

MARCH - APRIL 2019

LENTEN REFLECTION GUIDE

from mercy volunteer corps



A LENTEN REFLECTION GUIDE

ash wednesday

To begin the Lenten season, the staff of Mercy Volunteer Corps would like to present you with this reflection guide. We hope this small compilation of reflections, quotations, and meditations draws you closer to your spirituality and strengthens your sense of community with Mercy, especially with us here at MVC.

As we take time to step back and reflect, we are reminded of our commitment to Catherine's vision to serve the most marginalized members of our society. The Lenten season is our gentle nudge, a reminder that our spirituality is to be an action. While some fast and others commit to service in their communities, we are all called to be light, especially for those who are marginalized.

There is a quote from *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho that states, "When we love, we always strive to become better than we are. When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better, too."

As we take time this season to reflect, let us also take time to put our reflection and our words into action. This Lent, may we strive to love.

Wishing you the many blessings of the Lenten Season,
The Staff of Mercy Volunteer Corps

THURSDAY, MARCH 7TH

For this new morning with its light, for rest and shelter through the night,
For health and food, for love and friends,
For everything Your goodness sends, we thank you, Lord. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 8TH

Meditation: Breathe in. Let go of comparing. Breathe in. Let go of judgments. Breathe in. Let go of anger. Breathe in. Let go of regrets. Breathe in. Let go of worrying. Breathe in. Let go of blame. Breathe in. Let go of guilt. Breathe in. Let go of fear. Breathe in. Let go of anxiety. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.

SATURDAY, MARCH 9TH

"There is a voice inside of you || That whispers all day long,
'I feel this is right for me, || I know that this is wrong.'
No teacher, preacher, parent, friend || Or wise man can decide
What's right for you - just listen to || 'The voice that speaks inside.'" -Shel Silverstein

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Thoughts from an MVC alumna

Mercy is...

Creating a hospitable space for all. Generosity of heart and soul. Listening without judgment. Spreading peace in a broken world. Trusting in one another. Loving those who have hurt you. A journey of ups and downs. Patience for when things don't go as planned. Gratitude for the small moments. Hope that we can all find healing. Believing in the goodness of every individual. Seeing God in all things. Love.

Bekah Kornblum '15: Sacramento, California
Former support person for the Sacramento Mercy Volunteers

MONDAY, MARCH 11TH

“Joy is the net of love by which you can catch souls.” -Mother Teresa

TUESDAY, MARCH 12TH

“Try to meet all with peace and ease.” -Catherine McAuley

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13TH

“Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.”
-Brene Brown

THURSDAY, MARCH 14TH

“Seek peace and pursue it.” -Proverb 34:14

FRIDAY, MARCH 15TH

“Astonish a mean world with your acts of kindness.” -Maya Angelou

SATURDAY, MARCH 16TH

“Your feet will bring you where your heart is.” -Irish Proverb

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

a reflection from an alumna

My spirituality had always been full of contemplation. I would sit with God and wonder, share my thoughts and feelings, and try to be still and listen. I would try to wrap my head and my heart around how loved I was by God and by the humans in my life and would try to express that love I felt back to God and those humans I loved. I wouldn't call it passive, but my spirituality was inward-focused, which fits me, the introvert, the deep thinker and feeler.

During my year of service, I began to be challenged to see spirituality as more than contemplation. I had always seen service as an expression of love and compassion for the world and an opportunity for me to be served in turn by those whose paths I crossed. Through my time in community and sharing spirituality, I realized that what I saw, what I thought, what I felt - what I had always brought to contemplation - could become fuel for action.

During and since my time as a Mercy Volunteer, the Mercy family has guided me to see how I can put my love, contemplated in prayer, into action with others in order to shape myself and the world into the place full of the mercy and love which I had always tried to recognize and be aware of. I have been challenged to maintain my inner sense of peace and give that outward. It is not comfortable at first, to take the action that is called for after contemplation, to share the inward parts of myself, because many times it means speaking out to structures of power and privilege, including and especially my own. But this growth born out of challenge has made my spirituality all the richer and deeper.

