Daily Reflections for Lent and Holy Week 2023

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Introduction

Please use these short readings and reflections through Lent as a part of your Lent studies and reflections.

Reflections (Monday to Friday, but also including Holy Saturday and Easter Day) include a verse taken from the Morning or Evening Prayer readings for the day, a brief reflection and an action.

The themes of the reflection and the action will be based on the branches of our diocesan vision. You will notice that some verses cover various branches (some of those are mentioned, some not). The verses will be part of a longer reading for the day which it would be good to look at if you have chance.

During this Lenten period take time to reflect on your life and pray for the future... Lent is a time of reflection and cleansing - it is a time and an opportunity to get closer to God.

Week 1

Ash Wednesday (February 22nd)

Verse: As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. *1 Timothy 6:17*

Reflect: Lent begins with a challenge to think about the good things we have and how we appreciate and use them. Also, that our material riches don't last forever. In these words, we are called to put our hopes and focus on God.

Action: Think of three material things for which you are thankful – in what ways do you appreciate and use them as a response to God's love.

Vision branch: Stewardship

February 23rd

Verse: I will meditate on all your works and ponder your mighty deeds Psalm 77: 12

Reflect: It's easy to take God for granted as we view God's incredible creation and the wonder of our very being and other people around us. For our own relationship with God, it is essential that we recognise where we see his wonder.

Action: Where do we see God's wonder most clearly? Take time to thank God.

Vision Branch: Discipleship

February 24th

Verse: Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman.... *John 4:27*

Reflect: This was a very different society to ours and even speaking to a woman in these circumstances was considered unusual at best. We've moved on in so many ways but it's still possible to think of some people as 'different' for all kinds of reasons. God loves and values every one of us, whoever we are, and calls us to do the same.

Action: Is there anyone you struggle with consciously or subconsciously because they seem 'different'? What are the reasons? Pray for God to help you overcome any barriers you may have in such relationships with others.

Vision Branch: Equality and Diversity

Week 2

February 27th

Verse: O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed, so that those from earth may strike terror no more. *Psalm 10:17,18*

Reflect: Jesus commands us to love, to try and follow his example of extravagant and limitless love. He also gave the example of seeking out those who were struggling or those considered the underdogs in society. Loving our neighbour (whoever that neighbour is) must mean actively seeking to care for those in need today.

Action: Do something kind for someone who is struggling today

Vision Branch: Social Justice

February 28th

Verse: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. *Psalm* 46: 1-3

Reflect: The spiritual impact of these words is powerful in a psalm reminding us of God's strength and protection. Today though, we're also challenged to think of the reality of a world where creation is being damaged by things that can be avoided. The weather patterns are changing and the climate crisis is worsening. God's creation is entrusted to our care and that gives us a responsibility to look after it.

Action: Think about the impact we as humans have on God's creation. Now think about your own lifestyle. Why not try filling in this short quiz to calculate your carbon footprint: https://footprint.wwf.org.uk/#/

Vision Branch: Environment

March 1st

Verse: I will give thanks to you, Lord, with my whole heart. I will tell of all your marvellous works. *Psalm 9:1*

Reflect: It's easy to put our faith into a compartment, separate to the rest of our lives. But the Christian faith is for every part of our lives, anything less means we are not enjoying the richness of our faith that God wants for us. As part of our everyday faith, we can think about where God fits in, whether it be in our confidence in a particular situation, feeling supported and strengthened in a challenge, recognising the beauty of creation, enjoying relationships with other people or any number of other things. And part of our response to that recognition is to be ready to respond by sharing our faith with others through our words and our actions.

Action: What have you got to be thankful for? In what ways do you tell people about those things?

Vision Branch: Discipleship and stewardship

March 2nd

Verse: When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" *John 6:5*

Reflect: Jesus knew all along what he was going to do, but he was interested to know what his disciples thought. What followed was a display of how abundantly God provides for us. He not only fed those present but there was some left over as well. Spending time with God in worship, prayer, fellowship and bible study are all incredibly important, but so is offering practical support to others when we can.

Action: Think of a way in which you can 'lift someone up'. Do you have a local foodbank, clothes bank or community fridge etc locally? Can you donate or even look at volunteering? Many of our churches are very active with these projects.

