



GSR in the Classroom: LENT

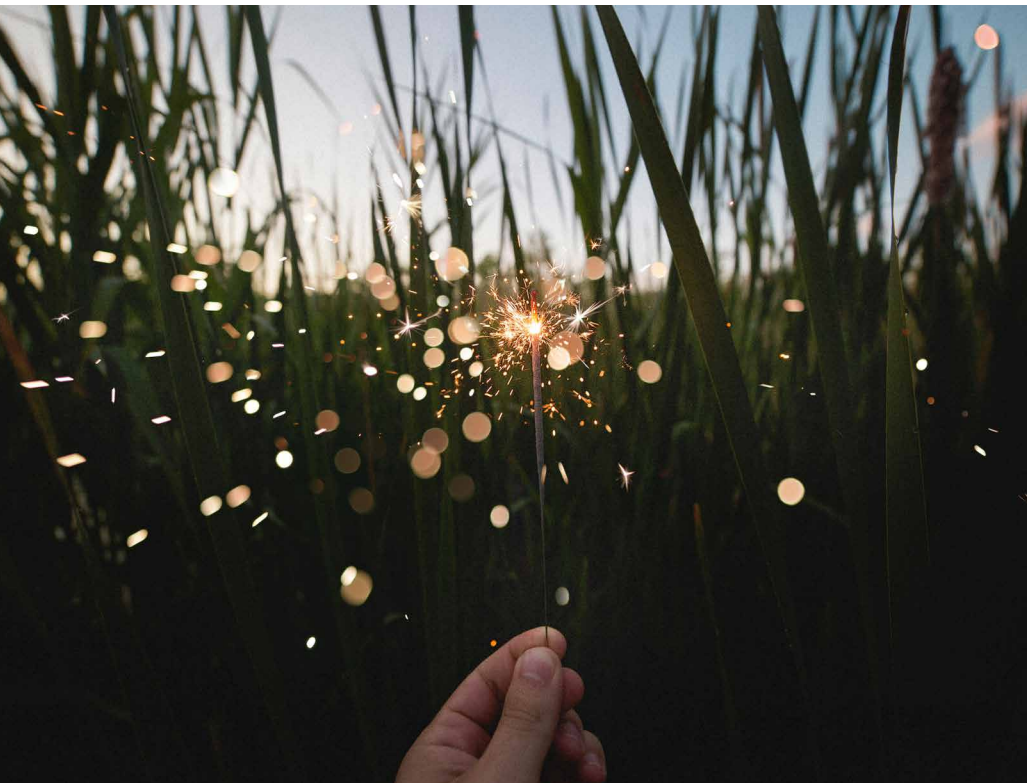
LESSON – EMBRACING PRACTICES THAT SPARK JOY

BEFORE YOU READ: Alone, or with a partner, consider:

- Do you have a particular object that holds special spiritual meaning for you? Describe it.
- What objects or activities clutter your life? Which of these might be cleared to create sacred space?

Keep in mind while you read:

This story will describe greater depths of holiness and joy to be discovered in our relationship with God. Be patient with wherever you are at in your personal relationship. Growth will come with effort, but it will take time.



(UNSPLASH / KRISTOPHER ROLLER)

NOT TOO TIDY: JOY AND HOLINESS

BY COLLEEN [GIBSON](#)

[April 12, 2019](#)

Besides a trailer for the [Netflix series](#) “Tidying Up with Marie Kondo,” I haven’t seen much of its content, yet the question central to Kondo’s philosophy of decluttering has somehow made its way into my life. As Lent has come to a close and Easter quickly approaches, a question has kept surfacing in real and surreal ways in my life: *What sparks joy?*

I happened upon the question quite by accident. At first, people would dramatically hold up objects in the midst of everyday situations and jokingly ask me, “Does this spark joy?” Then news articles began to

surface in my social media feeds, followed by think pieces about why people were so captivated by Marie Kondo, a Japanese organizing consultant, author and, now, television personality. Soon, I began to look around me and echo the question central to her philosophy; somehow, even though I hadn't watched the show, it was having an influence on me.

As that question — Does it spark joy? — surfaced time and again, I began to look at what objects line my walls. Glancing around the spaces of my life — my bedroom, my office, my community — I recognized the glimmers of joy surrounding me. I saw the many markers of where I've been: objects that signify moments on my journey, **totems** of people and places that hold significance in my life, and souvenirs of lessons and ideals that have become part of the very marrow of my being.

There were crosses from my travels and homemade prints, family photos and gifts from friends. Joy is only part of why I keep these things around. I keep these items because they are placeholders. They are reminders of the gifts of being alive, the lessons of experience, and the **palpable** presence of the sacred in very specific moments of my life.

