sense.—KENNETH BOULDING

My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky:

So was it when my life began;

So is it now I am a man;

So be it when I shall grow old,

Or let me die!—WORDSWORTH

Now thieving time,
take what you must—

Yet leave, O leave
exempt from plunder

My curiosity, my wonder!—MARK HOWE, AT 87

For your prayers to be real, you must be at grips with hard work. If you were to remain a dilettante, you would be incapable truly to intercede. Your prayer will become total when it is one with your work.—RULE OF TAIZÉ

Friday, March 12

Simeon and Anna

Simeon . . . was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. . . . Anna . . . of a great age . . . a widow . . . did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. Luke 2: 25, 36, 37. Read Luke 2: 22-38.

The comment will be briefer today. It is more important to set down together the full galaxy of words and phrases describing Simeon and Anna.

The two are never mentioned again. Nothing is known of them except what is recorded in these seventeen verses. The point of their story could be put this way: they were in the house of God when something special happened *because they were in the habit of being in the house of God.*

Most congregations are blessed with at least a few such members of "the order of Simeon and Anna." They are not the type usually found in places of official leadership. The quiet reserve of their piety, their tendency to be inarticulate, precludes their usefulness in teaching or organized work.

Their service is that of the bowed head and bended knee. It is their *faith* and their *faithfulness* which make them major sources of the spiritual power by which the life of a church and the work of the kingdom are nourished.

PRAYER: We thank thee, Father, for those whose steadfast goodness, simple faith, and regular presence in thy house have been their testimony to the refuge and the strength which they have found in thee. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Those who kneel are bigger than those who are standing, and those who bow down stand up gigantic.²—RAINER MARIA RILKE

He who thinks of God without contemplation is like an ass with a load of books.

—ARABIC SAYING

All that which pleases is but for a moment
—That only is important which is eternal.

—Over the three great doors into Milan Cathedral

Recollection is like an atmosphere in which we live, like a backdrop to the stage on which we move. . . . In the spiritual life, the constant background to all that we do should be the glad consciousness of our personal dedication to God.—E. J. CUSKELLY

A man is constituted in his freedom as a Christian in the event of his hearing the Word of God in the Bible and in the company of the church and, as well, in the common life of the world.¹³—WILLIAM STRINGFELLOW

I find that a life of little whispered words of adoration, of praise, of prayer, of worship can be breathed all through the day. One can have a very busy day, outwardly speaking, and yet be steadily in the holy Presence. . . . It is a life unspeakable and full of glory, an inner world of splendor within which we, unworthy, may live.¹⁴—THOMAS KELLY

Honor and glory
through endless ages
to the king of all the ages,
the immortal, the invisible,
who alone is God. Amen.³

—1 TIMOTHY 1: 17 (A. Harman)

Saturday, March 13

Nazareth Neighbors

They returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. . . . And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man. Luke 2: 39, 52. Read Luke 2: 39-40; 4: 16-30.

It could be contended (see Matthew 2: 19-23) that Nazareth was not the original home of Joseph and Mary, but that they settled there only after the holy family's return from their flight into Egypt.

Does this suggest that the natives of Nazareth may have never quite forgotten that this family were "outsiders"? Does this help to explain their resentment toward Jesus (Luke 4: 28-29), along with their seeming inability to take him seriously (Mark 6: 1-6) because they had known him and his family so well?

Yet "the company" with whom the family journeyed to and from Jerusalem, when Jesus was twelve, no doubt included some of the Nazareth neighbors. His concept of "neighborliness" as reflected in some of his sayings and parables, his apparent ease in meeting and counselling people, suggest that in Nazareth, insignificant if not despised (John 1: 46) though the village was, there were kindly people who helped make our Lord's boyhood more than ordinarily meaningful, who testified long afterward that he had grown "in favor" among them, and who themselves were never the same after he had lived among them.

PRAYER: O God, help me to make my neighborhood a brotherhood, that no one's life may be impoverished or made difficult by my forgetting that every human being is precious in thy sight. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Ultimately there is only one place of refuge on this planet for any man—that is in another man's heart. To love is to make of one's heart a swinging door.¹⁵—HOWARD THURMAN

To none or all is the heart of eternity open. What is reserved for the learned part of mankind, what is kept from the poor in spirit, cannot be the living truth.—MARTIN BUBER

As socialists we want a socialist world not because we have the conceit that men would thereby be more happy—those claims are best left to dictators—but because we feel the moral imperative in life itself to raise the human condition even if this should ultimately mean no more than that man's suffering has been lifted to a higher level, and human history has only progressed from melodramatic farce and monstrosity to tragedy itself.

—LEON TROTSKY

The least among us will find contentment, and the best among us will find greatness, and all of us will respect the dignity of the one, and admire the achievements of the other. . . . And then people shall say to people: There on this earth, as in the eyes of God, walks my brother. . . . Well, this is my dream.

—LYNDON B. JOHNSON

Can we profess to believe in the God who says, You shall love me, and not listen to him when in the same breath he says, And your neighbor as yourself? Faith—Christian faith—exists only when the neighbor exists with it.

Cousin John

Your kinswoman Elizabeth . . . has also conceived a son . . . And Mary remained with her about three months. Luke 1:36, 56. Read Luke 1:35-66; Matthew 3:13-17.

There should have been quotation marks around the word "cousin" in the topic for today. The King James Version does use it in Luke 1:36, but later translations read more accurately "kinswoman."

The story in Luke clearly indicates that Mary and Elizabeth were related, "by birth" the Greek text would imply, and that therefore Jesus and John the Baptizer were at least distantly related.

Yet the description of the coming of Jesus to John to be baptized, the exchange of messages between them on another occasion (Matthew 11:2-6), the existence of a band of John's disciples (Acts 18:24 to 19:5) long after the death of our Lord, combine to give the impression that there were no close ties or acquaintance between the two, no meeting except that one day at the Jordan.

Nonetheless, their stories belong together. There can be no doubt that John's fearless puncturing of the pious pretensions and the conventional evils and mediocrities of the times plowed afresh the soil for our Lord's planting of the "good news" of God's redeeming love.

PRAYER: O thou who didst speak through the prophets of old, make our hearts restless at the cold and casual shallowness of our commitment to thee, and cause us to re-examine our ways, that we may be turned to loving thee more truly, as thou hast loved us. Amen.

The first verse of scripture I ever memorized was taught me by my mother from the Book of Proverbs: "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (3:6) These twelve words formed the foundation for the faith which later transformed my life.¹⁶

—BILLY GRAHAM

God is not just here and now. Even more, he is now by trust where we shall be when we move forward into the feared unknown to meet him in the ministry he will give us.

—MARTIN BUBER

What a man is drowned, it fills his mouth.

—ALBERT SCHWEITZER

Let naught trouble thee;
Let naught frighten thee;
All things pass.
God alone changeth not.
Patience can do all things.
Whoever has God, has everything.
God alone sufficeth.—SAINT TERESA

Love both supports and threatens, never the one without the other. Without support, faith would fail. Without threat, hope would deteriorate into wish. Thus love gives the courage to risk, to change, to go on pilgrimage "not knowing whither."

Ours is not to choose whether to endure or to perish from the earth. Ours only to choose, while perishing, whether we live for long dreams or short ones, for great visions or petty, for our little sovereignties or God's kingdom.

Monday, March 15

The Temple Teachers

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Luke 2:46. Read Luke 2:41-52.

This scene in the temple ought to warm the hearts of teachers with a sense of their high calling. Many of us will recall certain teachers whose friendliness of spirit made learning a pleasure and whose clearly evident joy in the wonders of life and the universe transformed classrooms into chapels.

There are incidents in the gospels where the rabbis appear in a bad light, in some instances badgering Jesus, asking trick questions designed to embarrass or entrap him. Could there be, however, a finer portrayal of the teacher-pupil relationship than is intimated here?

Here are teachers receptive to the questions of a twelve-year-old boy. Here is a boy who has apparently discerned in the teachers not only the evidences of knowledge and wisdom but a spirit which encourages him to feel free to ask questions.

Here one gets an impression of the educational enterprise as a partnership in which teacher no less than pupil is engaged in a humble, expectant quest of truth.

PRAYER: We remember with gratitude, our Father, all those teachers in whom knowledge combined with goodness to make learning a happy adventure. We pray thy blessing on all who teach and all who learn that they may be led to think thy thoughts after thee. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Lord Jesus, teach thou me that I may teach them.

Sanctify and enable all my powers, that in their full strength they may deliver thy message reverently, readily, faithfully, and fruitfully.

O make thy Word a swift word, passing from the ear to the heart, from the heart to life and conversation; that as thy rain returns not empty, so neither may thy Word, but accomplish that for which it was given.

O Lord, hearken and do so for thy blessed Son's sake.—GEORGE HEBERT

Father in heaven, what we know not, teach us; what we have not, give us; what we are not, make us. For what we have been, forgive us. As we now are receive us, and toward what we should be and shall be, guide, guard and direct us for Jesus' sake.

—ANONYMOUS

A conscience is not a gadget built for comfort, but an internal time bomb. It ticks away the days, ready at a decisive moment to blow your life apart by turning you against your self-interest or setting you apart from your neighbors.—T. GEORGE HARRIS

In the great game that is being played we are the players as well as being the cards and the stakes. Nothing can go on if we leave the table.—TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

O thou who art with us when life opens out and when life closes in, may we this day be with thee in our goings out and in our comings in. Amen.

Tuesday, March 16

Pharisees and Scribes

And the Pharisees and scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?" Mark 7: 5. Read Mark 7: 1-23.

The story of the Pharisees, "the separated ones," originated from one of the highest and most praiseworthy motives in human experience. From the time of the Jewish exile in Babylon, and more particularly after the return and restoration under Ezra, there were those who tried to observe and develop a distinctive way of life and thus preserve the "old-time religion" and the traditions of the fathers from being changed or watered-down by the influences of alien cultures—Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman.

But, as has happened so often in similar movements, in the time of our Lord Pharisaism had come to concern itself with outward forms and conventions, with enforcing the "proper" and "pious" way of doing things, not with man's inner thoughts and motives.

Precisely at this point Jesus clashed again and again with the Pharisees and scribes, as in Matthew 23: 23: "Woe to you . . . hypocrites! for you tithe . . . and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith. . . . You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!"

PRAYER: O thou who judgest not by outward appearance but lookest into the secret places of our hearts, keep us ever suspicious of our own motives, words, and deeds, lest in striving after righteousness we be no longer humble and contrite in heart. Amen.

For Further Meditation

People wish to be settled. Only so far as they are unsettled is there hope for them.

