



**The Time is Now!**  
**Ko Tēnei tonu te Wā!**



# Caritas Lent Reflection Programme 2024

Printable version

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The Caritas Lent Reflection Programme is available in English, Te Reo Māori and Samoan.

# Introduction

**The Time is Now! *Ko Tēnei tonu te Wā!*** is the theme for our 2024 Lent resources. The obvious question that follows this call for action is, “Time for what?” There are many answers to this question, which are found in the key messages and themes of these resources.

As we focus on the three pillars of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during Lent, we naturally connect with God and look to serve others. **It is indeed time to renew our relationship with God** and to consider practical ways we can be bearers of God’s love to those around us.

Many of the Gospel stories in this year’s resources include a call to action. The Greek word for time that is used in this resource is “*Kairos*,” meaning opportunity to act. **It is God’s appointed time to act.** As Pope Francis says, “Our life is made of time and time is God’s gift, and it is therefore important to make use of it by performing good and fruitful actions.”

Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.” In these resources, each of the weeks during Lent have their own sub-theme or focus, reminding us of what it is time for. In a way, these all answer the initial question: “Time for what?”

## **Time for Preparation *Te Wā mō te Takatū***

In the Gospel reading for the first week of Lent, we begin in the desert with Jesus and His forty days of preparation. We are then reminded of the importance of preparation through a Caritas story from Kiribati involving climate change and the work of Health Champions.

## **Time for Encounter *Te Wā mō te Tūtaki***

The transfiguration of Jesus in the Gospel reading for the second week reminds us that now is the time for encounter. Instructors and students from Rural Training Centres in the Solomon Islands share how they’ve experienced a growth in skills, knowledge, and confidence through shared encounters.

### **Time for Justice *Te Wā mō te Tika***

In the third week's Gospel reading, Jesus overturns tables in the market in his drive for the worship of God and the pursuit of justice. The Caritas story for this week highlights the work of the global Caritas network to bring justice after emergencies, such as after the flooding in Pakistan.

### **Time for Love *Te Wā mō te Tūtaki***

In the Gospel reading in the fourth week, Jesus explains to Nicodemus about God's love. We meet Mana Gertrudes from Timor-Leste who serves as an inspiring example of love in action, working with Caritas' partner Hamahon Feto Timor (HAFOTI).

### **Time for Sacrifice *Te Wā mō te Whakahere***

Jesus tells a crowd about His upcoming sacrifice and leaves a challenge about sacrifice and serving God's call in the Gospel reading for the fifth week of Lent. We also meet the Phea family from Cambodia and learn how their sacrifices have brought them to where they are today.

### **Time for Hope *Te Wā mō te Tūmanako***

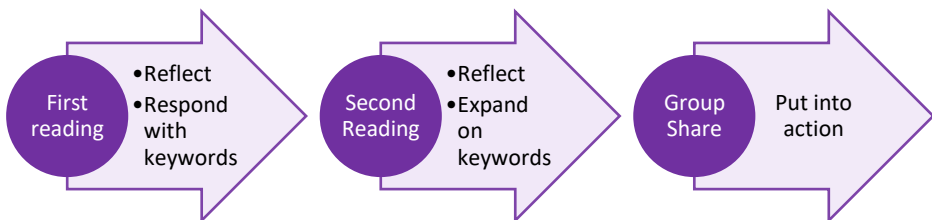
In the sixth and final week of Lent, we finish off during Holy Week with Jesus entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and the excitement and hope of the crowd. The final Caritas story is about Bridgith from Papua New Guinea, who reminds us about the importance of hope in our lives.

# A Guide to using the Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand Lenten Reflection Programme

The Lenten season provides an opportunity each year to deepen our understanding of our faith by reflecting on the Gospels. During Lent we are called both to turn away from those things that encumber our faith journey and to turn towards God. Lent is a wonderful opportunity to open ourselves to changes that God wants to make in us so that we can truly flourish.

## **Lectio Divina**

Central to the Caritas Lenten Reflection Programme is shared reflection on the Gospels for the six Sundays of Lent in the style of Lectio Divina, a Latin term which means ‘reading with God’. In this form of prayer, the Gospel is read once, and members of the group repeat a word or phrase which stood out to them. They may repeat several words or phrases each, as they feel so moved. The gospel is then read again, and there is an opportunity for sharing.



