

# A time for Encounter with Refugees



2025 Lenten Booklet



## Table of content



Introduction.....	p. 3
Ash Wednesday.....	p. 5
<b>5 March 2025</b>	
First Sunday.....	p. 8
<b>9 March 2025</b>	
Second Sunday.....	p. 11
<b>16 March 2025</b>	
Third Sunday.....	p. 14
<b>23 March 2025</b>	
Fourth Sunday.....	p. 17
<b>30 March 2025</b>	
Fifth Sunday.....	p. 20
<b>6 April 2025</b>	
Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion.....	p. 23
<b>13 April 2025</b>	



# Introduction

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As we journey through the **season of Lent**, we are invited to pause, reflect, and prepare our hearts for the coming of Easter. Let us open our hearts to the cry of the poor and the displaced and let us seek reconciliation in the face of division and hostility.

*Let us be open to the encounter, for in the encounter we discover the face of Christ in the stranger, and in the stranger, we find the love of God that binds us all together.*

Lent is a time of **prayer, fasting, and almsgiving**—the three primary pillars of this sacred season that help us grow closer to God and to one another. These practices, when lived authentically, can transform not only our personal lives but also our communities and the world around us. This year, as we contemplate the meaning of Lent, we are particularly called to reflect on the themes of migration, reconciliation, and the encounter with the other—especially the refugee and the stranger.

The suffering of migrants and refugees, who are often displaced due to war, violence, or economic hardship, is an urgent issue of our time.

As Children of God, we are called not only to pray for them but also to act—to welcome the stranger, to share our resources, and to seek a just and peaceful world where all can live with dignity. Lent, a season of repentance and renewal, offers us the opportunity to live out the call for reconciliation—beginning with ourselves but extending to others as well. In environments where refugees and migrants face hostility and marginalisation, we are called to bridge divides and build a culture of peace.

This is more than a call to political solutions or acts of charity; it is about a deeper transformation of hearts. It is about moving from a place of indifference or suspicion to one of solidarity and compassion.



## How to use this resource

This season of Lent, JRS invites you to reflect on our attitudes toward refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. Do we see them as threats or as brothers and sisters in need? Do we turn away, or do we open our hearts to their suffering?

Our Lenten journey should help us to break down the walls of division and recognise that we are all part of one human family, all created in the image of God.

Each week you will have access to a new reflection and three calls to action related to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that will help you deepen your journey toward reconciliation and discern your call to be open to encounter.

May this Lenten season be a time of deep transformation, as we grow in compassion and solidarity with all who suffer, particularly those who are displaced and in need. May we, through our prayers, fasting, and almsgiving, become instruments of peace, reconciliation, and hope in a world that longs for the light of Christ.



# Ash Wednesday - 5 March 2025



## Reflection of Matt Ippel SJ

JRS USA Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Volunteer

We are increasingly faced with prolonged and complex humanitarian crises, leading to a record-high number of forcibly displaced persons. Yet, funding for humanitarian efforts remains critically inadequate, failing to meet the urgent needs of over 122 million people.

The recent federal freeze on US foreign aid has only worsened this crisis, with devastating consequences. It not only restricts our ability to carry out life-saving interventions and essential educational, livelihood, and MHPSS programmes, but it also threatens the sustainability of our efforts to foster reconciliation and long-term stability among displaced populations and host communities.

In Maban, South Sudan, this funding freeze has forced us to halt our teacher training programme at the Arrupe

Centre - an initiative that prepares primary school teachers from both refugee and host communities. The Centre is the only space in the region where men and women from diverse ethnic backgrounds can come together - not just to coexist, but to collaborate on a shared mission.

Here, they live together, learn side by side, share meals, play volleyball, and engage in meaningful conversations. A former student once told me that the program not only certified her as a teacher but also transformed her perspective: for the first time in her life, she no longer saw her classmates from different ethnic groups as “the other” or the “enemy”... she saw them as human beings - eager to learn and committed to the education of their people.



# Ash Wednesday - 5 March 2025

## Focus on the US stop work order

The suspension of all foreign aid ordered by the US Government on 24 January 2025 has disrupted life-saving support to refugees and other forcibly displaced people.

