



Art: *Taste and See* by Sophia Cowell

# Devotion Guide

Created by the Imagine Worship Congregation at St. Bart's  
**Awakened to the Mystery: Sensing God's Presence During Lent**  
2025



**We invite you to make  
this place yours.**

Here is a place that is ancient and new, a faith that we hold going back to Jesus, back to his spiritual ancestors, back to those who walked the earth and found holy ground. And what we do is often based on really ancient patterns—worship and music; loving service to the poor, the hurting, the lonely; working for justice and peace; lively, fearless education and formation of minds and souls. And that faith is also completely contemporary, engaged in the culture and the needs of the moment.

**What we are for**

The dignity and worth of every person. An open minded, passionate commitment to truth. The importance of everyone's own spiritual journey. God's friends wherever we find them. Seeking Christ in every person who comes through the door. The sacredness of life's rites of passage. The value of community. The hard work necessary to make sure that all are welcomed. Telling the truth about life's challenges. A "user-friendly" church experience. Children, youth and families.

**What we are against**

Claiming to have all the answers. Elitism and exclusivism, especially in church. Bigotry for any reason. Authoritarianism. Indifference to injustice and suffering. Certitude in the face of ambiguity and superficial answers to hard questions. Boring sermons, bad music and general cluelessness. (So, God help us, because we don't always avoid these!)

**What we value**

Community, open hearts, open minds, open arms. Faith. Fortitude. Staying current, but equally staying rooted in tradition. Reason and honesty. Civic responsibility as New Yorkers, Americans and global citizens. Debate that allows for mutual respect. Music and beauty for their own sake. Joy in God's creation. Anyone who makes an effort to get to know and follow Jesus.

## **Foreword**

Each year the church is invited to a “Holy Lent” as we embark upon the Way of the Cross, beginning with Ash Wednesday. Each of us brings our own stories to the great story of God’s redemption of the world through Jesus Christ — Our own joys and tears, sorrows and triumphs. Each of us brings our own longing for resurrection. I am so grateful to the members of our community who so vulnerably and faithfully contributed to this collection of meditations as we journey with Jesus to Jerusalem, wherever that might be for you. I hope you will embrace the invitation to consider how your story resonates with the words shared in this offering. I hope you will take up the ancient call to slow down and spend time in scripture, prayers, and self-reflection this Lent — to see, taste, touch, hear, and smell the goodness of God in your life — and then to play your part in sharing the feast of God’s love with a world that hungers and thirsts for good news.

Blessings,

The Rev. Zack Nyein  
Pastor, Imagine Worship

## **Invitation to a Holy Lent**

Dear People of God: The first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them by a season of penitence and fasting. This season of Lent provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when those who, because of notorious sins, had been separated from the body of the faithful were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to the fellowship of the Church. Thereby, the whole congregation was put in mind of the message of pardon and absolution set forth in the Gospel of our Savior, and of the need which all Christians continually have to renew their repentance and faith. I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word. (*The Book of Common Prayer 1979*, pp. 264-65)

## Using this Devotion Guide

Following the assigned readings from the Episcopal Church's lectionary, the Gospel lesson for each week is provided before the meditation. All scripture passages come from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

We encourage you to engage the ancient practice known as *Lectio Divina* or "Divine Reading," whereby Christians listen for the Holy Spirit speaking through the plain words of the scriptures. Read the passage once — aloud if you wish — and then observe a minute or more of silence. Then read the passage a second time, and listen for a word or phrase that stands out to you. Read it a third time and consider how the Gospel is calling you to respond.

At the conclusion of each week there is a piece of art. You may wish to practice a form of *Visio Divina*, or "Divine Seeing." Gaze upon the art for a minute, and hold a minute of silence. Gaze upon it a second minute, and consider a word or phrase that comes to mind. Gaze upon it for a third minute, and consider how the image is calling you to respond in your walk with Christ.

After reading the meditation written by a member of the community, questions are provided for your reflection. You may wish to journal or draw as you respond. Carry the questions with you throughout the week. In this way, we can tap into the ancient practice of *Midrash*, whereby rabbis would make notes, interpolations, and interpretations around the margins of the scriptures, which were regarded as sacred and living texts.

As you wrestle with the questions and hold them in your heart, consider how God is showing up in your life. Consider how you are being called to show up for others, bearing God's love to and for the world.

