

LENT and **LABELS ARE FOR JARS™**

This Lent, you are invited to participate in **Labels Are For Jars**, an effort to help feed hungry people in Lawrence, MA. **Labels Are For Jars** offers this daily guide for Lenten reflections, as well as a unique opportunity to help feed some of our neediest brothers and sisters through our Lenten almsgiving.

LENT

Lent, the period of weeks leading up to Holy Week and Easter, is a unique gift from God. During Lent, we are invited to renew our relationships with God, turn away from sin, and experience reconciliation with God and others.

We traditionally embrace three disciplines during Lent: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. None of these is an end in itself. Instead, each discipline helps us better focus on God and on living God's love.

PRAYER

The goal of Lenten prayer is to dedicate more of ourselves to building our relationships with God. To make best use of this **Labels Are For Jars Lent Guide**, you are invited to set aside some period of time each day during Lent (perhaps half an hour) to communicate with God through reflective prayer. Each day, you are invited to read in your bible the Gospel passage listed in this guide, and then to consider the reflections and questions for the day. You might want to keep notes of your reflections each day.

FASTING

Through fasting, we recall that God gives us all the gifts we have in life - not just food, but breath, health, speech, thought, love, and every material good. By choosing to deny ourselves some food during Lent, we gain a better perspective on all of the material blessings God gives to us. In addition to observing the Lenten fasting regulations of the Church, each of us chooses particular ways to fast during Lent.

ALMSGIVING

Almsgiving is our sharing the best of our treasure with people who are in need. All that we are and all that we have are gifts from God. It is tempting to grasp those gifts for ourselves, without considering God or other people. When we sacrifice our gifts for people in need, we become better focused on God and others. We grow closer to God and all of our brothers and sisters by living God's generous love.

Labels Are For Jars is a fantastic focus for Lenten almsgiving. **Labels Are For Jars** raises money to help feed hungry people in Lawrence, MA. In Lawrence today, 75% of children are at risk for hunger. **Labels Are For Jars** raises money to provide food for hungry people in Lawrence through the Cor Unum Meal Center. Cor Unum provides free hot meals to hundreds of people every day, 365 days a year. **100% of the alms you contribute to Labels Are For Jars during Lent will help provide food through Cor Unum.**

To participate in the Labels Are For Jars Lenten program, all you need is an open heart, the desire to grow in the Lord, and a jar.

ASH WEDNESDAY and LABELS ARE FOR JARS™

Wednesday, 2/6 (Ash Wednesday): Matthew 6.1-6, 16-18

During Lent, we will ask ourselves many important questions. The most important questions of Lent ultimately are, "Do you reject Satan? And all his works? And all his empty promises? Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth? Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?" The reason these are ultimately Lent's most important questions is that they are the questions we are asked when we are baptized, and that we will again be asked this Easter. During Lent, we have the opportunity of honestly exploring with God the extent to which we are living as Christians, the possibilities for our turning away from sin, and the ways we might become more faithful to the Gospel. How do you feel about this? Today's passage from Matthew 6 reminds us that our intentions and motivations are critically important. Spend some time today speaking with God. Why are you observing Lent this year? What are your motivations, and what are your intentions?

ALMSGIVING!

To begin Lent, put a Labels Lent Jar wrapper on an empty jar. Place your Labels Lent Jar in a location that is very visible to you, and each day during Lent place in it an amount of money that will be a reasonable daily sacrifice for you. Your sacrifice will help feed some of the neediest of our brothers and sisters through the Cor Unum Meal Center.

Thursday, 2/7: Luke 9.22-25

In today's passage, Jesus explains to His disciples that "The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised." This is not what Jesus' first disciples initially expect from him. They expect greatness and glory, not a passion. Jesus' first disciples also do not nearly understand what Jesus assures them about themselves: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." To truly be a Christian, one must freely choose to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God. One must freely choose to follow His way. One must freely choose to enter into the passion involved in following the way of Jesus, with whatever daily crosses that involves. Just as it was for Jesus' first disciples, it may be difficult for us to let go of our expectations of who we think Jesus should be. It may be difficult for us to accept real Christianity, rather than our personal version of Christianity. During Lent, are you open to moving beyond your possibly narrow expectations of Jesus, and being more open to His actual expectations of you? Are you willing to consider life as He explains it to you, rather than as you might like it to be? Are you open to the possibility that your life is meant to be a passion of living the way of Jesus Christ? Talk to Jesus about this.

