

February 26, 2023 — 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent**Readings**

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7a

Psalm 50 (51): 3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14.17

Romans 5:12, 17-19

Matthew 4:1-11

*“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.”*

—Psalm 51:10

## Return to the Sources

In facing the challenges—and even the chaos—of life, **Lent** is a gift. It is a time of looking back and contemplation that allows a return to sources and preparation for renewal. It is a beautiful invitation to get back to the essentials and offer the best of oneself. It is also a call to penance, to prayer and to sharing.

On this first Sunday of Lent, the Gospel invites us to reflect on our own spiritual life and our calling to follow Jesus. We discover how Jesus resisted temptations in the desert while fasting for forty days and forty nights.

“Hunger is a good discipline,” Ernest Hemingway wrote. In the past, **fasting** was practiced to cope with waning winter reserves. Jesus followed the Holy Spirit into the desert to test his faith. Fasting also has therapeutic virtues. The body gets rid of the superfluous to make room for the essential. If fasting first sharpens—then calms—the senses, above all else it clears and strengthens the spirit.

Fasting and the desert also predispose us to silence and prepare us for **prayer** in order to (re)establish a sincere dialogue with the Creator in the silence of our hearts. If silence is golden, it is because it is rare and therefore precious. It is in silence that we can hear the song of the Earth and the cry of her children. It is in its eloquence that the answer to our questions is often revealed to us.

Taking advantage of this time to recognize our shortcoming and renounce sin, we would be better prepared to talk to God, to pray to Him and to ask Him in all humility: “Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit” (Ps 51:12).

**Sharing** is an opportunity to welcome, appreciate and fulfill what is just and good. “... so one man’s [Jesus’s] act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.” (Rom 5:18). We can also *live simply so that others might simply live*. Just as a single candle is enough to light up the night, every hand extended, and every loaf shared contribute to the survival of others.

At Development and Peace — Caritas Canada, we believe that every person has value and that every gesture counts, even the smallest one. It is our duty to defend the rights and dignity of anyone who is deprived of them. And then, doesn’t the *salvation* of one person—as well as his or her survival—depend upon the salvation of every person? More than just Christian charity, this is what we call **human solidarity**.

This Lent, let’s **Stand for the Land** and its children who defend it and depend upon it. Our mission is to seize every opportunity to do Good: to invest our time, our money and our talents for the benefit of *she or he who comes*, of our neighbour in need.

Today’s readings help us to understand not only the importance of resisting temptations and being faithful to our spiritual calling, but also the importance of being faithful witnesses of God’s love and justice in the world.

*Let us remember that every child, woman and man who is full has, somewhere in the world, a sister or brother who is hungry, cold, and thirsty—for justice.*

Author: Philippe Lafortune, animator for Central and Southern Quebec, Development and Peace — Caritas Canada



## March 5, 2023 — 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent

### Readings

Genesis 12:1-4A;  
Psalm 33: 4-5, 18-19, 20, 22;  
2 Timothy 1: 8B-10;  
Matthew 17: 1-9

*You are social poets, because you have the ability and the courage to create hope where there appears to be only waste and exclusion.... I am convinced that your dedication is above all a proclamation of hope. Seeing you reminds me that we are not condemned to repeat or to build a future based on exclusion and inequality, rejection or indifference; where the culture of privilege is an invisible and insurmountable power; and where being exploited and abused are common methods of survival. No! You know how to proclaim this very well. Thank you.*

— Pope Francis, message to the 4<sup>th</sup> World Meeting of Popular Movements, October 16, 2021

## Creating Hope

Today's readings show us men who courageously left their lives behind, answering the Voice from the heavens that called them to a new life, a new way of being, a new nation, a new world order. They left everything they knew and dedicated their lives to the mission God gave them, to build a community based on the principles of love and dignity.

Am I as willing as Abram, Paul, Timothy, Peter, James and John to reorient my life in such service? Am I ready to leave behind comforts, habits and even worldviews to abide by that voice? Am I ready to really love my neighbours—all of them—the way Jesus taught?

**“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”**

Jesus's example is not always easy. He served with compassion, healing, feeding and including wherever he went. He also confronted injustice, disrupting an exploitative temple market, challenging the system of prejudiced punishment and, ultimately, freeing the whole of humanity from death.