To find more resources to help you practice a Holy Lent, please visit [stbarts.org/lent](https://stbarts.org/lent) and download our app at [stbarts.org/app](https://stbarts.org/app).



# The First Week in Lent

## Devotion Guide for the Week of Thursday, March 6, 2025

### Imagine Worship Theme

Seeing with the Heart  
(Feeling)

### Gospel Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Jesus said, “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

### Meditation By Kate Moran

The images of pride and ego stick out to me the most in these passages. In the time of social media, so many people do good deeds seemingly only to post them online and receive praise. But if we do good deeds in Christ’s name, with faith, and for His glory, most people won’t even know—because it’s not about recognition here on Earth. Our actions and any good deeds we do should be about honoring God rather than not seeking approval and praise from others. I understand why people crave that praise — I can’t deny the part of me that recognizes that it feels good to be recognized for achievements or good deeds. But as the passage says “...*but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...for where your treasure is there your heart will be also.*” If we try to find meaning in our life through social media, I think we will find that life shallow and meaningless in the end. This passage also reminded me of a misconception I had as a child. To preface, I did not grow up in a Christian household, so I knew very little about Ash Wednesday. When I was in middle school I thought the kids who had the ashes on their

foreheads were sort of “showing off” their religion in some way. Of course, this was my own naivety -- I thought this was some sort of way “to be seen by others”. As I got older and became curious I learned that the imposition of the ashes is completely optional for the faithful. The ashes are there to remind us that we are dust and to dust we shall return. There is no earthly treasure to gain from receiving the ashes.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. When was the last time you caught yourself seeking approval from others? How might shifting your focus toward honoring God change your perspective?

2. What does storing up treasures in heaven mean to you?

### **Practice**

Lent is a season of spiritual realignment, of reorienting ourselves to the way of Jesus. This week, consider asking yourself where your “treasure” is. Where do you spend most of your time, energy, and money? This isn’t to say that all of your treasure needs to go to church *per se*; after all, Jesus himself said to his followers are and ought to be the salt of the world, not that they should stay in the metaphorical saltshaker! But are the ways in which you spend your treasure in line with your deepest values? If, on reflection, you realize that they are not, maybe spend some time journaling or contemplating how you can store up your treasure in God’s “kin-dom” (a phrase coined by Mujerista theologian Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz). Don’t expect an immediate answer, but be prepared: God’s kin-dom has the lovely habit of flourishing in the least expected places in our lives and our world.

## **Prayer**

Our Father in heaven,  
Our loving Mother,  
Parent of us all,

We pray that we might see your kin-dom flourish here while you are growing it, seed by seed.  
Help us to rest in your love, not in the approval we think we can get from others.  
Give us hearts that are quick to listen, swift to give compassion, and hesitant to mete out vengeance.

When we are tempted to measure our worth by numbers and by attention, remind us that you love us, and give us your love freely,  
forever.

May we always recognize that your kin-dom is what is real, here and now, always and forever.  
Amen.

## **Visio Divina**



*Jesus Preaching* by José Trujillo





## The Second Week in Lent

Devotion Guide for the Week of Thursday, March 13, 2025

### Imagine Worship Theme

Listening for the Truth  
(Hearing)

### Gospel Luke 4:1-13

After his baptism, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

### Meditation

By Kate DiTullio

Reflection — 300 words

Jesus had just been baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit, God's life-filled Breath, when that same Spirit led him into the wilderness where he would be tempted by the devil. The wilderness features heavily in Jewish and Christian scriptures. It was there that Moses met God in the form of a burning bush and later received the Ten Commandments; it was in a desolate place that the prophet Elijah encountered God in the form of "a still, small voice", as the KJV puts it. The various forms of "wilderness" we go through differ from Jesus': a life-changing diagnosis. A rejection letter. Mental health challenges. Financial insecurity. Political turmoil. Discrimination and oppression.

One common thread in these wildernesses we face also shows up in the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. When tempting Jesus, the devil said, "*If you are the Son of God...*" more than once. *If you are who God says you are, turn this stone to bread.*

If you are who God says you are, jump off the temple. Jesus, secure in his identity, batted the devil's darts away easily.

We are not always so sure of our status in God's eyes, and the wilderness can prey on our deepest insecurities in ways that often feel unbearable.