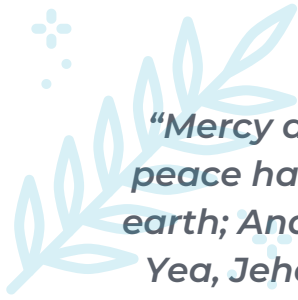
Life-saving programmes around the world have been abruptly halted due to the suspension of funding from the US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and widespread stop-work orders for international humanitarian organisations.

JRS has estimated that this sudden funding suspension disrupts vital mental health treatments, medical care, and rehabilitation services for approximately 100,000 refugees and displaced people.

In response, JRS/USA is actively expanding advocacy efforts to respond to this crisis, mobilising supporters, partners, and policymakers to take action. By engaging with lawmakers, JRS is urging the restoration of critical funding and emphasising the profound impact these programmes have on forcibly displaced communities and the US.



# Ash Wednesday - 5 March 2025



*“Mercy and truth are met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth springeth out of the earth; And righteousness hath looked down from heaven. Yea, Jehovah will give that which is good; And our land shall yield its increase. Righteousness shall go before him, And shall make his footsteps a way to walk in.”*

*Psalm 85*

## Calls to action



### Prayer

Open your ears and your heart to the encounter. By listening with openness and empathy, we allow God's presence to break down barriers and strengthen our shared humanity.



### Fasting

Take a step back from your usual routines and simplify your life. Whether it's fasting from excess food, limiting your social media time, or stepping away from material distractions, use the freed-up time to deepen your prayer life and engage in acts of kindness. Focus on growing spiritually and emotionally, allowing the space to mourn and weep over the world's suffering.



### Almsgiving

Dedicate a portion of your income, food, or clothing to those in need. This could be as simple as setting aside a small amount of money each week or gathering clothes or food you no longer need.

# First Sunday - 9 March 2025



## Reflection of Sr María Pilar Brufal Jaén

JRS Thailand Accompaniment Assistant and Reconciliation Focal Point

My encounters with refugees have transformed my way of listening and approaching people, from my deepest being, as Jesus did. From vulnerable, patient, stripped down and kind listening, I feel God's presence, incarnated in each of my refugee brothers and sisters.

Meetings are safe spaces for conversation where everyone feels recognised and loved.

They share their suffering, desires, resistances, and joys as they go through a process of personal reconciliation, empowering themselves to be hopeful reconcilers in their homes and communities.

They feel that by listening to others, their pain is lessened and they have the desire to help to others. Even if some see how their process is helping the whole family others are not ready to forgive yet.





# First Sunday - 9 March 2025

## Focus on Thailand

Thailand remains a host country for thousands of refugees and asylum seekers from across the region, many of whom live in highly vulnerable conditions.

As Thailand has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, refugees and asylum seekers are not legally recognised and are instead classified as undocumented migrants. This leaves them at risk of arrest, detention, and severe restrictions on their ability to work or access essential services.

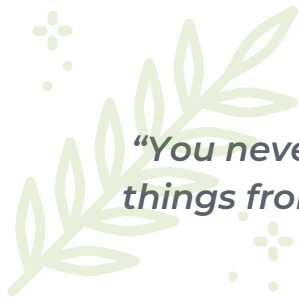
JRS Thailand's Urban Refugee Project

accompanies refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok and Mae Sot, providing casework assistance, mental health and psychosocial support, and skill-building programmes. The casework service focuses on meeting basic needs such as housing, food, medical care and transport by providing financial assistance.

On the border with Myanmar, around 100,000 people live in nine refugee camps. JRS provides educational opportunities to migrant children living in the camps on the Thai side of the Myanmar border.



# First Sunday - 9 March 2025



*“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”*

*To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee*

## Calls to action



### Prayer

Take care of serene times to welcome God's presence in your life, to love the Lord and others with unconditional love. Prepare for the moment of your prayer and listen with your heart to the Word of the Lord. Ask him for what you want to live and thank him for his step in everything that is happening in your life. In Mk 7:24-30, the woman Syrophences touched the heart of Jesus because He listened to her in depth. Vulnerable listening sets us up for transformation.



### Fasting

Before entering a meeting, a class, an event make internal silence to be ready to meet people by listening patiently, empathetically, and without prejudice, to connect in depth with them.



### Almsgiving

Donate time to listen to someone who has a different opinion from yours and welcome them without judgment.

## Second Sunday - 16 March 2025



### Reflection of Sr Esperance Mave Bahati

JRS Uganda English Instructor

When I first joined JRS, I didn't fully understand the services provided to refugees and forcibly displaced people.