Friday, 2/8: Matthew 9.14-15

Fasting as a spiritual exercise is a means for growing closer to God. When Jesus explains to people in today's reading why His disciples don't fast, he is actually telling them that there is no need for them to fast to grow closer to God, since God is fully among them in Jesus. As Christians, we fast - as Jesus says his later disciples will - as a way of tangibly expressing our love to God, as a means for focusing better in prayer, and as an instrument for helping us recall that all the good we have comes from God. Particularly in Western society, fasting may also help us come to terms with our excesses in the consumption of food and drink, alcohol, and drugs. For many of us, our consumption of food and drink, alcohol, and drugs draws us away from the vibrant relationships we are meant to have with God, those whom we love, our neighbors, and ourselves. During this Lenten season, how do you plan to fast? More importantly, why do you plan to fast? Your intentions have much to do with fasting's rewards.

Saturday, 2/9: Luke 5.27-32

In today's passage from Luke 5, Jesus sees a tax collector (a disreputable profession in Jesus' time and place) named Levi sitting at the customs post, and says to him, "Follow me." Levi leaves everything behind, follows Jesus, and welcomes Jesus into his home for a banquet with tax collectors and others. Levi hears some religious leaders criticize Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners, and he hears Jesus reply that "Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners." During Lent, Jesus through the Holy Spirit invites you to follow Him, and accepts your welcoming Him into your home. Jesus is not

expecting you to be healthy, but for you to need a physician. If Levi invites Jesus to enter his home but doesn't spend focused time with Jesus, Levi will not grow in his relationship with Jesus, and he won't experience the spiritual healing Jesus want to give him. One of the central ways you are able to spend focused time with Jesus in your home is to dedicate time each day during Lent to communicating with Him in prayer. Do you want to do this during Lent? What are your specific plans for daily prayer time with Jesus during Lent? How will you protect these plans when they are challenged by the circumstances of your life?

THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT AND

LABELS ARE FOR JARS™

Sunday, 2/10: Matthew 4.1-11

Today's reading shows us three critical temptations from the devil that Jesus experiences: (1) to seek what he needs or wants apart from the will of His Father, (2) to test the Father to prove that His promises are true, and (3) to receive all the power of the world on the devil's terms, not His Father's. These are fundamental temptations for people of all times - to live life apart from the will of God. When you recognize your failures in relation to these temptations in your own life, you are on the right track in understanding your sin. When you recognize your successes in staying true to God in relation to these temptations in your own life, you are on the right track in understanding your holiness. How do you recognize these temptations, and how you respond to them, in your day-to-day life?

ALMSGIVING!

During the past few days, you hopefully have figured out how you will fast during Lent. This week, calculate the cost of the food from which you are fasting during Lent, and add that to your Labels jar. By doing this, you are both offering your fast to God and directly offering the equivalent of what you would have eaten to help feed the hungry through Labels. Also this week, consider spending some time on www.labelsareforjars.org learning the details of our project, so you can explain it to other people.

Monday, 2/11: Matthew 25.31-46

In Matthew 25, Jesus directly explains what determines the course of our lives, both every day on this earth and eternally. With the complete freedom God has given us, we choose daily whether to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to welcome the stranger, to clothe the naked, to care for the ill, to visit the prisoner. Our daily fulfillment and eternal life depend entirely on the choices we make to sacrificially love or not sacrificially love other people, especially the least of our brothers and sisters. No misfortune, illness, mystery, question, or other person can block our ability to sacrificially love - and therefore our ability to be happy and to live eternally. In fact, the only realities that can block us on the path of earthly fulfillment and eternal life are our choices to not sacrificially love, especially our choices regarding the least of our brothers and sisters. How do you react to this flat-out truth?

