



Centre for  
Pastoral  
Development  
ARCHDIOCESE OF CAPE TOWN

# Lenten Prayers Series

We gather and pray in preparation for the Easter Triduum  
A series of three prayer sessions for parish small faith-sharing  
communities



## **SESSION ONE**

Reflecting on the Story  
of the Transfiguration



## **SESSION TWO**

Surrendering in the  
example of Mary



## **SESSION THREE**

There is a Man on  
the Cross

These prayer sessions can happen in any order during Lent

Suggestion:

Session One in Week Two of Lent (in line with Week Two Gospel: Transfiguration)

Session Two in Week Four of Lent (close to the feast of The Annunciation)

Session Three in Week Six of Lent (before Holy Week)

## What is a parish small faith-sharing community?

It is a gathering of 6-12 people who meet to read and reflect on the materials provided. Each small group is made up of a variety of people, they may be people of different ages, diverse backgrounds and a variety of interests or they may be a group of people like the Parish catechists, or the stay-at-home moms, or the recently widowed - who do have similar interests. A faith-sharing group provides a place where we can simply be ourselves in a comfortable, friendly atmosphere - a place where we can renew ourselves spiritually. Faith-sharing is a prayerful experience of listening to God's word as well as other writings from Vatican II and the Catechism of the Catholic Church and then sharing how this is lived in our own lives and the lives of others. It is also a great way to meet and get to know others in your parish community.

## GUIDELINES FOR SMALL FAITH-SHARING GROUP FACILITATORS

Group Facilitators are expected to:

- ◆ Contact all group members before the Season begins to make sure each member knows the details of where and when the meetings will be.
- ◆ Prepare thoroughly for each meeting by reviewing the material and making sure he/she is familiar with all the texts quoted before the meeting.
- ◆ Make sure every participant has a full copy of the material for the session.
- ◆ Facilitate the small group discussion, keeping group members focused on the topic in a lively and interesting way. Encourage the group members to seek for new ways to
- ◆ explore and develop the material that is presented in their own lives and situations.
- ◆ Pray consistently for the people in the group and the Parish leadership.
- ◆ Encourage the group to love one another in specific and tangible ways, seeing the small group as a supportive community for its members, and an integral part of the larger Parish Community.
- ◆ Call or follow up with group members who are absent - they appreciate such care when they are unable to attend a meeting.

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## SOME POINTS TO NOTE FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING AND DISCUSSION

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**Reflection** is personal and private, a time to be with God and one's innermost self.

**Sharing** is voicing personal thoughts and feelings. Listeners should not comment, agree or disagree, just accept what has been shared as a gift.

**Discussion** is respectfully debating and deliberating issues related to the topic of the meeting.

# SESSION ONE

## Reflecting on the story of the Transfiguration

### 1. Welcome, Meet and Greet

Welcome, everyone. Do we know each other by name? Introduce yourself to others present.

Our prayer, today, is inspired by the story of the Transfiguration,

with a particular focus on our own spiritual journey through life, and a reflection on our own mountaintop experiences.

### 2. Bringing ourselves to the Present

Let us begin by taking a slow breath in ... and letting it out gently.

Let your body relax from the tensions of the day.

Be aware of the silence and the stillness ...

### 3. Read and reflect on the Poem “Thin Places – A Poem for the Transfiguration” by Jenny Bridgman:

“Thin Places” in the Celtic tradition are those mystical places where the veil between the physical world and the spiritual world is very thin, allowing for easy spiritual connection.

- ◆ Where do you especially encounter God in your life – where are those “Thin Places” for you?
- ◆ What was one mountaintop experience in your life?

#### Thin Places – a poem for the Transfiguration

*The sun-bleached rainbow framed by heavy cloud.*

A fleeting, fragile moment  
That lifts eyes from Earth to Heaven beyond.

In an instant her curtain is drawn back

And she is stripped bare in brilliant light:

A glimmer of the promise  
We heard whispered long ago.

*The kindness of a stranger’s gentle smile.*

It is good for us to be here,  
Sheltered from death’s dark shadow

And the sting of dread that wakes us each new day.

Here, we are as we are:

Alive to Earth’s brilliant goodness;  
Eyewitnesses to Heaven’s majesty.

*The crash of waves along deserted sand.*

This place is not for now:

The bubble bursts,

The curtain drops,

The moment fades.

This is a home too perfect; unready yet to hold

The fullness and frailty of all we must become.

*The peace of death as pulse and breath are stilled.*

We do not leave unchanged

If change is to become ourselves.