But the wilderness holds gifts, too. Like a refining fire, it can burn away the impurities of false beliefs about earning God's love or forgiveness. More than that, God seems to have a tendency to meet her people in the wild, deserted places of our lives.

Jesus overcame the devil's temptations by reminding himself of God's promises and teachings as recorded in scripture. He felt no need to prove himself to the tempter. Secure in God's love for him, satiated in God's presence, he walked the wilderness *with God*.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What forms has "the wilderness" taken in your life? What questions has the wilderness brought up in your heart? (Try sharing them with God.)

2. How has God been with you in these wildernesses?

### **Practice**

This week, spend time meditating on this week's Gospel reading, as well as Psalm 23. What images in these readings feel most resonant to you at this point? Spend some time recording your thoughts and feelings as you ponder how God has provided for you in the desolate places in your life.

## **Prayer**

Jesus,  
Bearer of our burdens,  
Fellow-sufferer,

We confess our doubts freely.  
We sometimes doubt that you love us.  
We often doubt that we can do the work you have called us to do, or that we can even know what that work is.

Give us your courage to believe that we are who God says we are:  
Marvelously created children,  
Whom neither hardship nor distress,  
Persecution nor famine can ever separate from your love.

Give us your strength to resist the temptation to despair,  
for you conquered all the hatred Earth could launch,  
and now you shelter us under your Mother Hen wings.

Make us bold in the face of accusations and our own doubts.  
May we learn how to trust you to provide our every need.

Amen.

## **Visio Divina**



*Temptation in the Wilderness, Briton Rivière, 1898*





# The Third Week in Lent

## Devotion Guide for the Week of Thursday, March 20, 2025

### Imagine Worship Theme

Under Love's Wings  
(Touch)

### Gospel Luke 13:31-35

Some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

### Meditation

By Michael Waterson

Jesus is busy. I guess that's to be expected when you are perfect God on imperfect Earth. Jesus is so busy that he brushes off reports of his imminent peril with little more than a scoff (and some sass?). He's checked his Google calendar, and - Listen! - it is FULL for the next three days. Casting out demons, curing diseases - this is what's important, not some people-proclaimed head of state. Of much greater concern is Jerusalem, that magnificent mess of a city that just cannot, will not, get over itself. Prophets who tell the truth don't stand a chance there. Jesus won't stand a chance there.

But what of *it*? Jesus has a divine mission, and even though it will lead Him right back into the heart of that prophet-killing machine, nothing can stop Him. So He soldiers on, busy being Son of God and mother hen. Healer of bent backs and broken hearts. Teacher of hard truths and bringer of the best Good News.

And what of *you*? What are you busy doing? Filling the hours of this precious life with distraction and seeking what cannot satisfy - or with healing wounds and casting out evil?

And what of *us*? Will our cities continue to fight against their best interests, running roughshod over others to fulfill the desire of self? Or can we find a way to bring the Kingdom that Jesus is so busy trying to expose into full, clear reality? A Kingdom as uplifting as yeast in

a batch of dough and mysterious as seeds turning into shade. A Kingdom that can be present here and now in this weary, terrifying, beautiful world.

**Questions for Reflection**

- 1. If you took stock of what filled your time, what would you find yourself busy with?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2. What would a Lenten calendar tuned toward Jesus look like?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3. This Lent, how will you make your communities more like the Kingdom of God?

**Practice**

This week, notice the ways you spend your time, especially any free time you may have. Is there space for a spiritual practice to slip in to your schedule? Perhaps you can pray after waking up and before going to bed. Maybe you want to read a chapter of the Bible in the afternoon. Or maybe you feel a tug to give sacrificially of your time, talent, or treasure to those who need your gift. Whatever you decide to introduce this week, keep it small—for now. The Kingdom of Heaven begins as a tiny mustard seed in one of Jesus' parables, remember. If God chooses to work in this way to build God's Kin-dom, we can rest in the wisdom of God's ways as we follow our Creator's example.

## Prayer

Jesus,  
Mother Hen,  
Teacher of Hard Truths,  
Help us, we pray.

Heal our wayward hearts, which try to find rest in anything but that which will ease our wearied souls.

Tend to our wounded souls, which balk at accepting your Good News call to turn away from death and turn towards your Life.

Break our warped systems, with which we destroy your good creative work in ourselves, in our world, and in our neighbors.