Vision Branch: Social Justice

March 3rd

Verse: If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another. *Galatians 5:25,26*

Reflect: We live in a competitive world, a world where the strongest seem to thrive and the weakest can be left to struggle. That sort of mentality can easily bring about a culture of competition, but we're all in this life together and none of us can truly be complete while

others are left to struggle. Our Christian faith allows us to be part of a family and families should not be jealous of one another, or competing against each other, but seeking to encourage and to build each other up.

Action: Think about the people you will meet today and tomorrow; look for the good in them and encourage them.

Vision Branch: Equality and Diversity

Week 3

March 6th

Verse: Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" *John* 6:41,42

Reflect: Lent is well known as a season of self examination, a chance to reflect on our relationship with God. Whilst that will be a real joy hopefully, we will probably find times when it's quite painful as we recognise what we could be doing better!

But fundamental questions to keep asking ourselves are, What do we think of Jesus? Who is he? And perhaps most importantly, what does he mean to you? The Jews in this passage couldn't work him out - to them he was just the son of Joseph. They couldn't see God in him at that point, perhaps they didn't want to see God in him.

Action: Ask those questions in the reflection of yourself. Transformed lives are the most visible and attractive sign of our faith to others who may be thinking about faith. In what way is your life transformed by your relationship with God?

Vision Branch: Discipleship

March 7th

Verse: The mighty one, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth. *Psalm 50:1,2*

Reflect: What is being described here as Zion is the glory of God's creation. In the verse we are reminded of the wonder of creation and of God's power and control over his creation, but he trusts us to care for it because he loves us and he wants us to enjoy it.

Action : Think of a beautiful place you have visited. Thank God for its beauty and for the memories and experiences you have from there. If it is local, maybe visit it today or very soon.

Vision Branch: Environment

March 8th

Verse: Contend O Lord with those that contend with me, fight against those that fight against me. *Psalm 35:1*

Reflect: The psalms are a perfect example of expressing emotion. Here, the writer of the psalm is calling for God to protect and strengthen them. It's a cry we can all make but it issues us with a challenge as well to try and stand up for and strengthen those who are struggling.

Action: Look up a Christian organisation (e.g. Christian Aid, Tearfund, Open Doors, Church Action on Poverty, Toilet Twinning) and join in one of the campaigns they are involved in.

Vision Branch: Social justice

March 9th

Verse: O Lord open my lips and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. *Psalm 51:15*

Reflect: The Psalms are about emotions. They speak some of the clearest words in the Bible. Topics include praise, worship, regret, joy, anger, despair, hope, trust and the list can go on. In Psalm 51 David is expressing his repentance about his relationship with Bathsheba.

There's plenty of verses about asking God to help him to be forgiven, but in the psalm there's the underlying theme of hope and trust and the recognition that God is always eager to offer mercy and grace. It's something we should never forget - nothing we do or fail to do puts us outside of God's love and care and his desire to rebuild our relationship with him.

Action: These words are crucial in every one of our vision branches. They're about praising God with our words. Some people are better with words, some with actions, but we need to build confidence to share our faith verbally as well as practically.

Think of any 2 branches of the vision and reflect on how you speak about those things so people would recognise your faith.

Vision Branch: All branches

March 10th

Verse: The Jews were astonished at it, saying, "How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?" Then Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me." *John 7:15,16*

Reflect: This is a bit of a double-edged sword for us. Just as the Jews were surprised at the extent of Jesus' knowledge and teaching, we too can sometimes listen to people with ears that only want to hear what we want to hear. This is hugely dangerous, running the risk of us neglecting teaching that seems to come from people who don't look or act exactly like us. But, on the other side of the sword, we also have the wonderful opportunity to respond to Jesus' words and recognise him as God, God who loves everyone.

Action: There are many traditions in the church. Whatever yours might be, try something a little bit different. That might be pledging to visit a church that's different to yours or read a book about something that you find difficult in your faith tradition. Step out of your comfort zone!

Vision Branch: Equality and Diversity



March 13th

Verse: Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. *Hebrews 4:14*

Reflect: Day by day, we are invited into a closer relationship with God. We do that through our prayers, through reading and reflecting on the Bible and in our fellowship and discussion with others.

Action: As you're making time to do these reflections through Lent, make a commimtment now to carrying something forward when Lent is over. If you don't do it already (other than in Lent), set aside some time (try for at least ten minutes) each day for prayer and bible reading. Speak to someone in your church if you want help with resources, such as bible reading notes.

