

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How do you respond to the questions that Pope Francis has raised about the culture in which we live?
2. What are the main burdens that are weighing people down in our community?
3. What are we already doing to help those who are struggling? What more could we do?
4. How is our parish community supporting families, especially those with different structures or difficult experiences? Are there other ways we could help?

## Practical Evangelisation

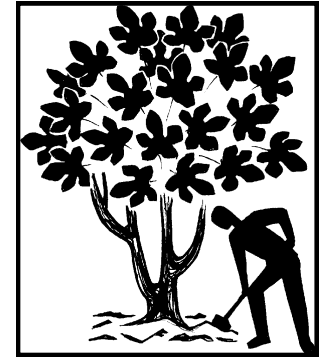
Have a conversation this week with someone whose experience is very different from your own. Ask them what weighs them down and what gives them hope.

## Prayer

God of life,  
at times we experience death  
not only within ourselves  
but in the world around us.  
Give us courage to be vessels for life to flow  
within us and through us.  
Give us strength to stand as witnesses for life  
and fill us with compassion for those who struggle  
to find life in the midst of death.  
May we always be mindful of the invitation  
to unbind and let go free  
those who have experienced the darkness  
of poverty, pain and heartache,  
that they may find the joy of the Gospel.  
Amen.



*Together on  
the Road  
Lent 2019*



## *Third Sunday of Lent: The Fig Tree*

Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did.'

He told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to the man who looked after the vineyard, "Look here, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down.'"

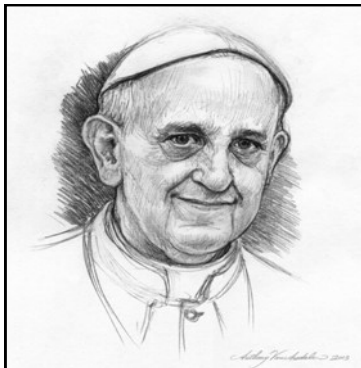
*Luke 13:1-9*

**Jesus challenges two popular beliefs in this passage: that people get what they deserve and that the key values in organised societies are production and profit. Instead of blaming victims and destroying unproductive trees, we should be repenting, having a changed mind and a new, more merciful, way of seeing.**

**Pope Francis urges us to think again about how our economy and our society are organised, to put people, not consumption or profit, at the centre.**

These Lenten Reflections can be downloaded from

[www.synod2020.co.uk](http://www.synod2020.co.uk)



**To ponder:** The way our global economy has developed has consequences for people's lives.

**Pope Francis reflects on an economy of exclusion and inequality:**

Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving?

This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape. Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a "throw away" culture which is now spreading. [53]

**Question:** How does the global economy impact on me and the people I know? Are there choices I could make to resist its negative effects?

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**To ponder:** Our lifestyle affects others.

**Pope Francis reflects on a lifestyle that excludes:**

Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us. [54]

**Question:** How conscious am I of those who produce the goods I consume? How does this awareness affect the choices I make?

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**To ponder:** People can be oppressed by financial structures.

**Pope Francis reflects on a new idolatry of money:**

One cause of this situation is found in our relationship with money, since we calmly accept its dominion over ourselves and our societies. The current financial crisis can make us overlook the fact that it originated in a profound human crisis: the denial of the primacy of the human person! We have created new idols... man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption. [55] While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. [56] Money must serve, not rule! [58] Today's economic mechanisms promote inordinate consumption, yet it is evident that unbridled consumerism combined with inequality proves doubly damaging to the social fabric.[60]

**Question:** What part does money play in my life and in my decisions? How carefully do I think about what I choose to consume?

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**To ponder:** The gospel is about relationships and community, but the bonds that unite us can be weakened by our culture.

**Pope Francis reflects on a crisis in relationships:**

In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children. [66] The individualism of our postmodern and globalized era favours a lifestyle which weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds. Pastoral activity needs to bring out more clearly the fact that our relationship with the Father demands and encourages a communion which heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds. [67]

**Question:** How strong are the relationships in my life? What sort of pastoral activity in my parish is strengthening family and community life?

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