For me, following Jesus requires not only that I serve those around me, sharing whatever I can to help my sisters and brothers in their immediate needs, but also that I work to address the global systems that create or perpetuate poverty and exclusion. This means questioning my participation in systems that use exploitative labour, that deny land rights and that put money, rather than people, at the center of concern. It means refusing to endorse abusive systems with forms of charity that reinforce power imbalances. It means building alternatives that support the dignity of individuals, families and communities, by ensuring they are in control of their own development and that we change the laws and policies that have denied their rights and dignity.

To be like Jesus and the prophets in these readings, we have to be ready to leave behind what we have known to build a new nation, a new world order, founded on the love and compassion to which we are called.

**“Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.”**

Lent is a time to return to this hope. To simplify, reduce or do away with all the things that distract from this hope. As we prepare for Easter, we are sent to live the Gospel by our lives.... We are sent to **Create Hope**.

To **Create Hope** is to share the love and truth we have received.

To **Create Hope** is to orient our lives to the service of humanity in compassion and justice.

To **Create Hope** is to witness to the work of the Holy Spirit in communities that are actively building that new world order where all can live in dignity.

To **Create Hope** is to foster alternative social, economic and political models that promote dignity, compassion and inclusion.

To **Create Hope** is to invite others into this vision, this community, this action of building this kingdom, “on Earth as it is in heaven.”

Join us!

In the coming weeks, these reflections will share the work of our partners. Learn with us and act with us so that together we can **Create Hope** for our families, our communities and our world.

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Author: Kathleen Cross, Project Lead for Strategic Planning, Development and Peace — Caritas Canada

## March 12, 2023 — 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent

### Readings

Exodus 17:3-7

Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

John 4:5-42 or John 4:5-15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42

*“But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.”*

—John 4:35

# Let's Stand for the Land

On this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent, the Gospel recounts the story about a conversation between a man (Jesus) and a Samaritan woman at a place that is important to the citizens of Samaria in Palestine. It is the well, an indispensable place that provides the water needed by a community. A place of life, of meetings and of fruitfulness.

In the Bible, the Word of God, there is water everywhere. There is a special place for water in the life of Jesus. In the encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus tells her that he is the source of living water. Many Old Testament stories speak of the importance of the well. It is, among other things, a propitious place for marriages. Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Zipporah, and Isaac and Rebekah all met near wells.

Just as in the time of Jesus, wells today are still important, especially for rural communities in the Global South. And just like wells, land and territory constitute vital elements for a community. People use land to build a shelter or a house to raise and watch their children grow. They use land to sow seeds in a field and harvest food after some months of hard work. To speak of territory and land means speaking of the bonds of life, of knowledge, and of alliances and traditions that the members of a community create with their territories and lands over years and generations. It is also a means of telling and transmitting their individual and communal stories.

It can thus be said that the territory is a kind of treasure. A treasure that deserves to be defended at all costs. That is why communities mobilize to protect their native territories or the territories that have been legally recognized as theirs. For the *Asociación Campesina de Antioquia* (ACA, Peasant Association of Antioquia), a Development and Peace — Caritas Canada partner in

Colombia, defending the territory means: “To continue to live, respecting the land and cultivating food whilst dignifying memory, defending life and building other possible relationships with the territory and within communities; all while valuing the diversity of stories and learning that coexist in the vast and complex territory.”

As we can see, the concept of territory goes beyond geographical space. It includes all the diverse relationships through which people and communities appropriate, use and interact with space.

Thanks to your donations, Development and Peace is supporting ACA, which supports peasant communities in defending their territories and waters.

*“... but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”*

—John 4:14

For the peasants (*campesinos*) in Colombia, water is life. Like Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, the *campesinos* gather around their water, weave bonds, unite to celebrate and protect it and to defend their right to live with dignity in their territory. Let us show solidarity and stand with communities that protect their territories and waters, two sources of life that sustain the survival of human beings and biodiversity for present and future generations.

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Author: Nicolas Kalgora, animator for New Brunswick, Development and Peace — Caritas Canada

## March 19, 2023 — 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

### Readings

1 Samuel 16:1B, 6-7, 10-13A

Psalms 23:1-3A, 3B-4, 5, 6

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41 or John 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38

*But the LORD said to Samuel, "..., for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."*

—1 Samuel 16:7

# Acting collectively to defend the land

In today's readings from 1 Samuel, Ephesians, and John's Gospel, we are challenged to see in new ways. As David is anointed instead of his older brothers, we are told that God does not judge based on the appearance of a person, but rather he sees into the heart. Jesus heals the blind man and with his new sight he is unrecognizable to those who had known him before. "I am the [same] man," he is forced to assert. In Ephesians, we find the powerful contrast between dark and light representing death and life, truth and error. To see by the light of God is to be a witness to the truth and to recognize the difference between the forces of life and death.

