

by Katherine McLaughlin, CSJ

Place a lighted candle or votive, a small bowl of water, and a small piece of evergreen at the center of your group.

LEADER: Earth's springtime stirs the roots of our spirits.

ALL: *Tree buds swell and crocuses push through snow.*

LEADER: Rivers run high.

ALL: *Water puddles beneath our steps.*

LEADER: The sun warms our faces.

ALL: *We breathe deeper of air and Holy Spirit.*

LEADER: Each Lent we remember the power of love Jesus reveals in his death and resurrection.

ALL: *Let us revive our lost hopes and awaken to new life.*

LEADER: Jesus exhorts us to reform our lives and believe in his good news.

ALL: *We resolve to live in hope.*

Hand the bowl of water around your group. Bless and sprinkle one another with the water.

EACH: *Baptism calls us to be people of hope and new life.*

Dream, when you're feeling blue; dream, and they might come true. Things never are as bad as they seem, so dream, dream, dream.

These song lyrics played on the radio when I was a child. It is dreamers and visionaries who keep hope alive, especially in hard times such as we face now.

SUNDAY

by Sunday

Around the globe nations work to achieve the visionary Millennium Development Goals to which the United Nations committed in 2000. Cut extreme poverty and hunger in half by 2015. Improve maternal health and child mortality. Achieve primary education for every child.

Locally we also need to renew our dreams this Lent. Families live in cars after layoffs and foreclosures. Some folks live with little hope of finding jobs. Thankfully service men and women are home from Iraq but unlearning the skills of war and building up the skills of peace will take healing and renewing time. For those of us who understand we cannot separate loving God from loving our neighbors, the afflictions and anxieties of our neighbors are our own in the solidarity to which the Second Vatican Council called us in the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*.

Where I live, Churches United in Ministry (CHUM) works for change and new life. Its mission: "Churches caring about people and working for change through programs and efforts that respond to, serve, advocate for, and empower people with unmet needs."

The many visionaries and dreamers in our midst say in our time what Jesus said as he began his ministry. "Believe in the good news. Come along and be a part of it."

- **What do you dream for our world?**
- **What groups in your area work for new life for people in need?**



GOSPEL

The Spirit drives Jesus into the desert.

NARRATOR 1: Immediately after his baptism the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert.

NARRATOR 2: There for 40 days Satan tested him. He was with wild beasts, and angels ministered to him.

NARRATOR 1: After John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

JESUS: The time is fulfilled. God's reign has come near. Repent and believe in the good news.

Mark 1.12-15



The Spirit impels Jesus into ministry.

Sunday's gospel about Jesus' temptation and first preaching immediately follows Jesus' baptism, an event that inaugurates his public ministry. As Jesus comes out of the water, the heavens split open, and the Spirit descends upon him. A voice affirms that Jesus is "my beloved Son." These images—the open heavens, the descending dove, the affirming voice—create a theological picture of Jesus in relationship with God, Father and Spirit.

Mark wastes few words describing Jesus' sojourn in the desert. In two verses Mark tells us that Jesus went into the desert and stayed for 40 days with wild beasts and angels (an interesting combination of companions). The two verbs in the account stand out—*drives* and *tests*. After

40 days Jesus begins preaching in Galilee, announcing the good news of God.

All three synoptic gospels place this desert time of testing or temptation at the beginning of Jesus' public life. Something happens to Jesus in this time.

We can project that in his humanity Jesus is coming to a fuller sense of self-identity and a deeper sense of his own mission. Jesus' baptism and desert experience connect him with God, with Holy Mystery. His solitude leads to his preaching and prophetic actions. The interplay of the mystical and the prophetic begins to spin itself out in Jesus' life.

After his desert time Jesus lives the rest of his life as an itinerant. He carries on ministries of healing, teaching, preaching,

associating with outcasts, standing in opposition to unjust structures, forming a community of equals, celebrating meals with friends, and praying alone and with others.

The whole of Mark's gospel unfolds what awakens in Jesus after living in harmony with God and all creation in the desert. "God's reign has come near," Jesus announces. God is near, within, and around us—the reality in which Jesus lived in the desert.

- What do you think happened to Jesus in the desert?
- Describe a desert experience in your life. How does it influence your way of living?

Jesus' relationship with God mirrors the relationship to which he calls us. We are God's beloved. The Spirit drives us, too. Really knowing this in our bones empowers our deepest, best selves to reach out in warmth, hospitality, healing,



Desert area in Israel.

SUNDAY BY SUNDAY (ISSN 1057-3259) (USPS 007-228) © 2012 by Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, 1884 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105. Editor: Joan Mitchell, CSJ. SUNDAY BY SUNDAY is published weekly 52 times during the year. Periodicals postage paid at St. Paul, Minnesota. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A. Material in this issue may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any form or format without special permission from the publisher. Subscription rate in U.S.A. 300 or more subscriptions \$8.95 each; 100-299 subscriptions, \$10.95 each; 10-99, \$13.95 each. Single subscription rate in U.S.A. \$35.00 per subscription. Office of publication, SUNDAY BY SUNDAY, 1884 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105-1700, 1-800-232-5533.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to SUNDAY BY SUNDAY, 1884 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105-1700

hope, and deep care for those around us. Like Jesus, our lives in the embrace of God lead us to bring God near to others.

