

An outward-facing Lent

BY JULIA SEYMOUR

THIS MONTH, WE CONTINUE with “An outward-facing Lent,” a Lenten devotional series that began with days 1-12 in the January/February 2021 issue. We may be used to taking time during the Lenten season for inward reflection and contemplation. Adding these outward-facing daily devotions reminds us that we are never alone in our Christian journey. The Holy Spirit connects us to other people and to creation in ways beyond our imagination. Opening our prayer lives to reflection and supplication for others helps us to consider our own contributions in the world.

DAY 13: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3
Mechanics use their gift of spatial awareness and understanding to shift, repair and build engines, machinery and tools. Their work creates a hum of traffic, heating and cooling systems, and other equipment. Their work is the background noise of our lives. How often we take for granted the gifts of this work, which creates the baseline of normal for many people.

Repairing God, we glimpse your mystery in the interconnectedness of all things. Bless those who work to keep many things operational and safe. Amen.

DAY 14: THURSDAY, MARCH 4

From piles of paper, fabric, yarn, paint, glue sticks, beads and more, those with the gift of crafting make beautiful, inspiring work. Their talents decorate homes, cover beds and warm bodies. Their creations draw our attention toward the One who makes all things, seen and unseen.

Holy God, you knit all things together in your love. Guide us to our own inspired work by the beauty of your creation. Amen.

DAY 15: FRIDAY, MARCH 5

Hospice workers are holy witnesses to the journey of dying. They help families and friends understand and be present to a life passing. Their work guides our understanding of a good

death as part of a blessed life.

God of life, death and resurrection, we thank you for your presence in all the stages of life. Bless those whose work includes being present for those moving from this life into the next. Amen.

DAY 16: SATURDAY, MARCH 6

The Bible tells us that God knows every hair on our heads. We give great trust to those who trim, curl, shave and shape those hairs. Barbers and hairdressers often listen to their clients, offering counsel and consolation alongside the paid services.

Bless, O God, those whose work includes both grooming and companionship of others. Amen.



DAY 17: MONDAY, MARCH 8

Park rangers hike the trails, view the animals and stay alert to changes in the land that others may never experience. Their dedication preserves the shared natural resources that belong to all people. They work on behalf of people whom they may never meet and who may never recognize their work, but who benefit from it all the same.

God, we thank you for those who work on our behalf to care for your creation. Amen.

DAY 18: TUESDAY, MARCH 9

Many people receive nourishment from food banks and similar food programs. Volunteers in food programs are part of how God distributes daily bread. Those working in food and meal distribution are doing God's work with their hands.

God of plenty, we thank you for those who are dedicated to making sure others receive all the blessings you intend for your children. Amen.

DAY 19: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10

Every day millions of trucks deliver food, mail and other goods around the world. Delivery and long-haul truck drivers spend long hours sitting, moving goods and hopping in and out of their vehicles. Every package on a shelf represents the many transportation workers who labored to get it there.

Holy God, protect those whose vocation is transportation. Keep them alert, awake and safe in all they do. Amen.

DAY 20: THURSDAY, MARCH 11

From quilt shops to independent bookstores to consultants, small business owners work for themselves while trying to provide goods and services to others. Without the safety net of corporate infrastructure, they take necessary and calculated risks to bring creativity and diversity into the business community.

We give you thanks, O God, for small business owners whose pursuits create possibility and creativity in all communities. Amen.

DAY 21: FRIDAY, MARCH 12

Librarians do more than organize, read and recommend

books. They help people complete job applications, navigate new towns, and research local and family history. Librarians are willing to carry and be part of the stories of their community. Their work holds space in the present for both the past and the future.

Dear Jesus, through you we are all included in God's story of love and healing for the whole creation. Thank you for those who help carry our stories. Amen.

DAY 22: SATURDAY, MARCH 13

Community gardens offer space for people to grow food for themselves and others. In working with soil, plants and water, we learn about God's call to us to be co-creators of life, beauty and joy. Those who organize, volunteer in and cultivate community gardens see grace in each shoot, pod and bloom.

Spirit of God, you moved in the beginning of all things—bringing forth order and beauty. Bless the gardens of the world that feed both bodies and souls. Amen.

DAY 23: MONDAY, MARCH 15

Administrators keep things moving in schools, healthcare facilities and offices. Beyond answering phones, they juggle schedules, building use and budgets. They memorize faces and names. They



know the emergency plans by heart. Keeping things running smoothly is a dance of grace that often goes unnoticed.

Loving God, you have set all things in order according to your purposes. Guide us that we may cooperate with your gracious will for the flourishing of peace in our world. Amen.

DAY 24: TUESDAY, MARCH 16

Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, was a carpenter. Like many in that job today, he likely built window and door frames, crafted small furniture, and repaired stairs and ladders. The work of carpentry blends utility and artistry, moving from rough, raw wood to useful finished products.