Ahead: a thousand moments of transfiguration,

Each one a death – and resurrection – in itself,

As we are both transformed and transform,

Sacred moment by sacred moment.

#### 4. Scripture:

Read the story slowly from St Matthew' Gospel (Mt 17:1–9) and take time to reflect

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don't be afraid.” When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

- ◆ Jesus often went up a mountain to pray – where and when do you find is the best time to pray?
- ◆ Where have you seen the divine reflected in another person?
- ◆ Why was Peter’s response inappropriate?
- ◆ What is significant in what the voice in the cloud says about Jesus?

## 5. A Reflection: “A Surprising Closeness”

The disciples who witnessed Jesus in his glory could never be the same after that moment.

This powerful experience birthed them into a more intimate and deeper relationship with their Teacher than they had ever known. The contemplative moment marked their inner selves forever.

The same is true for us in our transfiguring moments, those times when we know from a simple, yet profound, experience that God is with us in a surprising closeness previously unimagined.

This sense of divine presence might be in the brief space of receiving Eucharist, the surprise of hearing someone express their love for us, or any experience that catches us off guard when it draws us into a keener sense of God’s being with us.

When these moments take place, they usually intensify our relationship and renew our desire to be in union with the Holy One.

*Surprise me today, God, with the wonder of your presence. My heart is open and ready to respond.*  
 (“God’s Enduring Presence”  
 by Joyce Rupp)

## 6. Sharing

The leader encourages all in the group to share some of their thoughts and insights gained during the reflections.

## 7. Closing Prayer

*“Seen or unseen, the light is there,  
 ready to kindle, eager to expand.  
 refusing to be tightly contained.  
 As soon as the tiniest space is allowed  
 it quickly emerges, floods outward,  
 Illuminating the darkest of places.”*

("A Piece of Light" – Joyce Rupp)

Today we pray that we would be transfigured to be your presence in the world.

Help us to live in ways which show by our deeds the words of Jesus, who was friend of the outcast and the poor. May we be moved to think of ways of helping the vulnerable, to bring the compassion of Jesus to those who suffer, to bind up the lonely and the broken-hearted.

In these ways may we experience your presence with us in the common tasks of life.

Amen.

## 8. Closing Hymn

"How Lovely on the Mountains are the Feet of him who brings Good News"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDAvUcJqCyE>

How lovely on the mountains are the feet of Him who brings good news,  
good news

Proclaiming peace, announcing news of happiness, our God reigns, our  
God reigns!

*Our God reigns, our God reigns, our God reigns, our God reigns!*

You watchmen lift your voices joyfully as one, shout for your King, your  
King

See eye to eye the Lord restoring Zion, our God reigns, our God reigns!

*Our God reigns, our God reigns, our God reigns, our God reigns!*

Waste places of Jerusalem break forth with joy, we are redeemed,  
redeemed

The Lord has saved and comforted His people, our God reigns, our God  
reigns!

*Our God reigns, our God reigns, our God reigns, our God reigns!*

Ends of the earth, see the salvation of your God, Jesus is Lord, is Lord  
Before the nations He has bared His holy arm, our God reigns, our God  
reigns!

*Our God reigns, our God reigns, our God reigns, our God reigns!*



## SESSION TWO

### Surrendering in the example of Mary

#### 1. Welcome and Introduction

Welcome, everyone. Do we know each other by name? Introduce yourself to others present.

Tonight, our prayer is a prayer of surrender, in the line of Mary: **“Let it be done to me.”**

So, let's be present to this moment.

◆ Take a slow breath in... and let it out gently.

◆ Let your thoughts settle like dust on still water.

◆ Let your shoulders relax.

◆ Let yourself arrive here.

#### 2. Opening Prayer

Let us begin in prayer: We pray:

*God, we come before You as we are...  
Not carrying perfection, but honesty...  
Not carrying strength, but willingness...  
Meet us at this moment. Amen.*

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.  
All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.  
I who made the stars of night,  
I will make their darkness bright.  
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?  
*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?*  
*I have heard you calling in the night.*  
*I will go, Lord, if you lead me.*  
*I will hold your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,  
I have borne my people's pain.  
I have wept for love of them. They turn away.  
I will break their hearts of stone,  
Give them hearts for love alone.  
I will speak my word to them. Whom shall I send?  
*Here I am, Lord...*

I, the Lord of wind and flame,  
I will tend the poor and lame.  
I will set a feast for them. My hand will save.  
Finest bread I will provide, till their hearts be satisfied.  
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?  
*Here I am, Lord...*

We sing the Opening Hymn together

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UA2fMeXEKLA>

### 3. Introduction and Reading and Reflection

In this reflection, we will bring to mind a number of incidents from the life of Mary. This will be presented as a short passage from Scripture.

