



LENT 2024
WITH JRS

*Journeying
with Jesus
and forcibly
displaced people*

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To help you enter this Lenten season, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) humbly offers this spiritual booklet, which seeks to bring us into **communion with our brothers and sisters** who have been forcibly uprooted.

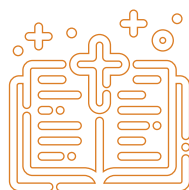
For **over 100 million people** today, exile, no matter the motive, is a true Passover, a crossing, a passage through murderous borders. It is an act of faith in the promise of a “resurrected” life. Upon closer examination, the life of a migrant resonates with the Paschal Mystery.

Between the two cries, that of agony and that of the joy of the Resurrection, we are called to move in two directions: **to reach out to them with every possible form of hospitality and learn from them.**

This is the humble purpose of this Lenten journey:

To join Jesus in the desert for 40 days with his forcibly displaced companions who are already there.

EVERYTHING'S TURNED TO ASHES!



Gospel extract

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them [...]

But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Mt 6:3, 6

The ashes on our foreheads remind us of the fragility of our human condition. Let us enter into communion with the fragility of the lives whose destiny can be turned upside down by a cannon shot, by the breaking wave of a tsunami... Everything turns to ashes. Flee for your life. Every step taken with unflinching hope.

The conversion to which the Gospel calls us is literally a turning of the heart. How can we, like our forcibly displaced brothers and sisters, turn resolutely towards hope in the future, towards change, towards God's mercy?

Oh, that you would tear the heavens apart and come down (Isaiah, 64:1)

FOCUS ON MYANMAR

Living under military dictatorship for 50 years, from 1962 to 2011, before entering a period of democratic transition, Myanmar (previously known as Burma) is home to nearly 130 ethnic minorities. In 2017, a United Nations report denounced serious human rights violations against the Rohingya in Rakhine State. After only ten years of democratic rule, the Burmese army (the Tatmadaw) regained power on 1 February 2021.

In recent years, the junta's opponents have relentlessly pursued guerrilla warfare against the military. But the junta has plunged the country into a humanitarian and human rights catastrophe. At least 55 communes are under martial law. Faced with opposition from the general population and pro-democracy armed groups, the army is struggling to maintain control of the country.

An estimated 94,000 people have fled Myanmar and nearly 2 million are internally displaced.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has declared that 18 million people are in need of humanitarian aid, 5 millions of whom are children.



Many children in Myanmar cannot access basic learning due to the current conflict. Education is disrupted, schools are attacked, and many are closed. Children are forced to flee from one place to another making it nearly impossible to go to school. Without the ability to exercise their basic rights and fundamental freedoms, they will not be able to determine their own future.

JRS calls for peace, protection and non-refoulement of Myanmar citizens seeking refuge in neighbouring countries.

THE TESTIMONY OF MYA AND PAN

Mya, 11, comes from Myanmar. She wants to be a teacher when she grows up, but because of the crisis that has hit the country for the past two years, access to education for children has been reduced to nothing.

JRS associates itself with the words of Mya and the many other displaced children in Myanmar: “may peace reign immediately in Myanmar.” JRS calls for displaced children to have access to humanitarian aid, including education programmes.

“I want to go back to school in my village. I want to study in peace. Work together, shake hands.”

Pan, aged 12, believes that this is the way to improve the situation in Myanmar.

A group of Rohingyas from Myanmar who previously found refuge in Bangladesh arrives in Indonesia.





PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

We pray for all those who have died on the migration routes, for the victims of human trafficking, may they rest in Peace.

We pray for their families: console them. Father, help us build a single human family, as fellow pilgrims in this journey sharing the same flesh.

Each of us brings the richness of his beliefs, of his way of loving, of being resilient. Open our hearts to learn from the human experience of refugees.

Our forcibly displaced friends teach us to have:

A heart that hopes

READINGS OF THE DAY

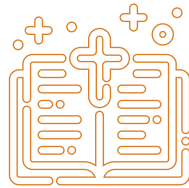
1ST READING: Jl 2,12-18

PSALM: Ps 50, 3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14,17

2ND READING: 2 Co 5,20 - 6,2

GOSPEL: Mt 6:1-6:16-18

PERSEVERANCE IN THE DESERT



Gospel extract

“Immediately the Spirit urges Jesus into the desert, and in the desert, he remained for forty days, tempted by Satan. He lived among the wild beasts, and the angels served him. After John’s arrest, Jesus set out for Galilee to proclaim the Gospel of God, saying: “The time is fulfilled: the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.”

