

*REFLECTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS*

*Wild*  
**HOPE**



**SAINT MARY  
MAGDALEN**  
CATHOLIC CHURCH

*Lenten Message Series • Beginning Ash Wednesday*

# Introduction to Wild Hope Lenten Series

*(Excerpt from Lent One Day at a Time for Catholic Teens)*

The start of Lent always begins with a grand plan—spiritual or otherwise. Plans to sacrifice a favorite food or dessert, to pray decades of the rosary, to go to confession more often or to eat healthier. If we think about Lent as a season of “doing this” or “not doing that” then it’s very easy to fail. When we pigeonhole the entire season as a time to complete our Catholic to-do list filled with stressful tasks, it is easy to treat these forty days with a win-or-lose attitude. Either we successfully give up the one thing we like and have a good Lent; or, we fail miserably and give in to a temptation and the entire season becomes a colossal waste of time.

Rather than doing a half-hearted Lent this year, what if you approach it as a time that can center and reshape your entire year, maybe even your whole life? What if you enter into the spiritual desert of Lent ready to seek out and meet Jesus—a person so different than anyone you have met before and who offers something so unique? We will call this unique gift “Wild Hope”—a deep trust in God’s plan for us amidst the wilderness and the desert. What if we traveled through this forty-day Lenten desert with this “Wild Hope”?

The Church uses Scripture passages in which people thought their circumstances were permanent: they were ostracized from society; they were set back from birth and never had a fighting chance; they were grieving over their loved one’s death. Even Jesus himself lived in the desert for forty days. In each seemingly permanent and despairing desert, Jesus was present. He offered them—and us today—Wild Hope. **This Wild Hope is the hope that there will be joy, wholeness, reunion and victory over sin and death.** That is truly Wild Hope.

Our parish invitation to you is to walk through Lent with purpose, focus and a real desire to meet Jesus and practice living his gift of Wild Hope. No cross, no desert, no wandering in the wilderness is the end of anyone’s story. These are all moments to live with Wild Hope—trusting in God’s plan for us amidst the wilderness and deserts of our lives.

Feel free to give up something or add a spiritual practice this Lent. Here is a list of possible Lenten works: <https://bustedhalo.com/ministry-resources/25-great-things-you-can-do-for-lent>. However, let us not obsess if we do not perfectly check off the “Lenten to do” list; rather, let us live with the Wild Hope that at every moment—whether fasting or feasting, praying in solitude or busy with family and work—Jesus offers us his victory over sin and death. He offers us Wild Hope.

# *Prayer for Lent*

Jesus,  
Help me enter the desert  
with an open mind, a ready heart,  
and a trusting spirit.

Show me where I need to grow,  
and lead me  
where you need me to be.

Help me look to you alone,  
my strength, my hope,  
and my salvation.

AMEN

*Adaptation from "Lent, One Day at a Time"*





## Ash Wednesday

February 26, 2020

### GOSPEL MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-18

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.”

## About the “desert”

Jesus “did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners” (Matthew 9: 13). That is the struggle. It is the struggle to die to the false self. But this struggle is far, far beyond our own strength. Anyone who wants to fight his demons with his own weapons is a fool. The wisdom of the desert is that the confrontation with our own frightening nothingness forces us to surrender ourselves totally and unconditionally to the Lord Jesus Christ. Alone, we cannot face “the mystery of iniquity” with impunity. Only Christ can overcome the powers of evil. Only in and through him can we survive the trials of our solitude.

**Henri J. M. Nouwen**

*The Way of the Heart: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*

•

### **ENTER THE DESERT**

Desert doesn't necessarily mean heat and sand.  
The Greek word is ***eremos***

*Desert*  
*Deserted place*  
*Desolate place*  
*Solitary place*  
*Quiet Place*  
*Wilderness*

The desert is not a place of weakness – it's the place of strength. That's why, over and over again, you see Jesus come back to the eremos, the desert, the wild, the “quiet place”.

- *“The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry”*

•

### **POPE FRANCIS**

calls the journey to Easter a ‘dynamic process’.

Like Jesus, “enter the desert of creation” to make it return for you to being that garden of communion with God.

*Our hope is in the Lord - and we are on a journey to the hope of Easter, a great Wild Hope that does not disappoint.*



## First Sunday of Lent

March 1, 2020

### GOSPEL MATTHEW 4:1-11

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread."

