

Lent

This week we enter the season of Lent – the 40 days (not counting Sundays) leading up to Easter. Lent is a time for self-examination; a time for taking an honest look at ourselves and the manner of our living to see how well we are doing at following Jesus. It is a time for studying his word with fresh eyes and open hearts to seek a closer walk in Jesus' steps – steps that call us to be our neighbor's keeper, and love not judge others, even those with whom we most disagree.

Lord, forgive us for the unintended hurt we cause. So often we act or speak without thinking. We do not listen and so do not hear the pain and hurt in people around us. We let self-righteousness get in the way of understanding and empathy. We let our agenda get in the way of seeing the needs of others. Open our hearts, our eyes and our minds. Move us to love as you love. Lead us to speak and act as you would speak and act. Help us to be as forgiving as we want to be forgiven. Amen

Pray For:

- **Brazil** – Extremely heavy rain has caused mudslides & flooding. 46 people have died; 2,500 people are homeless. The Brazilian president has pledged to rebuild the town of Sao Sebastiao, (home to 91,000 people) in a new safer location. More rain is expected.
- **Turkey & Syria** – More than 47,000 people have been killed & thousands more are injured. These numbers continue to climb. Another earthquake hit the same area this week.
- **Refugees fleeing political crisis & violence** – At the end of 2021 there were 89.3 million people forcibly displaced (people forced out of their home countries). Of these, 27.1 million were refugees (half were under age 18). There were also 53.2 million internally displaced people, 4.6 million asylum seekers, & millions of people who are stateless (their countries will not grant them citizenship). The hope that displaced people will be able to return home is decreasing. In the 90's an average of 1.5 million refugees were able to return home each year. Now, the number has dropped to 385,000 a year. This means more people are being displaced than are able to return home.
- **Haiti** – Gang activity is still creating terror, violence, hunger, & disease in Haiti. Kidnaping for ransom is a major & growing problem. Rape & murder are also being used to terrorize people. What remains of government has been unable to stop the gangs. No international help has been offered, though it has been requested. Pray for the country & for the Haitian Brethren there trying to survive in this crisis. Haiti is now on the US government no travel list because it is not safe to go there.
- **Ukraine where war continues** – attacks against Ukrainian civilians are ongoing. Russia is using both Russian forces & private troops against Ukraine. At least 30,000 Ukrainian civilians have died in the war.
- **Victims of Gun Violence** – Already this year, 6,054 people have died in gun violence (up 813 from last week) including 254 children (up 36 from last week). 4,551 people have been injured (up by 652 from last week) including 485 children (up 68 people from last week). 3,432 of the deaths are suicides (up 462 from last week). There have already been 81 mass shootings (up 13 from last week) this year. (Gun Violence Archive statistics). Do not forget, these statistics are not just print on paper. These numbers represent precious lives, loved ones lost; futures cut short, none of which can be replaced.
- **The continuing COVID Pandemic** – COVID continues to be a serious issue. While vaccines & treatments have reduced COVID death rates, COVID continues to spread. (The number of new cases in Ohio has been trending up in February.) Again, new COVID variants are circulating & causing concern.