Shape us in your image, Jesus, that we may be useful to the will of your Holy Parent in the world. Amen.

DAY 25: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17

A grocery store is a busy place and rarely empty. During the day, cashiers, managers and department clerks are constantly at work. At night, stockers empty boxes and move displays, while janitors clean. All this work is part of how food gets from farms to our tables.

Dear God, bless those whose work provides access to food for others. Amen.

DAY 26: THURSDAY, MARCH 18

There are many reasons people need or want wigs. People with medical conditions, like alopecia, may not grow hair. Some medical treatments cause people's hair to fall out. Some cultural and religious traditions value and encourage wigs. Skilled wigmakers bring comfort and joy to all kinds of people, across ages, races and creeds.

Bless wigmakers, dear Lord, in their vocation of numbering hairs for each head their work will cover. Amen.

DAY 27: FRIDAY, MARCH 19

The job description of a teacher's aide is probably best summed up by "all duties as assigned." From making copies to helping individual students to supervising playgrounds, aides bring efficiency and greater functionality to classrooms and schools. Those who do full-time work are often compensated as part-time employees in both pay and benefits.

Jesus, we seek your blessing on those whose work facilitates learning in schools. Encourage them in their vocations and keep them safe. Amen.

DAY 28: SATURDAY, MARCH 20

Many rural, some suburban and a few urban areas rely on volunteer firefighters and emergency medical personnel. These trained volunteers are willing to take shifts and be on alert to help neighbors and strangers through some of life's most difficult moments. Taking their scheduled turns, they never know what each phone call will bring. Their willingness to intercede and bring help is a blessing to their communities.

God of hope and help, safeguard those willing to put their lives on the line for their communities, especially volunteer firefighters and emergency service personnel. Amen.

DAY 29: MONDAY, MARCH 22

For nearly anything we can buy, there are people who first try it out. Is the combination of fibers too itchy? How long do these batteries last? How does this flavor of chips taste? Is this joke funny enough or at all? Product testers stand in for all of us to check everything from car interiors to food to TV shows. We may complain about their work when we don't like a particular item, but we often forget that their input helped shape so many things we use and appreciate.

Spirit of grace, thank you for people who test products before we ever see them. They offer feedback

to improve things in ways beyond our imaginations. Amen.

DAY 30: TUESDAY, MARCH 23

In Exodus 1, two midwives named Shiphrah and Puah trick Pharaoh and save a generation of Israelite babies. Today midwives might not have to be tricky, but otherwise they do the same work. They accompany pregnant people on their journey to becoming parents, through giving birth and afterward. Midwives also accompany expectant parents when the story doesn't end as hoped. Their dedication gives glory to God, who is attentive to the world's labor pains in becoming what the world is meant to be.

We live in hope, O God, for safe delivery from all our fears and from external threats. Amen.

DAY 31: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24

At any given point in time, someone somewhere is cooking for others. In prisons, in hospitals, in factories, on military installations, in homes, everyone needs to eat, and someone has to prepare the food. A cook makes lunch while thinking about dinner and makes dinner while thinking about breakfast. And just like Jesus, they stretch small quantities of food to nourish many.

From loaves and fish to pans of lasagna, we give you thanks, dear Lord, for all who work to feed others, from one hungry person to a gathering of thousands. Amen.

DAY 32: THURSDAY, MARCH 25

Opticians design and fit the tools needed to correct vision, like eyeglasses and contact lenses. Hearing aid specialists help people select the best tools to improve their hearing. People with these vocations help others adapt to new realities of vision or hearing loss. Their work requires sensitivity, patience and an encouraging attitude.

Lord of life, you know the ebb and flow of our senses. Be with those whose work it is to care for our senses. Strengthen our spirits, that we may perceive others and the world around us through your love and compassion. Amen.

DAY 33: FRIDAY, MARCH 26

A good coach praises what is going well, gently corrects what is flawed, and inspires us about what can be. No longer limited to athletics, coaches are available for life transitions, academic subjects and professional development. Being coached helps us see ourselves through someone else's eyes—and know that we are worthy of time, attention and discipline.

Coaching God, you love us as we are, and still your Spirit helps us become ever more fully the people you have made and called us to be. Amen.

DAY 34: SATURDAY, MARCH 27

“Domestic engineer” is a modern, formal title for someone we once called a stay-at-home parent or house spouse. This new label attempts to honor the breadth of work done to maintain a household. This work includes, but is not limited to budgeting, calendar keeping, facilities maintenance, menu planning and execution, and laundry. The unpaid labor of domestic engineering makes possible everything else that happens in a household.

Jesus, you looked with love on Martha of Bethany, whose work made others feel comfortable and cared for. Grant your peace to domestic engineers whose work makes shelters into homes. Amen. 🌿