—EMERSON

He judges men and nations by his righteous will declared through prophets and apostles.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, United Church of Christ

Christianity is not an old-Adam renovation society. Jesus is the resurrection before he is the Life, and there is no resurrection without a dying. One reason why the church goes weak and halting today is that she will not consent to die. "Except a corn of wheat fall in the ground and die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit."—CHURCHMAN

The main task of Satan is to make you think he is not there.—C. S. LEWIS

Tersteegen, in one of his letters, speaks of "three kinds of union with God: 'union with God in *will*': the sincere and honest desire and purpose that the will of God may be fulfilled in us, whatever we may be doing or enduring; secondly, 'union with God in *silent prayer*': when we wait upon God in silence and reverence and peace; third, there is 'union with God in *conscious religious experience*'; this kind of union depends wholly upon God; we cannot achieve it by our own efforts nor do we know when it will be given to us, nor why." Tersteegen adds: "On Good Friday Jesus had neither the second nor the third kind of union, but He had the first kind," that is, the union with God in will.¹⁷—OLIVE WYON

Wednesday, March 17

Nicodemus—The Good Pharisee

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus. . . . This man came to Jesus by night. John 3: 1-2. Read John 3: 1-21; 7: 50-52; 19: 38-42.

Probably there are few social movements, no matter how far their original high aims have been glossed over or lost with the passing of time, that do not continue to number within their membership those who represent the best the movement once stood for.

Among the Pharisees, Nicodemus is a case in point. He is mentioned only in the Gospel of John, but there he appears three times: first, when he came to Jesus as an inquirer by night, evidently in order not to jeopardize his standing in the Sanhedrin; again, when that body was pondering what to do about Jesus, and Nicodemus put in a discreet word in our Lord's behalf; and finally, when he joined Joseph of Arimathea, another member of the Sanhedrin who had also become secretly a disciple of Jesus, in giving our Lord's body a decent burial.

There is something deeply moving about the discipleship of these two, and yet something regrettable that they had never come out in the open with it. Perhaps they will remind us of ways in which our own commitment to Christ is often compromised by our entanglement with the world—in business and professional life, in party politics, in organized labor, in our social and fraternal groups.

PRAYER: Use us, heavenly Father, toward changing those circumstances of our daily life which dampen our zeal or limit our practice in following thy will. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Michelangelo, who is in that stone? "Thou, my God, who else? But I cannot reach thee." Michelangelo, who is in thee? "Thou, my God, who else?"²—RAINER MARIA RILKE

It is by an excess of self-love that we should like to be perfect all at once and at slight cost.

—FRANÇOIS FENELON

The Bible knows nothing of the intrinsic value of *success*. On the contrary, when it announces a successful deed, it is duty-bound to announce in complete detail the *failure* involved in the success. When we consider the history of Moses we see how much failure is mingled in the one great successful action, so much so that when we set the individual events which make up history side by side, we see that his life consists of one failure after another, . . . True, Moses brought the people out of Egypt; but each stage of this leadership is a failure. Whenever he comes to deal with his people, he is defeated by them, let God ever so often interfere and punish them. And the real history of this leadership is not the history of the exodus, but the history of the wandering in the desert. The personal history of Moses' own life, too, does not point back to his youth and what grew out of it; it points beyond, to death, to the death of the unsuccessful man, whose work, it is true, survives him, but only in new defeats, new disappointments, and continual new failures—and yet his work survives also in a hope which is beyond all these failures.—MARTIN BUBER

Ungracious Host

"You gave me no water for my feet. . . . You gave me no kiss. . . . You did not anoint my head with oil." Luke 7:44-46. Read Luke 7:36-50; 11:37-44; 14:1-6.

Today's and earlier references to the Pharisees will have missed their mark if they do nothing more than point a condemning finger at members of that ancient Jewish sect. Rather, each glance at them should serve as a mirror in which we see reflected our own shortcomings in faith and piety.

Consider in Luke the three incidents in which Jesus was the invited guest at dinner in a Pharisee's home. In one (14:1-6) the host argues a point of law which would have made a piece of property more precious than a human being. In another (11:37-44) the host shows surprise at our Lord's failure to observe the ceremonial washing of his hands.

In the third and most revealing instance (7:36-50) the host takes offence at the sympathetic attitude of Jesus toward a woman who intruded and indulged in a dramatic demonstration of reverence for him. The host's objection was that the woman was "a sinner," which here means not necessarily one of ill repute or evil deed, but more probably simply one of unconventional or irreligious life. But as Jesus pointed out, the intruder had rendered the conventional courtesies which the host had failed to offer his guest.

PRAYER: Lord, let our zeal to know the *right* people and to do the *proper* thing crowd out the exercise of simple kindness toward any of thy children. Amen.

The most exposed and hazardous frontier for the Church is not the boundary where the church faces the world. It is the frontier where the Church faces its Lord and gives an account of itself not to the world but to him. This frontier situation is presented with incomparable eloquence and truth in the Holy Communion. . . . In this offering of himself he also asks his people a question: "What are you doing with the Gift?"—TRUMAN DOUGLASS

We who wished to lay the foundations of kindness could not ourselves be kind.

—BERTHOLT BRECHT

I never met a man who was truly happy or truly wealthy.¹⁰—HENRY MILLER

He who takes a road that in its nature does not already represent the nature of the goal will miss the goal, no matter how fixedly he holds it in sight. The goal that he reaches will resemble the road he has reached it by.

—MARTIN BUBER

Devotion is simply the promptitude, fervour, affection and agility which we have in the service of God.—FRANCIS DE SALES

He promises to all who trust him forgiveness of sin and fulness of grace.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, *United Church of Christ*

For a thousand worlds the like of this, I would not have served any other Lord.

—THE DYING BROTHER BERNARD (ST. FRANCIS' FIRST DISCIPLE)

What gets your attention gets you and is your lord.

Friday, March 19

Jairus—Leading Citizen

Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and seeing him, he fell at his feet, and besought him, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death." Mark 5:22-23. Read Mark 5:21-24, 35-43.

Jairus was, as one scholar puts it, "a lay president of the congregation"; or, according to another, "an official appointed by the elders to supervise the conduct of worship" in the synagogue. He was doubtless one of the leading personages in the village.

At this moment, however, all the petty trappings of position and prestige are "nothing worth." His little daughter is at the point of death. He is just another human being, at least for this moment aware of and sharing our common human lot. He has, so to speak, joined the human race.

Is this not what it often takes—disaster, death, destruction—to dispossess us of our pride of person, race, class, culture, even pride of religion, which ordinarily serves to set us apart from one another?

And he came to Jesus. Whether as a last resort, after he had tried everything else, or because he had heard and seen enough to be sure that in Jesus he would find help.

He came, and to his cry of desperation our Lord responded as must his followers always when they hear man's cry. He went. So must those who bear his name.

PRAYER: Keep us, O Lord, ever mindful of our oneness with all men everywhere, ever responsive to the cry of thy children in their hope and need and yearning. Amen.

For Further Meditation

He promises to all who trust him . . . eternal life in his kingdom which has no end.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, *United Church of Christ*

(Christians) found themselves irresistibly constrained to worship Jesus. This, however, could only be if his relation to God was such that in worshiping him they were at the same time worshiping God. Clearly they could not simply identify this Man . . . with the God of their fathers to whom also he himself prayed; yet just as clearly they could not . . . regard him as other than that one God.¹⁸ —JOHN BAILLIE

The price of not re-examining the premises and of readjusting ourselves to the world we actually live in will be continuing failures and frustrations. —WALTER LIPPMANN

Christians range themselves with God in his suffering; that is what distinguishes them from the heathen. As Jesus asked, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" That is the exact opposite of what the religious man expects from God. . . . It is not some religious act which makes a Christian what he is, but participation in the suffering of God in the life of the world. —DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

The line between those who believe in God and those who do not bears little relation to their profession of the existence or non-existence of . . . a Being (out there). It is a question, rather, of their openness to the holy, the sacred, in the unfathomable depths of even the most secular relationship.⁷

—JOHN A. T. ROBINSON

Saturday, March 20

Roman Centurion

Now a centurion had a slave who was dear to him, who was sick. . . . When he heard of Jesus, he sent . . . asking him to come and heal his slave.
Luke 7:2-3. Read Luke 7:1-10.

Here is a good illustration of the way God has blessed us by guiding the early church to recognize and preserve more than one gospel. For Matthew also (8:5-13) tells this story, but it is Luke who gives us some of the most enriching details.

Palestine was then, in the language of our times, an "occupied" country, under the iron control of imperial Rome. The centurion was doubtless a Roman, probably the officer in charge of the garrison at Capernaum. But he was the kind of representative that any nation might wish its military, diplomatic and civilian representatives to be.

He was, first of all, a human being, not untouched by the distress of another, even a slave. He was humbly conscious of the delicate position in which his exercise of authority placed him (verses 6-8). Of chief importance, he had identified himself with the people of the country in which he was stationed: "he loves our nation, and he built us our synagogue."

PRAYER: O thou who art the Father of all men everywhere, we remember before thee our diplomats and men in uniform all over the world, that thou mayest watch over them, and that they in turn, with all who travel in other lands, may do justly and love mercy, and walk humbly before thee and before all men. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Without God we cannot:
Without us he will not.—AUGUSTINE

Who takes God's Word
in firm, dry faith
When drought seems to abound
Shall see at last as some have seen
The promised fragrant shoots of green
Rise conquering from the ground.

—HELEN SKOGBERG

Sociological understanding cannot by itself be a school of compassion, but it can illuminate the mystification that commonly covers up pitilessness.—PETER BERGER

And in the logic of the skies
He who keeps Israel in his hand,
The God whose hope for joy on earth
The Gentile yet shall understand,
Through powers like Esther's steadfast
eyes
Shall free each little tribe and land.

—VACHEL LINDSAY

Whether we are gifted with "intuition" or not, if our wills are set on obedience to God the "guidance" comes, whether from without or from within. The differences of temperament make no difference to the value of the service we can render, nor to our power of doing what we are meant to do.—OLIVE WYON

Our courteous Lord willeth that we should be as homely with him as heart may think or soul desire. But let us beware that we take not this homeliness so recklessly as to neglect courtesy.—JULLANA OF NORWICH

Merchants and Money-Changers

"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." Mark 11: 17. Read Mark 11: 15-19. See John 2: 13-25.

That phrase "for all the nations" condemns all the racial, creedal, and social exclusions by which we have limited any church's accessibility to any of God's children; just as the whole story condemns every crude, tasteless, often mercenary, thing done in the church, which dishonors the building by belying the sacred purposes for which a church is dedicated.

John reports Jesus to have said, "You shall not make my Father's house a *house of trade*." According to the other three gospels, Jesus charged the merchants and money-changers with having made the temple "*a den of robbers*." Only John gives the detail about Jesus "making a whip of cords" to drive out the offenders.

No incident in the gospels so clearly reflects the Master's *capacity for indignation*. Because anger and resentment are usually un-Christlike, we have tended to develop a concept of Christlikeness which encourages us to quiet or quench an effective resistance to evil. A story like this reminds us that being Christlike does not mean that we must *not* react vigorously to wrong. Indeed, if we have got to the point where nothing arouses our indignation, we may be falling short of what Christ demands.

