

Becoming Beloved Community
Exploring Our Relationship with Authority

“Humans go abroad to wonder at the heights of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motions of the stars, and they pass by themselves without wondering.” St. Augustine

Lent, 2026

Dear Friends,

May Christ be with us and the Spirit guide us through this holy season of Lent.

Lent is an intentional season of the church’s calendar when we inwardly explore ourselves, our personal relationship with God, and the relationships we have with other human beings. *Who are we* in relationship? How do we show up to God and others? Where might self-exploration reveal opportunities for growth and transformation?

Conflict happens in relationships. It has a way of persistently providing us with opportunities to explore the question ‘what is happening between us?’ In relationships we experience as conflicted, we may fall into our natural and automated emotional patterns that can override prayerful observation and consideration of our thoughts, feelings and responses. We may miss the opportunity to experience spaciousness, taking a pause and reflect beyond our familiar responses.

Our personal and corporate stewardship of power and authority makes all the difference in a conflict. The “quality of the fighting matters”, as Pdraig O’Tuama discusses when exploring the “Space Between Intention and Impact” (podosullivan.com, *The Leadership Context, Changing the Plot. Ensuring Your Intentions Have Substance*). He notes that people must show up for quality dialogue, understanding what they want and what action they are willing to take. Underneath the capacity to expand one’s “quality of fighting,” I believe, is a requisite to explore how we personally understand, experience and respect power; our own, God’s and that of our fellow human beings. Such discernment can empower conscious and faithful action.

In my address to the convention last September, I mentioned that exploring how power and authority work in the Diocese of Florida would be an important assessment in preparation for discerning and electing your next bishop. The matter of how power and authority are used in the diocese is a critical aspect for review of the systems-wide conflict that has

happened in the diocese. I noted that a Bible study on power and authority might be a helpful tool for this exploration. The Bible, among other things, offers a mirror of the human experience in relationship to the divine.

It has been an interesting experience to research existing bible studies through the lens of this topic. Many bible studies come with natural biases, opinions and perspectives about how power and authority ought to be exercised, often influenced by various religious traditions. Options expressed in the Bible for how to engage with power and authority as a person of faith include, prayer, listening, following, distancing, argument, conciliation, manipulation, obedience, acquiescence, drawing straws or exercising the very last option available. A Biblical character's discernment of a decision includes their cultural lens and personal experience. We too must be aware of our own lens and perspectives as we engage Bible stories seeking faithful discernment in our life with Christ.

The gospel readings for Year A in Lent are an excellent place to explore the stewardship of power and authority. How were we raised to think about power and authority? Who had it, who didn't, and what were the methods to use it? What do we think about power and authority? How do the words make us feel? Is my use of power and authority aligned with what I believe Jesus is inviting me to do, and in keeping with the Baptismal Covenant of my faith tradition?

Below are questions for reflection that accompany the gospel reading for each Sunday of Lent. They are intended to offer an opportunity to explore power and authority through individual reflection, as you study scripture in a trusted group of church members. We hope members of the diocese will become more acquainted with their experience of God's power and authority, as well as their own, and learn to listen for the experience of others. Exploring this topic will develop personal insight, as well as a common awareness of the patterns of the use of power and authority in the Diocese of Florida, especially as this time of transition unfolds.

THE PROCESS

- You are invited to use the general instructions for [Lectio Divina](#) in your reading of the text, using the basic Lectio questions to listen deeply to the scripture and to the group's insight of what it says.
- Use [Mutual Invitation](#) and the [Communication Norms](#) in order to hear one another stories and insights. Thank you to Julie Davis from Good Shepherd, Jacksonville for crafting the Communication Norms.

- Use the questions below to specifically explore your stewardship of power and authority.

Beginning with prayer (this one or another):

God of all life, we thank you for the life you give us in Jesus Christ, and for the blessing of being part of his body, the Church. We pray for open hearts and minds as sacred scripture is opened to us. May we discern the wisdom of your Holy Spirit as we listen and share together. Make this time fruitful and in the service of your kingdom. **Amen.**

Lent 1- Matthew 4:1-11 the Temptation of Jesus

What do you think of good and evil?

In a word what is your experience of temptation?

When you think of times you have been tempted, what has been the source of your feelings within?

Map your thought process in dealing with temptation. How did you resist or succumb?

Are there lessons from your journey with temptation that have strengthened your faith life?

Lent 2 – John 3:1-17 – Jesus and Nicodemus

What is your experience when you encounter a voice that speaks with a different type or quality of authority than you have experienced before?

What individuals and institutions were your primary authorities growing up?

Did you disagree or rebel against them in your life? What was that experience like?

What is your relationship with that authority now?

If you had all the authority, how would you use it?

Lent 3 - John 4:5-42 – Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

Think of a personal experience of being in conflict with your family or wider community.

What internal and external voices of authority did you hear during the conflict?

What were your thoughts and feelings when you heard those voices? How did you behave as a result?

From your perspective, what is happening between Jesus and the woman and the woman and the community?

What was the impact for the woman and the community?

What is the impact of the story on you?

Lent 4 – John 9:1-41 Jesus and a Man Born Blind

There are many questions coming from different perspectives in this reading.

How do you feel when a group takes sides during a conflict? What authority does ‘the group’ have for you?

What is your experience of questions? For example, how did you feel when you were a child and asked for an answer to a question?

Think of a time when your account of a significant event was not heard, believed or respected by a person(s) in authority. What was the impact on you and others?

What insights does this story offer you in your exploration of your relationship with authority?

Lent 5 – John 11:1-45 Jesus and the Death and Raising of Lazarus

There are numerous levels of understanding – and misunderstanding – around the events in this story. When you have been involved in a complex situation, how have you used your power to discern what you thought was the right way to think and the right way to behave?

Think of a time in your life when you realized a power or energy greater than you was involved in a situation or event. How did you relate with the power?

How did the presence of the power or authority change the way you viewed the situation?

What was the impact on your spiritual life and your relationship with authority?

Personal post-reflection:

What shifts, if any, happened in your understanding of your stewardship of power and authority?

What shifts, if any, happened in your understanding of how God's power and authority works in the world?

Are there conflicts in your life where God might be calling you to steward power in the work of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation?

What faithful action might be involved?

Closing prayer:

God of all glory, we give you thanks for Jesus Christ your Son, by whom we know the power of your love. We thank you for this opportunity to dwell in your Word together, deepening our faith and strengthening our witness in the world. May this time of indwelling with you and one another continue to bear fruit in our lives, and may we strive to be good stewards of your grace, serving always your Kingdom and your glory. In the loving name of Jesus, we make our prayer. **Amen.**