Holy Jesus,  
Our Prophet, Priest, and only King,  
Help us, we pray.  
Amen.

## Visio Divina



Mosaic art at Dominus Flevit Church in Jerusalem





## The Fourth Week in Lent

### Devotion Guide for the Week of Thursday, March 27, 2025

#### Imagine Worship Theme

Turning Our Eyes to God  
(Sight)

#### Gospel Luke 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them — do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.” Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

#### Meditation By Brooks Ishler

This text is one of the most important in the New Testament for addressing the problem of unjustified suffering. Jesus is directly refuting a view that is held by many about God, both in his time and in ours today: that all events should be interpreted as divine justice, that God is the direct cause of tragedy. You may be familiar with the saying “everything happens for a reason.” Here, Jesus is wrestling with this understanding of God and offering a different approach to reconciliation with suffering.

In this passage, Jesus responds to two different events: the execution of a group of Galileans by Pontius Pilate and the collapse of the Tower of Siloam. Jesus essentially asks whether the people who fell victim to these events deserved it. His definitive answer is no. Jesus directly refutes the claim that God caused these events for the purpose of divine justice.

So, what then do we make of tragedy? Jesus does not offer an explanation as to why Pilate committed those atrocities or why the tower fell. Rather, he calls for repentance, focusing on our response to suffering instead of its causes. For whatever reason, life is short, and we should focus on leading good lives in the here and now. The enigmatic Parable of the Fig Tree emphasizes this point. It illustrates God's patience and mercy in allowing us the time for

personal growth. But perhaps in the end, like the fig tree, we too may be cut down. It is best to bear fruit while we can.

We may never know why God allows suffering, but Jesus is clear that tragedy certainly doesn't occur because God is punishing his people. This passage calls us to focus on the way we live rather than on any divine cause of our pain.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. How have you wrestled with what C.S. Lewis termed “the problem of pain” in your own life?

2. How does Jesus' rejection of the idea of God as Heavenly Punisher challenge us today?

3. How can contemplating Jesus' solidarity with humanity — living as one of us, loving the ones surrounding him, dying under an oppressive empire of human making — shift our perspective on “the problem of pain”?

## **Practice**

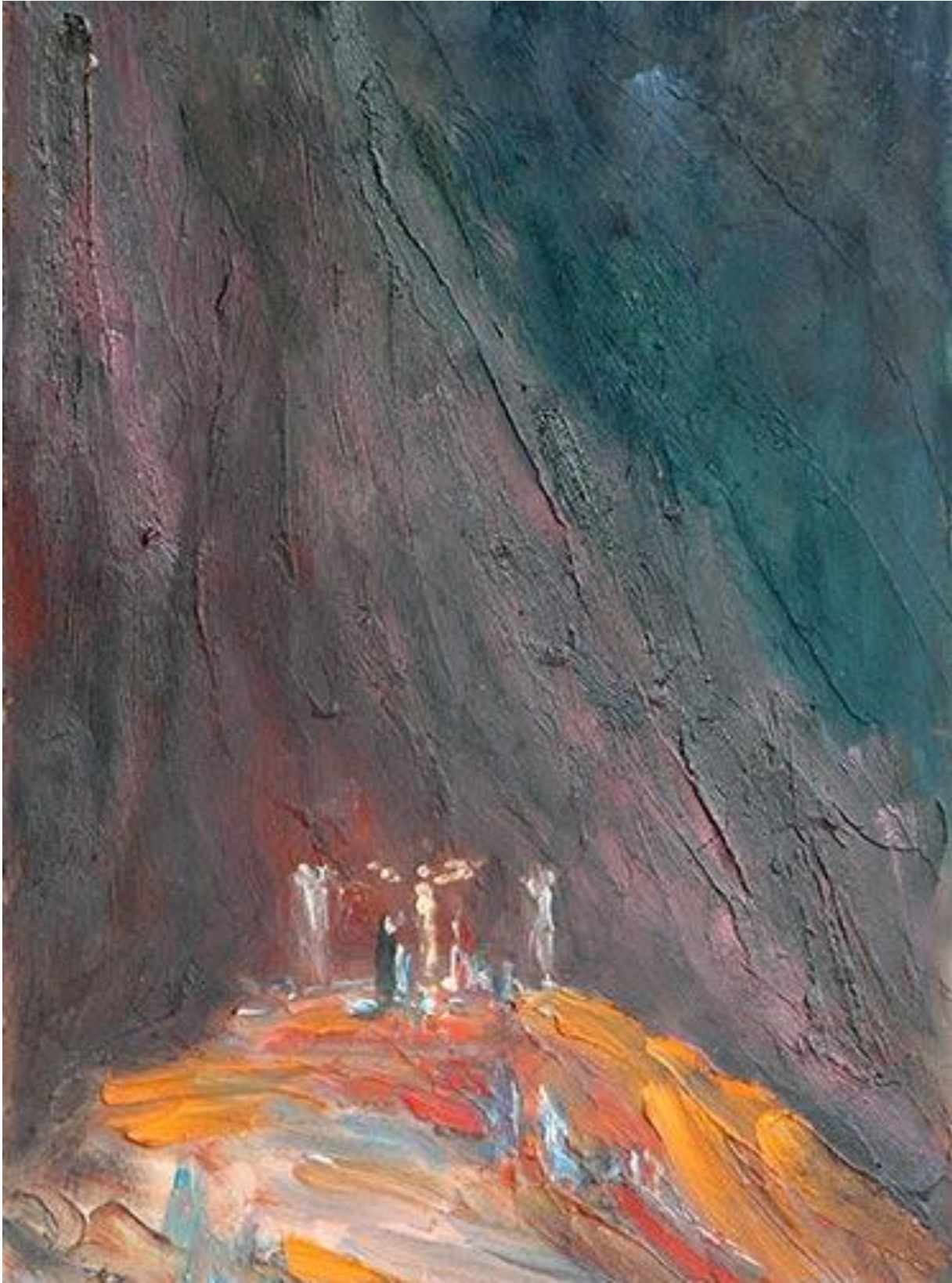
In his 1983 book *Now and Then*, theologian and writer Frederick Buechner wrote, “Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.” This week, try “listening to your life”, as Buechner suggests. This might take the form of eating one meal mindfully, noticing how each bite tastes and how you feel as you eat. It might look like meditating or listening to a piece of music that moves you—with no other distractions, as much as you can help it. Notice how you feel in these moments. Practice being curious about how God might be speaking “in the boredom and pain” as well as “in the excitement and the gladness” of your life this week.

