

A Living Hope

MARCH 2018

We are in a constant process of growing and renewing. Without being aware of it, we are shedding skin, shedding hair, and shedding old cells that make way for new ones. Just as our physical bodies are always changing and adjusting, so must our inner selves shed what no longer serves us to make way for new growth. Some of this growth comes easily and naturally, but it is often through challenges and conflicts that the deepest kinds of transformations take place.

1. Read *Jonah 2:1-10*. *What imagery does Jonah use to describe his time at sea? What emotions do you think he was feeling? At what point does he cry for help?*
2. *Where is the darkness in your soul? What are some "vain idols" you loyally turn to for comfort? Do they help you or hinder you? Explain.*
3. *Who demonstrated God's grace to you in a moment of strife and "brought up [your] life from the pit"? What impression did that person leave on you?*

When you find yourself in a period of great change or darkness, may you fix your eyes on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Identify the things that are weighing you down, allow them to fall from your life, and open your heart and mind to things that will help you flourish. As always, turn to the fortress of the Church to remind you of the gift of God's love, which is more precious than gold.

4. Read *1 Peter 1:3-9*. *What about this passage brings you hope? What would it look like to have joy in the midst of suffering?*
5. *What habits have you been trying to break in order to be a better version of yourself? How can you honor the image in which you were created through your own habits and actions? How can you encourage others to do so as well?*

In closing, reflect on the words of St. Gregory of Narek from his *Book of Lamentations*:

“ Now, look upon me held captive by overwhelming danger, you who are alone sweet to all. Cut me loose with your victorious sword of life, the cross, and release me from the nets that have snared me, nets that assail me on all sides as the captive of death. Please steady my shaky feet on the crooked path and heal the burning fever of my anguished heart. Turn away the demonic whisper of temptation to sin against you. Drive away the despair of my dark soul that dwells with evil. Dispel the thick smoke of sin that has infused and obscured me. Destroy the vile dark passions of my base needs. Renew the image of light revered by the glory of your mighty name, my soul. Fix your glowing grace upon my face and the perception of my mind, an earthbound creature. And cleanse my mucky sinfulness with your purity so that you might restore and reveal your image in me. With your divine, living, uncorrupted and heavenly light that envelopes your three persons. For you alone are blessed with the Father and Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen. (Prayer 40C) ”

"He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