Over time, my involvement deepened my understanding, aligning closely with the charism of my congregation, the Sisters of Mary of Ingelmunster, which is to serve the poor in the spirit of the Gospel. As a volunteer in the education department, I facilitate language training and offer support, advocacy, and accompaniment.

My eight-year journey has been

transformative, both for me and for those I serve. One poignant story is of a young boy from DRC who, after losing his family, was abandoned and faced immense hardship in Kampala. At his lowest point, he considered ending his life but found hope through our support.

Today, he's thriving in a construction training program. Each day with refugees brings new challenges and joys, inspiring me to guide them with love, empowering them with life skills, and reminding them of their worth.



# Second Sunday - 16 March 2025

## Focus on Uganda

Uganda hosts the highest number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Africa, with 1.7 million people who have sought refuge in the country.

Most of them are from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and live in settlements alongside host communities, exacerbating underlying economic and environmental challenges.

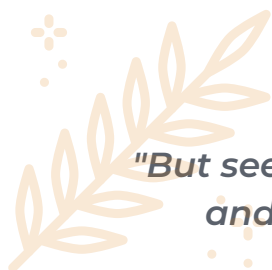
JRS supports urban refugees in Kampala and those living in settlements in

Adjumani, northern Uganda, in the West Nile region.

The Kampala Urban Refugee Project assists both refugees and vulnerable host community members—who make up 10–20% of all people supported by JRS Uganda—living across Kampala’s five divisions. JRS provides education, mental health and psychosocial support, livelihoods assistance, socio-economic integration, pastoral care, and reconciliation initiatives.



## Second Sunday - 16 March 2025



*"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

*Matthew 6:33*

### Calls to action



#### Prayer

Let us begin each day by surrendering everything to God, placing our lives and work into His hands. Throughout the day, let us pause to offer our remaining tasks to Him and thank Him for the accomplishments and blessings we experience. Through prayer, may we grow in trust, resilience, and focus, dedicating ourselves with single-minded devotion to finding God in the people we serve.



#### Fasting

If you have hobbies or habits like sports, social media, or other activities that often consume your time, use that energy for good. For example, if you're passionate about sports, consider using your expertise to teach or mentor young people, or organize community activities that benefit those who are less fortunate. Channel your passions into purposeful action that can benefit others, like refugees and migrants in your community.



#### Almsgiving

As we approach the Resurrection of our Lord, consider ways you can share the joy of Easter with others. Organise a community meal, or share a moment of celebration with those who may not have the means to do so themselves. Let your almsgiving not just be a gesture of support but a sharing of the joy of Christ's victory over death.

## Third Sunday - 23 March 2025

### Reflection of Fr Jerry Gomes SJ, JRS Bangladesh Project Director

The Rohingya children served by JRS Bangladesh often face rejection from the host community. While foreign policies push for their repatriation, we are called to support them despite the surrounding negativity. These children do not wish to be part of war or conflict; they dream of a better future.

One afternoon, I met a child with some burns who had received psychological first aid. I spoke to her gently and offered her a chair. Despite her pain, she soon smiled. A parent compared the center's

services to oxygen—something invisible yet essential for life.

Rohingyas, both within Myanmar and outside their homeland have nowhere to go. The registered refugees generously share food with those who are starting again, having entered Bangladesh in late 2024.

The strength and kindness of the Rohingyas to the new arrivals, giving whatever they have, teaches us valuable lessons that the world rarely offers.



# Third Sunday - 23 March 2025

## Focus on Bangladesh

Due to its proximity to Myanmar, Bangladesh has become a key destination for Rohingya refugees escaping religious and ethnic persecution. In August 2017, around 700,000 Rohingya men, women, and children were forced to flee Myanmar and seek refuge in Bangladesh. The military coup in Myanmar in 2021 further exacerbated the vulnerability of the Rohingya.

Today, around one million Rohingya have taken refuge in Bangladesh, most of them residing in Cox's Bazar.

In the past six years, over 200,000 children have been born in the camps. Rohingya families are extremely vulnerable, with many adolescents having spent the majority of their lives in refugee camps. Since 2018, JRS Bangladesh has been working in partnership with Caritas Bangladesh to support Rohingya children and adolescents.