## **Prayer**

By The Rev. Lizzie McManus-Dail, *God Didn't Make Us to Hate Us*, pp. 169-170

Wounded Healer,  
who has wept and walked where we walked,  
who sees what no one else sees,  
who laments what we cannot even name—  
thank You for seeing. For knowing. For being.  
Be with us in the great despair.  
Show us the contours of the pit because You have been there, too,  
and when we are ready  
(or maybe when we think we're not),  
show us how to climb up,  
with shaking limbs and all.  
For You are the redeemer of the lost,  
and the healer of the broken,  
and the One who shows us that life is worthwhile, even with holes in the story.  
Amen.

**Visio Divina**



*Cosmic Mourning* by Joesph Matar



## The Fifth Week in Lent

### Devotion Guide for the Week of Thursday, April 3, 2025

#### Imagine Worship Theme

Feasting on Grace

(Taste)

#### Gospel Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So Jesus told them this parable: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe--the best one--and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"



**Meditation** By Kate DiTullio

What makes us worthy? For the religious leaders of Jesus' day, it sure didn't look like welcoming known sinners and eating with them. They might have nodded in solidarity with the older son in Jesus' parable who exploded at his father: "...when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" What the older son said about his brother was true. But his impression of his own worth in his father's eyes? That was not true. Both sons in this parable told themselves stories about their father based on the sons' fears about their worth. The younger Prodigal son—the one who demanded his inheritance early, blew through it all in the first century Palestinian equivalent of Vegas, and came to the point of starvation before deciding to try crawling back to his father's household as a servant—he told himself the story that he was "no longer worthy to be called [his father's] son". The older son—the one who worked day and night for his father and "never disobeyed [his] command"—he told himself the story that his father valued him only for what he did. Neither son could conceive the reality that his father simply loved him.

We probably can see ourselves in one or both of these sons. Accepting that God loves us simply and purely, *right now*, can be a difficult story to believe when we've heard so many other stories telling us otherwise. And yet it's true. God runs to embrace us the minute we decide to try our luck with God because we have nowhere else to go. God listens to our rage and tells us that we are God's beloved child, always. No untrue story can erase our beloved, priceless state in God's eyes.