Mk 1:12-15

In just a few sentences, we are told all about Jesus’ life and mission, described in 3 stages: in the power of the Holy Spirit, he faces evil and conquers it, then works towards the harmony of creation and reconciliation (beasts are no longer a threat), and finally he proclaims the Good News.

In the desert of exile, on the migratory routes, there are many wild beasts to combat. And as with Jesus in Gethsemane, right up to the last minute, there can be the temptation to back down in the face of suffering:

“My soul is sad to the point of death...Father, all things are possible to you; take this cup away from me! Yet not what I want, but what you want.” (Mk 14:34-36).

So yes, these people have the courage not to fail, and to believe that suffering will not have the last word, to believe that it is worthwhile continuing to educate their children, to follow a course of study, to believe in life, to believe in tomorrow...

1ST SUNDAY: FEBRUARY 18

FOCUS ON SUDAN

“The international community must not turn its back on the world’s largest population movement in Sudan,” warned the head of the UN migration agency on January 17, 2024.

In April 2023, clashes between Sudanese armed forces and paramilitary rapid reaction forces occurred at a time when Sudan was already experiencing a humanitarian crisis unprecedented in a decade.

In addition, extreme weather conditions due to climate change, such as floods and periods of drought, have affected hundreds of thousands of people across the country.

More than 7.3 million people have been displaced inside and outside Sudan since fighting broke out. Nearly 18 million people in Sudan are facing acute hunger, including almost 5 million in emergency situations.

People fleeing the conflict in Sudan arrive at a reception centre in Joda, South Sudan.



The country now has the highest number of internally displaced people in the world. Chad has received the largest number of people. South Sudan is currently witnessing the return of many South Sudanese who sought refuge in Sudan decades ago.



THE TESTIMONY OF SADIA AND AHMAD

In Chad, JRS teams focus on protecting children, making sure they can continue their education.

Sadia* was relocated to Djabal refugee camp, in the eastern part of the country. She fled Sudan alone with her nine children: “We escaped the hostilities of war. I want peace for my children. My wish is that they can go to school in Chad.”

Ahmad*, a Sudanese teacher in Djabal refugee camp, is a great role model for the children because he experienced displacement first hand in 2004. In Chad, he met JRS, that supported him in pursuing his studies.

“I tell children my own story, I also fled Sudan and now I am a teacher here. I try to explain to them that here they can feel safe, calm, and that little by little they will forget the horrors they have been through. At school, we try to build a better future for them.”

**Name of fantasy to protect the identity of the person*

People fleeing the Sudan conflict find refugee in Renk, a border town in South Sudan.





PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Father, we are witnesses of so much bloodshed, so many shattered lives, so much hope buried under the rubble of violence and failed attempts at peace, in Sudan and in so many other countries.

Come to our help!

Give us Your peace, guide us towards Peace, infuse us with concrete steps to build peace. Give us the strength to be peacemakers every day... come and clean up our hearts!

Father, we thank you for all those who have experienced so much loss, who live in conditions of extreme precariousness, and who still get up each morning continuing to courageously believe in life.

**Our forcibly displaced
friends teach us
to have:**

A heart that takes courage

READINGS OF THE DAY

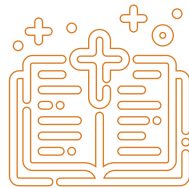
1ST READING: Gn 9:8-1

PSALM: 24 (25):4-5ab, 6-7bc, 8-9

2ND READING: 1 Pet 3:18-22

GOSPEL: Mk 1:12-15

LISTEN TO HIM! LISTEN TO THEM!



Gospel extract

Jesus takes Peter, James and John with him, and leads them off on their own, on a high mountain.

And he was transfigured before them. [...]

Peter then spoke up and said to Jesus:

“Rabbi, it’s a good thing we’re here!

So let’s put up three tents: one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

In fact, he didn’t know what to say, such was their fright.

A cloud came and covered them with its shadow,

and from the cloud a voice was heard:

“This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.”

Mk 9:2-7

The Lord wants to take us with him. Does he not say to us today, to those of us who are so often preoccupied, threatened with turmoil: “Stop, step outside, God has something to say to you”?

From now on, the word that the Lord addresses to us is no longer a message, but a person: “This is my Son”.

And the invitation to follow him “uninstalls” us. It’s about letting ourselves be led, making a transition, experiencing the Paschal Mystery. For once, our friends in exile precede us on this steep descent down the mountain.

Listen to him! Listen to them! It’s by listening to our brothers and sisters who haven’t had time to “set up the pegs” and erect three tents, that we can learn how to stand at the foot of the Cross. For they carry within them an experience of humanity that is vulnerable, threatened and yet alive, from which we all can be enriched.