Tuesday, 2/12: Matthew 6.7-15

In the Lord's prayer, Jesus instructs us to ask God our Father, "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. . . ." Many times, it be easier if we could ignore the second half of that line. Could God's forgiveness really be limited by the extent to which we forgive others? Jesus' next words in Matthew 6 addresses that question: "If you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions." Perhaps without delving at this time into a deep analysis of your thoughts and feelings about this passage, do you accept that these are the words of the Son of God?

Wednesday, 2/13: Luke 11.29-32

Many of the people who first encounter Jesus expect Him to perform certain signs - perhaps miracles, healings, wonders - in order to prove to them that He is really God's instrument. Jesus directly tells these people that the only sign they will be given is His word - His call to change their lives and to follow Him. To know who Jesus is, these people must choose to listen to Him and actually put into practice His way of love. This is the truth in every generation. Many of us wish Jesus would perform this or that sign to prove to us who He is, and sometimes we even demand that He do so.

Unfortunately, that perspective is essentially self-focused, and will never lead to knowing the Lord. Are there ways that you expect Jesus to do certain things or perform certain signs in order for you to believe or grow in Him? How do you react to the proposition that this will get you nowhere?

Thursday, 2/14: Matthew 7.7-12

Jesus assures His disciples that God our Father gives good things to whomever asks Him. He states that "everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." What Jesus does not say is that God our Father gives good things according to the expectations, hopes, demands, or timelines of anyone other than Himself. To what extent are you open to the fact that God loves you much more than you love yourself, uniquely knows what is good for you, and gives you all the good you need, according to His own will? How do you react to the truth that the greatest good you receive from your asking, seeking, and knocking is the development of your relationship with God, rather than the immediate reception of the particular good you seek?

Friday, 2/15: Matthew 5.20-26

Many of the readings on which we have reflected in these first days of Lent have pushed us to consider how open we are to the true and full word of God revealed to us by Jesus, and how much we are more comfortable with some different version of His word. If you are at least somewhat open to the fullness of Jesus' truth, are you willing to fully consider His words in today's passage from Matthew 5? Jesus says that his disciples must live and love more deeply and honestly than some religious leaders around them, who have a personalized, limited version of God's love. Jesus says that His disciples' inner actions, not just their major external actions, matter. He says that His disciples are accountable before God for all of their actions - external and internal. Jesus then gets to a direct challenge: "If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift." In your prayer today, could you open yourself enough before God to honestly respond to these words from Jesus? If so, will you name before God the people who have things against you? Are you willing to go and be reconciled with them straightaway? If not, why not?

Saturday, 2/16: Matthew 5.43-48

Jesus acknowledges the natural human inclination to live limited, reciprocal love - if a person loves me, I love that person. Jesus is direct in stating the value of reciprocal love: it is nothing - it is the love of sinners. Jesus tells His disciples how to live true, full love: ". . . love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. . . ." Jesus makes it clear that, in a sinful world, anyone who lives a good and holy life is guaranteed to have enemies, since goodness and holiness will always be actively opposed. It is also possible to have enemies for reasons other than living a good and holy life. So, to begin a reflection on what turns out to be the heart of Christian life, who are your enemies? For what reasons are they your enemies? How do they treat you? How do you treat them?

THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT AND LABELS ARE FOR JARS™

Sunday, 2/17: Matthew 17.1-9

In Matthew's account of the transfiguration of Jesus, His disciples see Him in His glory. They hear the voice of God the Father tell them, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him." This is the most astonishingly direct revelation of the truth. God makes completely clear that Jesus is His Son, and makes completely clear what the disciples are called to do with their lives - listen to Jesus. At this point in Lent, how does the account of the transfiguration resonate with you? How is Lent going for you to this point?

ALMSGIVING!

Most of the people who are helping feed the hungry through Labels Are For Jars have heard about the project by word-of-mouth. This week, consider ways you might help expand the number of people sacrificing to help feed the hungry by choosing a specific time and place (better yet, times and places) to wear your Labels shirt telling other people about the project and encouraging them to get involved in Labels. For inspiration and images, you might visit the website of the Cor Unum Meal Center, www.corunummealcenter.org.