**Questions for Reflection**

1. There are three stories here: the younger brother's, the older brother's, and the father's. Does one or more of these stories resonate with you? Why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What stories have you been told (by yourself or others) that keep you from accepting your beloved, priceless status in God's eyes?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What emotions do you feel when you imagine a God who loves you, entirely and completely?

## **Practice**

It can be difficult to rest in God's love. This week, try to dedicate some time for activities that typically put your heart and mind at ease. The goal is not to try to force a "mountaintop" spiritual experience, but rather to practice resting, maybe even to practice contemplation. If you have a busy schedule, try listening to music that calms you on your commute or when you're getting ready for bed in the evening. You might be able to go for a walk in a peaceful area, or have a leisurely conversation with a trusted friend. Rest might look like engaging in a creative practice such as writing, making music, working with clay, creating visual art, or dancing. Rest might involve playing with any pets or children in your circles. In short, try to find ways to delight in God's good creation (which certainly encompasses you!) this week.

## **Prayer**

By The Rev. Lizzie McManus-Dail, *God Didn't Make Us to Hate Us*, pp. 14-15

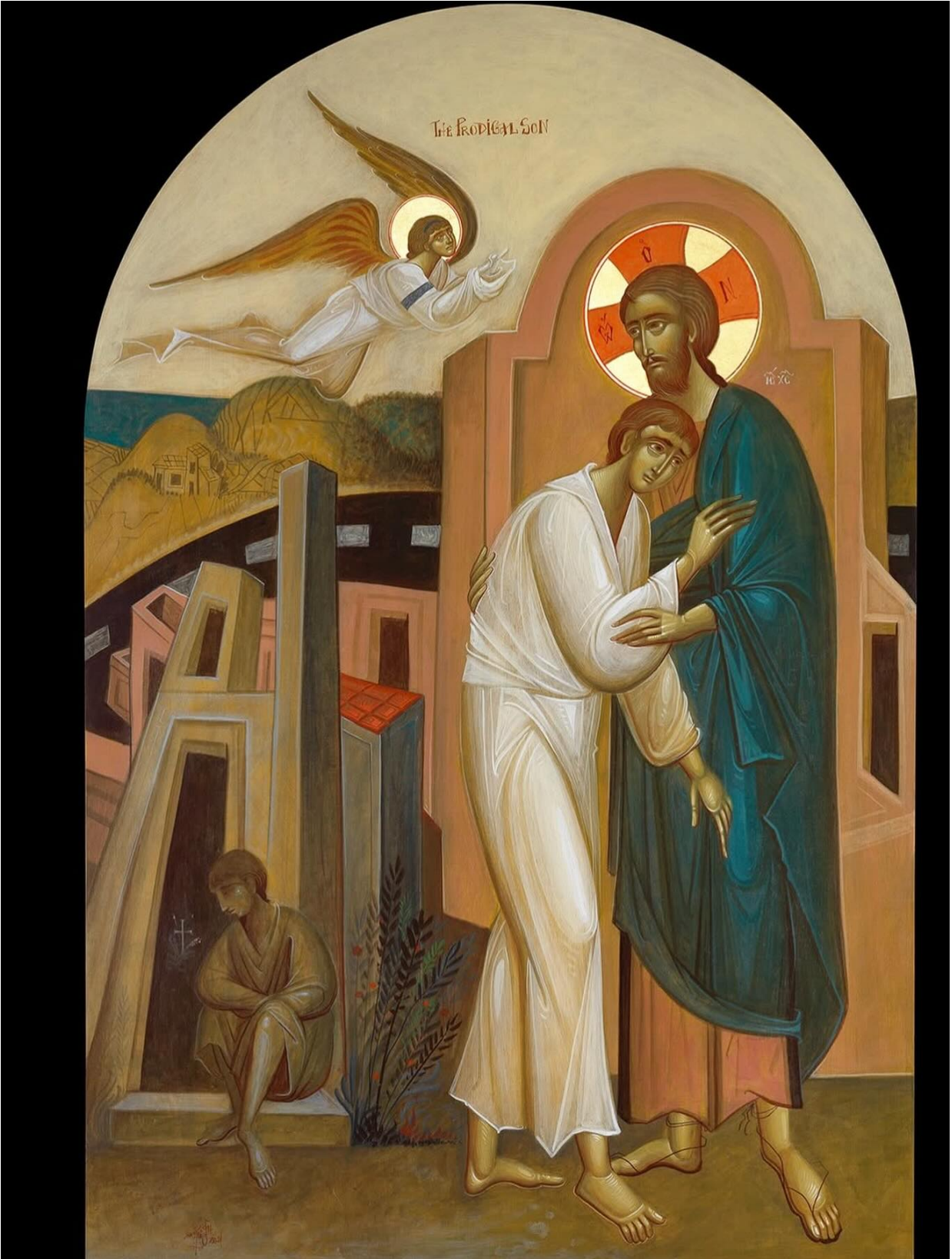
Lover of souls,  
You have wrapped us in Your infinite affection.  
From our unremembered infancy to the moments that weigh us down now,  
You have always loved us,  
completely.