Vision Branch: Discipleship

March 14th

Verse: When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." *John 8:7*

Reflect: This was a passage about justice. The woman in the account had been caught in the act of adultery and the punishment in the Jewish law at the time was stoning, but Jesus was introducing a new way, a new law. This was underpinned by mercy and grace.

Jesus was offering a second chance. Sometimes when we think about people who are struggling financially, or battling against addictions we can think that they've brought about their own problems. Bluntly put, they're getting what they deserve. The wonder of the gospel of Jesus is that we regularly don't get what we deserve because of this underpinning of mercy and grace in God's relationship with us.

So, we're reminded that we're not in a position to judge, but just to try and love. And that has an impact on how we view others as we are called always to share compassion.

Action: Think about how you could stand up for others today, especially those whose voice is not being heard. You might like to look at advocacy organisations such as Amnesty International or more local organizations such as Citizens Advice, MIND, Age UK.

Vision Branch: Social Justice

March 15th

Verse: For with you is the well of life, and in your light shall we see light. *Psalm 36:9*

Reflect: Every day is a great gift from God and a gift that is illuminated more brightly when we live in the knowledge of God's presence with us. As we cherish God's gifts, we can think of how we use them to show something of God's love for us and all people, and our love for him.

Action: What talents have you got that can bring light to others? Use that light today to bring light to someone.

Vision Branch: Stewardship

March 16th

Verse: O God you have cast us off and broken us; you have been angry; restore us to yourself again. *Psalm 60: 1*

Reflect: The idea of God turning against people is one that we struggle to understand, but it would have been a common thought at the time the psalm was written. Whilst confident

of God's love for us today there may be times when we struggle to feel God in our lives. It certainly doesn't mean he's not there. For some people though they do feel that God has turned against them, when actually what that really means is that the church seems to have turned against them.

Action: Who comes to your church? As you think about that, think about what your community looks like. How representative is your church of the community? If it's not, why do you think that is?

Vision Branch: Equality and Diversity, Social Justice

March 17th

Verse: Be not far from me O Lord; you are my strength, hasten to help me. *Psalm 22:19*

Reflect: This is a strange psalm in some ways. It begins with a real lament about God forsaking the writer, but then, as if that was just a momentary lapse, the writer turns back to God, recognising his power. The psalms are wonderfully honest, and we can be too. Sometimes life isn't easy, sometimes we do struggle to see God in all situations, but we too are called to cling to God.

Action: Is there anything you're struggling with at the moment? Pray openly and honestly about it – talk to God as you would talk to your closest friend. Trust that he will hear.

Vision Branch: Discipleship

Week 5

March 20th

Verse: The wolf shall live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion will feed together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. *Isaiah 11:6-9*

Reflect: The world often seems to be in turmoil. God's creation has been used and misused so much that damage, some irreversible, has been done. Yet this wonderful prophecy gives hope, hope of a time when God reconciles everything to himself, when the things that seem incompatible are brought together in a marvellous unity, recognising God.

But this vision isn't just for the future. In small ways, and in big ways, we are encouraged to make a difference today to make life better for anyone we can and to make God's creation more stable and secure for all. God is in control but we all have a responsibility to do our part.

Action: Did you calculate your carbon footprint earlier in these reflections (Feb 28th)? If not, have a go now (https://footprint.wwf.org.uk/#/). What small change could you make to your life? Remember, for changes to be sustainable and become a habit they can't be too big or too ambitious. Think of achievable changes such as driving a bit less, recycle a bit more, eat a bit less meat etc.

Vision Branch: Environment

March 21st

Verse: I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly John 10:10

Reflect: Sometimes Christians can make faith seem like a chore! It can seem joyless and look like too much effort. Here Jesus is making it clear that faith is a strength, support and joy and that it is life giving rather than life sapping! We are called to celebrate faith, living our lives as an act of worship but also working to ensure that others know God's love for them too. We do that in our witness both in words and in our actions.

Action: Think of a way in which you show the joy of your faith to others. How do you express that joy? Write some ideas down.

Vision Branch: Discipleship

March 22nd

Verse: I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. *John* 10:11

Reflect: A good shepherd will always lead their sheep. The sheep will happily be led because they trust that the shepherd knows and wants what is best for them. There may be times when we think we know best, when we 'go our own way', without seeking to rely totally on God. It is a mistake. As we recognise his presence, we see his guiding hand on our lives and we know him better and we recognise that he wants and knows what is best for us.

