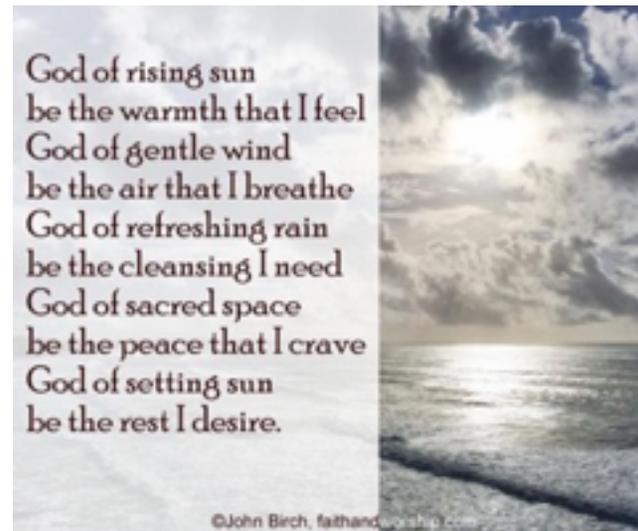


serve Jesus Himself! My life is just as yours, a Lenten journey, it is a constant opportunity for self-discovery and renewal - it is a journey that calms my fears and assures me of a Father's love for His children. I encourage you to make an extra effort to attend Lenten services - here we are reassured of God's love, and come to understand the meaning of sacrifice and suffering. Here we can rediscover the true meaning faithfulness.

Let us pray: Loving God, often life seems overwhelming and situations arise that come uninvited and for which I am ill prepared. Help me during this Lenten journey to rediscover my relationship with You as my loving Father. May all my fears give way to love and trust, and may I have the courage to always journey with You through Jesus to the meaning of life - to live, to love, to laugh, to pray, to share, to forgive and to seek forgiveness, and finally at the end of my days to rest in Your arms. Amen.

Some thoughts for your Lenten journey: FATHER

A N T O N ' S W O R D S O F W I S D O M: Let's start with an expert from Paul's letter to the Romans: Brothers and sisters... All who are led by the Spirit of God are God's children. You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back to fear, but a spirit of adoption through which you can cry out "ABBA -FATHER". The Spirit itself gives witness to our spirit that we are children of God. We suffer



with Him so we can be glorified with Him. I consider the suffering of the present to be nothing compared with the glory to be revealed in us.

Indeed the whole created world eagerly awaits the revelation of the children of God. Creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord, but by Him who once subjected it; not without hope, because the world itself will be freed from its slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God." These are powerful words and we need to breathe them in over and over again until they permeate our very souls, that they become one with us.

There really is no greater gift. While at times our lives may seem overwhelming, we need to remember that to be one of God's children is to embrace not only the good times in our lives, but also those times when illness and suffering comes uninvited. Human weakness isn't new to the story of humanity, but through the course of our lives we can see where it can get the best of us. In the old Testament suffering was believed to be a punishment from God for our sins; if there was a catastrophe that could not be explained, it was God's doing - He was showing the power of His vengeance. Jesus, in the new Testament, gave us a much different picture of God. Jesus teaches that God is a loving father Who cares for His children. God is full of mercy and compassion - quick to forgive and His love has no conditions. Over the years and throughout the history of the Church, this image of a loving God has become a bit tarnished. Prior to the middle-ages God was merciful and forgiving, and slowly the image of God changed through the "dark-ages" to an image of a vengeful and punishing deity who go as far as He could to punish humanity and to inflict suffering and pain on a world that was weak and broken. Only since the Second Vatican Council has there been an effort to move hearts from fear to love and trust, and to a better understanding of God that is more in line with the teachings of Jesus +Pope John XXIII, and now Pope Francis I has opened the windows of the Church that fresh air may now flow - in other words to call on the Holy Spirit to bring renewal into the hearts of the hierarchy and faithful. What is your image of God? Do you truly believe that He loves just as you are, at this very moment? Do accept His forgiveness, by forgiving yourself and others? In other words can you accept and embrace your

humanity in order to claim the Divine life that lives within you? Paul encourages us to do just that! "You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back into fear, but a spirit of adoption through which you can cry out 'Abba - Father.'" He gives us the image of a loving father. Relationship is defined through love rather than fear. Suffering is put into perspective - it isn't a punishment from God! No human parent in their right mind would intentionally inflict pain and suffering on their child, no matter what the circumstance, so how can we possibly reconcile the idea of a vengeful God with a loving Father? Lent is the perfect time to reflect on our relationship with God through Jesus. In the person of Jesus, God has chosen to walk with us through life; not stand in front, nor to lag behind, but to walk beside us! Yes He indeed is God, but He is a loving parent; not interfering in human affairs but accompanying us on our journey, even though at times our decisions that brought us confusion and at times pain in our lives lead us away from Him - but make no mistake - He is not the one who moved! He is there not to say 'I told you so,' but rather 'I am with you.'"This is the loving Father that I have experienced and that I serve. This is the God that I have tried to share with those entrusted to my care for the last 30 years. I have experienced the desert of despair and at times thoughts of hopelessness, and certainly am keenly aware of temptation... I understand sin because I am as weak as any of you; yet through good and bad times I have witnessed and felt God's presence, in spite of turmoil and confusion I have had peace. I try to model my life after Christ - I consciously try to be servant and not to be served, and all I do is out of love for those I care for - they are the living Icons of Christ for me. To serve others is to