When we feel like love is a scarcity to be measured,  
doled out in small sums, to keep the lock on our hearts securely fastened,  
unfurl our fingers in the way only You can  
and remind us that Your love is not counted in cups or days,  
but in the infinite, borderless expanse  
of all the rooms, in all the universe,  
and more.

And when we feel like we have no love left to spare,  
draw us to collapse in Your arms,  
kiss our foreheads,  
and remind us:  
Your love can bear all things, even when we cannot.

Author of Love, who believes and hopes and endures,  
Hold us now, and evermore.

Amen.



*The Return of the Prodigal Son* by George Kordis (installed at Yale Divinity School Library in February 2025)

## The Sixth Week in Lent

### Devotion Guide for the Week of Thursday, April 10, 2025

#### Imagine Worship Theme

Breathing in Love  
(Smell)

#### Gospel John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

#### Meditation By Carlos Santiago

The scene of Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus, anointing Jesus with an expensive perfume made of nard is powerful. For one, Mary and her family were poor. Her willingness to use such an expensive item for Jesus speaks volumes, as most people would hesitate to part with their valuable possessions, especially when they don't have many to begin with. Judas's reaction—suggesting the perfume should have been sold to help the poor—implies that Mary was being wasteful. However, Judas's words were not genuine. His selfishness, driven by his desire for money, reveals his human flaws, contrasting with the godliness Jesus exemplifies. Judas's actions remind us of the tendency in all of us to misunderstand and act out of self-interest.

Mary's use of the perfume can also be seen as an act of preparation for Jesus' death. The Greek word for "nard", *pistikos*, means pure, trustworthy, and genuine. By anointing Jesus, Mary demonstrated her deep trust in Him. She was offering her most precious possession, symbolizing her faith and hope that the fragrance would reach heaven, much like a prayer. By anointing Jesus' feet, she humbled herself, serving Him in a deeply personal way. This act calls us to use our own bodies and lives as offerings to God—sacrificing what we value to serve Jesus. Mary's actions remind us that genuine worship requires humility, trust, and a willingness to give our best, no matter the cost.

## **Questions for Reflection**

1. What are some valuable things in your life (money, time, or possessions) that you're willing to sacrifice in order to serve Jesus?
  
2. In what ways have you noticed human tendencies, like those of Judas, that have led you away from fully embracing God's call for you to be your best self for your community?

## **Practice**

Lent is traditionally a season when Christians abstain from something we enjoy (the spiritual practice of fasting), or when we invest more deeply in another spiritual practice. Any spiritual practice, whether it be fasting from food or praying every hour for a few moments, involves an element of sacrifice. Maybe you have given up or added something during Lent. If so, try journaling about what your fast has taught you so far this season.

Regardless of how you have engaged with Lent this year, spend a few quiet moments with yourself and God. Reflect on the ways you have noticed God's loving presence, fragrant as perfume in the air, in the past several weeks. Is there any way you can practice being that loving presence for yourself and for others?

## **Prayer**

Holy God,  
Lover of all that has been created,  
Holy and Mighty One,

We delight in Your extravagant love for us all, which saturates the atmosphere around us like precious perfume.

We thank You for Your everlasting mercy for us all, which shatters our illusions of perfection and hierarchy.