And then a note on Mary's reaction / response.

We will have a short pause between each "incident".

This is followed by a question, a worry or a fear that Mary might have been on her mind.

*It is suggested that one **person reads all the Scripture passages.**  
The non-Scripture parts could be read by two people alternating.  
(or just one person)*

**The angel appeared to Mary... Let it be done to me".**

How can this be? What does this mean?

She makes herself available. I accept, I surrender. I am your humble servant.

**Promised in marriage to a man named Joseph.**

Her worry: How would he react to this news?

She, in surrender to the God of love, tells Joseph and is at peace

**Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem**

Her fear: On that journey to Bethlehem: What is going to happen?

Where are we going to stay?

She accepts and the Lord provides a stable

**An angel appeared to Joseph and said: Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt**

Her fear: I can't speak their language, why not Samaria, I know their language?

Yet she went with Joseph and the child survived the slaughter of Herod.

**Simeon blessed them and said to Mary: This child is chosen by God for the destruction and salvation of many in Israel."**

Mary might think: This is my child and I'm losing control.

Her reaction? Take the child back to Nazareth, so He can grow in strength and wisdom.

**They have no wine. What concern is that to you and to me?**

Mary: How can I help this married couple?

"Do whatever He tells you."

**Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were His mother, ....**

And at the end He said to his mother: "Woman, here is your son." and to the disciple "Here is your mother." (Jn 19:25 -26)

Did she understand anything? Did she recall all the events of their lives together?

Hopeless as it seemed she stayed at the cross.

**Devoting themselves to prayer together with...Mary the Mother of Jesus.**

At Pentecost, at the birth of the church, she is there again, in prayer and faith. Beginning now to understand the God of Love, the Resurrected Life and the presence of the Holy Spirit that has been with her all the time.

She is at peace.

Her surrender is all encompassing. It does not exclude any aspect of her life. It is a positive response to His Love, enabling her to be free, to be available for others, to love others and to be at peace.

Surrender is not giving up - it is giving over.

Surrender is not losing control. It is choosing who we trust with our lives.

This is not an instruction to stop life, but to stop forcing life.

It means letting God write the story instead of us insisting on our own script.

## 4. Scripture

Philippians 4: 6-7

To be read by a participant

“Do not be anxious about anything but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

## 5. Reflection

A time for personal reflection:

We are invited now silently to bring to God the things we are struggling to surrender.

- ◆ What areas of my life, fears or worries am I holding onto tightly, afraid to let go?
- ◆ Am I resisting past hurts or disappointments I need to release, trusting that God will heal them?
- ◆ Is there something I am trying to control, that God is asking me to trust Him with instead?
- ◆ Is there someone or something that I need to forgive, in order to fully surrender my heart to God?

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Take this time to speak with God.

He knows our hearts and He is waiting to take out burdens from us.

## 6. Hymn

“All that we have” by Gary Ault

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k16C-ukG-KI>

## 7. Prayer of Surrender (Group Response)

*Let us pray together.*

God... I release what I cannot control.  
I release the outcomes I've been trying  
to force.  
I release the weight that has been on  
my chest.  
I release the fear of not being enough.  
I release the pressure to figure  
everything out.

Teach me to trust You one step at a  
time.  
Teach me to rest in Your timing.  
Let Your peace replace my tension.  
Let Your guidance replace my anxiety.  
Let Your love replace my fear.

I place myself in Your hands  
again-fully, gently, sincerely.  
Amen.



## 8. Closing Blessing

**Leader:**

May the God of peace, who  
knows our hearts and holds  
our future

Give us the grace to surrender  
every part of our lives to Him.

May He lead us in His perfect  
will and may His presence bring  
us joy and peace, and rest.

Amen.

I AM THE  
LORD'S SERVANT  
*May it be done to me  
as you have said.*  
FROM LUKE 1:38

## SESSION THREE

### There is a man on the Cross

#### 1. Welcome and Introduction

Welcome everyone back and introduce any newcomers to the

Our prayer session today takes us towards the culmination of our Lenten Journey, the Easter Triduum. We reflect on the image of Jesus on the Cross, and the impact of the Cross on our lives today.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? (x2)  
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Were you there when they nailed him to a tree...  
Were you there when they pierced him in the side...  
Were you there when the sun refused to shine...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuV2EV1siZY>

#### 2. Opening Prayer

- ◆ We join together in song
- ◆ We listen to the poem: **THERE IS A MAN ON THE CROSS**

Whenever there is silence around  
me  
By day or by night--  
I am startled by a cry.  
It came down from the cross.  
The first time I heard it  
I went out and searched--  
And found a man in the throes of  
crucifixion.  
And I said, "I will take you down,"  
And I tried to take the nails out of  
his feet.