FOCUS ON UKRAINE



On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. By December 31, 2023, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) counted nearly 6 million Ukrainian refugees throughout Europe. The majority of Ukrainian refugees have gone to neighbouring countries. JRS is coordinating a global response to accompany them as they navigate life in these new countries.

The number of internally displaced people has also sharply increased. Between three and four million people have had to leave their homes that were destroyed by a drone or a rocket. Most of them are living a few kilometres from home, with family or friends. This situation changes rapidly as military offensives evolve. The most vulnerable are the elderly who have been unable to leave, the unemployed and children.

As the conflict continues, with devastating consequences for the population, JRS and the Jesuits continue to be present and mobilize resources to support those most affected. Together with the Xavier Network, we are coordinating the implementation of the One Proposal, a structured plan to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate Ukrainians forcibly displaced across Europe.



Arrivals at the Danube bank in Isaccea, Romania at the border with Ukraine (Marco Giarracca)

THE TESTIMONY OF YULIIA

Yuliia, a 31-year-old Ukrainian refugee from Donetsk, has been in Poland since March 2022.

She has had to cope with a certain level of conflict and displacement since 2014, when separatists seized power in her hometown. After moving to Crimea and then Kiev, Yuliia now finds herself living alone in Poland, having left her family behind.

“When I arrived in Warsaw, I had no job and only a few savings. JRS surrounded me with warmth and care and helped me in many ways. JRS assigned me a social worker, and I had the opportunity to talk about everything for the first time”.

She meets regularly with a psychologist who has helped her navigate her new reality and come to terms with her past.

“I didn’t even realize how hurt I was. It’s one thing to arrive in a new country as an immigrant: it’s another when you’re fleeing war. You can’t adapt quickly”.

Today, Yuliia holds down several jobs and is rebuilding her life, with courage and self-sacrifice.



Yuliia from Donetsk, Ukraine,
is now living in Poland.



PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

“What have you done with your brother?” We pray to you for all those trapped in hatred and violence. You believe in our capacity to love, convert our hearts! Push on the detonator of forgiveness, and processes of reconciliation and justice. Help us to overcome our fears, our refusal to open up to others, our desire for vengeance, our forgetfulness of our “brother’s face”.

Father, give our hearts the right tempo and true flexibility! Give us the strength to adapt to what we are given to live, and the courage to change what can be changed. May our quest be to reach out to others, to love more.

**Our forcibly displaced
friends teach us
to have:**

A heart that's uninstalled!

READINGS OF THE DAY

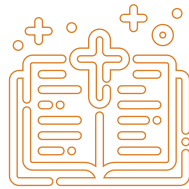
1ST READING: Gn 22, 1-2.9-13.15-18

PSALM: 115 (116 B), 10,15, 16ac-17, 18-19

2ND READING: Rm 8, 31b-34

GOSPEL: Mk 9, 2-10

BELIEVE IN THE PROMISE



Gospel extract

“Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.’

The Jews replied, “It took forty-six years to build this sanctuary, and you would raise it up in three days!” [...] So, when he rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word Jesus had spoken.

While he was in Jerusalem for the Passover feast, many believed in his name”.

Jn 2, 29-23

Our eyes are filled with images of “razed” temples and cities, at the risk of becoming accustomed to them! This Gospel summons us to vigilance with regard to our times. The shock of being a victim of violence or a natural disaster is overwhelming. But once they have left, people remain in exile for an average of 17 years...

Patient acceptance is vital if we are to enter confidently into the promise of “a new day”.

And it often rises to its full potential when reconciliation has been made possible. That’s why we make it a central part of our programmes.

What about us? Are we inclined to embark on a path of reconciliation, to rebuild what has been damaged in ourselves, in our relationships and in those around us?

Knowing that “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain,” (Ps 127:1).

3RD SUNDAY: MARCH 3

FOCUS ON COLOMBIA



Colombia's civil war began in 1964, displacing millions of people across the country. Despite the peace agreement signed with FARC and other paramilitaries groups in 2016, the country is faced with violence targeting leaders of the social indigenous movement, land restitution claimants, environmentalists, and demobilized guerrillas.

There are over 8 million displaced persons in Colombia. In recent years, the country has also seen the entry of large numbers of migrants fleeing economic and social hardship in Venezuela. In 2013, 2.9 million Venezuelan nationals are currently in Colombia.

JRS Colombia began its work in 1995, serving people displaced by the country's civil war. Today, JRS Colombia continues to provide legal, psychosocial, and emergency assistance to forced migrants and Venezuelans.