PRAYER: O Lord, make us angry—not at the petty, personal irritations of life, but at the great entrenched wrongs, and at ourselves when we take those wrongs lightly. Amen.

(Man is) Created half to rise and half to fall,
Great lord of all things, yet a
prey of all,
Sole judge of truth, in endless
error hurled,
The glory, jest, and riddle of the
world.²⁰ —MARSHALL FISHWICK

We have to do not with an absent God about whom we have a certain amount of information, but with a God whose living and active presence with us can be perceived by faith in a large variety of human contexts and situations. This is the true burden of Kierkegaard's—the only original—existentialism; the true meaning of his declaration that true Christianity is not doctrine but existence.¹⁸

—JOHN BAILLIE

We covenant one with another to seek and respond to the Word and the will of God. We purpose to walk together in the ways of the Lord, made known and to be made known to us. We hold it to be the mission of the Church to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in all the world, while worshipping God and striving for truth, justice, and peace. As did our fathers, we depend on the Holy Spirit to lead and empower us. We pray for the coming of the kingdom of God, and we look with faith toward the triumph of righteousness and eternal life.

—COVENANT in the United Church of Christ
local Church model constitution

Monday, March 22

Officers of the Temple

The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this man!" John 7: 46. Read John 7: 31-52.

These were not Roman soldiers. They were Jewish deputies or constables in the service of the chief priests and Pharisees who constituted the body known as the Sanhedrin, which governed most of the daily Jewish life where it did not impinge on the interests of imperial Rome.

The Sanhedrin, made uneasy by the rumors they heard of the increasing popularity of Jesus, sent officers to arrest Jesus at the first opportunity to do so without stirring up a riot.

Eventually the officers returned, without their man! The explanation they offered suggests that our Lord had impressed them much as, in Lloyd C. Douglas's *The Robe*, he is portrayed as impressing the Greek slave Demetrius who caught a glimpse of Jesus through the crowd on the day of the "triumphal entry."

"See him—close up?" asked another slave. Demetrius nodded.

"Crazy?" persisted the other. "No."

"King?" "No," muttered Demetrius soberly, "not a king."

"What is he then?" demanded the other.

"I don't know," mumbled Demetrius, in a puzzled voice, "but—he is something more important than a king."

PRAYER: Remind us, O God of all the years, that once there walked the earth a man, thy Son, who captured men's hearts and minds by the simple spectacle of his goodness. Amen.

For Further Meditation

The modern mind has become aware of the loss of the sense of a divine presence in the world.—KARL JASPERS

We open our arms to all those who glory in the name of Christ.²¹—POPE PAUL VI

Almighty God, turn us to Jesus Christ our Lord, that in his presence we may come to life again and know the abundance of thy grace. Set us in the path wherein he walked, that we may grow in wisdom and in stature, in favor with our fellow men and with thee. Teach us how to forgive as he forgave, bringing the souls of men out of hiding and shame into the light of joy and peace. Help us to put our hands out with the same blessing with which he healed and glorified the least of his brethren. Strengthen our sight to see among our comrades the living glory of the kingdom of heaven. If, or when, we must bear the cross, grant us courage and humility to lift it toward thee. In all our strivings, keep us in remembrance of that life which in Christ our Lord was light indeed. Amen.—SAMUEL H. MILLER

Where the right dedication is, there also is the power.—MARTIN BUBER

Politics, we say, is the art of the possible. But what happens to the limits of the possible when, aflame with love, we become servants of justice and peace, subjects of that kingdom which is over all?

The Holy One is present, and we are hallowable through the divinely given power to place ourselves at his disposal.

Tuesday, March 23

Herod the Tetrarch

Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done, and he was perplexed. . . . And he sought to see him. Luke 9: 7-9. Read Luke 23: 1-12.

Four glimpses we get of this Herod. He was known as the tetrarch ("ruler of a fourth part," that is, a petty ruler, not a king) of Galilee. He had stolen his brother Philip's wife (Mark 6: 14-29) for which John the Baptist had bluntly condemned him to his face, and John had lost his head as a result.

When this Herod first heard of Jesus he "sought to see him"; but there is no intimation that our Lord at that time made any effort to see Herod. Indeed, later, when the name of Herod was mentioned to him (Luke 13: 31-33), Jesus dismissed him as "that fox."

Finally came that day—the first "Good Friday" (isn't that name for it a testimony to the Christian faith?) when Pilate, seeking by any ruse to get out of having to decide about Jesus, sent him to Herod. The shallowness of Herod's interest in Jesus is clearly reflected in the story.

It is on this occasion that one aspect of "the manhood of the Master" is shown. With dignity and self-respect, not cringing, as the King James Version puts it, "He answered him nothing."

PRAYER: Help us, O God, to grow in selflessness and self-sacrifice; but grant that, growing in this grace, we may never mistakenly yield up our self-respect or lose our contempt for mean and petty ways. Keep us ever mindful that we are thy children and that thou hast set eternity in our hearts. Amen.

For Further Meditation

God operates in the events and movements of men, and the task of Christianity is to get where the action is, to get where the decisions are being made.—DONALD L. BENEDICT

He calls us into his Church . . . to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, *United Church of Christ*

The principal verb of Christian theology is not "ought" as some Christian teaching makes it appear. . . . It is not even the word "is" although that is an improvement because Christianity says much about who God is and who we are. The important word is "does" in all its synonyms and tenses. The gospel is the account of what God did, of what God is doing, and of what God promises to do. The core of the gospel is divine action.—ROGER L. SHINN

There has never been a saint who did not deal with politics and economics.—MARTIN LUTHER

O God, who has appointed for all thy children a war to wage and a kingdom to win, accept and fit us, we pray thee, for thy service. Enter, cleanse, and inspire our hearts in this day of our visitation. Give to us, not the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of discipline. Lead us to the battlefields which thou hast prepared for us, and meet us there with the comfort of thy help; that though of ourselves we can do nothing, yet by thy grace, and in the fellowship of thy saints we may minister to the needs of our generation and the coming of thy kingdom in peace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.¹⁷—OLIVE WYON

Wednesday, March 24

A Certain Lawyer

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Luke 10: 25. Read Luke 10: 25-37.

The words "lawyer" and "scribe" are used in parallel passages in the gospels. Generally they carry an evil connotation for us, mainly because so frequently this group were the most petty and captious critics of our Lord. Perhaps this derived from the fact that in the time of Jesus their "real interest," as one authority asserts, "was less in the plain meaning of the text (of the law) than in the preservation of the legal system built upon it."

However, if you have a Bible which includes the books known as the Apocrypha, you will find a beautiful passage in verses 1-11 of the 39th chapter of the book known as Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach. There you will see reflected the ancient scribe or lawyer at his best—and a statement which might well become the motto of every teacher.

Many of the scribes and lawyers must themselves have been, deep down, seekers after truth. Their inquiries (Matthew 22: 34-40; Mark 12: 28-34) elicited one of the great sayings of our Lord. In the lawyer of today's story one detects a note of honest inquiry, and our Lord treats his questioning as worthy of respect.

PRAYER: Search our hearts, Spirit of the living God, making us uneasy about what we think are our convictions, lest they be only comfortable but outworn prejudices. Amen.

For Further Meditation

God speaks to every man through the life which he gives him again and again. Therefore man can only answer God with the whole of life—with the way in which he lives this given life. The Jewish teaching of the wholeness of life is the other side of the Jewish teaching of the unity of God.—MARTIN BUBER

"I am a fool for Christ" his placard said. For him, this shabby thing, as he approached, one look sufficed. No second look gave I, so good, so wise, with what the world calls goodness. No second look till as he passed his eyes looked into mine with kindness. "I am Christ's fool" they said to me. They seemed to hold the light of truth with tenderness. He passed. I turned and looked—what could I do? and read a question, this: "Whose fool are you?"—EDWARD F. OUELLETTE

Every one of the founding fathers of this country was a controversial figure. It was out of the long and ardent discussion—which is controversy—that the union was born.

—THE CHURCHMAN

I am a saint, open to the One who is holiness and love. That is, saint is what I am most uncomfortable at not being.

Thursday, March 25

Rich Man—and Young

When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions. Matthew 19: 22. Read Matthew 19: 16-30.

"What good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" Almost word for word the question raised by the rich young ruler is the same one raised by the lawyer in yesterday's devotions.

Both were in positions of power and prestige. One at least was wealthy. Yet both are prototypes of an unending line of men and women in every generation who, having achieved wealth, or power, or prestige, or all three, have testified to the ultimate futility of these alone.

It would be false to deny or minimize the pull such ends exercise in forming our ambitions. They are tangible spurs to much human improvement and achievement—a better job, a higher salary, more security.

But one of life's certainties is this: if in pushing ourselves toward such self-serving ends we are not at the same time finding joy in our work and some selfless, creative outlets for our leisure, we shall come to the same inexorable moment of emptiness and desolation as the rich young man's question reflects. Millions have found the answer where he did, though he passed it up: in the spirit and summons of Christ.

PRAYER: Preserve us, O Lord, from the error of disdaining possessions, or power, or prestige. In whatever measure they are granted to us, help us to be grateful for them as a trust from thee, and to use them to thy glory in the service of all mankind. Amen.

For Further Meditation

There is no painless way to move with God. That is what the cross says to us. But it also says that there is no hopeless task undertaken at his behest.—ROBERT SPIKE

Self-denial as a goal is morbid and unholy; but self-denial for the sake of a loyalty is something else. And Christ's promise, beyond self-denial, is always life. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10: 10) The irony of "abundant life" today is that most Americans take it to mean a ranch house, two cars and elegant dining.

—ROGER L. SHINN

"I am a child of the earth and the star-spangled heaven." Man is the meeting place of two worlds; and however closely his mind and labor may be tied to the visible world, he has never forgotten his lofty destiny.

—NATHAN SOEDERBLOM

I lack decisiveness and purpose and guidance when I neglect what is more important than my necessary food (private devotion).¹⁶

—BILLY GRAHAM

Next to sincerity, remember still
Thou must resolve upon Integrity.
God will have all thou hast, thy mind, thy will
Thy thoughts, thy words, thy works.

—CHRISTOPHER HARVEY

God just might be able to make a stone so big he couldn't lift it; it would still be a stone. But God can't force man to love him; it would no longer be love, and man would no longer be man. For love is free response and therefore real responsibility.

Midway

He set his face to go to Jerusalem. . . . And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him. Luke 9: 51; 23: 33. Read Luke 9: 51-62.

The two sentences coupled together in the paragraph above mark the beginning and the end of the last six months of our Savior's earthly life. They seem especially appropriate on this day, the precise mid-point between Ash Wednesday and Easter.