Through multi-purpose centres, JRS offers essential services, including mental health and psychosocial support, as well as reconciliation initiatives designed to promote a culture of peace.



# Third Sunday - 23 March 2025



*“Preach the gospel at all times and use words if necessary.”*

*Attributed to St. Francis of Assisi*

## Calls to action



### Prayer

In Bangladesh, Christians refer to Lent as ‘Tapasyakal’ where ‘kal’ means season. Lent is a time for Tapasya (spiritual effort). Tapasya, meaning “generation of heat and energy,” invites us to draw warmth from Jesus and recharge by staying close to Him. Let’s turn to Jesus to rediscover our identity.



### Fasting

Another Bengali word ‘Upobash’ goes beyond fasting; it means dwelling near the Master. Let us not run only after personal salvation.



### Almsgiving

Take action to serve without expecting anything in return. Be cheerful and generous, enlarging the horizon of our family, especially by serving strangers like refugees.



## Fourth Sunday - 30 March 2025



### Reflection of Sr Maria José Rey Merodio

JRS Italy/Centro Astalli Project Coordinator “Communities of Hospitality”

Thanks to the availability of a congregation participating in our project, we were able to give hospitality to a young Iranian woman.

In Tehran, together with her husband, she had participated in demonstrations against the regime: her husband was imprisoned and tortured for months; she, in shock, fainted, falling down the stairs and losing the seven-month-old twins she was carrying.

Having escaped and arrived in Italy, their suffering turned to violence.

The young woman found safety with a community of nuns, and she and I were able to get to know each other. Once, although she was not a Christian, I invited her to participate in a youth trip to Assisi.

On her return to Rome, to my great surprise, she confided in me: “Many speak to me of a justice that does not contemplate love, but today a conviction was born in me: violence must be denounced and I must make myself safe, but this is not enough to have peace. The only way is forgiveness.”



## Fourth Sunday - 30 March 2025

### Focus on Italy

With increasingly restrictive migration policies across Europe, there remains a severe lack of legal and safe entry channels for people on the move. In Italy, this has resulted in a lack of investment in protection, reception, and integration, exacerbating the physical, health, and psychological vulnerabilities of those who already endure increasingly perilous and prolonged journeys.

Albeit significantly less than the previous year, in 2024 more than 66,000 people arrived in Italy via the Central Mediterranean route—the deadliest migration route in the world.

Since 1981, JRS Italy/Centro Astalli has been supporting asylum seekers and refugees in Italy by offering first reception services, health care and psychosocial support, and skill-building programmes to support integration and economic inclusion.

In 2013, in collaboration with religious congregations, JRS Italy/Centro Astalli launched an innovative project of semi-independent housing support for migrants and refugees, who are hosted and accompanied on their path to autonomy and gradual integration into the social fabric.



# Fourth Sunday - 30 March 2025



*“At the end of our life we will be judged on love.”*

*St. John of the Cross*

## Calls to action



### Prayer

Share a moment of prayer together with a refugee or offer to pray for an intention that is in his/her heart. If you do not have the opportunity to relate directly with a refugee, ask someone who works with them to ‘entrust’ you with someone to pray for.



### Fasting

Invite a refugee to share a moment with you over a meal or a simple coffee. Alternatively, try to deprive yourself of something in one of your meals and offer the equivalent in money so that a refugee can eat.



### Almsgiving

Make a gift, even a simple action of care, to a person living in exile, so that the person does not just feel labelled as “a refugee” but “called by name”.



## Fifth Sunday - 6 April 2025



### Reflection of **María Elena Hernández Lara** and **Diana Rueda**, JRS LAC Reconciliation Coordinator and JRS IO Reconciliation Advisor, respectively

No one is ever fully prepared for humanitarian work. No one should have to do it because no one should be forced to flee home.

No university teaches how to support those starting over, but in aiding migrant women, we've learned from remarkable teachers about faith, love, resilience, and forgiveness.

We met the women of Revista Lideresa at the Transborder School of Citizenship in Tame, Arauca, on the Colombia-Venezuela border. Facing great risk, they turned their community media project

into a platform for sharing stories, poetry, and hope. Their work fosters hospitality, welcoming displaced Colombian women, returnees after the peace accords, and Venezuelan migrants seeking a better life.

Through writing, they transform pain into connection, offering refuge through words.