Monday, 2/18: Luke 6.36-38

Jesus continually teaches His disciples how to recognize what is wrong, unjust, sinful, and evil in themselves and other people. He continually teaches His disciples to address and strive to change these realities. At the same time, Jesus strictly warns His disciples not to confuse themselves with God. While they are to recognize and work to change sin in the world, Jesus' disciples are not to presume for themselves what belongs to God alone - the judgment and condemnation of people on the deepest level. They are not to judge, condemn, and withhold forgiveness. How do you cross the line from recognizing and rejecting others' sins to judging, condemning, and withholding forgiveness from other people?

Tuesday, 2/19: Matthew 23.1-12

Jesus points out to His disciples certain religious leaders who preach the truth but do nothing to help people live the truth. Such behavior is entirely unlike God, who both reveals the truth and continually helps us to understand and live the truth. In what ways do you speak the truth, and perhaps criticize others for not living the truth, but do not reach out to others to help them live the truth? A principal way we know we are living the love of Christ is that we humbly serve the specific people whose limitations we most clearly recognize.

Wednesday, 2/20: Matthew 20.17-28

Jesus recognizes His disciples' desire for greatness. He tells them, ". . . whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave." If you have been pursuing serious spiritual reflection during Lent, you have surely by now gained insights into areas in which you are called to be a more faithful Christian, and areas in which you are called to turn away from sin. Today, for one or more of those insights, consider prayerfully how you might take specific action to live more as Christ's servant for others. (For example, if yesterday you had insight that you are sinfully judgmental of your neighbor, you might reflect on specific actions you could take to live as Christ's servant in that neighbor's life.)

Thursday, 2/21: Luke 16.19-31

Perhaps the key figures in today's parable are the dogs. The dogs have the natural inclination to lick Lazarus' sores. The rich man is so distant from the love of God and his fellow human beings that he does not even extend to Lazarus the care that is naturally offered to Lazarus by the dogs. The message of the parable, and of Christianity, is not that the rich man must give a certain amount of money to Lazarus. The message of the parable, and of Christianity, is not that the rich man must do a certain number of good works for Lazarus. The message of the parable, and of Christianity, is not that the rich man is supposed to sell all he has and move to Calcutta. The message of the parable is that the rich man has the ability and freedom to live some amount of compassionate love with Lazarus (perhaps feed him, give him drink, clothe him, welcome him, care for him), but chooses to not extend to Lazarus even the care that is naturally offered by dogs. Jesus states clearly that there are life-long and eternal consequences that result from the rich man's free choices. As suggested in the parable, even Jesus' rising from the dead has not convinced people of the truth of what love and justice are. Conviction only comes through practice. How do you react to this very strong parable?

Friday, 2/22: Matthew 21.33-43, 45-46

In today's parable, the tenants are treated fairly by the landowner. They agree to give the landowner a portion of the produce of the vineyard as payment for their use of his land. However, the tenants want all of the produce for themselves. They violently reject, and even kill, the landowner's representatives when they come to collect the produce that is in justice owed to him. Jesus' listeners understand that the landowner will severely punish these tenants and turn over the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him the produce at the proper times. God gives us all the important gifts we have in life. God reveals through Christ how He expects us to use our gifts. God makes clear that He holds us accountable for our acceptance or rejection of His ways. However, we may want to grasp all of our gifts for ourselves, without reference to God or others. We may very strongly or even violently reject the truth that God would ever punish us for our free choices to reject His ways. How do you relate to this?

Saturday, 2/23: Luke 15.1-3, 11-32

In today's parable, the father represents God our Father. Through the parable, Jesus offers a profound revelation of how God our Father responds to any of His children who is truly sorry for his/her sin. Spend some time with the details Jesus gives about the prodigal son. What does this tell you about the nature of true repentance for sin? Take a careful look at the details Jesus offers about the father's perspectives, reactions, and agenda - including his interactions with his other

son. What does this tell you about the nature of God the Father's response to truly repentant sinners? How does all of this make you feel?

THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT AND



Sunday, 2/24: John 4.5-42

The woman in this passage is considered an important model of a person who has a powerful, real, important relationship with Jesus Christ. What details about the woman are given to us in the passage? What are her limitations? What about her is positively important for us to note?