Action: Can we give more to God? This passage thinks about sacrifice and one of the greatest sacrifices we can make is giving up our time. Think about what time you give to the church, or could give, and how it can help. All of us have the privilege and responsibility of being God's ambassadors today.

Vision Branch: Stewardship

March 23rd

Verse: And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another. *Hebrews* 10:24,25

Reflect: It is a sad but true fact that some people don't feel that the church is ready to welcome them. Whether that is true or not (and in some cases it probably will be and others it won't) it is a perception which needs to be changed. Meeting together as a Christian family must include all kinds of different people.

Action: On March 16th you thought about who is missing from your congregation. What can you and your church do to ensure everyone feels welcome? Who in your church should you share your ideas with? Find out who it is and speak to them!

Vision Branch: Equality and Diversity

March 24th

Verse: Lord you were gracious to your land... Psalm 85:1a

Reflect: Land was, and remains, tremendously important to people in the Middle East. It is viewed as a great gift from God and is treasured. For us, land isn't viewed in quite the same way, but it remains a great gift from God and we are called to recognise God's part in creation, the gifts he entrusts to us and how we care for and use that gift.

Action: Encourage your church to consider what positive impact can be made for the environment. Perhaps it will be in working towards something like an 'A Rocha' award – maybe you could offer to be part of a group co-ordinating this? (https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk)

Vision Branch: Environment and Stewardship



March 27th

Verse: By faith... Hebrews 11:17a

Reflect: The passage set for evening prayer (Hebrews 11:17-31) describes the faith of various characters from the Old Testament. They have different stories associated with them, stories of remarkable faith in some cases. When we think of our own faith story,

there may be a remarkable story to tell, or it may be unremarkable, but what matters is that we recognise the presence of God in our lives.

Action: What is your faith story? Write it down and reflect on it and we will think about how you can share it as we continue through Lent and then beyond.

Vision Branch: Discipleship

March 28th

Verse: Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow... *Jeremiah 22:3a*

Reflect: Dorothy Day wrote, 'I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least'. These words represent a massive challenge to us as we look around at different people in our society and further afield who are suffering. As Christians we are obliged not to ignore suffering or social injustice in whatever form. While even one person suffers, we all suffer.

Action: What organisations are seeking to improve life for people either by meeting immediate needs or by working to combat the causes of injustice. Can you get involved in one?

Vision Branch: Social Justice

March 29th

Verse: Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" *John 12:3-5*

Reflect: Mary's gift to Jesus was extravagant. Judas Iscariot certainly didn't understand it, and perhaps he wasn't alone. In our giving to Jesus, whether it be in time, talent or money, we are called to give extravagantly as our giving can be a measure of our love for him.

Action: Mary's gift is a financial gift. Think about the financial gifts that you donate and whether you can afford to give more.

Vision Branch: Stewardship

March 30th

Verse: You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you. Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted. *Psalm 40: 5*

Reflect: As we open our eyes more to the beauty of creation, we recognise that we are called to help as stewards of that creation and to look at what more we can and should be doing to preserve it. Sometimes our voice seems quiet and we're not sure we can do much but we can speak to others who can help as well. Why not write to your MP calling them to act on one of any number of causes. Here are examples of some things you can look up, think about and act upon:

https://www.wwf.org.uk/climate-promises/contact-your-mp

https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/protecting-trees-and-woods/campaign-with-us/campaign-in-your-community/contact-your-mp-for-help-to-protect-trees-and-woods/

https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/contact-your-mp

Action: It's not always easy to stay on the right side of a debate or argument. Today think about the beauty of creation and the damage we do to it through our lifestyle. Do something to make the world better. For example, give up meat for a day a week or take out at least one car journey a week and walk or use public transport instead.

Vision Branch: Environment

March 31st

Verse: Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." *John 12:20,21*

Reflect: Recent census figures provide all kinds of interesting information, not least about religion. The negative portrayal was about the number of people describing themselves as Christian fell below 50% for the first time, but this is still a huge amount of people. Joining together, we can form a great band of witnesses testifying to God's love through our words and our actions.

Action: Think about the five branches of the Diocesan Vision. How do you live your faith in ways those branches promote? Are there one or two to which you are most drawn? Why do you think that is?

