

PILGRIMS OF HOPE: REFLECTIONS FOR FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT
SIGNS OF THE TIMES

OPENING PRAYER

Christ Jesus, on whom the Spirit rests,
Guide us on our journey as pilgrims of hope.

Christ Jesus, bringer of Good News,
Guide us on our journey as pilgrims of hope.

Christ Jesus, liberator of captives and all who are oppressed,
Guide us on our journey as pilgrims of hope.

Christ Jesus, restorer of sight,
Guide us on our journey as pilgrims of hope.

Christ Jesus, proclaimer of the year of the Lord's favour,
Guide us on our journey as pilgrims of hope.

Christ Jesus, in whom the Scripture was fulfilled,
Guide us on our journey as pilgrims of hope.

Lead us all to be signs of your hope in our world. Amen

READINGS FOR REFLECTION

Luke 12: 54 – 59

Jesus said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. "You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? "And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? Thus, when you go with your accuser before a magistrate, on the way make an effort to settle the case, or you may be dragged before the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer throw you in prison. I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny."

Pope Francis

"During the Holy Year, we are called to be tangible signs of hope for those of our brothers and sisters who experience hardships of any kind." (Spes Non Confundit, 10)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

In the gospel reading, Jesus wants us to be attentive to the different signs in our lives. Prayer helps us notice God in our lives. Reflect on the past week (month, year) in your own life:

- Where was love given and received?
- Were there moments of particular depth?
- Were there moments where you received the call to help or serve?

LEARNING MORE ABOUT READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Reflect on the readings below to learn more about “reading the signs of the times”:

- **Spes Non Confundit, 7.** In addition to finding hope in God’s grace, we are also called to discover hope in the signs of the times that the Lord gives us. As the Second Vatican Council observed: “In every age, the Church has the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. In this way, in language adapted to every generation, she can respond to people’s persistent questions about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other”. We need to recognize the immense goodness present in our world, lest we be tempted to think ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence. The signs of the times, which include the yearning of human hearts in need of God’s saving presence, ought to become signs of hope.
- **Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes, The Church in the Modern World, 4.** To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which humans ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.
- **Saint Pope John Paul II, At the Beginning of the Third Millennium, 33.** Is it not one of the “signs of the times” that in today’s world, despite widespread secularization, there is a widespread demand for spirituality, a demand which expresses itself in large part as a renewed need for prayer? Other religions, which are now widely present in ancient Christian lands, offer their own responses to this need, and sometimes they do so in appealing ways. But we who have received the grace of believing in Christ, the revealer of the Father and the Saviour of the world, have a duty to show to what depths the relationship with Christ can lead.
- **Spes Non Confundit 12** Signs of hope are also needed by those who are the very embodiment of hope, namely, the young. Sadly, they often see their dreams and aspirations frustrated. We must not disappoint them, for the future depends on their enthusiasm. It is gratifying to see the energy they demonstrate, for example, by rolling up their sleeves and volunteering to help when disasters strike, and people are in need. Yet it is sad to see young people who are without hope, who face an uncertain and unpromising future, who lack employment or job security, or realistic prospects after finishing school. Without the hope that their dreams can come true, they will inevitably grow discouraged and listless. ... The Jubilee should inspire the Church to make greater efforts to reach out to (the young). With renewed passion, let us demonstrate care and concern for adolescents, students and young couples, the rising generation. Let us draw close to the young, for they are the joy and hope of the Church and of the world!

- **Spes Non Confundit 13** May the Christian community always be prepared to defend the rights of those who are most vulnerable, opening wide its doors to welcome them, lest anyone ever be robbed of the hope of a better future. May the Lord's words in the great parable of the Last Judgement always find an echo in our hearts: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" for "just as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me" (Mt 25:35.40).

LEARNING MORE REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What supported my thinking?
- What challenged my way of thinking?
- What piqued my interest?

DISCERNMENT AND A CALL TO ACTION

Reading the signs of the times calls us to discernment. The **See – Judge – Act** process helps us to do so.