It might be good to spend a little time today assessing where you stand vis-à-vis the continuing observance of Lent. It turns out that the daily scripture passages really challenge us to examine how we live as Christians. This may not be easy to do day after day. It may have seemed easier to make a commitment to turning away from sin and growing in faithfulness to the Gospel on Ash Wednesday that it does two and a half weeks later. At the beginning of Lent, we were reminded that our motivations and intentions would be critically important for experiencing the depth of Lent. As you enter the Third Week of Lent, what is your commitment to living deeply this season? What are your motivations and intentions today?

ALMSGIVING!

In many cases, the economically poor and hungry must begin order to live. Your almsgiving through Labels this Lent makes it possible for more people to be given the food they need - not to have to beg for it. This week, would you be willing to stand in for your hungry brothers and sisters by asking some of your family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers to make contributions to your Labels jar? How could this be done creatively?

Monday, 2/25: Luke 4.24-30

Even if we are familiar with today's passage from Luke, it may still amaze us. When Jesus tells some of His neighbors that people have often violently rejected the truth when it has been spoken by those closest to them, Jesus' neighbors attempt to kill Him. If we are honest, we should be able to recall experiences in our personal histories when we rejected God's truth when it was spoken to us by close family and friends. Can you honestly recognize ways you might be doing this today?

Tuesday, 2/26: Matthew 18.21-35

Last Saturday, you reflected on the complete, eager, joyful, grudge-less forgiveness that God the Father has for every repentant sinner. Recall for a moment how you feel about the truth that God is one hundred percent eager for every sinner to experience His all-embracing forgiveness. Jesus' parable in today's passage from Matthew presents a realistic picture of a person who receives compassionate, life-saving forgiveness, but then refuses to forgive a much smaller debt owed to him. Perhaps considering some of the people whom you currently refuse to forgive, speak with God about how you react and relate to the unforgiving servant in today's parable.

Wednesday, 2/27: Matthew 5.17-19

In today's passage from Matthew 5, Jesus warns against teaching others to break the commandments. Who is guilty of teaching others to break the commandments? All of us are guilty. In our sinful words and actions, we all teach others how to sin. Spend some time today reflecting on the ways you teach others to sin. How do you feel about this reality? How do you react to Jesus' words that "whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven"?

Thursday, 2/28: Luke 11.14-23

When some people make the ridiculous assertion that Jesus casts out demons by the power of the devil, He offers them a logical explanation of the truth. The scripture does not report whether Jesus' opponents listen to His explanation, open their minds to logical truth, or even care about what Jesus says to them. What the scripture reports is that the Son of God responds to the statement of what is false by clearly stating what is true. In our relationships, families, communities, and world, we too often choose not to speak and explain God's truth in the face of what is false and wrong. Very often, this is because we fear others' reactions, especially their hostility. How do you back away from

speaking and explaining God's truth to other people? What are examples of your speaking and explaining God's truth to hostile listeners in the last three months?

Friday, 2/29: Mark 12.28-34

Jesus tells one of the scribes that the greatest commandments are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. When the scribe tells Jesus that he agrees with Him, Jesus recognizes that the man understands His words. The scribe's understanding, to which Jesus responds so positively, is probably not a merely intellectual understanding, but understanding deep in his soul. During the first three weeks of Lent, have you experienced any increase of understanding about God and Christian life deep in your soul? Talk to Jesus about this.

Saturday, 3/1: Luke 18.9-14

Luke says that Jesus addresses today's parable to those who are convinced of their own righteousness and despise everyone else. Because that description seems extreme, very few of us might immediately associate it with ourselves. However, when we hear the parable, there may be ways that we can personally relate to the perspective and attitude of the Pharisee. Do you?

THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT AND



Sunday, 3/2: John 9.1-41

In today's passage from John 9, a man who has been blind since birth is miraculously made able to see by Jesus. The formerly blind man almost immediately faces misunderstanding, callousness, cruel accusations, and disloyalty from people around him. As he reacts to a barrage of trouble from neighbors, enemies of Jesus, and his own family, the formerly blind man actually becomes more bold and stronger in his responses. In the end, the man finds himself alone with Jesus, Who gives him an extraordinary gift. During Lent, have you found yourself becoming more positively bold and strong in relation to your faith? How?