He said in reply, "It is written: *One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.*"

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: *He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.*"

Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, *You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.*"

Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me."

At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away, Satan! It is written: *The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.*"

Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him.

The desert is not a very inviting place for most humans. It is where things shrivel up and often die. Water and vegetation are dangerously scarce. The blazing sun beats down all day, and at night, it is freezing cold. But it is in a desert that Jesus enters right after he is baptized. In fact, he is driven there by the Holy Spirit so that he can pray, fast, think and prepare.

## Reflection:

1. What desert are you in right now? Physical challenges? Spiritual desert? Family challenges? Work desert?
2. The desert in the Bible is a place of preparation, a place of redemption and ultimately, a place of meeting God. Look at your answer to #1. How can we begin to see that OUR desert is a prime place of meeting God and receiving His **Wild Hope** precisely in our emptiness?...in our solitude?...in our LACK of answers and resources?
3. The desert is also a place of being tempted. Satan's lie is two-fold: 1. you are not good enough for God and, 2. turn to everything else but God to satisfy your needs. Jesus models for us how to combat these temptations. In each temptation, Jesus goes to Scripture and models for us **Wild Hope** that he has conquered every temptation of ours.

**Challenge:** Let us take a page from Jesus' Prayerbook. Let us turn to Scripture to give us **Wild Hope**. What passages of Scripture or quotes in your journal give you encouragement, consolation, guidance, or Wild Hope in the midst of your desert? Pray this passage this week.

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ~Philippians 4:6-7*

*Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it. A man is powerful on his knees.  
~ Corrie Ten Boom*

*Oh God, be greater, than the worries in my life  
Be stronger, than the weakness in my mind  
Be louder, let your Glory come alive  
Be magnified*

*~ from "Magnify" lyricists: Jonathan Lindley Smith, Casey Brown, Darren Mulligan*

**Closing Prayer:** *Jesus, help me enter the desert with an open mind, a ready heart, and a trusting spirit. Show me where I need to grow. Lead me where you need me to be. Give me Wild Hope amidst the desert. Amen.*



## Second Sunday of Lent

March 8, 2020

GOSPEL [MATTHEW 17:1-9](#)

Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him.

Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid.

But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and do not be afraid." And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone.

As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, "Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

What does Wild Hope look like? We get a glimpse of it this week in the Transfiguration episode on the mountain with Peter, James and John. When Jesus is transfigured, his clothes are radiant—so bright and dazzling that Peter wants to stay there forever. This week, Jesus takes us from the desert to the mountaintop, another prominent place of encounter with the God of Wild Hope.

## **Reflection:**

1. God gave the Apostles “Wild Hope”—affirming that Jesus is God and that he has everything under control. Share what might have been going through the Apostles’ mind at the moment of the Transfiguration. What would have gone through your mind?
2. We have all had mountain-top experiences—moments of closeness to God where we can feel his presence and love in our life. Share this experience, if you would like.
3. Rather than staying on the mountain of consolation, the Apostles have to leave it. We too have to leave these cherished moments and head back “down the mountain.” Why do you think God allowed the Apostles to experience the Transfiguration and then have to leave it? Why does he allow us to experience similar moments?

**Challenge:** Where might you see the glory of God? Consider your day-to-day existence. The sun rises, and you see God’s creative beauty in the colors cast across the sky. A friend makes you laugh, and the joy shared is a reminder of God’s goodness. You sit down to a delicious meal with your family, and while talking about your day, you are reminded of God’s deep and abiding compassion. Every sacrifice, every act of charity, every moment of prayer is an opportunity to fully wake up to, and witness, the goodness of the Lord. Ask the Lord to stir up in you Wild Hope as you witness the many “God-moments” of the day.

*And this is a prayer we need to pray every day, every day: Holy Spirit may my heart be open to the Word of God, may my heart be open to good, may my heart be open to the beauty of God, every day. ~Pope Francis*

**Closing Prayer:** *Jesus, open my eyes to see your glory, and give me strength to walk with you. Wake me to your goodness and comfort me when I face the things that frighten me. Give me Wild Hope, that lasts beyond the mountain. Amen.*

## Third Sunday of Lent

### March 15, 2020

#### GOSPEL [JOHN 4: 5-42](#)



Jesus came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon.