One Lenten tradition has been that during this period each year devout souls retraced the steps which led Jesus from the quiet obscurity of the Nazareth carpenter shop to Pilate's judgment hall and Calvary's cross. For the truly devout, the steps would be retraced in the prayerful hope that one might enter a little more deeply into an understanding of Jesus, might absorb a little more of his assurance of God and his compassion toward men, and might inch his way a little closer to the goal St. Paul once (2 Corinthians 5: 17) put this way: "If a man is in Christ he becomes a new person altogether." (Phillips Translation.)

Have we seen ourselves mirrored in the life or spirit of any of those whose contact with Jesus we have thought about? Has this glimpse of ourselves through them strengthened our will to follow Christ more faithfully?

PRAYER: Let not these daily meditations serve only as a pretty performance of religious piety, but through them, O Lord, stab us afresh with a sense of our sinfulness and our need of thy salvation. Amen.

Love is rejoicing over the existence of the beloved one; it is the desire that he be rather than not be; it is longing for his presence when he is absent; it is happiness in the thought of him; it is profound satisfaction over everything that makes him great and glorious. Love is *gratitude*: it is thankfulness for the existence of the beloved. . . . Love is *reverence*: it keeps its distance even as it draws near; it does not seek to absorb the other in the self or want to be absorbed by it. . . . Love is *loyalty*: it is the willingness to let the self be destroyed rather than that the other cease to be. ²²

—H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

Has one man more than another the right to be called "missionary," for of what use is any man in the world if he has no mission in it? —WILFRED GRENFELL

He cannot heal who has not suffered much,
For only sorrow sorrow understands;
They will not come for healing at our touch
Who have not seen the scars upon our
hands. —EDWIN MCNEILL POTTEAT

There are stages of renunciation—of body, mind, emotion, and (hardest of all) will. As one ascends the scale, the cost becomes greater while the reward gets less clear. At the top, all is given up and no reward is in sight. Then we are faced with an absolute separation between love for him whom we know and the fear of the unknown. Our ego is bereft of satisfaction and is forsaken by him who is nevertheless still "my God." The saint lives on the other side of calculation, beyond reward.

Saturday, March 27

Mother-in-Law

And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. Matthew 8: 14. Read Mark 1: 21-31.

Probably more jokes are cracked about mothers-in-law than about those in any other role among family relationships. Many of the jokes are crude, some cruel, most of them convey at least a tiny intimation that mothers-in-law in general are not quite all that humans should be.

Yet mothers-in-law, being mothers first of all, are emotionally deeply involved with their sons and daughters. Comes then the day when they must try to adopt, take to their hearts, make "one of their own," another grown-up they have known for a relatively brief time and whose ways are different.

Such considerations bring out into bolder relief some inferences from the mention of Peter's mother-in-law. Unnamed, she was mother-in-law to perhaps the oldest of our Lord's disciples. Apparently she made her home with him. It was a fisherman's home, one where other fishermen gathered. Hard work and a simple, unpolished manner of life probably characterized that home. And the story suggests an affectionate solicitude on the part of Peter for his mother-in-law, bringing Jesus to where she was at the moment when she needed the healing ministry of our Lord.

PRAYER: O thou who hast set the solitary in families, keep us mindful and understanding of those to whom we are bound, not by blood and birth but by the ties of love and marriage and the common life we share. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Man serves God by helping God's creation; man helps God's creation by leading it to God, a leading which does not turn its back on life, but walks through the middle of life itself.

—MARTIN BUBER

With the folding of hands
There's a spreading of wings,
And the soul's lifted up
With invisible hands,
And ineffable peace.—EVELYN UNDERWOOD

Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world differently. The point is to *change* it.

—KARL MARX

O God, who art beyond anything our wandering thoughts can grasp and yet art here in this room now, make us more keenly aware of thy presence. Help us to think more clearly and steadily, help us to love more widely and deeply. Strengthen our desire to bring thy goodness into our daily living, so that in our small environment at least there may be peace and justice and kindness, and so, in a tiny way but the only way possible to us as individuals, we may help to meet the world's most desperate need. Amen.—ELIZABETH VINING

Make of me this day, O Light of light, a thin place where thy healing radiance can shine through into this dense world of sadness, sickness, and suffering. By my own willful density I am a child of the darkness, but in my deeper will strengthen me for the work of the children of light. Amen.

Zebedee

They left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him. Mark 1:20. Read Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11.

All we know of Zebedee is epitomized in two verses of Mark (1:19-20). He was a fisherman. He was sufficiently well off to have more than one employed assistant in addition to his sons. His sons, James and John, were among the first four called by Jesus to become his disciples.

There lies the point of Zebedee's story for us. He must have wished that his sons would continue in the family occupation. Moreover, since they were part of his working force, their response to the Master's call represented an economic loss to him as well as the loss of companionship.

Yet Zebedee, so far as we know, said never a word to discourage or restrain them. It is not always easy for parents to act thus, especially if they have cherished occupational, financial, or social ambitions for their sons and daughters. If in our time Christ's work at home and all over the world is to have adequate numbers of young men and women enlisting to do that work, they need the initial encouragement of fathers and mothers who will follow their sons and daughters with understanding, and hope, and prayers all their days.

PRAYER: Bless, O Lord, fathers and mothers everywhere, that they may wisely guide their children's choice of lifework; where sons and daughters choose full-time, life-time service in thy church, may their parents rejoice in and nurture that choice. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Whoso has felt the Spirit of the Highest
Cannot confound nor doubt him nor deny:
Yea with one voice, O world, tho' thou
deniest,

Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

—F. W. H. MYERS

Copy nature, and you infringe on the work
of our Lord. Interpret it, and you are an artist.

—JACQUES LIPCHITZ, Sculptor

With them (Christians) temperance dwells,
self restraint is practiced, monogamy is observed, chastity is guarded, iniquity exterminated, sin extirpated, righteousness exercised, law administered, worship performed, God acknowledged: truth governs, grace guards, peace screens them; the holy word guides, wisdom teaches, life directs, God reigns.

—THEOPHILUS OF ANTIOCH

Prayer and ethics are simply the inside and outside of the same thing. Indeed, they could both be defined, from the Christian point of view, as meeting the unconditional in the conditioned in unconditional personal relationship.⁷—JOHN A. T. ROBINSON

God protests against both fragments when nature and spirit are separated, body and soul, outer and inner life. In each hour and in each place, the New Heaven and the New Earth offer themselves as one under the one Lord. Creation, dance before God this day! And when night comes, let me not forget my double moorings in the intersecting worlds—I who this day have heard the call to unity.

Monday, March 29

Mrs. Zebedee

She said to him, "Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." Matthew 20:21. Read Matthew 20:20-23.

Compare this story in Matthew with its parallel in Mark 10:35-45. This is another good illustration of the way the gospels sometimes differ in details; for Mark's story says the request was made by James and John, but makes no mention of their mother.

Her name was probably Salome (for this compare Matthew 27:55-56 with Mark 15:40). She appears, when her sons answered the call of Jesus and followed him, to have gone with them, becoming part of the group of devout women who (Luke 8:1-3) accompanied the disciple-band and Jesus and "provided for them out of their means."

In this incident, however, how much like mothers everywhere and in all times is the mother of James and John! She cherishes for her sons places of prominence and power, yet must learn, as Jesus taught on that occasion, that in the order of things that matter—that is, in the kingdom of God—such achievement cannot be *bestowed*—"not mine to grant"—but must be *earned*.

PRAYER: O thou whose kingdom is not of this world but who shall be reigning still when the kingdoms of this world have passed away, help us to re-examine from time to time the aims and hopes we've set our hearts upon, and teach us anew that he who would be great among men must be the servant of men, even as Christ came not to be served but to serve. Amen.

For Further Meditation

He calls us into his church . . . to be his servants in the service of men.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, *United Church of Christ*

Instant obedience, constant self-offering, readiness to do and to be what love demands in the occasion—these are the valid marks of servanthood.—ROGER HAZELTON

The bond which unites each individual to Christ is the cause of the bond which unites each individual to all others. . . . Every Christian loves Christ as his ideal and feels himself united with all other Christians by the tie of identification. But the Church requires more of him. He also has to identify himself with Christ and then love all other Christians as Christ loved him. The Church thus requires that the affective situation roused by the community formation, be completed in two directions.—SIGMUND FREUD

Delight, top-gallant delight is to him who acknowledges no law or lord but the Lord his God, and is a patriot only to heaven.

—HERMAN MELVILLE

If I am against the condition of the world, it is not because I am a moralist—it is because I want to laugh more. I don't say that God is one grand laugh. I say that you've got to laugh hard before you can get anywhere near God.¹⁰ —HENRY MILLER

Slow me down, Lord, I'se goin' too fast;
I can't see my brother when he's walkin'
past.

I miss a lot of good things day by day;
I don't know a blessin' when it comes my
way.—NEGRO SPIRITUAL

Tuesday, March 30

Wedding Reception

Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. John 2:2. Read John 2:1-12.

Many aspects of the story of the wedding at Cana invite our interest and meditation: the changing of the water into wine; the seemingly brusque response of our Lord to his mother when she asked him to do something after the supply of wine was exhausted; her obviously unperturbed assurance that, notwithstanding, he would not fail to help in some fitting way; the amusing reflection of common practice in serving poorer wine last when presumably the guests' taste would be dulled so that they would not notice any difference.

But consider only the fact that he was *there* at the wedding. It reminds us that, although in a very profound sense he was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," he lived life as if it were meant to be enjoyed.

He, who saw God's presence in nature's provision for the birds of the air and the grass of the field, saw in man and human fellowship something even more precious. Man's world, its joys no less than its sorrows, was to him—and should be to us—what we say when we sing, "This is my Father's world, I rest me in the thought."

PRAYER: Let not this holy season pass, our Father, without our recalling the Bible teaching that there is a time to laugh and dance as there is a time to weep and mourn. Grant that by our uses of leisure we may be enabled to grow as Jesus grew, in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man. Amen.

For Further Meditation

The spirit will not descend without song.

—WEST AFRICAN PROVERB

So great the joys I have in sight that every sorrow brings delight.—ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

It is not the task of Christians to advocate a program of ideology. Rather our task is to create *a mystery*, a mystery that cannot be explained by any human system of thinking and can finally only be understood as the grace of God.—CARDINAL SUHARD,

spiritual father of the French worker-priest movement

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we, thine unworthy servants, do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving kindness to us and to all men. We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life, but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we show forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory, world without end.

Amen.—BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

Wednesday, March 31

Where Death Came Twice

A man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. Luke 7: 12. Read Luke 7: 11-23.

Only Luke tells this story of a funeral, as only John tells the story of the wedding. Together, the two remind us that, then as now, this is our life—the ups and downs of joy and sorrow. As someone has put it, life is “a smile with a tear behind it.”