Alex Pierlott '14: Hartford, Connecticut

Current support person for the Philadelphia Mercy Volunteers

MONDAY, MARCH 18TH

“Do not pass by a man in need, for you may be the hand of God to them.”
-Proverb 3:27

TUESDAY, MARCH 19TH

“We should be shining lamps giving light to all around us.” -Catherine McAuley

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20TH

“He counts the stars and calls them all by name.” -Psalm 147:4

THURSDAY, MARCH 21ST

“When eating a fruit, think of the person who planted the tree.”
-Vietnamese Proverb

FRIDAY, MARCH 22ND

Meditation: Breathe in. Feel the warmth of the sun on your face. Breathe in.
Hear the sounds of nature. Breathe in. Feel the calming energy.

SATURDAY, MARCH 23RD

“A person’s true wealth is the good he or she does in the world.”
-Mohammed

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

current mercy volunteer pat boduch reflects

My year of service with Mercy Volunteer Corps is a particularly stark example of life as a murky and ambiguous plane of decision-making. I’m serving this year with MVC in Cincinnati, working in hospital chaplaincy. I’ve changed cities, jobs, type of work, and living situation to be here. Nearly all of this experience is unfamiliar: new colleagues, new friends, new places, new customs, new environments. And in that grayness and unfamiliarity, I often don’t know what to do, what to say, or what my priorities should be. In this foreignness, what should guide me?

In our lives more generally, we often don’t know the right thing to do - how we should act, what we should choose, what we should say, who we should spend our time with, or what our priorities should be. That is why we think, reflect, read, learn, and talk things over with the people we trust. Christianity has something to add to this ambiguous nature of moral decision-making. The Christian tradition offers a lens to see the world and an orientation to help guide our thinking. It allows us a chance to apply religious principles to our daily lives through specific, commonplace decisions. The central ideal in this tradition is that whatever leads to greater love is the true and right path.

A year of service gives plenty of opportunities to practice this ideal. For me, this may take lots of different forms. It may mean striving to bring all of myself into the present moment as I talk with a patient in her hospital room. It may mean learning to sit in a room alone, with no iPhone or to-do list, and simply be with myself in peace. It may mean being the person in my community to unload the dishwasher, even though I’m pretty positive I unloaded it the last two times. It may mean learning how to say my feelings were hurt without in turn hurting someone else.

At its best, Christian service allows each of us to more deeply ingrain these tenets of love, freedom, authenticity, and communion into ourselves so that we may more ably choose them. It may give us opportunities, examples, and a culture which fosters that way of being. The challenge then is to continuously bring that into our lives. At its best, Christian life allows us – over years, over decades – to try and track ourselves to that moral principle of love, so that we may more easily recognize what is good and choose it. Of course, often times we are not “on our game” and we fall well short of what we’d like to be. Still, we adjust and we adjust and we adjust and we hope that our struggle to abide to this track is the way.

Pat Boduch ‘18: Cincinnati, Ohio

MONDAY, MARCH 25TH

“Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous.” -Psalm 27:14

TUESDAY, MARCH 26TH

“Be light in someone’s darkness.” -Helen Keller

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27TH

‘We must create sacred time for ourselves to access the deepest, highest, wisest parts of ourselves.’ -Attribution Unknown

THURSDAY, MARCH 28TH

“The most deadly poison of our time is indifference.” -St. Maximilian Kolbe

FRIDAY, MARCH 29TH

“Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love for I have put my trust in you.” -Psalm 143:8

SATURDAY, MARCH 30TH

“Mistakes are the portals of discovery.” -James Joyce

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

a reflection from an alumna

The seed for a deeper relationship with God was planted during my time as a volunteer. This seed blossomed into a call to become a Sister of Mercy. I am a Sister of Mercy, but this does not mean that my relationship with God was instantaneous and perfect the moment I entered the convent. All relationships benefit from both parties putting in the work to strengthen the relationship. I have found that to foster my relationship with God, I must listen. If you know me, then you know that talking is easy for me and listening takes work! Work that I do not always want to do.