JRS Colombia carries out local integration activities for migrants and forcibly displaced people.



THE TESTIMONY OF PASTORA

Pastora is a community leader in the Panorama district of Soacha, a city on the outskirts of Bogotá, Colombia. Historically, Panorama has been a place of refuge for thousands of forcibly displaced people from various parts of the country due to the violent internal conflict, and more recently, Venezuelan migrants.

“When we arrived in our territories, we weren’t very well accepted. They looked down on us, saying we were people of bad origin, that we were invaders,” Pastora recalls. There were no services available in the area: “we had no electricity, no running water, no sewage.”

By dint of patience and bold meetings, the situation changed. Today, Pastora is working with other women leaders and JRS to create training centres. These spaces foster links between community members from different backgrounds, enabling them to understand each other and share their difficulties. Pastora has forged bonds of unity in her community, bringing together people from different backgrounds in the hope of building a future of lasting peace.



Pastora, Community Leader in the Panorama district of Soacha, Colombia.

3RD SUNDAY: MARCH 3



PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

We pray for the countries from which refugees have fled, for all the countries at war: for lasting peace and the conditions for a dignified life. We give you thanks for all the reconciliation initiatives that are building tomorrow's peace.

“You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but members of the family of God” (Eph 2:19):
Father, thy will be done!

**Our forcibly displaced
friends teach us
to have:**

A heart that takes patience

READINGS OF THE DAY

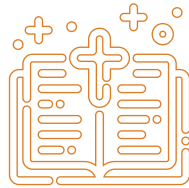
1ST READING: Ex 20:1-17
(or briefly: 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17)

PSALM: 18B (19), 8, 9, 10, 11

2ND READING: 1 Cor 1:22-25

GOSPEL: Jn 2:13-25

GOD GAVE US HIS SON!



Gospel extract

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world, not to judge the world, but that through him the world might be saved. He who believes in him escapes judgment; he who does not believe is already judged, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. [...] But he who does the truth comes to the light, so that it may be manifest that his works were done in union with God.”

Jn 3, 16-18, 21

Out of love, God gave his only Son to the world. A gift without any calculations or conditions! A gift to be welcomed...

He was not sent to condemn but to save the world. He took the initiative to seek out the lost in order to save them. This is what Christ offers. It's an offer, because love cannot compel or impose.

When a conflict has been raging for years, His weapon of massive reconstruction is the only way to convert murderous hearts. This in the literal sense, to put life back into what was dead, to remember the face of a brother and not that of an enemy - dispelling hatred, putting an end to weapons and breaking through to forgiveness. But to come to “the light”,

*“Love and truth meet. Peace and justice embrace”
(Ps 84).*

Let us give thanks and be inspired by all the peacemakers that JRS meets every day among the people we support.

FOCUS ON SYRIA



More than 13 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes over the past 13 years, among them 6.6 million people who have fled Syria since 2011, seeking safety in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and beyond. Millions more are displaced within Syria as the war continues. According to the head of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, Paulo Pinheiro, the war is at its worst moment “in 4 years”.

JRS Syria was founded in 2008 in response to the growing number of Iraqi refugees. When civil war broke out in 2011, JRS Syria began helping displaced Syrians, providing health services, education, child protection, livelihood training and emergency aid in areas where no other NGO could go. JRS programmes in Lebanon and Jordan also assist Syrians with education and other services.

JRS Syria provides emergency support in Aleppo in response to the February 2023 earthquakes.



THE TESTIMONY OF OUSSAMA

Oussama, a 13-year-old Syrian refugee residing in Bar Elias, Lebanon, has overcome numerous challenges to pursue his dreams. Despite being forced to leave his home in Reef Damascus, at the age of five years old, his determination and love for education have propelled him forward.

Living next to Telyani School, he has not only received free education and support from JRS Lebanon but has also discovered his passion for engineering and innovation. This is the inspiring story of a young boy who defies the odds and aspires to become a great inventor.

The programming course became a turning point for Oussama. He acquired skills in setting up automated systems and gained the ability to control them through commands. "Using my experience and the new programming skills I acquired, I created a multiplication board table that enhanced the understanding of the multiplication table during maths lessons, by illuminating the correct answers to the needed equations after connecting the proper numbers to each other," he explained.

Another impressive invention was a water tank monitor that indicates the quantity of water remaining, saving his family's time and effort of going up to the roof every time they needed to check the water level.

Oussama's dreams extend far beyond his current circumstances. His unwavering passion for inventing and his desire to make a positive impact on humanity drive him forward. He envisions himself becoming a renowned inventor, and his aspirations know no bounds.

