

**Parish Lenten Retreat**

*“Deus ibi est”*

*“God is There”*

*Where Charity and Love are, God is There.*

*Ubi Caritas et Amor, Deus ibi est.*

**Artwork and Prayer Card**

A copy of Rembrandt's *Portrait of Christ's Head* is displayed to the left of the Nave over our music space and serves as a meditative focal point for prayer. Renamed "*Jesus Listens*" the artwork is also featured on our Lenten Prayer Card. Christ seems to be waiting for the viewer to speak a word. His head is tilted in anticipation as if unwilling to miss even a whisper or the slightest inflection of voice. The ear of Christ is exposed, open, waiting, anticipating, ready to listen. "*Jesus Listens*" to your prayer, thought, feeling, insight, petition, need, praise. "*Jesus Listens.*" You are invited to use Christ's image as an inspiration for communicating with our Lord who is closer to us than we are to ourselves. Study the portrait of Christ and ask not only what this image says to you but more importantly what you have to say to Jesus, who listens.

**Rembrandt**

**Portrait of Christ's Head**

Painted about 1640; oil on wood;  
State Museum, Berlin-Dahlem

More than any other artist of the period, Rembrandt strove to give earthly reality to the face of Christ. At the same time, no other artists endowed that face with more radiant kindness—particularly in our featured portrait which we are calling "*Jesus Listens.*" This work reveals a true depth of spiritual understanding and sentiment. Rembrandt was also a painter of the common people of history and of his time. Rembrandt's own experience with hardship and personal tragedy enabled him to show vulnerability in his subjects while also demonstrating each person as created in the likeness of God. Rembrandt's Christ is endowed with indescribable goodness and purity, the essence of one who would make the ultimate sacrifice in order that we might know God's unconditional love. As a painter, Rembrandt's work reveals a new kind of beauty, the spark of the divine in the human.

**Life Story**

Dutch born Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, July 15, 1606, Weddesteege at leyden, the son of the village miller, Harmen Gerritzoon van Rijn and Neeltgen Wilems-dochter van Zuytbrouck, the daughter of a local baker. His contribution to art came in a period that historians call the Dutch Golden Age.

**Optical Theory – Weakness or Strength?**

A letter published in 2004 by Margaret S. Livingstone, Professor of Neurobiology at Harvard Medical School suggests that Rembrandt, whose eyes failed to align correctly, suffered from stereo blindness. This conclusion was made after studying 36 of Rembrandt's self-portraits. Because he could not form a normal binocular vision, his brain automatically switched to one eye for many visual tasks. This disability could have helped him to flatten images he saw, and then put it onto the two-dimensional canvas. Livingstone theorized that this was an advantage for the painter: "Art teachers often instruct students to close one eye in order to flatten what they see. Therefore, stereo blindness might not be a handicap—and might even be an asset for some artists."

**“In your weakness lies my strength.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)**

**Reflection Question**

What weakness of mine can become strength with God's power?

(over)

## Prayer Card

### Why A Prayer Card?

Your Prayer Card with the image of “*Jesus Listens*” is designed to remind you of God’s presence that is always with you. Your awareness of God may come and go, but God is always there for you. Your Prayer Card may be placed where you will see it often, prompting prayer. Your Prayer Card is an awareness card.

Prayer is to be aware-----when you are aware you may be moved to prayer.

### When Can I Pray?

You can pray anytime in any place. Many times we believe that God is only present to us in Church or when we read the Bible or when we are engaged in some active work of charity. God is present to us in every situation especially wherever our attention is already directed. God’s spirit is at work especially in the areas of life which grab our attention and influence our thoughts or feelings. Whenever your mind or heart are especially engaged, God is present to you. We do not need to wait until we are in some “peaceful place” or even in a peaceful state of mind. Wherever you are and however you feel, “*God is There.*”

### How Can I Pray?

Seeing your Prayer Card acknowledges God’s presence with you—right there in that moment. You may share with God exactly what you’re thinking and what you’re feeling without self-editing. God already knows and is there for you.

### Breathing and Prayer

Breathing can help us to focus on God’s presence. Once you are aware of yourself and of God being “there for you” monitor your breathing. Breathing is the first step in meditating. As you breathe be aware of your breath entering your nostrils and breathe out slowly. Focusing on the breath being inhaled and exhaled at the point of the nose is calming in itself. Breathe slowly and deeply. Breathe in God’s grace, goodness and light and breathe out anything negative. This type of awareness, breathing and prayer, can be done at any time.

### How To Pray When Alone

Allot some time, even five minutes, to personal prayer. Begin with the breathing exercise mentioned above and then repeat our Lenten spoken prayer “*God is There*” or “*Deus ibi est.*” Keep repeating the prayer either focusing on the image of Christ or on the words or with your eyes shut. For example, breathe in—*God*—breathe out, breathe in—*is*—breathe out, breathe in—*there*—breathe out or breathe in—*de*—breathe out, breathe in—*us*—breathe out, breathe in—*ibi*—breathe out, breathe in—*est*—breathe out.

### What Happens Next?

Something wonderful! Be open to God, who is there for you. You may have a thought, see an image, relax, have an idea to help someone else, gain an insight or just feel a bit more peaceful. Spend a few moments asking the question of yourself “How is God with me in this moment? What do I have to say? What do I hear?” God is always with us. “*God is There.*”

### Reflection Questions

Where am I keeping my Prayer Card so that I may see it often?

What time of day will I set aside (five minutes minimum) to be with God alone and practice these new prayer techniques?

**Remember: There is no right way or wrong way to pray. Any time that you give to God will bring blessings beyond anything you could ever hope for or imagine.**

Aware and Prayer—“*God is There*”