

## PAX CHRISTI USA COMMUNITY LENTEN SERVICE – week 5

*Fifth week of Lent – [Readings are from Monday, March 27](#)*

### Welcome

*We'll be remembering tonight: **David O'Byrne**, longtime member of Pax Christi Florida; **Gus Nystrom**, longtime leader with Pax Christi Northern California; and **Helen Casey**, long-time leader with Pax Christi Michigan*

# Lent 2023

Witnesses on the way

*So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them.  
(John 20: 2)*

### Opening song

**Opening Prayer:** (from the Archdiocese of Chicago)

*This is the fast that pleases me: to break unjust fetters,  
to let the oppressed go free, to share your bread with the hungry  
and shelter the homeless poor.*

*If you do away with the yoke, the clenched fist, the wicked word,  
if you give your bread to the hungry and relief to the oppressed,  
your light will rise in the darkness. (Isaiah 58:6-7, 10)*

All praise be yours, God our Creator,  
as we wait in joyful hope  
for the flowering of justice  
and the fullness of peace.  
All praise for this day, this season.  
By our weekly fasting and prayer  
cast out the spirit of war, of fear and mistrust,  
and make us grow hungry for human kindness, thirsty for solidarity  
with all the people of your dear earth.  
May all our prayer, our fasting and our deeds  
be done in the name of Jesus.

**ALL: Amen.**

**First reading:** From the book of the prophet Daniel...

The assembly condemned Susanna to death. But Susanna cried aloud: "O eternal God, you know what is hidden and are aware of all things before they come to be: you know that they have testified falsely against me. Here I am about to die, though I have done none of the things with which these wicked men have charged me."

God heard her prayer. As she was being led to execution, God stirred up the holy spirit of a young boy named Daniel, and he cried aloud: "I will have no part in the death of this woman." All the people turned and asked him, "What is this you are saying?" He stood in their midst and continued, "Are you such fools, O children of Israel! To condemn a woman of Israel without

examination and without clear evidence? Return to court, for they have testified falsely against her.”

Then all the people returned in haste. To Daniel the elders said, “Come, sit with us and inform us, since God has given you the prestige of old age.” But he replied, “Separate these two far from each other that I may examine them.”

After they were separated one from the other, he called one of them and said: “How you have grown evil with age! Now have your past sins come to term: passing unjust sentences, condemning the innocent, and freeing the guilty, although God says, ‘The innocent and the just you shall not put to death.’ Now, then, if you were a witness, tell me under what tree you saw them together.” “Under a mastic tree,” he answered. Daniel replied, “Your fine lie has cost you your head, for the angel of God shall receive the sentence and split you in two.” Putting him to one side, he ordered the other one to be brought. Daniel said to him, “Offspring of Canaan, not of Judah, beauty has seduced you, lust has subverted your conscience. This is how you acted with the daughters of Israel, and in their fear they yielded to you; but a daughter of Judah did not tolerate your wickedness. Now, then, tell me under what tree you surprised them together.” “Under an oak,” he said. Daniel replied, “Your fine lie has cost you also your head,” for the angel of God waits with a sword to cut you in two so as to make an end of you both.”

The whole assembly cried aloud, blessing God who saves those who hope in her. They rose up against the two elders, for by their own words Daniel had convicted them of perjury. According to the law of Moses, they inflicted on them the penalty they had plotted to impose on their neighbor: they put them to death. Thus was innocent blood spared that day.

The word of God. **ALL: Thanks be to God.**

**Gospel reading:** From the gospel according to John...

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders.

So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replied, “No one, sir.” Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.”

The gospel of our God. **ALL: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

## **A reflection from this year's Lenten reflection booklet – Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace Mary Hanna:**

*Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. (Jn 8:6)*

Today in the Gospel, we hear the story of the woman caught in adultery, and Jesus proclaim, “Let those of you who are without sin cast the first stone.” The adage is well-known, and rightfully so. ALL of us have experience with sin. In the ancient Greek, “sin” is an archery term meaning, “You missed.” We take aim to be the best people we can be, to act with integrity, and live righteously – but so often we fall short. Still, Jesus beckons us back, over and over, telling us we need to try again: ‘Look more closely at your goal, at what you’re aiming for. Pay attention to the things that keep you from hitting the mark. Work to eliminate those things. Don’t dwell too long on the fact that you missed, but focus on doing better and never give up trying.’

There’s also a line in this story that’s easy to overlook: Jesus bent down and began to write with his finger in the dust. Why? And what did he write? It was only after he did this that the crowd began to disperse, so what did he scrawl in the dirt that may have influenced the mob? Perhaps he began writing out a list of other instances of “sin,” maybe committed by the men and women surrounding him? Did this prompt an examination of conscience? What’s important about this possible accounting of grievances is that was written in dust, not stone. It was meant to be seen and recognized, but not held onto indefinitely.

Jesus wants us to live consciously, truly seeing what it is that we are doing with our lives, and how what we do and how we live may affect others ... but we are not to cleave to those insights as an admonishment. We are to see them as a time when we “missed the mark.” We must try – and try again – to continually take aim as we strive to become the compassionate, loving, and hope-filled people he has called us to be.

*Are you writing your failures in dust or in stone? What about the failures of others? How do you remember to “take aim and try again”? And how do you gently encourage this in others?*

### **Silent reflection**

We invite you to quietly reflect on tonight's readings and reflection, and to consider this Lenten question: *Are you writing your failures in dust or in stone? What about the failures of others? How do you remember to “take aim and try again”? And how do you gently encourage this in others?*

After our prayer service is over, we encourage you if you are with others, to share your answer to tonight's question. If you aren't with others but would like to share in a small group after tonight's prayer, we'll send everyone into breakout rooms with a few other people to share. We'll take now just about 3-4 minutes of silence to reflect quietly.

(In preparation for the Prayers of the Faithful, feel free to enter into the chat any prayers you have that you want those of us on this call to lift up over the coming week.)

### **Prayers of the faithful**

Our response is: God of joy, hear our prayer.

## **Closing prayer**

### **World Peace Prayer**

Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth. Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust. Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace. Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe. Amen.

*(In 1-2 minutes everyone who wants to stay on the call will be sent to breakout rooms to discuss tonight's reading, reflection and Lenten question. Breakout rooms will automatically close after 20 minutes.)*