Oussama, Syrian boy residing in Bar Elias, Lebanon.





PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

“My Father, why have you forsaken me?” We pray to you for all those who live in abysmal solitude in the midst of trial, may they receive presence, listening and acts of empathy.

Father, our tears pour down your cheeks, you know our distress, you hear the laughter of a child who has found a home and that of a mother after a shipwreck, you know the weight of patience needed to hope. Inhabit all our lives with your tenderness and wisdom. Give us an alert, patient, compassionate heart. Through our actions, our words, our thoughts, make us grow in humanity.

**Our forcibly displaced
friends teach us
to have:**

A heart that loves

READINGS OF THE DAY

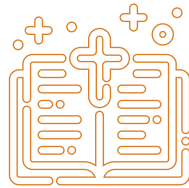
1ST READING: 2 Ch 36, 14-16.19-23

PSALM: Ps 50, 3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14,17

2ND READING: Eph 2, 4-10

GOSPEL: Jn 3, 14-21

LETTING THE GRAIN FALL INTO THE GROUND



Gospel extract

“Then Jesus said to them: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, amen, I say to you: if a grain of wheat falls into the ground and does not die, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it.”

Jn 12, 23-26

A heart stripped bare is a “grain of wheat that has fallen to the ground”, dead to its own ego, so that it can let God in and in so doing let others in. And when we study living beings, we realize that it’s not the most competitive who are the most resilient, but those who help each other the most. Mutual aid emerges in times of crisis and in difficult environments. We are witnesses to this!

At the very hour when he is overwhelmed, when he is approaching the Passion “with a great cry and in tears” (as the letter to the Hebrews says), Jesus can continue to say in all confidence: “Thy will be done”...shall we say it?

To glorify - far from prestige or the quest for recognition - is literally to reveal God’s presence.

“The Son of Man must be glorified”: make yourself known, reveal yourself as you are, so that we can enter into your unique desire that “all may be one” and work hard to ensure that everyone finds a their rightful place in this world.

5TH SUNDAY: MARCH 17

FOCUS ON AFGHANISTAN



Afghanistan has faced years of armed conflict and political instability, which has left millions of people displaced within and outside the country. The current political and economic conditions are a key driver of displacement. Many flee the country and the over 5.8 million internally displaced persons since 2012 continue to live in extreme poverty with little access to assistance.

Since 2005, JRS has accompanied internally displaced persons (IPDs) in camps in the Kabul and Herat provinces, providing complementary education for children, vocational training, youth programmes, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), social cohesion programmes, and emergency support.

Afghan boys participate to a JRS complimentary education class.



5TH SUNDAY: MARCH 17

THE TESTIMONY OF A YOUNG AFGHAN WOMAN

In this poem, we can hear the voice of a woman who had to escape because of the Taliban's takeover of the Afghanistan in 2021.

To the days that last day of the month, I went to the bank, took my hard-earned money, went to the market, and bought whatever I wanted.

To the days when I was proud of being a woman, I walked all over my city without any restrictions because of being a woman.

To the days when I was leaving the house, I would see my three colour flag all over the city and I would feel good to see it.

To the days when I lived with passion, I hoped for the future.

A girl participates to an embroidery training in Afghanistan.



5TH SUNDAY: MARCH 17, 2024



PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Lord Jesus, you who kneel to wash the feet of your disciples, teach us to adopt a “low position”, to serve with humility and in relationships of closeness and reciprocity.

“The stranger who lives with you shall be to you as a fellow countryman, and you shall love him as yourself”
Lev 19: we pray that everyone will know how to look upon a migrant as a brother, a resource and not a threat. Enlighten our leaders to propose laws that respect the dignity of every person. Help us to overcome our prejudices and mistrust and develop a culture of encounter and hospitality.

**Our forcibly displaced
friends teach us
to have:**

A heart stripped bare

READINGS OF THE DAY

1ST READING: Jr 31, 31-34

PSALM: 50 (51), 3-4, 12-13, 14-15

2ND READING: Heb 5, 7-9

GOSPEL: Jn 12, 20-33



Refugee camp in Dollo Ado, in southeast Ethiopia,
near the border with Somalia.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRAYER
PLEASE, CONTINUE TO STAND BY THE SIDE
OF OUR FORCIBLY DISPLACED FRIENDS:

WWW.JRS.NET



Inspired by the generous love and example of Jesus Christ, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation with a mission to accompany, serve, and advocate on behalf of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, that they may heal, learn, and determine their own future.