Their ability to forgive, rebuild, and embrace others has taught us that true hospitality is not just shelter but a commitment to humanity, dialogue, and reconciliation.



Photo: Philipp Spalek/Jesuit Refugee Service



# Fifth Sunday - 6 April 2025

## Focus on Colombia - Venezuela border

For over 60 years, armed conflict has forced millions of people in Colombia to flee their homes. Today, the country still has one of the largest internally displaced populations (IDPs) in the world. By mid-2024, nearly seven million people had been recorded as internally displaced.

In recent years, Colombia has also experienced a significant influx of people escaping economic and social crises in Venezuela.

Around three million Venezuelans have settled in Colombia, seeking safety and stability.

JRS began its mission in Colombia in 1995 and continues to assist thousands of people displaced by violence, including indigenous communities, and Venezuelan refugees.

Facing the region's immense challenges, JRS has initiated reconciliation and hospitality processes to heal, rebuild, and restore broken bonds within communities fractured by violence. The programme aims to foster inclusion and social cohesion as a means to counter violence—both a cause and consequence of forced migration—and to promote peace.



## Fifth Sunday - 6 April 2025



*“Hospitality means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people but to offer them space where change can take place... Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adore the lifestyle of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own.”*

*Henri Nouwen*

### Calls to action



#### Prayer

Pray using this prayer written by Maritza Jiménez, a migrant woman. “God is our supreme being—love itself, an infinite presence that connects my spirit and soul, bringing peace and shelter to my heart. His magnificence is rooted in love. What is the essence of life? It is love, forgiveness, and the peace we so deeply need to live in harmony with one another.”



#### Fasting

Fast from indifference and distractions that keep us from seeing the suffering of forcibly displaced persons. Compassion and tenderness can be learned when we tear down our internal walls and allow ourselves to see and hear God’s will expressed through the lives of others.



#### Almsgiving

True generosity means creating a world where migrants and refugees are received with dignity, and where hospitality is not just a gesture but a commitment to recognising their full humanity. One way to live this out is by creating spaces in our communities where people can truly know one another—through shared meals, storytelling, and meaningful encounters.

# Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion - 13 April 2025

**Maria Valan,**  
JRS Chad Project Coordinator

For many, the journey from suffering to resurrection is prolonged by unjust social structures that deny them their right to dignity.

Chad has opened its borders to nearly a million Sudanese refugees, yet its limited resources have made it difficult for both the government and humanitarian partners to provide dignified living conditions. Over 200,000 people face harsh conditions, living in tents under the scorching sun and enduring torrential rains.

Many, including children, carry the physical and emotional wounds of war, with bullets still lodged in their bodies. This is more than an act of charity—it is a profound testimony to the world. In an era where societies are closing themselves off to strangers, these communities embody the words of Mother Teresa: "Give until it hurts."

Their generosity is a reminder that true love is sacrificial, and in giving, we find the essence of Easter—hope, renewal, and the triumph of life over suffering.



# Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion - 13 April 2025

## Focus on Chad

For nearly two years, Sudan has been engulfed in conflict that has created one of the world's worst civilian protection crises in decades. Since April 2023, fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), alongside renewed intercommunal violence in Darfur, has forced millions of people from their homes.

Almost one million people have sought refuge in neighbouring Chad, including over 200,000 returning Chadians. The conflict in Sudan has further exacerbated the situation of protracted displacement that women, men, and children have been forced to live for years.

JRS has been active in Chad since 2006, focusing on education, livelihoods, protection, and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). In response to the Sudan crisis, JRS prioritised access to safe and quality education for as many children as possible.

Working with local partners, JRS Chad identified school-age children at reception sites and qualified teachers, as well as distributing school materials, and raising awareness on the importance of access to education. JRS also facilitated the integration of refugee students into Chad's national school system.





# Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion - 13 April 2025



*"I was a stranger and you welcomed me."*

*Mt, 25:35*

## Calls to action



### Prayer

Choose a specific refugee community or an individual story to pray for throughout Lent. Each day, offer a simple prayer for their strength, healing, and the resolution of conflicts that force people into exile.



### Fasting

Replace time spent on distractions (such as excessive social media or entertainment) with reading about the struggles faced by those forced to flee and the resilience they show to the world, allowing their reality to move your heart.



### Almsgiving

Participate in creating those spaces for healing and resilience by donating to JRS programmes.



[jrs.net](http://jrs.net)