## **Gospel reflections**

Participants have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the Scriptural context of the Gospels, in the light of Catholic Social Teaching and its application in the work of Caritas and in their daily lives.

This is a reflection and discussion programme, where the focus is on faith development and sharing, rather than an academic study programme. Some participants have used the Lenten reflection programme as a starting point for further Scriptural and Theological study, for example, through courses offered by Te Kupenga Catholic Theological College. Others have brought insights and material from Scriptural or Theological study to share with their

group. Additional sources used in preparing the programme include Papal encyclicals and statements, and the practical experiences of Caritas workers and our partners.

## **Prayers**

The programme offers suggestions for prayer, including Opening and Closing prayers. Your group are welcome to use other prayers or preferred styles of praying if you wish. For example, you may wish to use formal prayers of the Church or forms of intercessory prayer. What is important is taking time to pray together.

## **Bible translation**

The Gospel and Psalm readings are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE) Bible translation. The NRSVCE translation is characterised by a more exact translation of original Hebrew and Greek texts, with additional consideration given toward the use of more inclusive language. It is intended to be more direct, plain, meaningful, and easily understood, especially when read aloud. However, do please feel free to read the Gospels from the Bible in another translation – for example, for people who are new to the English language, the Good News version could be helpful.

## **Groups for shared Lenten reflection**

Communities who use this programme include Catholic parishes, ecumenical groups, families, ethnic communities, religious communities, rest home residents, and groups in prison. Many parishes organise their own daytime or evening groups. The programme is also used in other ways including by families who reflect and pray together for the six weeks of Lent, or people who use it for individual prayer and reflection.

Please feel free to adapt the programme to suit your needs or the needs of your group or community.

## **Leaders' Guide**

For guidance on leading Lectio Divina reflection please see the note on Lectio Divina above. The primary role of the leader or facilitator is to assist the

group by providing focus, some structure to the session, keeping track of time, as well as to encourage all members to share and listen.

This role can be taken by one person nominated for all the sessions or it can be rotated among group members. All members of Lenten groups have their own life experiences and faith journeys, as well as different gifts and different insights. Each person has a significant contribution to make to the weekly reflections. A prayer focus – a lit candle, a Bible, flowers, other symbols – and appropriate music as a background can all be very helpful.

### **Discussion sharing and faith in action**

Through the discussion, sharing and the Faith in Action sections we are invited to deepen our understanding of the Gospels, and to allow God to transform us. A significant aim of our Lenten practice of prayer, fasting and almsgiving is, by God's grace, to change our patterns of behaviour and to respond with love to our neighbours. Each session ends with an invitation and an opportunity to make a commitment to put our faith into action.

### **Session outline**

A session is generally expected to last approximately 60-90 minutes. Each group can determine its own timeframe, but a suggested timeframe could be as follows:

- Welcome, opening prayer and responsorial Psalm (10 minutes)
- Group sharing, Gospel reading using Lectio Divina (20 minutes)
- Gospel reflection and group discussion questions (20 minutes)
- Case study, video, and Faith in Action questions (15 minutes)
- Closing prayer (5 minutes)

## Week 1: FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

### **Time for Preparation *Te Wā mō te Takatū***



*The Temptation of Jesus, illustrated by Fran Denton*

#### **Opening prayer**

E te Ariki, Lord Jesus, as we start our Lenten journey this year, help us to open our hearts and minds to hear Your voice in new ways. Water the seeds of faith to prepare us to help bring Your kingdom here on Earth. Even in challenging times, help us to proclaim the Good News and stand as Your witness at all times and in all things, and in all places. Āmene.

**Responsorial: Psalm 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9**

**Response: To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.**



Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. **(Response)**

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord! **(Response)**

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore, he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way. **(Response)**

### **Gospel reading: Mark 1:9-15**

*Invite a member of the group to read the following passage aloud, from the Bible or from this booklet.*

<sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

#### The Temptation of Jesus

<sup>12</sup> And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

#### The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,<sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

*After the reading, pause for silent reflection. Then invite people to share a word or phrase that stood out for them. After a couple of minutes quiet reflection invite another group member to read the Gospel passage aloud again.*

## **Gospel reflection: Living in a Time of Transition**

Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan. The Jordan River was significant in Jewish culture as it marked the boundary point for the leaving behind of the old and the start of a new, promised land. In that sense it marked a time of transition or change. The Baptism of Jesus by John also marks the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Today we too live in a time of transition from a warming world to a boiling world.