However, in the years since I was a volunteer, I have found the deepest connection to God comes when I listen. My many forms of listening include watching the sunset, sitting quietly someplace, a walk in the woods, or a run through the city. Listening means switching off all my devices and taking time to just be in the moment. Every day I take a few minutes to ask myself where I saw God in the moments of the day. I imagine these daily reflections hung up on string miles long, stretching through the years. This visual helps me remember that my relationship with God has ebbed and flowed in the years since my volunteer experience.

I have been challenged by the journey. I have wondered, does God really exist? I have thought, does God really care? I have been challenged most by my wonderings of why there is suffering. Why are there people at the border needing a place to go? Why is there so much cancer, disease, and mental illness? Why do horrible accidents happen, taking loved ones away? God does not answer all my questions or take away the pain that life sometimes brings. In the listening God says I am here, and I love you.

Jenny Wilson '00, '03, '04: Guyana, South America
Sister of Mercy, Mercy Volunteer Corps Board Member

MONDAY, APRIL 1ST

“Let your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.” -Nelson Mandela

TUESDAY, APRIL 2ND

‘Everything you need, your courage, strength, compassion, and love; everything you need is already within you.’ -Attribution Unknown

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3RD

“If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.” -Booker T. Washington

THURSDAY, APRIL 4TH

“Be still.” -Psalm 46:10

FRIDAY, APRIL 5TH

Meditation: Breathe in strength of mind, body, and spirit. Exhale. Breathe in positivity, be kind to yourself today. Exhale. Breathe in you are loved. Exhale.

SATURDAY, APRIL 6TH

“God is within her. She will not fall.” -Psalm 46:5

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

mvc alumna reflects on her time in detroit

During my senior year of college, I knew that I wanted to serve after graduation. After prayer, I felt as though God was leading me to go somewhere I had never been before. Somewhere out of my comfort zone. As a child of God, I am called to be a light. Light does not hide in one spot. It radiates outward reaching every corner driving out darkness. So I decided to join MVC, pack my things, and move to Detroit. I told myself that this year of service would be a year of servitude, humility, and walking more in my identity as a child of God. I won't lie, I was terrified at first. I was afraid I was making a mistake. I was afraid that I wouldn't find a church home. I was afraid that being in a new environment all by myself would be detrimental to my physical, mental, and spiritual health. I thank God that I decided to ignore my fears because moving to Detroit was one of the best decisions I have ever made.

Moving to Detroit, I was completely stepping into the unknown. It forced me to put my trust in God, and just trust that He would guide me on this journey. Without a doubt, my year of service strengthened my relationship with Christ. I grew spiritually in a way I would never have if I stayed at home near the comfort of friends and family. In Detroit, I had the opportunity to strengthen my faith without distractions. I was able to find a church home in the city and it allowed me to mature in God. By growing closer to Christ I'm learning just how much He loves me. This, in turn, allows me to love others. Every day, I work towards carrying the love of God in all that I do. This included carrying the love of God at my service site as well. God has commanded us to love one another as we love ourselves. Every day, I strive more and more towards this beautiful command. Through finding my identity in Christ, I'm learning to find my identity in the world.

Through God, I discovered my reason for being in Detroit. He constantly told me to go out and exude His love, mercy, grace. So I continued to work towards His glory being shown through me in my service site and in my community. As God shows me love, I must also show love. As God shows me mercy, I must also show mercy. As God shows me grace, I must also show grace. The things God showed me while in Detroit have changed me forever. My year was such a pivotal time in my life. I did not expect to grow spiritually as much as I did. But then again, the whole year was full of surprises. God has definitely shown me that He is a God of surprises. Detroit taught me that I must continuously live a life of servitude and humility to God and others. I pray that even after this year of service, I will continue to grow in Christ and spread His love everywhere I go.

Precious Ndukwe '17: Detroit, Michigan

MONDAY, APRIL 8TH

Meditation: Breathe in. Sky above, earth below, peace within. Breathe out.