This Lent at Development and Peace — Caritas Canada, we are reflecting on the significance of *standing for the land*. What does it look like to **Stand for the Land**? What would it mean to see with the eyes of the poor who depend on the land, and must defend it?

At Development and Peace — Caritas Canada, we challenge ourselves to practice solidarity rather than charity. Charity, in the sense often meant today, of giving to those we pity, falls short of its deeper meaning: *caritas*, which means love. We are called to love, to see by the light of the Lord and so see to the heart, not merely appearances. Therefore, we express love not through paternalistic, one-sided giving. God's love is properly expressed through solidarity, meaning to think and act in terms of community.

Community is a web of relationship and mutual recognition wherein members lift one another up when they fall and challenge each other to improve when they miss a mark. It is incumbent upon us as a global solidarity movement to join in community with our partners and learn where we too can grow.

In Honduras, we partner with *Fundación ERIC-Radio Progreso*. This fascinating grassroots Jesuit organization is dedicated to strengthening Hondurans' understanding and democratic acumen, and to mobilizing them to

struggle against forces that have historically plagued their country with violence and corruption. Its media work, which reaches hundreds of thousands, can be fraught with danger, as community journalist Sonia Pérez recently discovered.

*Radio Progreso's* former head, Fr. Ismael Moreno, notes that although much was hoped for from Prime Minister Xiomara Castro because she was elected on a progressive platform, true power remains in the hands of powerful economic interests that are backed by sections of the judiciary. He encourages Hondurans to press for justice and institutional change; to question the co-optation of the state by the elite; and to forge a social movement to nourish what he calls the country's "incipient democracy."

This is an example of how our partners see deeply. Seeing by the light of the Lord is to see past the appearance of things; and the love of Christ is a love which heals our blindness and opens our eyes to the light. Organizations like *Fundación ERIC-Radio Progreso* can help us to live out our calling. Supporting their work is crucial not only for land defence in Honduras, but also for us to learn from poor people in Honduras how democracies are entangled with the owners of economic power. This is true in Canada as well as Honduras. Solidarity challenges us to recognize these international connections and to act collectively to defend the land.

In Ephesians, Paul exhorts us to expose the works of darkness. To make them visible in the light. To us residents of the privileged Global North, these works may at times be hidden; but in solidarity, in heeding the witness of our partners, they become visible, and it becomes possible to act and foster life, as against the forces of death.

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Author: Kiegan Irish, animator for Eastern and Northern Ontario, Development and Peace — Caritas Canada



March 26, 2023 — 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

## Solidarity Sunday

### Readings

Ezekiel 37:12-14

Psalms 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

Romans 8:8-11

John 11:1-45 Or John 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45

*“I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own soil.”*

—Ezekiel 37:14

## Let us shine the light of faith

This Solidarity Sunday, we are called to **Stand for the Land** through a joint expression of faith and almsgiving. Today’s first reading (Ezekiel 37:12-14) alludes to this theme through a powerful description of God’s words to Ezekiel: “I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own soil.” The preceding verses describe God breathing life into the Valley of Bones—a miraculous resurrection of the army of Israel. How fitting that, in today’s reading, the Lord is asking His people to stand for the land.

In the verses prior to God’s message of hope and restoration, the risen army first expresses collective dejection, saying, “our hope is lost, we are cut off completely (Ezekiel 37:11).” For many environmental defenders in the Global South who are standing for the rights of their communities, a similar response would seem reasonable. How is hope to be found in rural communities experiencing violence, environmental disasters and displacement stemming from the actions of powerful industries and governments?

For many, the foundations of that hope can be found in Pope Francis’ reflection that “As stewards of God’s creation, we are called to make the earth a beautiful garden for the human family. When we destroy our forests, ravage our soil and pollute our seas, we betray that noble calling.” Pope Francis also describes the tremendous hope offered by God, “the light that illuminates the darkness, even if it does not dissolve it” and reminds us that “a spark of divine light is within each of us.” These thoughts are, in part, what motivated Development and Peace — Caritas Canada’s five-year orientation to **Create Hope**.