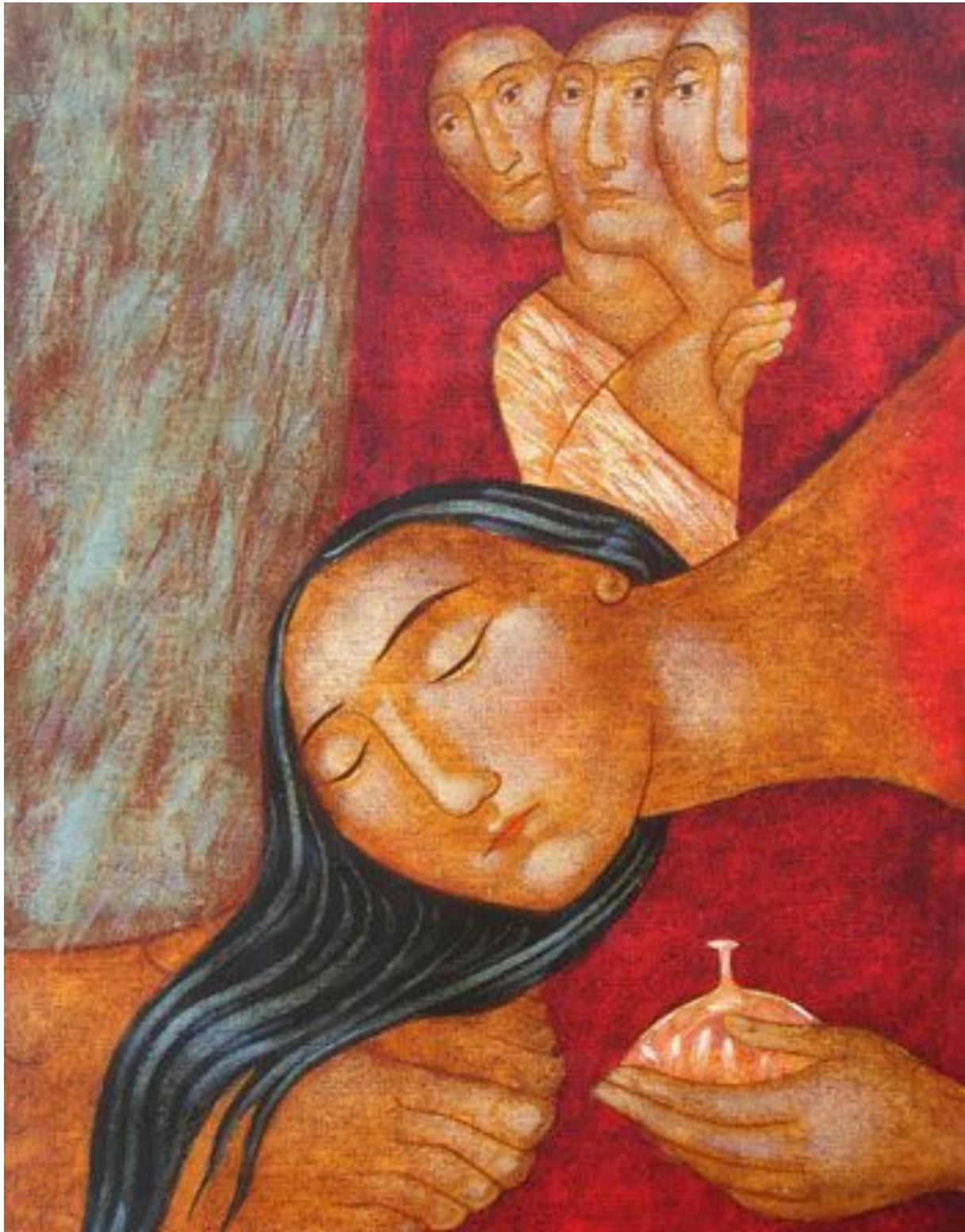
Help us to accept and rest in our beloved state of being.

Teach us to love others with the same affectionate, honoring, sacrificial love that Jesus taught us on Earth and gives freely now.

In the name of the One who created, loves, and keeps us all,  
Amen.



**Visio Divina**



*The Anointing of Christ* by Julia Stankova, 2009





**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH**

**TRANSFORMING LIVES :: TRANSFORMING THE CHURCH :: TRANSFORMING THE WORLD**

325 PARK AVENUE AT 51ST STREET, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10022  
212-378-0222 :: [CENTRAL@STBARTS.ORG](mailto:CENTRAL@STBARTS.ORG)



[@STBARTSNYC](#)

[STBARTS.ORG](http://STBARTS.ORG)