1. **SEE** is about taking stock of the situation in our local community, considering what are the common issues and hard realities that the people face. It is about identifying the needs that we can respond to. Here are some questions to guide you.
 - a. Are there people in need of food, housing, or friendship? What newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers?
 - b. Where are the places where peace and healing may need to be fostered?
 - c. Where have we not been wise stewards of God's creation?
 - d. What might people need immediate support with?
 - e. What data can help you learn more about your local community?
 - f. Where are people already serving in your community? What ministries and organizations exist that you can connect with to find out more?
2. **JUDGE** is about allowing the Word of God and the teaching of Christ's church to illuminate how we see the situation and what our response might be. Reflecting on these scripture passages might help
 - a. Matthew 22:8 – 10; 25:34 – 46
 - b. Luke 4:17 – 19; 6:37 – 38; 10:25 - 37
3. **ACT** is about how we respond (how we plan and carry out actions of response) as an individual, as a group/community. Attention needs to also be given to ways to transform the social structures that contribute to suffering and injustice.
 - a. What actions (s) will you commit to? Priority can be given to encounter actions.
 - b. The works of mercy can be challenging and confronting. Find support.
 - c. Pray for those you encounter.
 - d. What will your next action be?

1. **SEE** Here are some possible areas of need.

GROUP	INJUSTICES AGAINST LOVE OF GOD	SIGNS OF HOPE	SPES NON CONFUNDIT
Prisoners	Deprived of freedom Restrictions Lack of affection Lack of respect Captivity	Amnesty or pardon Reintegration into community Restorative justice	It calls for acts of clemency and liberation that enable new beginnings: "You shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants." (10)
The sick and / or disabled	Confined to home or hospital Suffering Limitations	Visiting them Works of mercy Restoring independence and freedom	Their sufferings can be allayed by the closeness and affection of those who visit them (11)
Despair (especially among the young)	Uncertain future Lack of employment and job security Discouragement	Greater efforts to reach out to the young Care & concern for adolescents Support programs	We must not disappoint them, for the future depends on their enthusiasm. ... With renewed passion, let us demonstrate care and concern for adolescents, students and young couples, the rising generation. (12)
Displaced persons & refugees	Have to leave their homes & families Face prejudice and rejection	Build a spirit of welcome Respect for their dignity as human persons made in image and likeness of God Guaranteed security and access to employment and education	A spirit of welcome, which embraces everyone with respect for his or her dignity, should be accompanied by a sense of responsibility, lest anyone be denied the right to a dignified existence. (13)
Those abandoned, especially elderly	Can feel lonely and abandoned May not be caring well for themselves May feel a lack of purpose	Should celebrate their life experience/ wisdom Strengthen the covenant between generations	Esteem for the treasure that they are, their life experiences, their accumulated wisdom and the contribution they can still make, is incumbent on the

		Support in the gratitude of children and love of grandchildren	Christian community and civil society, which are called to cooperate in strengthening the covenant between generations. (14)
Those who are poor	Lack the essentials of life May be homeless and lack sufficient food Target of exclusion and indifference	Acknowledgement that the poor are almost always the victims, not the ones to blame.	Each day we meet people who are poor or impoverished; they may even be our next-door neighbours. ... Let us not forget: the poor are almost always the victims, not the ones to blame. (15)

2. **JUDGE:** Choose and discern one or two of the signs of the times in the above chart. Consider what is in your sphere of control and/or influence. What is already being done? And, in light of the Gospel, what more needs to be done?

- a. “Discernment... involves hard work. According to the Bible, we do not find set before us, pre-packaged, the life we are to live. No! We have to decide it all the time, according to the reality that comes. God invites us to evaluate and choose: God created us free and wants us to exercise our freedom. Therefore, discerning is demanding” (Pope Francis, General Audience 31 August 2022).

3. **ACT:** What can we do? How can I help? What is God asking of us at this time?