TUESDAY, APRIL 9TH

“May my heart be kind. May my mind be fierce. May my spirit be brave.”
-Kate Forsyth

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10TH

“It is never too late to be who you might have been” -George Elliot

THURSDAY, APRIL 11TH

“Mightier than the waves of the sea is His love for you.” -Psalm 93:4

FRIDAY, APRIL 12TH

“May God preserve and bless you and grant you all the graces and precious gifts reserved for this holy season..” - Catherine McAuley

SATURDAY, APRIL 13TH

“The mind is like water. When it’s turbulent, it’s difficult to see. When it’s calm, everything becomes clear.” -Prasad Mahes

PALM SUNDAY

mvc alumna reflects on the healing stories

In John 9, Jesus encounters a man who has been blind since birth. He spits in the clay, wipes it onto the man’s eyes, and instructs him to wash off in the river. The man returns with his eyesight fully restored, a certain miracle to all who have known this man his whole life. They almost didn’t believe it was the same man! They wrote him off as a beggar, as an outcast. The man was quick to tell everyone that it was Jesus who helped him see again.

I personally think about the healing stories in the Bible often, sometimes even placing my name in the stories to pray for my own healing. It seems to be a theme in my life that I am continuously “blind” to seeing God’s presence in my life. I’m quick to be angry that I don’t hear His voice or feel His presence. I get discouraged in prayer because I don’t receive answers. I don’t trust that God plays a part in what happens to me.

Knowing that, it was quite the contrast in my professional life to provide Outpatient Spiritual Care to patients in Cincinnati. I called patients who dealt with chronic illness, grief and loss, or isolation. My goal was to actively listen to what they were experiencing, to help them explore what gives their life meaning, and to identify their support system. It was “eye-opening” to hear people who are homebound, out of work, terminally ill, isolated, and in deep physical pain immediately tell me how God has been so good to them. Even if it took a few calls, almost every patient was quick to express gratitude and tell me all the ways that they’re doing well: God woke them up, they’re able to breathe a little better, a group of deer was outside their window. Their eyes have been opened to see God’s abundant presence and providence. Though their bodies are sick, their hearts are healed by the hope they find in God.

I had one patient especially thank me after a phone call for giving her space to just talk. “I’ve grown up in this small town with the same people my entire life; nobody has ever asked me to tell my story before.” Her story wasn’t anything “miraculous” or headline-worthy, but it was rich in love for God and love from God. Her story was sacred. Some of these patients are even like the blind man, seen as an outcast or a beggar but quick to tell others about how God saved them. Their stories are sacred. I learned more than I taught, simply by asking “ordinary people” to tell me about their extraordinary lives.

When the crowd of people asked Jesus why the man was born blind, if it was his sins or his parents’ sins, Jesus told them, “he was born blind so that God’s works may be revealed in him”. These phone calls and conversations pushed me to look at my life through a new lens: where is God in all of this? If a patient with heart failure can find hope in her stumbling blocks, what might God be doing with mine? In each of the sacred stories I heard during my volunteer year, God’s works were revealed to me. I’ve seen how someone can use their pain to trust God and thank Him for the smaller blessings.

Maureen Kelly ‘16, ‘17: Cincinnati, Ohio

MONDAY, APRIL 16TH

“Do not ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and go do that. Because what the world needs is people who come alive.”

-Howard Thurman

TUESDAY, APRIL 17TH

Meditation: Breathing in feel your lungs expanding. Breathing out feel a sense of letting go. Breathing in feel alive and awake. Breathing out release your tension. Breathing in feel a sense of fullness. Breathing out know that you are enough.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18TH

“When you get to the end of all the light you know and it’s time to step into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing that one of two things shall happen: either you will be given something solid to stand on or you will be taught how to fly.” -Edward Teller

HOLY THURSDAY & GOOD FRIDAY

The suscipe of catherine mcauley

My God, I am yours for time and eternity.
Teach me to cast myself entirely
into the arms of your loving Providence
with a lively, unlimited confidence in your compassionate, tender pity.
Grant, O most merciful Redeemer,
That whatever you ordain or permit may be acceptable to me.
Take from my heart all painful anxiety;
let nothing sadden me but sin,
nothing delight me but the hope of coming to the possession of You
my God and my all, in your everlasting kingdom. *Amen.*

Catherine McAuley
Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy

EASTER SUNDAY

a final prayer

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice -
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
“Mend my life!”
each voice cried.
But you didn’t stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do -
determined to save
the only life you could save.

Mary Oliver (1935-2019)
Nobel Prize Winning Poet



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