A woman of Samaria came to draw water.

Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.

The Samaritan woman said to him, "**How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?**" —For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.— Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

The woman said to him, "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?"

Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." **The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."**

Jesus said to her, "Go call your husband and come back." The woman answered and said to him, "I do not have a husband." Jesus answered her, "You are right in saying, 'I do not have a husband.' For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true."

The woman said to him, "**Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.** Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain; but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand,

because salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "**I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ;** when he comes, he will tell us everything." **Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one speaking with you."**

At that moment his disciples returned, and were amazed that he was talking with a woman, but still no one said, "What are you looking for?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

The woman left her water jar and went into the town and said to the people, "Come see a man who told me everything I have done. **Could he possibly be the Christ?**" They went out of the town and came to him. Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat." But he said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." So the disciples said to one another, "Could someone have brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work."

Do you not say, 'In four months the harvest will be here'? I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest. The reaper is already receiving payment and gathering crops for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together. For here the saying is verified that 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap what you have not worked for; others have done the work, and you are sharing the fruits of their work."

Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me everything I have done." When the Samaritans came to him, they invited him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. Many more began to believe in him because of his word, and they said to the woman, "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, **and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.**"

***Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (John 4:7b)***

I thirst. I thirst for the living God. Like the Samaritans who beg for Jesus to stay with them awhile, I long for living water, to have my thirst assuaged forever from God's inexhaustible spring. Who would not? But this gospel opens with JESUS thirsting. Not only for water but for us. This is truly a WILD HOPE: despite our past, Jesus comes seeking something from us.

God seeks believers. Jesus tells the woman at the well that God is looking for those who "will worship him in Spirit and in truth." We may long for God, but God longs for us first. If only I could grasp this reality. Like all of us, I am flawed. Like the woman at the well, God knows the truth about me, whether I will admit it or not. And so, like the woman, I am surprised that Jesus would seek me out, would thirst for anything I might have to offer.

**Reflection:**

1. Christ comes to "my well"—the place I go to recharge and renew myself. What is he asking of me? Seeking in me? Thirsting for—from me? A living faith that overflows into my community? Which of your gifts do you think the Church is thirsting for?
2. Living water is not stagnant, it flows, and what I am flows into Christ's inexhaustible waters, to be brought to life in its currents, carried to places I cannot imagine, satisfying the thirst of Christ's Body with the gifts he has given me. Is anything impeding your ability to allow Christ to put your gifts at the service of the Body of Christ? Fears? Lack of Time? Energy? Fear of what others think? Discuss. Give all these to the Lord.
3. We may long for God, but God longs for us first. That statement should evoke Wild Hope in us. Even with our checkered past, God longs for our response to his love. What is one concrete action you can do this week to be living water for someone else? Remember that Christ is much more interested in our future decisions than our past mistakes.

**Challenge:** Consider asking God for the grace to becoming living water. Spiritually adopt someone who is entering the Church this Easter. As the Church begins the Lenten scrutiny's, keep the Candidate or Catechumen in your prayers and sacrifices this week.

***Sir, you do not even have a bucket...where then can you get this living water? (John 4:11)***

**Closing Prayer:** *Jesus, enlighten our minds, that we might know our strengths as well as our weaknesses.*

*Help us to draw living water from Christ's inexhaustible well, that we might use our gifts to quench the thirst of our brothers and sisters. Give me Wild Hope that you, Jesus, can use my gifts for your Body, the Church. Amen.*



## Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 22, 2020

### GOSPEL [JOHN 9:1-41](#)

As Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth. He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, "Go wash in the Pool of Siloam" — which means Sent. So he went and washed, and came back able to see.

His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, "Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is," but others said, "No, he just looks like him." He said, "I am."

They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees. Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a sabbath. So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see." So some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, because he does not keep the sabbath." But others said,

"How can a sinful man do such signs?" And there was a division among them. So they said to the blind man again, "What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

They answered and said to him, "You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?" Then they threw him out.

When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered and said, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "I do believe, Lord," and he worshiped him.

***Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world I am the light of the world.” (John 9:4-5)*** (excerpt taken from Daily Graces: Lent for Families 2020)

Today is Laetare Sunday, the halfway point of Lent. Today, we begin to see light at the end of the tunnel. There are 850 words in today’s gospel. (Go ahead and count them.) And 580 of those words, or 68 percent, communicate arguments, divisions, and even ridicule. The religious leaders are so busy searching for fault in the man’s story that they completely ignore seven amazing, life changing words spoken by Jesus: **“I am the light of the world.”**

## **Reflection:**

1. If we were to look at the total number of words we speak, write, text, or post in a day, what percentage of them share Jesus’ light in the world? What percentage of our words would we even want Jesus to hear?
2. The man born blind does not ask for Jesus’ help; he may not even know of Jesus. Jesus reaches out and heals him anyway. Through a very brief exchange of healing, Jesus gives this man Wild Hope that radically alters the rest of his life for the better. When was the last time Jesus gave you Wild Hope...a new way of seeing things? Hope or peace in a dire situation?
3. The man born blind is healed but at a cost. He is interrogated by his community, by the leading religious authorities, and his own family. What is the cost of Wild Hope in our lives? What are we willing to risk, to change in our attitudes and behaviors, to keep Wild Hope alive in our hearts?

**Challenge:** Ask God to shine light in the dark areas of your life. Attend the parish Lenten Reconciliation service this week and have those dark areas brought into the light and replaced with Wild Hope of healing and reconciliation.

***I went and washed and received my sight. (John 9:11)***

*Oh God, be greater, than the worries in my life  
Be stronger, than the weakness in my mind  
Be louder, let your Glory come alive  
Be magnified*

~ from “Magnify” lyricists: Jonathan Lindley Smith, Casey Brown, Darren Mulligan

**Closing Prayer:** *God, you have called us from darkness to be light for the world. Grant that we, like Jesus, might burn brightly with Wild Hope as a sign to the nations of your saving power. Amen.*



## Fifth Sunday of Lent / March 29, 2020

### GOSPEL JOHN 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33-45

The sisters of Lazarus sent word to Jesus, saying, "Master, the one you love is ill."

They said to him, "Sir, come and see." And Jesus wept.

When Jesus heard this he said, "This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was. Then after this he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

So the Jews said, "See how he loved him." But some of them said, "Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?"

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you."

So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, "Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?"

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise." Martha said, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me."

She said to him, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

He became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?"

The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go."

Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him.



***Many came to Mary and Martha to console them. (John 11:19)***

Rather than recovering from open heart surgery, my mother entered into the presence of God. The next day, my sister received a package marked, “*Damaged in transit but deliverable.*” It arrived on a day when my heart was broken. Jesus delivered a message to me through the post office. “I know you've been *damaged in transit*, but don't stop there. Read the rest: “*still deliverable.*” (*excerpt taken from Lenten Blessings Await*)

**Reflection:**

1. Have you ever felt like you are damaged in transit? Unexpected news disrupts your life and it is never the same. It is in those times you can practice Wild Hope—turning it over to Jesus. Tell him, “I'm devastated. Help me.” The blind, deaf, dying, and paralyzed cast their heartaches on Jesus, and he rescued them from their affliction. He gave each Wild Hope.
2. Jesus was seemingly late to arrive at the scene for Lazarus. But his timing is always perfect. He was late because he loves. He chose to show up to the tomb and not the sick bed in order to show us how deep his love extends... to beyond this life. He shows a glory that we have never seen before. He reveals the Wild Hope of Easter, the Resurrection. With whom can we share this message of Wild Hope this week?
3. Martha puts trusts in Jesus in this dire situation. She is an example of practicing Wild Hope. “If you had been here...but even now, I know...” We need to follow her example. Discuss a situation where you can be an example of Wild Hope.

**Challenge:** Many prayer and service opportunities exist in the parish these waning days of Lent: Feeding Children Everywhere Service project, Midnight Watch Adoration, and weekday Adoration. Practice Wild Hope this week as you round out your Lenten resolutions. Pray and/or serve as an example of Wild Hope to others.

***Yes, Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world. John 11:27***

*Oh God, be greater, than the worries in my life  
Be stronger, than the weakness in my mind  
Be louder, let your Glory come alive  
Be magnified*

*~ from “Magnify” lyricists: Jonathan Lindley Smith, Casey Brown, Darren Mulligan*

**Closing Prayer:** *Jesus, you know when I am damaged and disheartened. Thank you for not letting me stay that way. Let me live in the same Wild Hope that Martha lived in when all seemed lost with Lazarus. Amen.*