Lent is a beginning and renewal for many. Lent is when catechumens intensify their preparation to enter the waters of baptism. Lent is when the whole Christian community makes a concerted effort to renew our baptismal vows and celebrate resurrection as something that happens not only to Jesus but to the whole community.

Lent moves purposefully and relentlessly toward Easter, even in the midst of sorrow, suffering, and global peril. Lent says, “We are moving toward Easter, and we will not be stopped! We are choosing hope, and we are choosing new life.”

The practices we choose for Lent symbolize our hopes. We say in effect that we believe new life can come. We believe that we have the power of the Spirit within us to initiate transformation in the world.

In Sunday’s gospel Jesus says, “Reform your lives and believe in the good news.” The good news is that everything is possible—not easy, but possible.

In the midst of wars and rumors of wars, acts of violence, poverty, lack of health care



On the 1st Sunday of Lent, a catechumen signs the Book of Life and begins final preparation for baptism at Easter.

services, and educational opportunities for millions of people, we still choose hope. We choose resurrection. We choose to act for change.

- **When have you had a sense that you are God’s beloved?**
- **What signs of hope do you experience locally, globally?**

In the language of spirituality today, we might call Jesus’ desert solitude a time of discernment. To discern means opening one’s heart to the Spirit moving where it will—possibly beyond where one anticipates. To discern involves seeking self-knowledge and listening to others’ views and feelings. To discern involves recognizing where one’s gifts and the unmet needs of people around us intersect.

St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, teaches a daily practice of prayer and discernment. First, one looks back on a day, asking what or who energized me, gave me life, fueled my commitments, stirred my

thinking about? What leaves me bored or marginalized? What saps my energies? Prayers of gratitude and petition can follow these reflections.

- **What is testing your spirit this Lent?**
- **Practice using Ignatius’s daily discernment and prayer. To what does the practice call you?**



God will never again destroy the earth.

The first readings of the Lenten Sundays retell great moments in Israel’s history, beginning this year with God’s covenant with Noah. Most peoples of the ancient Middle East tell flood stories.

Ancient people imagined their world completely surrounded on all sides—up, down, and around—by water. Their world was flat with waters below, the source of springs. A dome topped their world, holding back the waters above. This is the firmament God creates on the second day (Genesis 1.6).

Social action has two feet.



- **Find online the United Nations Millennium Development Goal progress reports.**
- **Visit KeepingFaithToday.com, a blog inviting conversation about surviving and thriving as a seeker amid religious tensions.**

When the flood begins, waters both bubble up through springs from below and pour through the dome of the heavens from above. “The fountains of the deep burst forth; the floodgates of the sky opened” (Genesis 7.11). In our fears of nuclear winter or global warming, the same ancient fears of extinction well up.

In the Genesis flood story, God decides to wipe out all humankind because of people’s wickedness—everyone, that is, except Noah (6.5-7). God commands Noah to make an ark. It has one window, which Noah seals when the rain begins. For 40 days of darkness, Noah, his wife, his children, and the pairs of living creatures live inside the ark, not knowing if they will survive. Day after day rain pounds the wooden ark. Waters rise above the mountains. The ark floats closer and closer to the dome of the sky, where it can rise no farther.

Finally the rain stops. Noah opens the window. For weeks the waters recede, and then the dry land reappears, a repeat of the third day of creation.

Noah’s name means *Settler*. He is the believer in God who survives the flood and resettles the earth. After Noah makes a thanksgiving offering, God promises never again to destroy the earth. The rainbow becomes a sign of God’s covenant with the earth.

In recent years we have seen the terrible power of water in hurricanes, floods, and violent storms. We also experience the



power of water to nourish, heal, and cleanse. We know the awesome beauty of water in our lakes, rivers, and oceans. We watch earth thaw and water trickle and tease the soil to life.

Water can destroy life and give life. Noah’s story begins with a destructive flood but ends in God’s promise of an everlasting covenant. Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River signifies a new time in his life. Water is the sign of new life in baptism. Daily water reminds us we live in the presence of life-giving mystery and hope for new life.

God’s rainbow sign

God said to Noah and his children with him: “See, I am now establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you: all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals that were with you and came out of the ark. I will establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood; there shall not be

another flood to devastate the earth.”

God added: “This is the sign that I am giving for all ages to come, of the covenant between me and you and every living creature with you: I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, I will recall the covenant I have made between me and you and all living beings, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all mortal beings.”

Genesis 9.8-15

● **What threatens Earth and its creatures today? What fears do you have for our planet and people?**

● **What does the flood story have to teach those preparing for Baptism at the Easter Vigil?**

PRAY
LEADER: Let us take a couple minutes of silence to let surface our personal resolves.
LEADER: Brother Jesus, you revive our faith in the power of love.
ALL: We believe in your good news.

Katherine McLaughlin, CSJ, is a professor emerita at the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, Minnesota. She holds a Ph.D. in theology from Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.