But he said, "Let them be  
For I cannot be taken down  
Until every man, every woman,  
and every child  
Come together to take me down."  
And I said, "But I cannot bear your  
cry.  
What can I do?"  
And he said, "Go about the world--  
Tell everyone that you meet--  
There is a man on the cross."

*Elizabeth Cheney*

### 3. Candle Ritual

We light our candles,  
for the flame is the symbol of the Holy Spirit here among us...  
We place our candles around the CROSS

*This is done slowly and reverently*

*Each person says one sentence as they place a lit candle around the cross*

1	The cross has transforming power
2	The cross is a symbol of God's immense love and sacrifice
3	The cross is the victory of Jesus over death
4	The cross is the transformation of death into life and sin into holiness
5	The cross is proof that God understands us and can identify with what we're going through
6	The cross is the light of all nations
7	The cross is the newness of life
8	The cross is the new life of Baptism
9	The cross embraces all people for glory
10	The cross is love meeting law
11	The cross is grace perfecting nature
12	The cross is heaven entering earth
13	In the cross there is hope
14	In the cross there is healing
15	In the cross there is freedom
16	The cross of suffering reveals the true condition of our heart and the merciful heart of God
17	The cross is the ultimate pursuit of love for humankind
18	We are not meant to carry our cross alone, but we are to help carry each other's burden
19	The cross is a path to hope, salvation, and new life through Jesus' death and resurrection.
20	The cross is a present reality
21	Let us look at the cross and truly live

## 4. Scripture Reading

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. *John 3:16–17*

## 5. Reflection Time

### *Jesuit Institute*

When you pray, do you ever sit and gaze upon the crucifix? From an outside perspective, the crucifix is a puzzling reality. Why would we lift high and honour such a horrific event? The brutal murder of the Son of God may not be, at first, something we are attracted to. Yet, the crucifix has a power and a draw for those who gaze upon it in faith because it is not only a horrific and brutal murder, it is, first and foremost, the complete victory over sin and death. The Crucifixion of our Lord was the greatest act of love ever known, because in that act, He destroyed death and sin forever for those who turn to Him with complete abandon. The crucifix is also a sign to us of the self-giving we are called to live.

We are each called to enter upon that cross and die with Christ, giving ourselves to others. For in dying with Him, our sins are atoned for and we are able to share in the victory of His Resurrection. Gazing upon the Crucifixion of our Lord transforms us as it opens the doors of the Mercy won by this selfless act of love.

Try praying before the crucifix. Try sitting in silence and gazing upon it. To “gaze” is more than to simply “look.” When we gaze, we seek to look beyond the image we see and to peer into the love that brought Jesus to that moment. We see a God of infinite love who was willing to go all the way to save us from our sins and love us with a perfect love.

### **To ponder...**

Reflect, today, upon your own crosses. As you do, try not to see them as a burden. Instead, realize the potential within those crosses. Prayerfully look at your crosses as invitations to share in Christ’s Cross. Say “Yes” to your crosses. Choose them freely. Unite them to Christ’s Cross. As you do, have hope that God’s glory will come forth in your life and in the

world through your free embrace of them. Know that these “burdens” will be transformed and become a source of exaltation in your life by the transforming power of God.

**Allow time for reflection. Bring everyone back by reciting this prayer together:**

*Lord, I do desire to gaze upon Your perfect act of love and to see Your Heart, bursting forth with Mercy upon me and upon the whole world. Help me to understand the unfathomable gift of Your Sacrifice and to enter into an eternal gratitude for this gift. Jesus, I trust in You.*

## **6. Sharing**

The leader encourages all in the group to share some of their thoughts and insights gained during the reflections.