ALMSGIVING!

If you have been pursuing the almsgiving possibilities offered during the past weeks, you are doing much to grow in union with God and to be more connected daily with your brothers and sisters in need. This week, consider whether there are other material areas of your life that you might like to redirect toward doing God's work for the poor. If those areas are near at hand, consider redirecting the treasure involved to your Labels jar.

Monday, 3/3: John 4.43-54

This week, our Lenten scripture passages settle in the Gospel of John. It seems that each day's passage reflects some important revelation about Who Jesus is, and offers insight about critical ways in which people grasp the truth about Jesus or miss the truth about Jesus. If Jesus is the Son of God, and if our fulfillment and salvation depend fully on how we respond to Him, these passages may draw us deeper into the grace of Lent.

Jesus helps the helpless. The royal official in today's passage experiences a tremendous miracle performed by Jesus. The scripture writer notes that the official and his whole household come to believe in Jesus as a result of the miracle. Miracles are by nature exceptionally unusual. If the official's son became critically ill a few years later, what do you think would be ideal for him to seek from Jesus? Another miracle? Something greater? Are you able to relate this question to yourself and your faith life, perhaps in relation to the graces you recognize you have received from Jesus?

Tuesday, 3/4: John 5.1-16

Jesus heals. After Jesus performs the miracle of healing the sick man in today's passage, He can give the man any instructions He wants. Presumably, what He instructs the man is exceptionally important, since the miracle is astounding. Jesus instructs the sick man to stop sinning. Why do you think Jesus says this to the man? How important is the man's response? How will it matter if he accepts or rejects Jesus' instructions? How important are Jesus' words for you?

Wednesday, 3/5: John 5.17-30

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In today's passage from John, Jesus states directly what He offers all who believe in Him: the full vision of God, direct knowledge of the will of God, entrance into the life that God wants people to experience on this earth, the single relationship that determines one's state in life, and the path to eternal life. In response to these claims, people reject Jesus and plot to kill Him. How do you respond to Jesus' claims? How do you react to what He offers you? How does what Jesus offers relate to your current aspirations and goals in life? Would you prefer that He offer something else?

Thursday, 3/6: John 5.31-47

Jesus accepts our free choice to oppose and reject Him. Continuing the passage that we began yesterday, Jesus states directly to His opponents why they reject the truth He reveals. They do not use their intellects to understand how Jesus fulfills the Jewish scripture. They do not accept or recognize the power of God the Father working through Jesus' actions. They do not accept the testimony of God's Spirit. They do not want to believe in Jesus. Perhaps most powerfully, Jesus states that His opponents do not have the love of God in them. They accept the word and praise of other people, but do not accept His word or seek the praise of God. These comprehensive indictments of the opponents of Jesus are true in every generation, including ours. Especially for those of us who have received the blessing of some faith in Jesus, His specific descriptions of the reasons for opposition to Him should resonate deeply. How do you react to this passage, in light of your Lenten examination of your life and your plans for today and the future?

Friday, 3/7: John 7.1-2, 10, 25-30

Jesus reveals the fullness of the truth. At Jesus' time, some expect that when the Messiah comes to the world, no one will know where he is from, and he will suddenly manifest himself. In today's reading from John 7, people who have this expectation wonder if Jesus might be the Messiah. However, because they are positive that they know where Jesus is from (Nazareth), they assure themselves that He is not the Messiah. Their error is profoundly ironic. In fact, they do not know where Jesus is from (the Father), and so they are actually correct both in their expectation about the Messiah and their wondering if Jesus might be the Messiah. They so overestimate the importance of their limited insight - their knowledge of Jesus' hometown - that they close themselves to understanding the greater truth - who Jesus is. Jesus reveals the truth to anyone who is open to Him. Too often, because we overestimate the importance of our limited insights, we close ourselves to understanding the truth that Jesus wants to reveal to us. How do you react to this?

