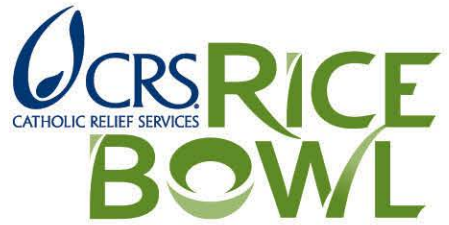


encounter
Lent Encounter ourselves.
Encounter our neighbors.
Encounter our God.



ENCOUNTER LENT

Theological & Scriptural Reflections

encounter *Lent*

Encounter ourselves.
Encounter our neighbors.
Encounter our God.



We are called to build a culture of encounter.

Jesus made that clear from the way he lived, the message he preached. Pope Francis makes that clear by his own daily example. And we have a host of holy men and women who have come before us, who have gone to the margins of society so that every member of our human family might know the love of God.

Now, it's our turn. With the spiritual pillars of Lent at our disposal, we set out on a 40-day journey, a journey of encounter with ourselves, our neighbors and our God.

- Through **prayer**, we encounter Christ, present in the faces of every member of our human family, so often still walking that long road to Calvary.
- Through **fasting**, we encounter our own obstacles, those things about ourselves that prevent us from loving God and neighbor.
- Through **almsgiving**, we encounter our brothers and sisters around the world, asking what we can give up so that others might have life to the fullest.

Lent is our time to **encounter**, to cultivate a spirit of global solidarity. CRS Rice Bowl is our guide, a vehicle through which the stories of communities around the world can be shared, an invitation through which our prayers and Lenten sacrifices can change lives.

How will you contribute to the culture of encounter this Lent?

encounter

Lent

Encounter ourselves.
Encounter our neighbors.
Encounter our God.



We encounter ourselves.

To build a culture of encounter, we must start from within ourselves, from our personal call to discipleship. God knows our true selves, desiring that we, too, discover the person God has called us to be. Through prayer, we encounter ourselves before God; we see ourselves as God sees us. And we realize that God delights in every member of our human family because God is truly present in each of us.

[Jesus reminds us](#), “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” To love another, we must come to know our own selves, our own hurts and triumphs, our own joys and challenges. What begins as an interior encounter necessarily goes beyond ourselves, challenging us to live in solidarity with people we may never meet. How can we hope to go to the margins, to accompany those who are most vulnerable and in need, if we haven’t properly wrestled with our own vulnerability, our own need? Only then can we recognize that each person we encounter can share with us some unique insight about our world, about ourselves and, ultimately, about our God.

We meet Jesus in the desert, a time of introspection and discernment before he begins his ministry. What has he gone there to accomplish? [Luke tells us](#) that Jesus “was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil.” There he fasts and prays—and the Enemy takes that opportunity to tempt Christ with those temptations we each encounter daily: material comfort, honor and pride.

Jesus responded by trusting in God, by emptying himself of pride and power and ultimately rejecting the invitations of the Enemy.

We, too, can better understand where we are broken and turning away from who we are called to be by following Jesus’ example and encountering ourselves through prayer and fasting. We may not go into a desert for forty days, but we can and should take the forty-day invitation of Lent as an opportunity to reorient our lives, examining how we are living in relationship with God and our neighbors.

That might mean coming to terms with troubling or disappointing truths. Can we, like Jesus, radically reject the offering of power, of influence? We all want glory, praise, a pat on the shoulder, but as Jesus turned away from the Enemy’s offering, so too must we. And then, where do we turn? We go to the margins with humility and compassion. Only by encountering ourselves can we then encounter our neighbors.

Luke 4: 1 - 15

encounter

Lent

Encounter ourselves.
Encounter our neighbors.
Encounter our God.



We encounter our neighbors.

Jesus' ministry was a three-year encounter with others. He went to those on the margins, those whom society had rejected, those who themselves believed that they had sinned one too many times to be forgiven. He went to each of them with a message of love, of compassion, of mercy. And he called them back to themselves, so that they, too, saw themselves as God saw them: dignified human beings worthy of divine love.

John relates to us [the story of the man born blind](#). Here, we see Jesus determined to encounter this man, to physically touch this individual where he was most hurting. Jesus does not allow politics, societal expectations or the gossip of others to stand in his way. Rather, he goes directly to meet the man, to work through him and to give him sight.

Society had forgotten this man, had quite literally kicked him to the curb, left to spend his days in poverty. But Jesus reminds us that no one is forgotten by God; no one should be condemned to a life of hunger, homelessness, poverty or injustice. Rather, Jesus quite radically points the finger at the accepted systems in place that deemed it okay to leave this man on the margins. And then he encounters the man in love.

But who is my neighbor, we may ask, echoing that scholar of the law who wished to test Jesus. Jesus replies with the [Parable of the Good Samaritan](#)—and it becomes quite clear that Jesus has little time for divisiveness, exclusion or othering. Instead, we encounter those in need recognizing that it was God who encountered us first. And, indeed, it is God's vision that we seek to realize through building a culture of encounter.

John 9: 1 - 9

encounter *Lent*

Encounter ourselves.
Encounter our neighbors.
Encounter our God.



We encounter our God.

God's vision can be scary. Sometimes, it's easier to *avoid* encountering God. What might God ask of us? Will it be in line with what we ourselves want?

We hear [Jesus' words in the Garden of Gethsemane](#): "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done." This is Christ's prayer on the night before he died—through prayer, he encounters God. And yet, God asks something of Jesus that could not be more difficult. And Jesus carries on.

Realizing God's vision for humanity is not an easy thing. We see in the Garden of Gethsemane that God enters deeply into human suffering, that not even Christ himself can avoid this all-too-prevalent part of the human experience. Indeed, we see in the Garden—and perhaps we recognize in our own lives—that God is at work through suffering, that we must enter into those dark moments in order to bring to fruition God's great dreams for us and for others.

As we look out at our world, perhaps we, too, carry on our lips that prayer of Jesus in the Garden. That's okay. That's an honest and intense encounter with our God, a God who asks that we live the Gospel call to mercy, justice and love no matter the cost.

But we also know that the story did not end in the Garden. It didn't end on the cross. It didn't even end in the tomb. Rather, God makes all things new, emerging victorious in even the darkest of hours. God calls forth from us great and wondrous things if we have the courage to encounter within ourselves those seeds of love that God has planted.

Luke 22: 39 - 46

encounter

Lent

Encounter ourselves.
Encounter our neighbors.
Encounter our God.



We encounter resurrection.

When the risen Jesus encounters his disciples on [the road to Emmaus](#), it's quite clear that their journeying away from Jerusalem is in fact a journeying away from hope. They have witnessed their friend, their hoped-for savior die; they have seen their community scattered; they have understood their trust in God to have been misplaced. What is left for them now?

Jesus, of course, turns them around—quite literally. The encounter with the risen Christ means a renewed encounter with hope; that God is not done yet; that darkness and suffering do not have the final word.

Indeed, this story continues to unfold in our own time. We look out at a world wracked by hunger, poverty, war, injustice and we, too, feel like walking away. Where should we place our hope when the challenges seem insurmountable?

This is the story of resurrection. We encounter Christ daily in the faces of our neighbors, of those we meet in our work, our home, on our streets, those whom we have yet to meet face to face but with whom we are intricately tied as members of God's one human family. We encounter Christ, too, within ourselves. And in these encounters, we have reason to hope. Because God is not done yet—and so long as we have strength to continue the work of building a culture of encounter, of responding to our Gospel call, neither are we.

Luke 24: 13 - 35