Jesus said, “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.” The concept of repentance involves stopping what we are doing, turning around, and taking a new path or adopting a different way. Jesus is that Way. To repent marks a time to start anew. Often in the Bible before prophets or leaders are called to a great work, they must go through a time of testing or challenge. With Jesus it was no different. For forty days He was tested in the wilderness. Unlike many Prophets and leaders, Jesus overcame the trials and temptations that came His way. We too need to take time to be prepared for the challenges of life. We need to be ready to face temptation and whatever the Lord calls us into.

This passage of scripture marks the transition from the old way of God reaching the world – through the nation of Israel – to the new way – through the person of God’s Son – Jesus Christ – and the people of God.

The good news of Christ involves radical transformation. A transformation, or changing of the guard, in our inner lives.

### **Group Discussion**

- How do we overcome temptation and use that to fulfil our mission?
- What can we learn from Jesus’ example of responding to temptation? (See Matthew 4:1-11).
- When should we make the changes Jesus calls us to make?
- How should we respond to living in times of change?



*Tebora, Kiribati.*

### **Kiribati Health Champions programme**

We share a strong connection with our local partner in Kiribati, Teitoiningaina (Catholic Women's Association). For over 40 years, Teitoiningaina has been dedicated to enhancing household food security and promoting healthy lifestyles, while also building resilience to face climate change and disasters.

Teitoiningaina works with schools, church groups, and various community groups. Through our partnership, Caritas is privileged to support Teitoiningaina's transformative work to enrich the lives of people in Kiribati.

Tebora lives in Kiribati in the sector of Rurete in Bikenibeu Parish, with her husband and four-year-old daughter. She has recently enrolled in the Teitoiningaina Health Champions programme and is learning ways to grow nutritional food in the face of a changing climate.

## **Faith in Action**

- Invite a family member, friend, or member of your parish or Lent reflection group to be your prayer partner during Lent. Practice praying together and for each other regularly as you prepare for the start of the Easter season.
- Make a commitment to perform one small action each day during Lent to prepare your heart for Easter, such as praying a new prayer, doing a good deed for another person, or setting aside some money to donate to those in need.

## **Closing prayer**

E te Ariki, Lord Jesus, when we are challenged to go out, to face temptation and uncertainty, help us to remember that You are with us. Through the hardships that we face, help us to keep our eyes trained on Your face and our ears tuned to Your voice. Āmene.

## Week 2: SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

### Time for Encounter *Te Wā mō te Tūtaki*



*The Transfiguration, illustrated by Fran Denton*

### **Opening Prayer**

E te Atua o ngā Maunga, God of the Mountains, we stand in awe of You!  
Sometimes life is tough and Your plan for us is not clear. We choose to follow  
Your instruction to listen to Jesus more. Let us be transformed by Your light,  
so that those we encounter will draw closer to You. Āmene.

**Responsorial: Psalm 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19**

**Response: I will walk in the presence of the Lord in the land of the living.**

I kept my faith, even when I said, "I am greatly afflicted;" Precious in the sight  
of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones. **(Response)**

O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord. **(Response)**

I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. **(Response)**

### **Group Sharing**

How has the last week been? What stayed with you from last week's discussion?

### **Gospel Reading Mark 9: 2-9**

*Invite a member of the group to read the following passage aloud, from the Bible or from this booklet.*

#### The Transfiguration

<sup>2</sup> Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup> and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." <sup>6</sup> He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup> Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" <sup>8</sup> Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

#### The Coming of Elijah

<sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

*After the reading, pause for silent reflection. Then invite people to share a word or phrase that stood out for them. After a couple of minutes quiet reflection invite another group member to read the Gospel passage aloud again.*

## **Gospel reflection: Encountering God and times of Transformation**

Jesus led Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. Mountains and cloud often signify the presence of God with his people. For example, God was present to Elijah on a mountain (1 Kings 19:8). God revealed himself to Moses and gave the Ten Commandments on top of a mountain (Exodus 19:20). The Israelites were guided by pillars of cloud and fire in the wilderness (Exodus 13:17-22).

God continues to turn up in the lives of His people. From a cloud God spoke in a voice saying that Jesus was God's Son "The Beloved" and urging the disciples to listen to Jesus. God continues to speak to His people. The question is whether we are listening for God's voice.

