

**Monday of the Third Week of Lent**  
**Day 17: Finding God in the Differences**

*For reflection:* Bishop Katharine is recognized as a person of faith whenever she wears her purple bishop's shirt. As she recounts, sometimes her purple shirt connects her to people, sometimes it seems to drive people away from her.

What do you wear that identifies you as a person of faith? Is it your joyful smile, your calm persona, your ear, always cocked to listen? If you're like most of us, you aren't always wearing your best "clothes," so to speak, for the sake of your faith.

Thankfully, there's always the chance to change so that your faith is more recognizable. But it isn't always easy. Each of us needs God's help. And God is willing to help us, no matter the masks we've worn in the past.

*Suggestion for Prayer: If you have a cross, or another item that symbolizes your faith, wear it for a day. Notice the way others respond to you. Does "wearing your faith on your sleeve" open up opportunities to share your faith with others? Pray for the awareness of little opportunities to quietly preach – and hear—the Gospel in your everyday interactions.*

**Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent**  
**Day 18: Traveling Light**

*For reflection:* This won't surprise you, coming from a writer: I love books. I love the way new covers crackle as you open them for the first time. I even love the musty smell of old ones, even though they aggravate my allergies. Mostly, I love the way an alternate world, or new ways of thinking or people who lived in a place and time I've

never visited are all contained in something I can hold in my hands. It was a miracle to me when I learn to read, entering the world of “Look, Jane, look!” and “Run Dick, run!” and it is a miracle to me still, whether I’m indulging my love of historical fiction or getting a little brain exercise in a theological gym.

Now loving books is almost always a trait clergy share, and so we frequently receive them as gifts. When I was a curate, little by little my office became stuffed with books – old ones from divinity school and earlier, and new ones that were gifts marking my ordination. I was never quite sure how to answer when asked, “Have you read all these books?” Some, I’d “read, marked and inwardly digested,” as we Episcopalians like to say. Several I’d enjoyed. Others I’d referred to when writing sermons. And still others I’d merely touched when finding a place for them in my burgeoning collection. About the time it became clear to me that I was being called to a new ministry, my beloved books felt like a burden. It occurred to me that I was hiding behind them, so that I would seem smart and intellectual. I couldn’t shake this insight, though I didn’t like it. And the idea of moving out of my office gave me courage to find a home for the books I knew I’d never read again. The bookstore manager at my divinity school pointed me toward a Lutheran seminary in, of all places, Jamaica. Neither the school nor the students could afford many books, but they were able to cover shipping costs. And with each box I took to the post office, I felt lighter – and better able to move into the new direction in which God was calling.

Maybe it’s much the same for all of us. Traveling light is the best way to set out on the surprising adventures that God has in store for everybody.

*Suggestion for Prayer: What physical items are weighing down your soul? Pray about what to do with them – and then do it!*

**Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent  
Day 19: Lab Report**

*For Reflection:* When I read about Tom Ehrich's insight that "the great sin of the church is the desire to be right," it felt like someone had just thrown a bucket of cold water at me. I suppose that's because I commit that sin too. How many times have I continued to argue a point long after I've stopped caring about it one way or another? Those are the times I hang on tenaciously to my ideas like a terrier, just for the sake of winning the argument.

As Bishop Katharine reminds us, we won't get it right until Jesus comes again – but that's no reason to stop trying. No reason to stop trying to listen, to forgive, to forgo pride. But none of us can do this alone. We all need to surround ourselves with friends and communities that support our efforts, as we in turn support theirs. We need to pray. And we need Jesus, who will help us try and try and try – even into eternity.

*Suggestion for Prayer: Today's suggestion comes word for word from Bishop Katharine's essay: "Close your eyes for a minute. Think of somebody whose opinions or actions or very self you reject, find repulsive, or someone with whom you are really angry. Maybe it's a member of your family. Or someone in your congregation...hold that person in your mind's eye. Look well. This is a child of God. This is God's beloved, even if it's not easy to see that just yet. If you can't let go of your anger with this person right now, your prayer could be for understanding...Make this person the focus of your*

*prayers for a week. And when you come again to the Lord's table, maybe, just maybe, there will be some new life in that relationship."*

**Thursday of the Third Week of Lent**  
**Day 20: Sibling Rivalry**

*For Reflection:* I couldn't help but recall the recent national magazine cover when I read Bishop Katharine's essay for today. The headline was something like "Your Siblings: Their Power to Shape Your Personality." I eagerly read the article in a doctor's office waiting room, as somebody whose two brothers who were so much older than I that they seemed almost grown-up from my earliest memories, and as the mother of an only child. How dare they! the article seemed to imply. How dare our brothers and sisters influence who we are and how our experiences are shaped!

But that's all part of the "risk" of sharing the world, with everybody from people we don't much care for to people we'll probably never, ever meet, and yes—even with our siblings. Especially with our siblings. We are, as John Donne reminded us so memorably, not islands unto ourselves. And sometimes we don't like that!