One way in which this hope finds expression is through international solidarity. This includes recognizing the interconnectedness of our human family and acting to

support those in need around the world. For instance, we work in partnership with CEHPRODEC, a Honduran organization that accompanies Indigenous communities and rights defenders; raises awareness about ecological and economic issues; resists unjust laws and policies; and has even helped to sensitize Canadians to the inadequacies of their own corporate laws.

In this example, we can see international solidarity—between Hondurans and Canadians—breathing life into communities that care for creation. One can imagine Víctor Vásquez, a falsely imprisoned Honduran land defender who was released through CEHPRODEC’s assistance, as a modern expression of God’s calling for the Israelites to rise up, resist despair and defend their land and communities.

Today’s Gospel reading contains the second most famous resurrection in the Bible—that of Lazarus. Christ’s words just before the miracle, offer the most profound testament of hope: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.” Those who saw Lazarus emerging from the tomb must have felt both radical hope and profound disbelief. Witnessing those in the Global South who, despite threats to their lives and wellbeing, continue to fight for God’s creation, can ignite similar feelings of surprise and optimism.

This Solidarity Sunday, we are invited to reflect on the profound hope and transformative nature of our faith. Let us shine the light of that faith onto the darkest peripheries of our world. May we be open to God’s desire to breathe His spirit into us, so that we can plant our feet firmly and stand for the land.

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Author: Jeremy Laurie, animator for British Columbia and

**April 2, 2023 — 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent**

## **Palm Sunday**

### **Readings**

Isaiah 50:4-7

Psalms 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24

Philippians 2:6-11

Matthew 26:14-27:66

*The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven.”*

—Matthew 21:9

# **The Power of Voice**

Once again, we come to Palm Sunday, the last Sunday in Lent, when we hear two impactful stories: the first, that of Jesus’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem; the second, that of His crucifixion. We begin with the crowds shouting “Hosanna in the highest heaven! Hosanna to the Son of David!” and end with them shouting “Let him be crucified!”

All throughout our readings today, we find the human voice. The Prophet Isaiah tells of how the voice can “sustain the weary with a word” (Isaiah 50:4). Our Psalm sings a great cry not only of supplication, but also of praise for God’s faithfulness. St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians speaks of how at the name of Jesus every tongue confesses to the glory of the Lord. And in the Gospel readings, we hear not only from the crowds, but we also hear Jesus’s instructions and prayers, and the disciples’ attempts, for better or worse, to deal with their fear and anxiety as they encounter a great celebration and an unimaginable horror. You may even hear the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gospel reading narrated in many voices in your parish.

The human voice is a powerful instrument. It can tell stories, give instructions and make wondrous music. It can express the heights of splendour and the depths of anguish. Most importantly, it is a powerful tool to speak truth, to decry injustice, to teach love and to demonstrate solidarity. One voice by itself, speaking with purpose and conviction, can pierce through both silence and cacophony. Many voices in harmony create a symphonic movement that awakens hearts and has the power to change minds. And a voice’s silence can speak more than any words ever could.

Chan Ramy, the Executive Director of the *Youth Resource Development Program* (YRDP), a Development

and Peace — Caritas Canada partner in Cambodia, has a keen understanding of the power of voice. The YRDP works with young people, helping them to develop their critical thinking skills and strengthen their social conscience, to understand the complexities and root causes of the social issues they face, and to create positive social action in their communities. The training these young people receive helps them to discover their voice, to empower it, and to exert it in service of promoting justice and lasting peace. It helps them to understand that their voice matters and that, when they use it, their voice has the power to effect change.

We too must understand the importance of our voice. Let us use it wherever we can to elevate the cries of the poor and of the Earth, to bring hope to those weary from the fight for justice, and to bring the Kingdom of God more fully to Earth as Jesus did in His lifetime. Let us also use our silence judiciously, so that we can listen more effectively to the voices of our partners and to the guiding voice of the Spirit. May our voices ring out in wonder and awe, proclaiming the coming of the King of Glory, in justice and in peace.

And though Lent is almost over, let us remember that the work of solidarity continues. By becoming members of Development and Peace — Caritas Canada, we add our individual voice to its collective harmonic movement of solidarity. And by engaging with the **Create Hope: Stand for the Land** campaign year-round, we give voice to the work of our partners around the world.

**Author: Celeste Woloschuk, Campus Minister, St. Thomas More College, Saskatoon**