We hold onto objects like this because in a way they hold sacred space for us. We need them because, beyond joy, they spark a remembrance in us of what is most holy and significant. There is no need to tidy up these moments. We hold them and they hold us and in moments when light seems dim, they spark something deep within, reminding us what the light is that we've experienced and we are meant to bear.

By acknowledging that significance, we can identify that light (and bear it to the world). And when we do that, we don't need any objects. Instead, we become the sacred spaces — living, moving, and breathing — that once captivated us.

The sacred spaces of our lives, after all, are spaces that have always just been waiting for us to enter. It is not our presence that sanctifies them. Each moment is holy. Our recognition of the Sacred in our midst, though, opens up a space to receive the sacred deep within us. This openness makes us a vessel, a means of carrying the holy far beyond a singular moment. If we are aware enough, that is to say attentive enough to grace, we can engrain the sacred moments and spaces of our lives into our very beings, revealing

VOCABULARY

totems: objects that are believed to have spiritual symbolism

palpable: capable of being touched or felt

sanctify: to make something sacred or holy

purveyors: people who supply something

coherence: consistency or unity in meaning or purpose

mundane: commonplace, routine

them in who we are and how we are in the world, becoming **purveyors** of sacred space in our everyday lives, peddling God's grace in the many spaces we are blessed to inhabit.

As L. William Countryman writes in his book [*Living on the Border of the Holy*](#):

"It can be helpful to imagine our human encounter with the Holy as life in a border country. It is a country in which, at privileged moments of access, we find ourselves looking over from the everyday world into another, into a world that undergirds the everyday world, limits it, defines it, gives it **coherence** and meaning, drives it. Yet this hidden world is not another world, but the familiar world discovered afresh."

The world we live in is filled with holiness. The discovery of the sacred in the **mundane** fills us with amazement, and as Countryman continues, "In the long run we find that the border country is in fact the place we have always lived, but it is seen in a new and clearer light."

Our call is to dare to cross that border and establish connection not only for our life, but for the life of the world. More often than not, this requires our branching out beyond our own boundaries, our sharing of the sacred by revealing the stories of the objects we carry with us *and also* being willing to hear the stories others have to offer.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer [*speaks*](#) directly to this point. "The first service one owes to others in a community

involves listening to them,” he declares. “Just as our love for God begins with listening to God’s Word, the beginning of love for others is learning to listen to them. God’s love for us is shown by the fact that God not only gives God’s Word but also lends us God’s ear.”

With God’s ears we learn to listen in a new way; we develop a manner of listening *to* and *from* the heart. The to and fro of this listening is a bridge that connects us, a pathway for the Sacred to make connection and to take up residence in yet another personified place. I can only imagine the joy such connection sparks in the heart of God.

With such joy comes the invitation to not just hold on to what has been but to once again encounter the Holy in the here and now. Holding firm to such experiences and the receptivity they nurture in us, we are able to both hold sacred space for others and be held in the sacred space God calls us to dwell in.

As Lent comes to a close and Easter approaches, we bear witness to the hopeful work of this season, work of renewing and refining our lives enough to better hold the Holy. We can tidy all we want but we must also realize that sacred space is most often found in the midst of mess. Embracing God present to us in all things — life, death, and resurrection — is our true invitation. Accepting that invitation and all the people, places and objects that hold it gives purpose to our being and, beyond the shadow of any doubt, sparks joy deep within, joy that is truly inextinguishable.



Colleen Gibson is a Sister of St. Joseph of Philadelphia. Author of the blog [Wandering in Wonder](#), she currently serves as coordinator of services at the SSJ Neighborhood Center in Camden, New Jersey.

AFTER YOU READ: Alone, or with a partner:

- When have you felt joy in your relationship with God?
- What can you do to add or maintain joy in your relationship with God?

SCRIPTURE SPOTLIGHT: These excerpts give a glimpse of Jesus’ encounter with Martha, the sister of Lazarus:

*“So the sisters sent word to Jesus, saying,
‘Master, the one you love is ill.’
When Jesus heard this he said,
‘This illness is not to end in death,
but is for the glory of God,
that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’
Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.
So when he heard that he was ill,
he remained for two days in the place where he was.
Then after this he said to his disciples,
Let us go back to Judea.”*

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*When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus
had already been in the tomb for four days.*