## **7. Petitions**

**Leader:** God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son to bring us life by his death and resurrection. Let us pray to Jesus as we say:

- ◆ **The cross is the victory of Jesus over death**  
May the victory of Jesus by which he has vanquished death and the power of Satan free us from death and the attraction of evil.  
*Lord hear us... Lord graciously hear us*
- ◆ **The cross is the transformation of death into life and sin into holiness**  
May our lives be transformed through the cross into the life and holiness of Jesus.  
*Lord hear us... Lord graciously hear us*
- ◆ **The cross is true freedom**  
May we live our lives in the freedom that Jesus Christ gives us through the cross  
*Lord hear us... Lord graciously hear us*

- ◆ **The cross is the light of all nations**  
 May we be the light to all peoples through our work for justice, dialogue with all people and with our commitment to bring peace in situations of war and conflict  
*Lord hear us... Lord graciously hear us*
- ◆ **The cross is the newness of life**  
 May the new life in the cross challenge us to overcome hatred, violence, prejudice, oppression and cruelty towards the vulnerable  
*Lord hear us... Lord graciously hear us*
- ◆ **The cross is the new life of Baptism**  
 May all who have died in Christ and risen with him through Baptism rededicate themselves to realizing the fullness of their Baptismal life  
*Lord hear us... Lord graciously hear us*
- ◆ **The cross embraces all people for glory**  
 May Jesus who gave his life as a ransom for all people of all nations and all times draw them to himself and lead them to the glory of the kingdom  
*Lord hear us... Lord graciously hear us*

**Invite those present to pray their own petitions...**

**Leader:** Lord Jesus Christ, your cross remains a mystery to us, as does all pain and want. We rely on your word and example that your cross is a way to joy and freedom. Turn our crosses into bearers of happiness and life, now and forever. Amen.

## **8. Closing Prayer**

*We are deeply grateful to Bishop Sylvester David OMI for allowing us to use excerpts from his sermon at the Jubilee Mass on the feast of The Triumph of the Cross on 14 September 2025.*

*These can be read slowly as the Closing Prayer but can also be used for reflection at home in preparation for the Easter Triduum.*

- ◆ We come together as the Church in Cape Town; young and old, rich and poor, wounded and healed; standing at the foot of the Cross and before the open gates of mercy as indicated by the celebration of a Jubilee.

- ◆ To human eyes, the Cross was a place of utter defeat, a tool of Roman torture and shame. Yet Jesus, through his patient endurance and absolute trust in God, transformed it into the tree of life, the gate of victory, and the throne of mercy.
- ◆ In a city like ours, where so many still carry crosses of poverty, violence, inequality, and racial division, the message of the Cross is this: God is not far from our suffering. He has entered into it and embraced it. He will transform it.
- ◆ To all of us, the Cross says: There is hope. There is healing. There is freedom. Here in the Archdiocese of Cape Town, the Cross stands over Table Mountain, not just as a symbol, but as a living invitation:
  - ◆ To be a Church of the Poor, where no one is excluded.
  - ◆ To be a Church of Reconciliation, where race and history no longer divide.
  - ◆ To be a Church of Mercy, where confession is a doorway, not a judgment.
  - ◆ To be a Church of Witness, lifting high the Cross; not in pride, but in love.
- ◆ The Cross is not just a historical event frozen into more than two millennia of Christian existence; it is a present reality.
- ◆ Jesus is still being crucified today, in the hungry, in the abused, in the migrants and in the lonely. But He is also still being raised: through acts of mercy, through justice pursued, and through every “yes” we give to God.
- ◆ Today, as we look upon the Cross, let us not turn away. Let us not be indifferent. Let us not grow cold. Instead, let us look... and live. Let us look upon His wounds... and find healing.
- ◆ Let us look upon His mercy... and offer forgiveness to those who have wounded us. Let us look upon His poverty... and open our hands to give generously, because he is still with the poor and the dispossessed.
- ◆ Let the Cross be our banner, our bridge, and our beacon. For in the Cross, death has been defeated, in the Cross, hope has been restored, and through the Cross, we have become a Jubilee people; free, forgiven, and sent to heal the world.

## 8. Final Hymn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z93jWBbmXCA>

### THE OLD RUGGED CROSS

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,  
the emblem of suffering and shame;  
and I love that old cross where the dearest and best  
for a world of lost sinners was slain.

Refrain:

*So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
'till my trophies at last I lay down;  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
and exchange it some day for a crown.*

Oh that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,  
has a wondrous attraction for me;  
for the dear Lamb of God left his glory above  
to bear it to dark Calvary. [Refrain]

In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,  
a wondrous beauty I see,  
for 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died,  
to pardon and sanctify me. [Refrain]

To that old rugged cross I will ever be true,  
its shame and reproach gladly bear;  
then he'll call me some day to my home far away,  
where his glory forever I'll share. [Refrain]