Saturday, 3/8: John 7.40-53

Jesus brings division to the world. In today's passage, people with various degrees of insight debate about Jesus' identity, and become divided from one another. Some religious leaders become angry with and condemn people who are unwilling to automatically oppose Jesus, and threaten those who speak in favor of Him. Jesus is not merely an inspiring teacher, an interesting role model, or one holy person among many holy people in history. He is the Son of God who offers salvation now and eternally to anyone who makes the choice to change his or her life and follow Him. To be His disciple, a person needs to make a life-embracing declaration of who Jesus is, and to freely decide to imitate Jesus by following His way. Jesus' way embraces all dimensions of human life. It can be understood by anyone, but makes the deepest demands on every person. In a fallen and free world, in every generation there is division between those who hear the Word of Jesus and choose to become His disciples, and those who hear the Word of Jesus and do not choose to become His disciples. How does this relate to you?

THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT AND LABELS ARE FOR JARS™

Sunday, 3/9: John 11.1-45

Jesus leads anyone who truly believes in Him to eternal life. In today's passage from John 11, Jesus says to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" What is your response to this question from Jesus? If you believe what Jesus says, what does it mean to you to believe Him? Given your experience of this Lent, do you feel Christ call you to deeper belief? How?

ALMSGIVING!

This week, as you continue your pattern of Lenten almsgiving, assess what you've been doing. Take a look at your Labels jar. All the money you've collected in there will help feed the hungry. How do you feel about that? What are your thoughts about the material sacrifices you've been making? Are you better off having made them? When Lent comes to an end, will you want to continue any of these sacrifices? How do you view your experience of telling others about Labels, and of asking others to sacrifice for the poor? Are those experiences you would like to be permanent parts of your life?

Monday, 3/10: John 8.12-20

Jesus definitively reveals God the Father to the world. When we enter into a relationship with Jesus, listen to His words, and follow His way, He gives us more and more of an experience of God the Father. Jesus tells some of His opponents in John 8 that "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also." How do you fit into this reality?

Tuesday, 3/11: John 8.21-30

Jesus shows anyone who follows Him the meaning of true freedom. He people who believe in Him, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Particularly in our society, many people have a limited understanding of freedom as our ability to choose to do what we want, when and how we want. True freedom is much deeper than this. True freedom is our ability to choose to do what is right and true. Do you want true freedom? To what extent do you believe that being Jesus' disciple is the way to true freedom?

Wednesday, 3/12: John 8.31-42

Jesus is the Defeater of Satan. On Ash Wednesday (five weeks ago today!), it was proposed that among the most important questions of Lent are: "Do you reject Satan? And all his works? And all his empty promises?". These are three of the questions we are asked when we renew our baptismal promises at Easter. In various scriptural passages this Lent, we have heard about Satan's opposition to Jesus personally and to those who might follow Him. In today's passage, Jesus seems to suggest that the people who are rejecting the truth He clearly reveals to them about Himself are falling prey to the work of Satan. Satan's goal is always to drive us away from God. He tries to convince us that what is good and true is bad and false, and vice versa. He tempts us with promises that appeal to us, but lead away from God. Because Jesus is infinitely more powerful than Satan, and because He has already ultimately defeated Satan through His death and resurrection, anyone who truly chooses to live as Jesus' disciple receives the power that defeats Satan in day-to-day life, and eternally. You don't have to know a lot about Satan to reject him, and all his works, and all his empty promises. Do you?

Thursday, 3/13: John 8.51-59

Jesus Christ, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is eternally God. Today's passage describes the ultimate reason why people put Jesus to death: because He equates himself with God the Father. It may not be difficult to imagine why people in Jesus' day consider this to be the ultimate blasphemy - for one whom they presume to be merely a man to claim to be God. It is more painful to realize that people in subsequent generations - who have been blessed with a much greater understanding of Jesus, hundreds or thousands of years of evidence of His continuing work on earth, and the graces experienced in a Christian life - through our sin reject who Jesus is. In a week, we are invited to enter into the reality of Christ's passion and death - to honestly confront how we accept and reject the truth of Jesus' identity. How do you feel about this?