Peter did not know what to say because the disciples were terrified. As we follow Jesus, we should not be surprised that as we encounter God there are times of confusion. At times God seems close to us and His purposes seem to be clear. But at other times He seems distant, and His purposes are not clear to us. At these times we are called to have faith in God. In a similar way while they were on the mountain, the disciples encountered Jesus in a new way – He was linked to the Divine. But their understanding was still limited and confused. Transformation always involves passing through darkness and the storms of life. Each day we have the invitation to rely on God for what we need through prayer and reading the Gospel message.

### **Group Discussion**

- In what ways have you encountered God?
- What might help us hear God's voice?
- How open am I to being transformed?



*Peter Bioka, student at SIAVRTC.*

## **Vocational and Rural Training Centres, Solomon Islands**

We work in partnership with the Solomon Islands Association of Vocational and Rural Training Centres (SIAVRTC), which oversees more than 70 rural training centres spread out across the Solomon Islands. These training centres offer vital vocational training, including agricultural, carpentry, mechanical, financial literacy, sewing, leadership, and life skills.

Together with SIAVRTC, Caritas is striving to uplift and empower communities in remote areas, equipping local people —especially the youth — with essential skills for a brighter future. SIAVRTC serves as a wonderful representation of an organisation that exemplifies the Catholic social teaching principle of participation by enabling both instructors and students to fully participate in society.

Hear from some instructors at SIAVRTC on how the programme has helped them build up their knowledge, skills, and confidence, as well as how students have felt empowered to set goals for their futures.



## **Faith in Action**

- Practice listening to Jesus through silent, meditative prayer. You may choose to repeat a piece of scripture in your head or listen to reflective music.
- Identify one area in your life where you feel God is calling you to make a change. Make a list of little actions you can do each day to move toward that goal.

## **Closing Prayer**

E te Ariki, te Hoa o etahi atu, Friend of others, thank you for being our faithful friend. Empower us to walk with others, as we make our way through the mountains and valleys of life. May we know when to lead and when to follow. Āmene.

## Week 3: THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Time for Justice *Te Wā mō te Tika*



*Jesus cleanses the temple, illustrated by Fran Denton*

### **Opening Prayer**

E te Ariki, te Reme o te Atua, Jesus, Lamb of God, help us to see the things we need to change in our lives to be more like You. Give us courage to act justly, love tenderly and to walk humbly even when it may challenge the status quo. Āmene.

**Responsorial: Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11**

**Response: Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.**

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes. **(Response)**

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; The ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. **(Response)**

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. **(Response)**

Moreover, by them is your servant warned; In keeping them there is great reward. **(Response)**

### **Group sharing**

How has the last week been? What stayed with you from last week's discussion?

### **Gospel Reading: John 2:13-22**

*Invite a member of the group to read the following passage aloud, from the Bible or from this booklet.*

<sup>13</sup> The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup> Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup> He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." <sup>18</sup> The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" <sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup> But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup> After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

*After the reading, pause for silent reflection. Then invite people to share a word or phrase that stood out for them. After a couple of minutes quiet reflection invite another group member to read the Gospel passage aloud again.*

## **Gospel reflection: The changing nature of sacrifice and the overcoming of injustice**

In this passage of scripture Jesus is actively overturning the unjust aspects of the Temple system of animal sacrifices as sin offerings. The Temple would be reeking of blood. It would have smelled like an open abattoir, with the smell of burning animals and the spilled blood of sacrifices.

Jesus also overthrew the tables of the money changers who were profiting from the Temple system. The poor were being exploited. Jesus destroyed the currency to buy sacrifices, throwing the animals out. Here we see the radical change in the nature of sacrifice. By throwing out the animals Jesus is fulfilling the true purpose of the sacrifice for sins. Jesus as Lamb of God takes over the role of the temple and personally becomes the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. Jesus overthrew the corrupted elements of the system of Temple sacrifices. We could ask ourselves what unjust systems today do people adhere to that enslave us?

The sacrificial lambs, cattle and birds were replaced by Jesus who becomes the new Temple. He himself becomes the Lamb of God – the sacrificial Lamb. Jesus then says that the temple will be destroyed and raised up in three days. In this he was predicting his own crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus's body becomes the new Temple and the one living sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins of all people.

### **Group Discussion**

- How can we connect to the Lamb of God at Mass each week?
- What groups today are treated unjustly?
- What systems create these conditions for exploitation?



