

[Spirituality](#)
[Scripture for Life](#)



Art by Julie Lonneman



by Denise Simeone

[View Author Profile](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

March 7, 2019

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

The story stopped me in my tracks and moved me to tears.

In a chilling photo journal article, TIME magazine told the story of Mamma Sessay, an 18-year-old woman in Sierra Leone, who gave birth to twins a day apart and died on that second day from blood hemorrhaging. I read this story on my own twin daughters' birthday, and that made it even more powerful for me. I was celebrating 29 years with them; Mamma Sessay did not even have two days with hers.

Lent is the season where we wrestle with the times that we need repentance and reconciliation. It is a season to bring our lives back into the kind of order that God invites and to look at our own culpability in the disorder and disarray in the world around us. I know I contribute to the chaos and sin of the world sometimes, even inadvertently. In my position in the United States, I had all the medical care that was available to a pregnant woman of twins. In a poor country even 30 years later, Mamma Sessay had no such access. My wrestling with that distress makes me reflect on God's desire for a world in right relationship and my work to create that kind of shalom.

In my personal scrutiny I could not look at any of the oil-covered beaches, marshes and living creatures in the Gulf without cringing at my own dependence on that oil being pumped through those pipelines for my home and vehicle. Imagine a Lenten season that calls me to examine that destruction of the environment and living creatures by examining my own addiction to driving wherever or whenever I want. That needs to be the stuff of my Lenten reflection of conversion and discipleship.

We ask those who are in formation, preparing for full Communion or baptism, to spend Lent as a time of retreat; to scrutinize their lives with the intention of being fully able to commit to the mission and the Gospel message. Yet our communities often go unthinkingly along, not connecting to that message in our own lives. We encourage our catechumens and candidates to spend the Lenten season reflecting and pondering conversion. And then we allow our catechumens and candidates to make that journey without us. How can we fully enter this Lenten season?

Set off on retreat as a parish. What if the entire parish was on a retreat together for the weeks of Lent? Can we suspend or minimize business as usual? We can try to limit parish activities that are not invitations to grapple with all we have left

unfinished in relationship to our mission as disciples. Jesus spent 40 days in the desert facing temptation. In the garden Jesus asked his disciples if they could watch with him. Can we?

Draw on the power of real-life imagery to call for conversion. People connect in many intense ways in times of instant news and streaming images. Use events such as oil spills or trapped coal miners to remind us of our dependence on fuel. Remember in preaching and prayer stories of state executions, nuclear weapons or discrimination to remind people of the church's teaching and our need to grapple with our own prejudices or call for revenge.

Advertisement

Form all members of the parish community through the Rite of Christian Initiation. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults says: "During Lent, the period of purification and enlightenment, the faithful should take care to participate in the rites of the scrutinies and presentations and give the elect the example of their own renewal in the spirit of penance, faith, and charity" (#9). We can help parishioners understand that all of us are "the faithful" whom the document calls to participate. Tell parishioners about these rituals in a variety of ways. We can't presume that all Catholics are familiar with the Rite. Using examples in preaching and prayers helps people become familiar with the terms and the rituals year after year. Utilize this rite in the formation of the whole parish. (See the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Web site, www.usccb.org/lent/rcia.shtml, for formation aids.)

Walk with catechumens and candidates. Tell the parish who they are on bulletin boards or give out prayer cards with their names and pictures on them. Ask people to pray with and for them and to send them messages of inspiration and care. Express gratitude for the power of their public expression of faith and witness before all of us in the assembly.

The Spirit of God is certainly to be found in the painful stirring that we might undertake in the Lenten season. God was in the desert with Jesus as he was sorely tempted, and in our "desert" stirring, God most undoubtedly dwells deeply with us.

Editor's note: This reflection was originally published in the March 2011 issue of [*Celebration*](#). Sign up to receive [**daily Lenten reflections**](#).

This story appears in the **Daily Lenten Reflections** feature series. [View the full series.](#)