As Bishop Katharine points out, even Jesus was impatient with his relatives. You get the idea that James' feelings toward his brother (or cousin, as Mark's gospel says; some other writings say James was the son of Joseph's first wife) were complex at best. In my experience, all relationships contain some complexity, and all families are dysfunctional, in varying degrees. Although reconciliation is usually desirable, there are those cases where it's unsafe or unhealthy to remain in relationship with another.

Sometimes the issues we have with one another go way beyond rivalry, so sometimes the hard choice of liberating ourselves from a relationship is the wisest course. But how to be simultaneously protective and forgiving? No matter what the situation, no matter how deeply we've been wronged, we can always pray for peace in both our own lives and in those of the others –even if it's someone from whom we need to protect ourselves.

***Suggestion for Prayer:** What blessings can you ask God to bestow on someone who has hurt you or someone you love? Peace? Safety? Deeper self-knowledge? Healthy relationships? Health? Be sure to ask God to bless you and those you love as well.*

## **Friday of the Third Week of Lent**

### **Day 21: The Family Table**

***For Reflection:** Bishop Katharine's reminder that all of us – the whiny, the grumpy, the lazy – are called to share God's table reminds me that a lot of the Church's mystics wouldn't even be runners-up in Miss or Mr. Congeniality contests. Take Margery of Kemp, for example – the mystic credited with writing the first autobiography in English. I picture her as a more spiritual, 14th century version of Hyacinth Bouquet, the British sitcom character on *Keeping Up Appearances* comically portrayed by Patricia Routledge.*

Well-born Margery was so haughty her neighbors wanted nothing to do with her. When she went on pilgrimage, her fellow seekers got so fed up with her dramatic spiritual reactions, always involving buckets of tears, that they ditched her. Margery writes movingly of her loneliness, of her husband's tolerance, of her passion for Christ and of her slow-growing intimacy with Him. By the end of her life, this once self-centered woman, who never did learn how to play well with others, spends much of her time praying for others. Through interceding for others, formerly selfish Margery seems to have found her calling, and her peace, at last.

Another 14th century English mystic, Julian of Norwich, shares a vision that is helpful when it gets hard to share the table with our fellow human beings. Julian says she saw Jesus presiding at a banquet – plentiful food, lots of laughter, and an assortment of listening and smiling faces. At first, Julian simply looked on, in awe at the delicious looking food and at the harmony among the guests at this version of the best Thanksgiving dinner ever. And then Jesus invited her to the table with these words: “Thank you.” Julian was understandably confused. Thank you? For what? And Jesus repeated Himself. “Thank you. Thank you for being human.”

It isn't always easy sharing the world with those we don't particularly like, or those we don't agree with, or those who frighten us. But Jesus rewards us for trying with a richer banquet than we might think possible.

***Suggestion for Prayer:*** Try placing yourself inside Julian's vision. Be sure the

*table contains plenty of people whom you find difficult, or unknowable, or downright odd. And then imagine Jesus thanking you for being human. Does your opinion of the difficult people soften or change in any way?*

## **Saturday of the Third Week of Lent**

### **Day 22: Live Long and Prosper**

***For Reflection:*** When I read Bishop Katharine’s point that Christianity “is not a journey for cowards,” I recalled an article I recently read in The New York Times’ travel section by a trekker through Patagonia. Located in southern Argentina and Chile, Patagonia is literally the end of the earth. And hiking it is apparently not a journey for cowards. I read about thigh-deep mud, altitude sickness, fierce wind, driving rain, and an endless diet of instant noodles. But I also read about breath-taking beauty: glaciers and pure light and fields dotted with wildflowers. The photos were jaw-dropping views of granite mountains, immense and capped with blindingly white snow. One of the photos included wild llamas, caught in mid-graze. What I remember most clearly is the writer’s epiphany that when nature is left to its own devices, there is never any true destruction. There is regeneration even in a forest blackened by fire. I also remember that this trek – which turned out to be challenging even for the experienced outdoorsman who wrote the article – was shared. This guy is smart – smart enough to write for The New York Times, after all, but also smart enough to take, along with his cook stove and sleeping bag, a companion. He didn’t go it alone. And together they faced the difficulties and savored the rewards.

This is why we need to find and build healthy communities – communities where even those we deem “alien” are welcome. Christianity, life, even trekking—none of these are meant to be solo activities. We can’t regenerate by ourselves. Like the scorched forest that needs birds to scatter seeds in fire-enriched soil, we need to draw on the wisdom, experiences, and courage of one another. Life is too hard to go it alone, and there’s no need to. Because Jesus is always with us.

*Suggestion for Prayer:* Focus on a challenge you’re facing: issues with your children, financial hardship, stress at work, loss. Think about that one challenge in depth. Envision yourself trying to come through the challenge. And then think about it with Jesus at your side. My guess is that the more you think about Jesus being with you, the more you’ll envision others who can help you find solutions