*Poonam and her family, Pakistan.*

### **Caritas Internationalis humanitarian emergency response**

As the world's second-largest humanitarian network, Caritas Internationalis is often one of the first to respond to major disasters around the globe. In recent years, we have seen tragedies such as the wars in Ukraine and the Holy Land, a volcanic eruption and tsunami in Tonga, and devastating flooding in Pakistan. In response to these events, the Caritas network can draw on support from around the world to provide food, water, and shelter to people in need. You can learn more about this work on our website, [Caritas.org.nz](https://www.caritas.org.nz).

### **Faith in Action**

- Start a conversation about a social justice issue with someone at school, work, or in your community from a different culture, age group, or background. Be open to learning something new from their unique perspective.
- Identify areas of injustice in your community. Research an issue that you are passionate about and find a group that is working to address it. Brainstorm one way that you can help to make a positive difference.

## **Closing Prayer**

God of Justice, E te Atua o te Tika, inspire us by Your Holy Spirit to act in solidarity with those who have experienced injustice. Give us the wisdom to understand how we can ensure that justice resulting from radical change lasts for future generations. Āmene.

## Week 4: FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Time for Love *Te Wā mō te Tūtaki*



*Jesus talks to Nicodemus, illustrated by Fran Denton*

### **Opening Prayer**

E te Atua o te aroha, God of love, thank you for Your unending love that we experience as Your sons and daughters. We know that You loved us so much that You were prepared to give Your only Son so that we could have life everlasting. Reveal how love could become a common language for us all to understand one another and to share together. Āmene.

**Responsorial: Psalm 137:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6**

**Response: Let my tongue be silenced, if I ever forget you!**

By the rivers of Babylon— there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. **(Response)**

For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” **(Response)**

How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! **(Response)**

Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy. **(Response)**

### **Group Sharing**

How has the last week been? What stayed with you from last week's discussion?

### **Gospel Reading: John 3: 14-21**

*Invite a member of the group to read the following passage aloud, from the Bible or from this booklet.*

<sup>14</sup> And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

<sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

<sup>17</sup> “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

<sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

### **Gospel reflection: God is love and acts in love towards his people**

This Gospel reading begins with Jesus referring to the Old Testament (Numbers 21:4-9) where God provided a way of healing the Israelites from serpent bites by lifting up a bronze serpent on a pole. Whenever the Israelites who had been bitten by poisonous serpents looked at the bronze serpent



then they would survive the serpent bites. Likewise, Jesus was to be lifted up on a cross and whoever looks to him will be saved. If you believe in Jesus, the world can be saved. If you believe in idols, you are already condemned to darkness.

The passage also reinforces God's love for all people by showing that God loved the whole world to the extent that he was willing to send his only Son as a sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. (John 3:16 and 1 John 4:7-16). Jesus is the sacrifice. Jesus was willing to go all the way to the cross – a sign of God's love rather than judgment.

People can choose whether to respond to God's love or not. God's will is that none perish (2 Peter 3:9) but He gives us free will to make our own choices. Light also has a symbolic meaning which can fit with the experience of new believers as they come to see things in a new light. For example, Nicodemus came by night but became enlightened (John 3:1-5).

At various stages in the life of God's people there are important moments of deep encounter with God. These kairos moments sit outside the normal chronological understanding of time. The Māori phrase "mā te wā" captures something of this. There is a right time in the universe for important decisions. Ecclesiastes also captures a sense of kairos (Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8). Ultimately there is an important time in which each of us must decide whether we are going to follow and believe in Jesus.

### **Group Discussion**

- In what ways have you encountered God and or experienced his love? This could be through other people, reflecting on scripture, in the Eucharist or the majesty of nature.
- When did you last think about the love God has for you? How did you or will you respond?



*Mana Gertrudes, HAFOTI, Timor-Leste*

## **HAFOTI, Timor-Leste**

In Timor-Leste, there are few economic opportunities, especially for women, after the country's history of occupation and colonisation. However, our partner organisation HAFOTI works to provide skills and economic opportunities to women across the country.

Mana Gertrudes has been working with HAFOTI for ten years, training rural women as well as learning farming and cooking skills that she uses to feed and provide for her family. This has allowed her five children to attend school, a great example of love in action. You can see Mana Gertrudes' full story on our website – [caritas.org.nz/hot-timor](http://caritas.org.nz/hot-timor).