Years ago Reinhold Niebuhr pointed out that even if—and as—a juster, more brotherly social order is achieved, and long-standing wants and oppressions are ameliorated, men will still have to deal with the age-old griefs, frustrations, and sins which have always driven them to penitence and prayer and the felt need of God.

Here was a woman whose family circle had twice been broken by death, first her husband, now her only son, leaving her with a loneliness twice-lonely and therefore doubly hard to bear.

And our Lord was there, making the incident a sort of parable of what Christian faith affirms is always true. Whatever our lot and condition at any moment—joy or sorrow, saintliness or sin—Christ still occupies the primary and ultimate place in our lives. As Peter once expressed it: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

PRAYER: O Father-God, of whom it is written that the darkness is not dark to thee, the night is bright as the day, comfort all who mourn, and grant us a faith to sustain us no matter what comes our way. Amen.

For Further Meditation

He whose understanding matters, understands.—TOLSTOY

We are in the ministry not to prove anything as of ourselves, but by every capacity within us to affirm that God is available and that he is sufficient.²³—SAMUEL SHOEMAKER

The first requisite of a contemporary theological method is a full acknowledgement of the death of God. This means that all traditional theological thinking is now irrelevant. In this situation, the task of the theologian becomes the paradoxical one of the unveiling of religious meaning in a world that is bathed in the darkness of God's absence. Paradoxically, he must search for light in precisely those corners which are most filled with darkness . . . most estranged from the world of the sacred.⁹

—J. J. ALTIZER

Faith is the energy your Master gives you, which enables you to take hold of his promises and participate in his life.—PHILIPPE VERNIER

In your life of prayer and meditation seek the command that God addresses to you, and put it into practice without delay. Therefore, read little, but ponder over it.¹²—RULE OF TAIZE

God cannot be relied on to stay dead. When he is present, you can be sure only of this, that he is present. You cannot even be sure of death, for in his presence death itself is uncertain and finally undone.

Thursday, April 1

Even Infants

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. Matthew 19:13. Read Mark 10:13-16.

Since, as Luke says, "they were bringing even infants" it was doubtless their parents, mother or father or both. Probably more often than not it was their mothers who brought them, since then as now child-care fell largely to mothers.

Why did they bring them? "That he might lay his hands on them and pray." But, was it only because Jesus had become a public figure, and proud mothers could return and boast to neighbors and friends that their children had been touched and blessed by him? Or did they think of Jesus' touch as having some sort of magic in it which would of itself guarantee good fortune and an untroubled life through all their years on earth?

What really matters is what those who brought their infants to Jesus did after they had taken them home again. Had they, in seeking his blessing for their children, also committed themselves to Jesus, and thereafter made a faithful, prayerful effort to bring those as yet unknowing children up in the ways of the Lord? This is a question which should haunt parents after a child is baptized, and haunt also the church into whose fellowship the child is baptized.

PRAYER: Bless, O Lord, all children, and especially their elders in home and church and community, that by the faith and honor of their living their children may grow in ways that are good. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Be, Lord, within me to strengthen me, without me to guard me, over me to shelter me, beneath me to establish me, before me to guide me, after me to forward me, round me to secure me.—LANCELOT ANDREWS

Which has done more to make our lives spiritual and to release us from the tyranny of the world, the thought that we may at any moment enter into the presence of our Lord, or the thought that every moment we are in the presence of the Lord?—WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH

The real snag about Christianity is not in its theories but in its practice. Our present age is far, far too concerned . . . with presenting new images. What Christians need to do is not to think up new images but to deliver the goods!

—O. FIELDING CLARKE

The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.—ANCIENT CHINESE PROVERB

And then—when you find your own manhood—your womanhood . . . then you know it is not your own, to do as you like with. You don't have it of your own will. It comes from—from the middle—from the God. Beyond me, at the middle, is the God.

—THE PLUMED SERPENT, quoted by John A. T. Robinson

Prayer is assenting to be known by God as persons, and treating ourselves in relationship to God not as things but as persons.

—C. S. LEWIS

Friday, April 2

Envious Brother

One of the multitude said to him, "Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me." Luke 12:13. Read Luke 12:13-21.

The spirit of this envious brother is not unlike that of the older brother in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Indeed, one is tempted to speculate that his actual experience in this one instance may have suggested that parable our Lord told later on.

In his response to the envious brother's request, including the parable which is part of that response, in the story of the older brother of the prodigal son, in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-11), and elsewhere in his teachings, our Lord did what at last in dramatic proportions he did by his death on the cross: he challenged the whole scale of values men then and men now set their hearts on.

Take his one use of the word "bread." Let it stand for material well-being, social acceptance, security, and similar familiar aims and goals which enter into our motives for living. Jesus was not so unrealistic as to deny them place and validity in our lives. What he did teach, reaffirming Deuteronomy 8:3, was that "Man shall not live by bread *alone*."

PRAYER: O thou to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, prompt us again and again to re-examine our motives and purposes lest, being occupied with making a living and with selfish pursuits in our leisure, we neglect to cultivate the things of the Spirit and fail to give ourselves to thee and to thy coming kingdom. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Men become what they are, sons of God, by becoming what they are, brothers of their brothers.—MARTIN BUBER

While we deliberate, he reigns.

When we decide wisely, he reigns.

When we decide foolishly, he reigns.

When we serve him humbly, loyally, he reigns.

When we serve him self-assertively, he reigns.

When we rebel and seek to withhold our services, he reigns.—WILLIAM TEMPLE

Lord Jesus Christ, who hast said to thine apostles, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you": look not upon my sins, but upon the faith of thy Church, and in accordance with thy will bestow upon it unity and freedom from strife; who livest and reignest, world without end. Amen.

—Kiss of peace prayer, LATIN LITURGY

We are to share his life

because we have shared his death;

if we endure,

we shall reign with him,

if we disown him,

he in his turn will disown us.

If we play him false, he remains true to his word;

he cannot disown himself.

That is why, when we give glory to God, it is through

him that we say our Amen.

—2 Timothy 2:11-13 and 2 Corinthians 1:20 (A. Hamman)

Christendom has never been divided in the chambers where good men pray.—W. R. INGE

Saturday, April 3

Sisters Unlike

And a woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary. Luke 10: 38-39. Read Luke 10: 38-42.

Three times in the gospels these sisters are seen side by side. In one instance they are entertaining our Lord at dinner. In a second (John 11: 1-46), they send for him in their hour of grief at the death of their brother Lazarus. In the third (John 12: 1-11), Mary is identified as the woman who anointed our Lord while he sat at dinner in the home of Simon the leper (compare Matthew 26: 6-13, Mark 14: 3-9), while Martha is named as the one who was serving at table.

In all three the two sisters are consistently portrayed as quite unlike each other. Such words as "overanxious," "complaining," "jealous," "quick-tempered" have been used to characterize Martha, while Mary is described as thoughtful, humble, receptive, devout.

To contrast the two in this way—unless the contrast is qualified by recognizing that both of them loved our Lord—is to do disservice to the simple truth that no two human beings are exactly alike. No two will serve Christ in exactly the same way. But no *one's* service will be underrated by our Lord when that service is the best one's own capacities and talents enable one to give.

PRAYER: Help us to be ourselves, O Lord, and to be satisfied with being no other than ourselves, but to be forever dissatisfied with being *less* than our *best selves*. Preserve us from imitation or pretence, but preserve us also from carelessness and mediocrity. Amen.

For Further Meditation

True godliness doesn't turn men out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavors to mend it.

—WILLIAM PENN

The blessed God who alone enjoys dominion; the King of kings and Lord of lords; to whom alone immortality belongs, who dwells in unapproachable light; whom no human eye has seen or ever can see; to him be glory and everlasting empire. Amen.²—1 Timothy 6: 15 (A. HAMMAN)

O God, give us serenity to accept what cannot be changed; courage to change what can be changed; and the wisdom to know one from the other. Amen.—REINHOLD NIEBUHR

I sing a song of the saints of God
Patient and brave and true,
Who toiled and fought and lived and died
For the Lord they loved and knew.
And one was a doctor and one was a queen,
And one was a shepherdess on the green;
They were all of them saints of God—
And I mean,
God helping, to be one too.—LESBIA SCOTT

Prayer is my chief work, and it is by means of it that I carry on the rest.—THOMAS HOOKER

The deeper things are there just because they belonged to the world he lived in, and he could not have kept them out.

—T. S. ELIOT, of Charles Williams

The soul is nothing.
The soul and God are nothing.
God, the soul, and the world are all.
God, is more than all.

Certain Women

There were also many women . . . who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him. Matthew 27:55. Read also verse 56 and Luke 8:1-3.

The woman who sits with peace and dignity in church on Sunday morning, is an active participant in the Parent-Teacher Association, works if she does not lead in other community affairs, even more the woman who has made a place for herself in business or professional life, is usually unaware that this changed status of womanhood is one of the fruits of the gospel of Christ.

In Bible times women kept—or were kept—largely in the background, as was true in many earlier cultures and is still true over vast areas of the world. But as Jesus moved through his brief public ministry, the lives of a number of women were touched by him in redemptive ways, and their stories or brief intimations of them are imbedded in the gospels.

Among them is the group of women who apparently banded together to accompany Jesus and the twelve and support and minister to them. The mother of James and John was one of this company. Others are named, "and many others" referred to. Preparing food, mending clothes, encouraging by their presence the approach of still other women, they must have eased the burdens and aided the impact our Lord and his disciples made on the villages and towns through which they passed.

PRAYER: Bless, O Lord, the faithful women in our churches, communities, and families, whose Christlike ministries make our own lives livable and lovely. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Moral education is impossible apart from the habitual vision of greatness.

—ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

Perfect love is a kind of self-derelection, a wandering out of ourselves; it is a kind of voluntary death, wherein the lover dies to himself and all his own interests, not thinking of them nor caring for them any more, and minding nothing but how he may please and gratify the party whom he loves. —HENRY SOOUGAL

The Spirit-filled Christian is a man who is not limited by his limitations. —FRANCIS E. WHITING

Our yearning to meet a personal life that shall resolve every element of separation between us and it into pure trust, and thus give our spirits a home, is the longing for the living God. . . . We find it satisfied in Jesus.

—WILHELM HERRMANN

Bishop Frank Weston of Zanzibar . . . said "You have been adoring Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, now go out and find Him in the slums!" What is said in *Honest to God* about the Eucharist, and about the "holiness" in the "common," is all well said, and very much to the point. —O. FIELDING CLARKE

The Christian is to obey Christ as the central purpose of his life. As Luther wrote, "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none. He is the most dutiful servant of all and subject to everyone."

—GEORGE W. WEBBER

Religion is God looking over your shoulder.

—REINHOLD NIEBUHR

Monday, April 5

Foreign Woman

The woman was a Greek, a Syrophoenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. Mark 7:26. Read Mark 7:24-30.

Whether our Lord was actually on "foreign soil" on this occasion is not quite clear, but the woman who took advantage of his being where he was to ask for help was a "foreigner" in at least two senses of the word.