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*When Martha heard that Jesus was coming,
she went to meet him;
but Mary sat at home.
Martha said to Jesus,
'Lord, if you had been here,
my brother would not have died.
But even now I know that whatever you ask
of God,
God will give you.'
Jesus said to her,
Your brother will rise.'
Martha said,
'I know he will rise,
in the resurrection on the last day.'
Jesus told her,
'I am the resurrection and the life;
whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will
live,
and everyone who lives and believes in me
will never die.
Do you believe this?'
She said to him, "Yes, Lord.
I have come to believe that you are the
Christ, the Son of God,
the one who is coming into the world."*

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*[H]e became perturbed and deeply troubled,
and said,
'Where have you laid him?'
They said to him, 'Sir, come and see.'
And Jesus wept.*

*So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him.'
But some of them said,
'Could not the one who opened the eyes of
the blind man
have done something so that this man
would not have died?'
So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb.
It was a cave, and a stone lay across it.
Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.'
Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him,
'Lord, by now there will be a stench;
he has been dead for four days.'
Jesus said to her,
'Did I not tell you that if you believe
you will see the glory of God?'
So they took away the stone.
And Jesus raised his eyes and said,
'Father, I thank you for hearing me.
I know that you always hear me;
but because of the crowd here I have said
this,
that they may believe that you sent me.'
And when he had said this,
He cried out in a loud voice,
'Lazarus, come out!'
The dead man came out,
tied hand and foot with burial bands,
and his face was wrapped in a cloth.
So Jesus said to them,
'Untie him and let him go.'
Now many of the Jews who had come to
Mary
and seen what he had done began to believe
in him."*

*John 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45
Read John [11:1-45](#) in its entirety*

Alone or with a partner, consider the following:

- Martha experiences many emotions over the death of Lazarus, including sadness and anger at Jesus. Have you lost someone dear to you? What emotions did you experience?
- Martha and Mary were overwhelmed with joy when Jesus raises their brother from the dead. What sparks joy for you? What steals your joy today?
- Sister Colleen Gibson writes, "With God's ears we learn to listen in a new way; we develop a manner of listening to and from the heart." What do your relationship with God and your daily actions say about the state of your heart?

THE CHURCH'S CALL

Pope Francis reminds us that Jesus calls all of us out of the tomb of sin:

"Christ is not resigned to the tombs that we have built for ourselves with our choice for evil and death, with our errors, with ou[r] sins. He is not resigned to this! He invites us, almost orders us, to come out of the tomb in which our sins have buried us. He calls us insistently to come out of the darkness of that prison in which we are enclosed, content with a false, selfish and mediocre life. 'Come out!' he says to us, 'Come out!' It is an invitation to true freedom, to allow ourselves to be seized by these words of Jesus who repeats them to each one of us today. It is an invitation to let ourselves be freed from the 'bandages,' from the bandages of pride. For pride makes of us slaves, slaves to ourselves, slaves to so many idols, so many things. Our resurrection begins here: when we decide to obey Jesus' command by coming out into the light, into life; when the mask falls from our face — we are frequently masked by sin, the mask must fall off! — and we find again the courage of our original face, created in the image and likeness of God."

[Pope Francis, April 6, 2014](#)

Reflection Questions:

- How might sin happen to you and sometimes happen *through* you?
- What spiritual practices, teachings or disciplines invite you to "come out of the tomb?"
- What social sins violate the teachings of the Gospels? What are the consequences for vulnerable and marginalized people and for the environment?

SYNERGY WITH SISTERS

Sister Colleen Gibson, who wrote this reflection, is a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia. Her congregation lives by a set of 100 maxims – brief statements that express truths or guidance for life. Read a simplified version of their maxims [here](#), then consider ways you can incorporate some of them into your life.



ACT

1. Join Sister Colleen Gibson in her Lenten invitation to explore fresh approaches to draw nearer to God. End your day with this video: [Act: The of Art Examen: Hospitality](#).
2. Sister Colleen Gibson reminds us that people, places and objects can give purpose to our beings, as well as spark joy that is inextinguishable. Here are a few ways to share your joy with others:
 - Share a smile—turn your frown upside down today.
 - Encourage someone who is having a hard day.
 - Practice random acts of kindness.
 - Help an elderly neighbor in need.
 - Strike up a conversation with a stranger—a friend you haven't yet met.
 - Write a note to someone who inspires you to practice your faith.

PRAY

I am the God of mercy.
Come out, I say to you.
I am not resigned to the tombs that you have built.

Come out, I say to you.
Leave, the tomb where your sins have buried you.
Break free from the prisons of your false self and selfish ways.

Come out, I say to you.
Be freed from the bandages of pride
that make you a slave to today's idols.

Come out! I say to you.
Come out into the light, into life.
My mercy has no limits.
Amen.

Inspired by the words of [Pope Francis](#).