## **Faith in Action**

- Participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Take the first step toward mending a broken relationship in your life. Ask your Lent reflection group to join you in prayer for peace and healing in our world.

## **Closing prayer**

E te Atua o te aho, God of light, shine Your light on our shadows and with Your healing touch transform darkness to light. As we make our daily decisions, especially difficult ones, enable and direct us to always bring truth, show love and shine Your light. Āmene.

## Week 5: FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Time for Sacrifice *Te Wā mō te Whakahere*



*Jesus speaks about His death, illustrated by Fran Denton*

### **Opening Prayer**

E te Atua o tēnei Wā Tonu, God of the Present moment, help us to see You through Your word and time with others today. Draw us closer to You so that we will hear Your voice and recommit ourselves to serve and follow You. Āmene.

**Responsorial: Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15**

**Response: Create a clean heart in me, O God.**

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are

justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

**(Response)**

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

**(Response)**

Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. **(Response)**

**Gospel Reading: John 12: 20-33**

*Invite a member of the group to read the following passage aloud, from the Bible or from this booklet.*

<sup>20</sup> Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” <sup>22</sup> Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

Jesus Speaks about His Death

<sup>27</sup> “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say— ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” <sup>29</sup> The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” <sup>30</sup> Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” <sup>33</sup> He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

## **Gospel reflection: With great love comes great sacrifice**

This passage opens with the arrival of some Greeks who had come to worship at the festival happening then. Jesus responds by saying that “Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.” He also said that “whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.” We should not, therefore, be surprised if we encounter trials and challenges and the need to make sacrifices. Jesus made much greater sacrifices during his lifetime. Whoever loves Jesus will serve him.

The story of the seed dying to self in order to bring new life, parallels Jesus dying on the cross for all people and to bring life to those who choose to follow him. There is a challenge here for God’s people to be willing to die to our selfish desires and ambitions and to put God first in all aspects of our lives.

This is a special moment in the history of the world and of God’s kingdom. Jesus is about to be sacrificed for the salvation of all mankind. The judgment of the world has begun. Satan, the ruler of the world is being deposed and driven out. God speaks from heaven as he reaches out to the people. But the people who heard it reacted in different ways. Some rationalise it as thunder, others thought it was the voice of an angel. God is present in that moment.

Finally, Jesus states openly what is about to happen – that he will be lifted up (on a cross) and that all people will be drawn to him. There is a great paradox here. This sign (the cross) of failure and rejection becomes the sign of hope, renewal, and redemption for humanity.

### **Group Discussion**

- What is God calling us to sacrifice for His kingdom and so that we can become more like Jesus?



*Phea Family, Mondulkiri, Cambodia.*

## **Development Partnership in Action, Cambodia**

Our partnership with Development Partnership in Action (DPA) in Cambodia prioritises the wellbeing, productive livelihoods, and climate resilience of Khmer Loeu people in remote locations. Thousands of indigenous farmers and their families have benefited from agricultural training and support protecting their customary land.

The Phea family live in Mondulkiri province in Cambodia. They are reliant on growing rice for both their income and food. In 2020, they joined a local rice growing co-operative that is supported by our partner, DPA, and this transformed their lives. You can learn more about the Phea family on our website - [caritas.org.nz/hot-cambodia](https://caritas.org.nz/hot-cambodia).

## **Faith in Action**

- Do something to serve the poor and vulnerable in your community. You could volunteer at a shelter, deliver groceries to an elderly neighbour, or donate to a local charity that helps those in need.
- Make a list of ways in which you hear God's voice and experience his presence in your life. Over the next week, take special care to listen closely. Share what you learn with your family, friends, or prayer partner.

**Closing Prayer:**

E te Wairua Tapu, Holy Spirit, stir up in us the desire to be bold and courageous to be more like Jesus; to follow his example and to be willing to make sacrifices and trust in God's plan so that His kingdom will be a reality on earth. Āmene.



## Week 6: PASSION SUNDAY

Time for Hope *Te Wā mō te Tūmanako*



*The Anointing at Bethany, illustrated by Fran Denton*

### **Opening Prayer**

E te Atua o te Tūmanako, God of Hope, as we remember the events of Palm Sunday and the Passion of Christ, we are reminded to welcome Jesus into our hearts and choose to follow You. We thank you for your promises. Our hope is in You and You will renew our strength. We will soar on wings like eagles. We will run and not grow weary. We will walk and not be faint. Help us to fix our sight on you and the hope of the resurrection. Āmene.