Vision Branch: All branches

Holy Week

April 3rd

Monday in Holy Week

Verse: Blessed are those who consider the poor and needy... Psalm 41:1a

Reflect: Many times in the Bible, and through the example of Jesus himself, we are called to care for the poor and needy. This teaching compels the church to look outwardly into the communities we are called to love and serve, reaching out to show God's love in spiritual and practical ways.

Action: As individuals we can make a difference. You should know by now where you can find your nearest foodbank etc and if you don't already, you will have considered if you can donate or voiunteer, but what about other actions as well? Perhaps pledge to buying more fairtrade items, making a difference to people throughout the world who are in need. Think of a food or drink you buy regularly and look up a fairtrade option – why not buy that option from now on.

Vision Branch: Social Justice

April 4th

Tuesday in Holy Week

Verse: May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. *Galatians 6:14*

Reflect: Most of us don't think of ourselves as boasters probably – and that is a very good thing! Except here, we are being called to boast very specifically about God's love for us. But as we do that, we celebrate and share the fact that it is a love for everyone. The victory of the cross achieved through the resurrection of Jesus is a victory won for all people. This verse again urges us to reflect on our faith, on how we serve and love God and how our lives can be a blessing to others.

Action: Sharing our faith is to a very large degree about welcome. It is about how we welcome people when we meet them, whether that be in church, in work, socially or in the street. And it is about how the church welcomes people, not just those who come into the church buildings, but how we welcome in an invitational way, boasting in God's love for all. Spend 5 minutes today reflecting on how you welcome people in whatever context you may be, and 5 minutes on ways you could do it better.

Vision Branch: All branches

April 5th

Wednesday in Holy Week

Verse: Then they seized him (Jesus) and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a female servant, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." *Luke 22:54-57*

Reflect: This is the beginning of the account of Peter denying knowing Jesus after Jesus' arrest. It's a really challenging account for us all as we wonder what we might have done in that situation. But it reminds to ask ourselves today, what do we do to tell others we 'know' Jesus.

Action: Invite a friend or family member to church for Easter or send them a card or even a gift which explicitly reminds (or outlines to) them of what Easter is really about.

Vision Branch: Discipleship

April 6th

Maundy Thursday

Verse: Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people **14** and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people, and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him."

Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!" *Luke* 23:13-18

Reflect: Pilate really wasn't sure about Jesus and he certainly had concerns about condemning him but he wasn't strong enough or didn't care enough to stand up against the cries of the crowd calling for Barabbas to be released and Jesus condemned to death. How often do we listen to the loudest voices and ignore the cry of justice?

Action: Spend ten minutes in prayer and reflection today. Think about where the loudest shouts hurt those who are vulnerable or in minority and sometimes marginalised groups. Pray for guidance as to how you can stand with those with the quietest voices and pledge to do something about it.

Vision Branch: Social Justice/ Equality & Diversity

April 7th

Good Friday

Verse: Let the heavens and the earth praise him, the seas and all that moves in them *Psalm* 69: 36

Reflect: On Good Friday we are reminded of the incredible depth of God's love for us. The pain and suffering Jesus endured was for each one of us. But he doesn't call us to have any sense of paralysing guilt, but rather invites us to respond to his love through our lives.

Action: On March 27th you wrote down your faith story. Now is the time to think about sharing that story with someone. Who can you tell? A friend, family member? Our faith is good news which we shouldn't keep to ourselves!

Vision Branch: All branches

April 8th

Holy Saturday

Verse: The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. *John 2:18-22*

Reflect: Holy Saturday or Easter Eve is a day to reflect. In this passage we are reminded of the promise of Jesus to over-ride the things of this world with something far more powerful. That is the potential of a full and eternal life. The disciples spent so much time with Jesus but didn't fully understand Jesus until after the resurrection and that was the beginning of a new journey for them.

Action: Think about everything you've done since Ash Wednesday in these reflections. From those thoughts and actions what are your commitments for the future? Write them down to remind yourself and hold yourself to account!

Vision Branch: All branches

April 9th

Easter Day

The day of resurrection...

As we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, reflect on your journey through Lent. It isn't a journey that stops today but rather a journey that begins again today.

Think about the commitments you've made and written down and remember, whatever they are, you do them with God supporting you, strengthening you, loving you...

A final thought!

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else — C.S. Lewis

We're invited to see with these eyes in the confidence of the resurrection of Jesus...