Friday, 3/14: John 10.31-42

Jesus reveals His identity to the world through His works. In today's passage, Jesus explains to those who consider Him the ultimate blasphemer that if they do not believe He is the Son of God on the basis of His words, they should look to His works - His actions - to recognize that He is the Son of God. The question remains, of course, whether they will choose to look at and reflect on Jesus' works. In every generation, the works of Jesus continue through the power of the Holy Spirit. Despite all of the limitations and sins of Christians, the works of Christ are abundantly manifest today through the actions of His disciples. The world remains free to look at and reflect on this reality, but it is reality. If you wish to grow in your relationship with Christ, to what extent do you look for His works in the world around you? If others are looking for His works to potentially believe in Christ, how do they recognize His works in you?

Saturday, 3/15: John 11.45-56

Jesus never fails to save. In today's passage, as the Passover of Jesus' passion draws near, some religious authorities have given the order that Jesus' whereabouts be reported to them, so they may arrest Him. Knowing of this threat to Jesus, some people in Jerusalem wonder, "What do you think? That he will not come to the feast?" Jesus will come to the feast of Passover in Jerusalem and put Himself directly into the hands of His opponents, because it is through His passion and death that His resurrection will be accomplished, and salvation will come to the world. Since the death and resurrection of Jesus until the end of the world, it will always be the case that He will enter into any situation in which salvation is to be breathed. As was the case for the Passover in today's passage, we do not know exactly when or exactly how Jesus will come into the concrete situations of darkness and evil in our lives, but we do know that He will come. A person who chooses to be a disciple of Jesus by imitating His way of love is given the grace of knowing that He will ultimately come into whatever realities threaten to separate us from God. This knowledge is much deeper than intellectual - it is a knowledge experienced in the core of a true disciple's soul. How do you relate to this?

HOLY WEEK AND LABELS ARE FOR JARS™

Sunday, 3/16: Matthew 26.14-27.66

On this Palm Sunday, we read Matthew's extended account of the passion and death of Christ. You may want to reflect on this passage through Wednesday, reflecting on the details of the Lord's passion. To which characters do you relate, and how? Are there any moments in the Matthew text that resonate with the spiritual realities you have experienced during Lent?

Monday, 3/17: John 12.1-11

As Jesus approaches His passion, one of the people supposedly closest to Him - Judas - makes a statement that on the surface might make him sound like a true disciple, but in fact is false. Jesus does not deny Judas' freedom to be a thief, a liar, a hypocrite, and His betrayer. Jesus never denies our freedom to live life as we choose - in holiness or in sin. Holy Week presses the question for Christians: How do you choose to live your life?

Tuesday, 3/18: John 13.21-33, 36-38

Peter is a faithful disciple of Jesus, but he does not fully understand his own weaknesses. Jesus knows that Peter exaggerates his strength, and He still loves Peter. If Lent has given you a greater awareness of your weaknesses, limitations, and sins, you have been blessed. Jesus not only accepts and loves you, he dies for you. Recognizing Peter's limitations and your own, speak with Jesus about your connection with Him as we approach the memorial of His passion.

Wednesday, 3/19: Matthew 26.14-25

Judas is a profoundly sad figure - a man who has been called to be a disciple of Jesus, who has experienced life with Him, who is still entirely loved by Jesus (Jesus dies for Judas), but has lost himself in sin. To his very last breath, Judas is free to turn back to Christ. This is the truth for every human being. What does this mean to you as you enter the Triduum?

YOUR JAR!

This Wednesday brings the end of Lent and the beginning of the observance of the Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

Your helping to feed the hungry through **Labels Are For Jars** is a wonderful gift for God and the neediest of our brothers and sister. Please remove the money you've collected in your **Labels** jar. Count it, then put it in the form of a check or money order and mail it to **Labels Are For Jars**, 118 South Broadway, Lawrence, MA 01843. One hundred percent of the money you have collected will be used to feed hungry people through the Cor Unum Meal Center!

It is likely that the almsgiving you've pursued during Lent is meant to somehow continue to grow in the future. What are your thoughts and feelings about the material sacrifices you've made during Lent? Are you better off having made them?

For all of the hungry people whose lives you have changed through your sacrifice for **Labels Are For Jars**, many thanks! We hope that you will stay in touch with **Labels Are For Jars** in the months and years ahead! **God bless you!**