**Responsorial: Psalm 31: 9-10, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16**

**Response: In you, O Lord, I seek refuge.**

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with

sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.

**(Response)**

I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbours, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. **(Response)**

For I hear the whispering of many— terror all around! — as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, “You are my God.” **(Response)**

My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love. **(Response)**

### **Group Sharing**

How has the last week been? What stayed with you from last week's discussion? How are you feeling about your Lenten journey as we go through Holy Week?

### **Gospel Reading: Mark 14:3-9**

*The full account of the Passion of Christ (Mark 14:1 – 15:47) is read on Palm Sunday. A short excerpt has been chosen for this programme, but you can choose to use a different passage from the Passion or to read the entire Passion Gospel from the Bible.*

*Invite a member of the group to read the following passage aloud, from the Bible or from this booklet.*

<sup>3</sup> While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. <sup>4</sup> But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? <sup>5</sup> For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. <sup>6</sup> But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. <sup>7</sup> For you always have the poor with you, and you can

show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me.  
<sup>8</sup>She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. <sup>9</sup>Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

### **Gospel Reflection**

The act of anointing, or pouring oil on someone’s head, is a traditional act of compassion and affection. The value of the ointment emphasizes the love that the woman feels for Jesus. This was obviously an object of high value, and she certainly wouldn’t have used it to anoint someone unless they were very dear to her. The people with Jesus when this happened didn’t know that his Passion was coming; Jesus tells them that she anointed his body for burial, but this wouldn’t have made much sense to them at that time.

The act of anointing ties back to the theme of preparation from the first week of Lent, as the woman is unknowingly helping Jesus to prepare for his death. Jesus knows that he is about to enter his Passion, and he shows appreciation for the kindness that the woman showed to him, saying, “She has done what she could.” Perhaps this woman’s act of love gave Jesus hope and reminded him of the reason for the suffering that he was about to face.

The Gospel reading itself fulfils what Jesus says: “Wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.” This story can be found before the accounts of the Passion of Christ in the Gospels of John, Mark, and Matthew. The woman’s act of love reminds us that there are many ways to love and honour God, and that the path we take is our choice. We are also reminded of the power of our actions. What we do can touch the lives of others and create a legacy of love for years to come.

### **Group Discussion**

- Think of a time in your life when someone did a small act of kindness for you. Why does it stand out in your memory? Do you think the person who performed the act remembers it in the same way?
- How do we use our talents and resources to bring hope to others?



*Bridgith Jene, Lujan Home for Girls, Papua New Guinea.*

### **Lujan Home for Girls, Papua New Guinea**

We support Lujan Home for Girls in Vanimo, Papua New Guinea. This refuge home is run by a religious order, the Sister Servants of the Lord and the Virgin Matará. They look after around 30 girls as young as two years old. They operate Lujan Home like a family, caring for the girls like they are their own. Malnutrition is a significant issue in Papua New Guinea, so the Home provides the girls with a nutritionally balanced and varied diet and teaches the girls about nutrition and cooking so that they can bring these skills back to their families and communities when they leave the Home.

Bridgith Jene is a 20-year-old resident of Lujan Home for Girls. Her life was marked by considerable hardship before finding refuge at Lujan Home. She used to endure a challenging 5-6 km trek to school through unsafe and poorly maintained roads, complicated even further by residing in a remote rural area. This often led to her arriving late. At the home, she enjoys the company of the other girls and the sisters, as it provides a safe refuge and access to education. As a result of her time at Lujan Home, Bridgith's future appears promising and full of opportunities, as she is supported and empowered to follow her dreams and lead a Christian life of purpose and dignity. Find out more about Bridgith's story on our website – [caritas.org.nz/hot-png](http://caritas.org.nz/hot-png).

## **Faith in Action**

- Write a letter of gratitude to someone whose love and compassion has made a difference in your life. Come up with three small things that you can do to pay it forward.
- Reflect on a major change that has happened in your life during the past year. In prayer, invite God to be with you and guide you on your journey.

## **Closing Prayer**

God of the Resurrection, we know that the time is now – ko tēnei tonu te wā – to answer your call. You know our paths and the obstacles we face; you know our hearts and you invite us to entrust them to you. Remind us to share Your peace and hope to transform our world, to help bring your kingdom into being on earth as it is in heaven. We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son, your gift of love for us. Āmene.