She was of non-Jewish birth, a Syrophoenician or Canaanite (Matthew 15:22), and she was Greek-speaking, presumably therefore like many in eastern Mediterranean lands who since the days of Alexander the Great had come increasingly under the influence of Greek thought and manners.

This foreignness evokes from our Lord a saying which is not easy to understand. It is as if (verse 27) he were saying that this Gentile did not deserve the help which he would have readily given to a Jew. His remark was perhaps a bit of banter "uttered in a kindly humorous way," perhaps as a test of the woman's faith. It is not without significance that she did not hesitate to give a witty, humble and perhaps half-smiling reply.

It is most significant that after that moment of banter, our Lord's response was—as we would expect of him and he ought to be able to expect of us—a response to human need with no line drawn at race or nationality.

PRAYER: Keep us ever mindful, O Lord, that every human being claims thy loving care—and ours. Amen.

For Further Meditation

He bestows upon us his Holy Spirit . . . binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, United Church of Christ

Believing in Christ as Savior is inseparable from being a Christian to your neighbor.

—MARTIN LUTHER

Deus ubique est et totus ubique est: God is everywhere totally present.—AUGUSTINE

God may speak to us through a pagan or an atheist, and in that way give us to understand that the boundary between the Church and the profane still and repeatedly takes a course quite different from that which we hitherto thought we saw.²⁴—KARL BARTH

To some among us comes that implacable day

Demanding that we stand our ground and utter

By choice of will the great Yea or Nay.
And whosoever has in him the affirming word

Will straightway then be heard.
The pathways of his life will clear at once
And all rewards will crown his way.

But he, the other who denies,
No one can say he lies; he would repeat
His Nay in louder tones if pressed again.
It is his right—yet by such little trifles,
A 'No' instead of 'Yes' his whole life sinks
and stifles.²⁵—LAWRENCE DURRELL

He seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, United Church of Christ

Tuesday, April 6

The Samaritan

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." John 4:7. Read John 4:1-42.

Those first four words spoken by Jesus to the Samaritan woman might serve as a shining example to all teachers, evangelists, counselors, and pastors. Those who would minister must begin with people where they are and at the point of their immediate need and interest.

In the conversation which followed, Jesus by-passed a long-standing break between two peoples: "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." In the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) he seemed deliberately to go out of his way to show that goodness and compassion might be found among these despised neighbors of the Jews. Simply that the Samaritans were *people* was all that mattered to him.

So with the woman at the well of Sychar. She was a Samaritan. She was a woman, and the rabbis had a saying, "A man should hold no conversation with a woman in the street, not even with his own wife, still less with any other woman, lest men should gossip." Indeed, she was then living with a fifth "husband" in a highly questionable relationship.

But she was a human being in whom, deeply hidden, was the great spiritual yearning: "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst." Such yearning was enough for Jesus.

PRAYER: O compassionate Christ, help us to discern beneath the sometimes brazen, often unconventional manners of others their need of thee the same as our own. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Where were you? What did you do? How do you account for your failure to be fully human?

—NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS' report of religious scholars' reaction to Rolf Hochhuth's "The Deputy"

Let me now accept Thy forgiveness and forgive myself. Let me no longer cling to the picture of myself as unclean, when thou thyself, by forgiveness, hast made me clean. Help me not endlessly to condemn and depreciate and despise myself, but to understand myself and move on to spiritual maturity.²⁶

—LESLIE WEATHERHEAD

In the last analysis we are never capable of evaluating our work adequately. Only God can do that. In his judgment some of our successes will be cheap and flimsy. Some of our failures will be glorious.—ROGER L. SHINN

The grownups aren't bothering about him, so we children must do it. Listen to a plan I've thought out. There are just seven of us children. Each of us must carry God about with him for one day, then he will be with us the whole week and we shall always know where he is at the moment.²—RAINER MARIA RILKE

A drop of Messianic consummation must be mingled with every hour; otherwise the hour is godless, despite all piety and devoutness.

—MARTIN BUBER

God is what is more than man without overwhelming to man's undoing. God is what overwhelms man to man's remaking.

Wednesday, April 7

Adulteress

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery. . . . He stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."
John 8: 3, 7. Read John 7: 53—8: 15.

This passage is not found in any of the oldest manuscripts and in one group of manuscripts is placed following Luke 21: 38. It is believed to have been passed on orally for centuries before being inserted in either Gospel. How much poorer the Christian story would have been without it! The whole incident seems just like Jesus.

The scribes and Pharisees were *so correct*. They were abiding by the law. *But they were so wrong*. They brutally chose to create the scene in a public place and thus double the woman's embarrassment. And they did the correct thing for an evil reason—to test and trap our Lord into making some vulnerable comment.

They illustrate clearly the implications of a stanza from the great hymn, "There's a Wilderness in God's Mercy." The stanza, unfortunately omitted from many hymnals, reads:

"But we make his love too narrow
By false limits of our own,
And we magnify his strictness
With a zeal he would not own."

Our Lord's words echo Micah 6: 8, in which God requires that justice be tempered with kindness and humility.

PRAYER (attributed to a little girl): "O God, make all the bad people good, and please make all the good people nice." Amen.

For Further Meditation

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord, he has come to us . . . , conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to himself.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, United Church of Christ

Misery, deliverance and gratitude (the divisions of the Heidelberg Catechism) are not abstractions but existential realities.

—BARD THOMPSON

Man is born broken, he lives by mending, and the grace of God is glue.—EUGENE O'NEILL

God's heaven is in thee,
in thee the pains of hell;
For everywhere thou hast
what thou dost choose and will.

—ANGELUS SILESIUS

O seed of God in humankind
Push up your tender shoots;
Roll back the stone,
Break up the cold,
Send deep your searching roots.

—ELIZABETH YARNALL

Religion is not religion unless it keeps burning bright in the dark hour the idea of life as a journey begun in the physical world and continued on into another world of 'becoming.' Religion is not religion unless it heals the dividing wound inflicted between these two levels of being and becoming. If the devil rules man by dividing him against himself, God rules by uniting us within ourselves.—LAURENS VAN DER POST

Thursday, April 8

Eighteen-Year Invalid

There was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years. . . . And when Jesus saw her, he called her. Luke 13: 11-12. Read Luke 13: 10-17.

One wonders who was worse afflicted, the woman with the bent-over back or the synagogue ruler with a concept of religion so distorted that he questioned the legality of her being healed on the sabbath day.

Ponder, however, only the woman's plight. Eighteen years is a long time. Only those who have been afflicted for an extended period can know how long the hours, the days, and longer yet the nights come to be. So long it was since this woman had been able to stand straight, to see the tree-tops and the sky. So long she had walked with her eyes toward the ground. So long it had been, indeed, that unlike another woman in a similar case (Luke 8: 43-48) this woman made no move to seek our Lord's healing: he went to her.

Perhaps Christians should be taking more seriously the ministry of healing the sick by faith and prayer. But there are thousands of devout men and women, sick in body, crippled, deformed, the physically handicapped, who have found sustaining strength in Christ.

PRAYER: If we are blessed with health, help us, our Father, that we may not take that blessing for granted. Give us, along with strong bodies, grateful hearts. Bless all who care for the sick, that they may know themselves to be instruments of thy healing. And grant thy peace to those who suffer in body, mind or spirit. Amen.

For Further Meditation

You name the person: God loves him. Men are able to be the instruments of such love in so far as they know that they are called, freed, sent, made rich, and, above all, loved. God does not ask the impossible of men: in calling them to be the instruments of his love, he has given them all they need to bear the suffering that such love always brings.¹¹—FRANCIS O. AYRES

Prayer is a ritual form by means of which individuals or . . . groups put themselves in communication with divine forces in order to enjoin, ask, promise, glorify, and confidently abandon themselves to a sense of knowledge of their own limitations. Personal, individual prayer precedes liturgical prayer, and is a preliminary condition of it. . . . The transition from personal prayer to liturgy is almost always the work of a great mystic or the prophetic souls who shape and form religious movements.—ALFONSO M. DINOLA

The words of St. Augustine, "Love God, and do what you like," were never safe. But they constitute the heart of Christian prayer—as they do of Christian conduct.⁷

—JOHN A. T. ROBINSON

Prayer should not be hindered by work, but neither should work be hindered by prayer.⁴

—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Assured of your salvation by the unique grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, you do not impose discipline on yourself for its own sake. The gaining of mastery over yourself has no aim other than to render you more available.¹²

—RULE OF TAIZE

Friday, April 9

Expensive Anointing

A woman came up to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head. Matthew 26: 7. Read Matthew 26: 6-13.

John's Gospel (12: 1-8) says that the woman who did the anointing was Mary, sister of Martha. The other gospels do not name her.

Forget any name for a moment. Consider the act and what followed. The anointing may have been done for a purely cosmetic purpose, for refreshment, much as an airline stewardess offers those pleasantly stimulating, hot towels. Or it may have been performed as a sign of the woman's acknowledgment or hope that Jesus was indeed the promised messiah.

The disciples—John says it was Judas Iscariot—indignantly objected on the ground that the cost involved (Mark specifies 300 denarii, "a year's wages") might better have been devoted to aiding the poor.

Surely the care of the poor, and all the other constructive Christian works which we must support, have a major claim on our giving and spending. But our Lord's defense of this woman's act stands as the charter and warrant in justification of those who for God's sake give and spend for things beautiful.

PRAYER: O thou of whom it is written that thou hast made everything beautiful in its time and hast put eternity into man's mind, make us the devotees and apostles of beauty—beauty of word, of deed, of thought and spirit, beauty on city streets and in open countryside, for thou thyself art altogether lovely. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Everything unselfishly shared with me, no matter how commonplace or unpleasant, becomes resounding joy.—LISTEN, THE LORD

The museums seem more and more like cathedrals and the churches more and more like archives. Whatever the reasons for our insensitivity toward the so-called "secular" artist of our times, we do continue to ignore our artists and only widen the gulf between the church and the world. But if the incarnation has any real meaning for us, and if we dare to sing that "He's got the whole world in His hands," then art is one of the joyful necessities of our lives.—MARGARET RIGG

He who reflects on the evil he has done is thinking evil, and what one thinks, therein is one caught. Stir filth however you will, it is still filth. In the time that I am brooding, I could be stringing pearls for the sake of heaven.²⁷—WILLIAM B. SILVERMAN

One who seeks suffering is not loving; he is merely sick. But a person who shrinks from suffering when that is the price that must be paid, is sick too. But of course, there is so much more than suffering in love, for it is in loving that we are nearest to God; in loving we are most nearly like him.—ALAN PATON

I believe that our era will prove able to offer most people a bigger chance of becoming persons; that is why this seems to me such an exciting time to be alive.—PAUL TOURNIER

Saturday, April 10

Women Who Wept

And as they led him away. . . there followed a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him. Luke 23:26-27. Read Luke 23:26-31.

Luke has sometimes been referred to as "the woman's Gospel." Only he, for example, records many of the more intimate details of the nativity stories. And only he incorporates this glimpse of the weeping women along the *Via Dolorosa*.

There are women who—mistakenly, it could be argued—steel and discipline themselves against any such display of emotion. But, it could be argued further, women are most truly womanly when they have not lost the capacity for tears.

In this instance, to dismiss the weeping of these women as a mark of feminine weakness is to ignore the strength of it. They were not calloused and insensitive to the suffering of someone who was at least some mother's son. Moreover, is it possible that these women wept because they sensed that the evil and agony they were seeing concentrated in one man would not be confined to him, but would spread to blight their lives and the life of generations yet to come? "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."

PRAYER: Strong Son of God, we remember that thou didst weep at the anguish of another. Keep us from any false hardening of our hearts that would make us uncaring toward the pains, and griefs, and disappointments of others. Amen.

For Further Meditation

God was in Christ
To say he shares the suffering of common
clay.—ANONYMOUS

Love, in the meaning it had for (Charles) Williams, is a deity of whom most human beings seldom see more than a shadow.

—T. S. ELIOT

The world stands out on either side
No wider than the heart is wide.

—EDNA S. VINCENT MILLAY

Go to dark Gethsemane,
Ye that feel the tempter's power;
Your Redeemer's conflict see;
Watch with him one bitter hour;
Turn not from his griefs away;
Learn of Jesus Christ to pray.
See him at the judgment hall,
Beaten, bound, reviled, arraigned;
See him meekly bearing all!
Love to man his soul sustained.
Shun not suffering, shame, or loss;
Learn of Christ to bear the cross.
Calvary's mournful mountain climb;
There adoring at his feet,
Mark that miracle of time,
God's own sacrifice complete;
"It is finished!" hear him cry;
Learn of Jesus Christ to die. Amen.

—JAMES MONTGOMERY

The Church, unlike any religion, exists to present to the world and to celebrate in the world, and on behalf of the world, God's presence and power and utterance and action in the on-going life of the world.

—WILLIAM STRINGFELLOW

Owner of the Colt

And as they were untying the colt, its owner said to them, "Why . . . ?" And they said, "The Lord has need of it." Luke 19: 33-34. Read Luke 19: 28-44.

The "triumphal entry" was the opening event of that first Holy Week. In it Jesus and his disciples captured the public eye and enthusiasm. Behind this big event, however, as is true of most big events, there were relatively unknown factors and individuals who contributed to its making.

One such figure is the anonymous owner of the colt the disciples borrowed for Jesus to ride on into the city. One easily imagines that, long after, he would tell his grandchildren and companions of his old age that it was his colt on which the Savior rode.

Maybe also he would tell how astounded he was when two strange men approached and untied his colt and started off with it, and who, when he objected, replied only, "The Lord has need of it."

Was he, perchance, himself already a disciple of our Lord, perhaps secretly like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea? Or does the story simply reflect the fact that by this time the name of Jesus had so gripped the imagination of the people generally that the mere mention of his name and need was enough for one who may never even have seen him?

PRAYER: If it is ours to do the humble deed and offer modest gifts in life and work from day to day, teach us, O God, that only on such foundations can great men rise and the world's great deeds get done. Amen.

For Further Meditation

William Law discovered that the gift of God is through the spirit of devotion and is not attainable by any mere power of our own; yet it is mostly given to, and never withheld from, those who by a wise and diligent use of the proper means, prepare themselves for the reception of it.—ALEXANDER WHYTE

All glory, laud, and honor
To thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring!
The people of the Hebrews
With palms before thee went;
Our praise and prayer and anthems
Before thee we present.
Thou art the King of Israel,
Thou David's royal son,
Who in the Lord's name comest,
The King and blessed One.
To thee, before thy passion,
They sang their hymns of praise;
To thee, now high exalted,
Our melody we raise.
Thou didst accept their praises;
Accept the prayers we bring,
Who in all good delightest,
Thou good and gracious King.
All glory, laud, and honor
To thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring! Amen.

—THEODULPH OF ORLEANS

We cannot prepare the messianic world, we can only prepare for it.—MARTIN BUBER

Monday of Holy Week, April 12

Child in the Midst

And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst, and said, "... Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:2-3. Read Matthew 18:1-10.

This event did not happen in Holy Week, but it illustrates how very slow even the disciples were in coming to understand the "way of the cross" which he had earlier forecast to them.

When James and John, or their mother in their behalf, requested the chief places in the new kingdom they expected Jesus to set up, the other disciples were indignant at such a self-seeking request. But they were no different, no better. For as Mark (9:33-37) and Luke (9:46-48) indicate, they had all got to arguing as to which of them was greatest.

Into that setting Jesus brought a little child. The child may have wondered what it was all about. But his presence, if Jesus had not spoken a word, would have been enough to remind these very human disciples that once they had been as selfless as this child. And Jesus said to them, That is how you must again become if you are to be fit for the kingdom of heaven.

So speaks he to us as once again the day of his cross comes near. To be childlike is to expect something new and better of the world each day.

PRAYER: Give us childlike hearts, our Father, unseeking, without prejudice, full of wonder and expectancy, teachable, and confident that the love which brought us into the world will see us through it. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Whatever my heart rightly wills, that is thy gift.—ANSELM

Let me no more my comfort draw
From my frail hold on thee,
In this alone rejoice with awe—
Thy mighty grasp on me.—ANONYMOUS

He is an apostle only as whatever capacities he possesses are wholly open to use for the purposes of God.⁸—DOUGLAS V. STEERE

You are as holy as you will to be.
—JAN RUTSBOECK

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with—with this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.

—MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. at March on Washington

It is an exciting and inspiring world to be in. And, although there are great dangers in it, much tension and cause for worry, it affords vast opportunity—greater, I think . . . than has ever been known.—RALPH BUNCHE

If you do not pray, you have no need for God as personal, for prayer is conversation between persons. As Martin Buber puts it, "He" is a metaphor, but "Thou" is not."

Life is a glory to be found and shared, and a problem to be solved—in that order of emphasis.

Widow's Might

And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, . . . everything she had. Mark 12: 42, 44. Read Mark 12: 38-44.

An old New Testament chronology placed this incident specifically in Holy Week: "Tuesday, April 4, A.D. 30." Scholars today would not venture being quite that precise.

The whole story of less than a hundred words, especially against the background of the earlier part of the chapter, puts a finger on the constant peril of being superficial in our professed devotion to God.

In this instance, only the giving of possessions is dealt with as an expression of religious commitment. The contrast Jesus draws between the gifts of the rich and the "widow's mite" affirms in effect that the depth of one's devotion is measured, not by how much one gives, but by *how much one has left*. A little boy once said it in these words at an old-fashioned Children's Day program when, just before the offering was to be received, he recited:

"The collection-plate is coming 'round,
It ought to hold a heap;
God doesn't look at what you give,
He looks at what you keep."

One may question those lines as poetry or liturgics, but they express stewardship as the widow practiced it.

PRAYER: O God, who didst so love the world as to give thine only Son for its redemption, help us to love thee as thou didst first love us, and give—time, talent, possessions, and with them all ourselves. Amen.

A bell is no bell till you ring it,
a song is no song till you sing it,
and love in the heart wasn't put there to stay;
love isn't love till you give it away.

—THE SOUND OF MUSIC

The one thing that concerns us is, Am I doing this for God? . . . I do it because it is God's will and so he is pleased, and it simplifies life wonderfully.—DANIEL CONSIDINE

The real essence of *community* is to be found in the fact—manifest or otherwise—that it *has a center*. The real beginning of a community is when its members have a common relation to the center overriding all other relations. . . . And the originality of the center cannot be discerned unless it is discerned as being transpicuous to the light of something divine. All this is true; but the more earthly, the more creaturely, the more attached the center is, the truer and more transpicuous it will be. This is where the "*social*" element comes in.—MARTIN BUBER

Father of all, we draw near to thee in common amazement at thy power and love in nature and grace, in common humility before thee and each other at our imperfect apprehensions of thee, and in common penitence over our sinful disobedience to thy holy will revealed in thy one holy Servant and Son Jesus, thy Christ and our Lord. Grace us with open windows on thee in devotion, on thy world in service and witness, and on each other in listening and longing love. Amen.

Day of Silence

Every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. Luke 21:37. Read Luke 21:5-38.

Pause now midway in Holy Week as earlier we paused midway in Lent. Look, not at one of those who looked on him, but at the crucial clustering of events as they bore down upon the Savior's life.

In older studies, Wednesday of that first Holy Week was sometimes designated as the "day of silence." As the sequence of events was reconstructed, each night he retired to Bethany, each morning he returned to the city to teach in the courts of the temple.

Daily it became clearer that opposition was crystallizing against him. Perhaps it was on Tuesday night that the evil agreement was made between the religious leaders and Judas Iscariot (Matthew 26:1-5, 14-16), leading to the betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

His hour was near at hand. That "day of silence" in Bethany gave him one of his last opportunities for quiet fellowship with his closest friends, a time to talk with them about the meaning of it all, to brace himself for the ordeal from which he shrank, to make the final decision for "the hard right against the easy wrong," and so lay that choice on all who ever after would take upon themselves his name.

PRAYER: Remind us that the choices he made, for which men since have called him Master, were not easy for him to make, and grant, O God, that when we waver between right and wrong we may find our strength in him. Amen.

Prayer is the elevation of the mind to God.

—ERASMUS

Reflective meditation consists in holding certain ideas in the mind long enough to enable them to form emotional connections, which tends to break up the crust of habit and to create a new will.—WALTER MARSHALL HORTON

The basic doctrine which fills the Hebrew Bible is that our life is a dialogue between the above and the below.—MARTIN BUBER

He calls the worlds into being, creates man in his own image and sets before him the ways of life and death.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, United Church of Christ

O God, you see that we live in a world of toil and travail, with the vague possibility that there might be something worth while at the end of it. We pray you to take from man the embarrassing gift of free-will that made possible the Fall, and makes possible the fall of everyman. Grant that we may all become unselfconscious parts of one vast, universal factory, where everything works by automation according to the press-button activity of the One Divine Will. O Lord, arise, Give up this awful experiment of making men like Christ.²⁸

—DAVID HEAD

You must at all costs have a quiet time. Give up work if need be. Your influence finally depends upon your own first-hand knowledge of the unseen world, and on your experience of prayer. Love and sympathy and tact and insight are born of prayer.—FORBES ROBINSON

Maundy Thursday, April 15

Unnamed Host

Tell the householder, "The Teacher says to you, where is the guest room . . . ?" And he will show you a large upper room furnished. Luke 22: 11-12. Read Luke 22: 7-20.

Here is another of the unnamed persons—like the owner of the colt used in the 'triumphal entry'—whose life momentarily touched the Master's, but about whom we know nothing else.

The story may, of course, indicate that Jesus knew that his name had become so widely known that, even to one he had not met, the mere mention of a request from "the Teacher" would get an immediate and willing response. More likely, the householder was one of that larger number of disciples and "sympathizers" in addition to the Twelve, like the 120 referred to in Acts 1: 15, or the "more than five hundred brethren at one time" mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15: 6. Some have speculated that the home was that of Joseph of Arimathea or of the parents of Mark.

"It was a Jewish custom," one scholar points out, "that Passover pilgrims might ask any homeowner for the use of a room for the occasion." Does this suggest that the unnamed host who provided the room for the Last Supper may have been an utter stranger but, like many a pious Jew of the time, kept a room ready on the chance that the long hoped for Messiah might knock at his door?

PRAYER: Grant to us our Father, ready, expectant and humble hearts, that at any moment when thou dost make thy presence known, we may bid thee welcome. Amen.

For Further Meditation

He calls us into his Church . . . to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, *United Church of Christ*

All experience comes to be but more and more of pressure of his life on ours. It cannot come by one flash of light, or one great convulsive event. It comes without haste and without rest in the perpetual living of our life with him. And all the history of outer or inner life, of the changes of circumstances or the changes of thought, gets its meaning and value from this constantly growing relation to Christ.²⁹ —WINFRED RHODES

I make it my only business to persevere in his holy Presence, wherein I keep myself by a simple attention and an absorbing passionate regard to God, which I may call an actual Presence of God; or, to speak better, a silent and secret conversation of the soul with God.

—BROTHER LAWRENCE

Awake, thou that sleepest,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ shall give thee light.

—EPHESIANS 5: 14 (A. Hamman)

The Holy Communion is the point at which the common, the communal, becomes the carrier of the unconditional, as the Christ makes himself known in the breaking and sharing of bread. Holy Communion is communion, community-life, *in sacris*, in depth, at the level at which we are not merely in human fellowship but 'in Christ,' not merely in love but in Love, united with the ground and restorer of our whole being.⁷ —JOHN A. T. ROBINSON

Good Friday, April 16

Man in Uniform

When the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was a son of God." Mark 15: 39. Read Mark 15: 16-39.

The men in uniform had to do that day what men in uniform have had to do so many times before and since—the dirty, inhuman deeds which usually others, not they themselves, have tried to justify on grounds of the worthy ends they served. In this instance, they compounded the cruel and calloused doings of the day by gambling at the foot of the cross for the clothes of the victim dying there.

There was, however, this one golden moment when the centurion uttered his verdict as if it burst from his lips before he fully realized what he was about to say and therefore could not suppress the words.

These words tell us something both about men and about Jesus. They remind us that men, having been made in the image of God, never—however hard and sinful they have been—never lose all capacity to respond to the good, the true, the beautiful—to God.

And the centurion's remark suggests that, more than miracle, or sign, or wonder associated with him, it was Jesus' simple integrity, his unyielding commitment to a will higher than his own, that led men to recognize him, a son of man, as being also Son of God.

PRAYER: Remember, O Lord, those who serve their country on land and sea and in the air; and spur us in the quest for peace among the nations, lest Christ be crucified again by the inhumanities of war. Amen.

For Further Meditation

He promises to all who trust him . . . courage in the struggle for justice and peace.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, *United Church of Christ*

We do not have God here anymore, neither his Son nor the Holy Ghost.

—OLD ANSELMO, an Ernest Hemingway character

I die adoring God, loving my friends, not hating my enemies, and despising superstition.

—VOLTAIRE

The essential is not that we should see things as standing out from God nor as being absorbed in him, but that we should *see things in God*, the things themselves. To apply this to our relations with creatures: only when all relations, uncurtailed, are taken into the one relation, do we set the ring of our life's world around the sun of our being.—MARTIN BUBER

Each exercise of . . . (the Christian's) limited freedom will either glorify or not glorify God: therefore he cannot divorce faith from works, or adoration from ethics.

—EVELYN UNDERHILL

True rewards come all unexpected,
And often on the wings of words.

It is not true that there are many ways to God. There is only one. It is the hallowing of the everyday.

God illumines the world with his wisdom and excites it to the love of himself.—ABELARD

They Gave Him Decent Burial

After this Joseph of Arimathea. . . . Nicodemus also . . . took the body of Jesus. John 19: 38-40. Read John 19: 31-42.

There is a strange and moving irony about the fact that two men who could never bring themselves to come out openly as disciples of our Lord, came together at last to bury him.

They were good men. Joseph is described by Luke (23: 50-51) as "a good and righteous man . . . looking for the kingdom of God." Nicodemus is portrayed as a devout seeker after truth (John 3: 1-12), a just and fair man (John 7: 50-51). Yet Joseph, we are told, was a disciple "but secretly, for fear of the Jews," while the coming of Nicodemus to Jesus "by night" suggests a similar unreadiness to be publicly identified with Jesus.

Both were members of the Sanhedrin, "rulers of the Jews." That is, they were socially prominent, politically powerful, probably of more than ordinary means, and deeply attached to the customs, traditions, and institutions of the past.

They remind us that the common ties of our daily life may press in upon us to weaken our discipleship or stifle its fullest growth.

Yet the names of Joseph and Nicodemus evoke our grateful remembrance, since it was they who assured our Lord's body a decent burial at the hands of friends.

PRAYER: Still our hearts this day, our Father, as we wait between the seeming defeat of the cross and the Easter assurance that life is ever lord of death and love can never lose its own. Amen.

O holy Jesus, Son of the most high God, thou that wast scourged at a pillar, stretched and nailed upon a Cross, for the sins of the world, unite me to thy Cross, and fill my soul with thy holy, humble, and suffering spirit. O Fountain of mercy, thou that didst save the thief upon the cross, save me from the guilt of a sinful life. Thou that didst cast seven devils out of Mary Magdalene, cast out of my heart all evil thoughts and wicked tempers. O Giver of life, thou that didst raise Lazarus from the dead, raise up my soul from the death and darkness of sin. Thou that didst give to thy apostles power over unclean spirits, give me power over my own heart. Thou that didst appear unto thy disciples when the doors were shut, do thou appear unto me in the secret apartment of my heart. Thou that didst cleanse the lepers, heal the sick, and give sight to the blind, cleanse my heart, heal the disorders of my soul, and fill me with heavenly light.—WILLIAM LAW

Grant the infinite distance between a God-man dying for the sins of the world and a man dying because of a man's inhumanity to man; grant that unbridgeable span between voluntarily laying down one's life and having it violently taken away; the latter still derives its value from the former as the coin from the die.—FULTON J. SHEEN

O come, O come, Immanuel, and ransom captive, Wordless Israel.—B. DAVIE NAPIER

Easter Sunday, April 18

Mary Magdalene

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. John 20: 1. Read John 20: 1-18.

It seems especially appropriate that Mary Magdalene should represent the followers of Christ in their joyful response to the assurance of eternal life found in his resurrection.

Comparison of the resurrection stories in the four gospels shows that Mary may have been the first, and alone, to see and talk with the risen Lord. She was one of the devout women who came early to the tomb to anoint his body but found no body there. She was present at the crucifixion and remained until the burial. She was one of the faithful women who had travelled with and ministered to the disciple-band and Jesus.

Her significance as the symbol of our Easter joy rests, however, on one other fact, that out of her Christ had cast "seven demons" (Mark 16: 9, Luke 8: 2), that is, had delivered her out of afflictions which were "of more than ordinary malignity."

Confronting him that resurrection morning, she found confirmed for herself, and serves to remind us, that "eternal life" is not something that begins after death. Rather—and this we celebrate today—eternal life begins when we come under Christ's redeeming influence and, our lives linked with his, goes on unbroken into that age everlasting "when time shall be no more."

PRAYER: Gladden our hearts with the realization that neither life nor death can separate us from thy love and care. Amen.

For Further Meditation

Joy dawned again on Easter Day
The sun shone out with fairer ray
When to their longing eyes restored,
the Apostles saw their risen Lord.

—ANCIENT HYMN (tr. John Neal)

The flame of the first blade is an angel
piercing through the earth to sing "God is
everything!"—EDITH SITWELL

It is only when one loves life and the world
so much that without them everything would
be gone, that one can believe in the resurrec-
tion and a new world.—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

He calls us into his Church . . . to join him
in his passion and victory.

—STATEMENT OF FAITH, *United Church of Christ*

"Mornward!" the angelic watchers say,
"Passed is the sorest trial,
No plot of man can stay
The hand upon the dial;
Night is the dark stem of the lily Day."

—JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

On what do we ground the Christian faith
in God as Creator of heaven and earth? On
the total fact of Jesus Christ, . . . and specifi-
cally on the fact of the resurrection . . . The
Christian faith is that the Day of the Lord
dawned in Jesus, and the validation of that
faith is in the resurrection. Here in this cre-
ated world the rule of God has been vindic-
ated to eyes of faith.³⁰—LESSLIE NEWBIGIN

They must necessarily be new who have
become partakers of the new world.

—CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

QUOTATIONS USED BY PERMISSION

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The author of the left-hand pages is Dr. James E. Wagner, Vice-President of Ursinus College and the last president of the Evangelical and Reformed Church (immediately prior to its uniting with the Congregational and Christian Churches to form the United Church of Christ). These pages, without the supplementary facing pages of quotations, appear also in **DAILY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE**, the regular United Church of Christ adult daily devotional periodical (which is 15 cents singly and 10 cents each for 10 or more copies to one address, available from either of the sources listed on inside front cover).

THE QUOTATIONS:

This is the third year that **THE FELLOWSHIP OF PRAYER** has been doubled in size by the inclusion of facing pages of quotations. Response to this format in 1963 and 1964 justified our faith in people's desire for a deepening in Lenten literature and an extending of Lenten discipline. The quotations have been selected by Willis E. Elliott of the Division of Evangelism.

Besides providing chewy meditational material in its own right, each right hand page is roughly correlated with the devotion facing it. The quotations are chosen for both spiritual and intellectual stimulus, with one eye on historical grounding and the other on contemporary relevance, with the mind on tight logic and the heart on spiritual depth and drive toward Christian action in the world.

Is there a "party line" throughout the quotations? There is not. The aim is to stir the inner wings into flight toward truth rather than to state truth in intellectual propositions and dogmatic formulas. May then the spirit of the reader be not to seize upon error nor even to be seized by truth, but rather to be lifted by the Spirit to fresh vistas of the kingdom and lowered by the same Spirit into new depths of concern for man in his needs and in his halting responses to the holy in the common.

DEAR READER:

May you find here a summons to praise, encouragement to responsible action in your worlds, and the strength to pull with a joyous yoke the load assigned you. The world is both too much and not enough with us. And the Presence with us, and with the world, fails not of sufficient grace.