Sin is real ... and salvation is real. The inspired author of the Old Testament Book of Chronicles in today’s first reading declares, “In those days, all the princes of Judah, the priests, and the people added infidelity to infidelity, practicing all the abominations of the nations.” Today, despite the passing of many generations, “all the abominations of the nations” continue to occur, within us individually and among us globally.

But, thanks be to God, salvation is real. For 2,000 years before Christ, God had sent many leaders including Abraham, Moses, David, Esther and Judith, and sixteen prophets to lead, guide and teach God’s people. Finally, as today’s gospel reports, “God so loved the world that he sent his only Son to be our Savior.” Jesus’ name means “Savior”.

Jesus described his mission as to save sinners. He identified himself as the Good Shepherd, who leaves the 99 sheep in the sheepfold to go in search of the one lost sheep. He added the Parable of the Lost Coin, wherein a woman who lost a precious jewel, calls in her neighbors to assist her, and thoroughly searches until she finds what had been lost. Perhaps the most endearing of all of Jesus’ three dozen parables is the Parable of the Prodigal Son, who after years of living a dissipated life, returns home ashamed, and for whom the Father races out to meet and kiss, and for whom the father hosts a celebratory banquet because, “my son who had been lost, has now been found.”

Our Savior defined the purpose of his mission in these words, “I have come to call sinners, not the just.” Accordingly, Jesus actively sought out sinners. He chose as his apostles twelve men including Peter, who would deny him; Thomas, who would doubt him; and Judas, who would betray him. Among his disciples and dinner guests were prostitutes and tax collectors. Repeatedly he praised the despised half-breed Samaritans and Sidonians for being the true neighbor, the one grateful leper, and the one true believer in the day of the prophet Namaan. Jesus came to save everybody, ... and he expects everybody to believe and behave as he had instructed. Many followed Jesus. Many others turned their backs on Jesus.

Jesus healed at least two dozen people suffering from blindness, lameness, leprosy or possession by an evil spirit. In these instances, he saved people not only physically but above all, spiritually. He wielded authority over the physical world as a sign that he possessed power over the much more profound and powerful spiritual world. Significantly, he concluded many encounters and healings with the important words, “Go, and sin no more.” Sin and suffering are real, and what is most real, most profound, eternal, and ineffable is the salvation which Jesus achieved and offers to everybody.

Individually and globally, we sinners need salvation. Individually, we bear responsibility for our sins. Globally, there is little we can do about the sin that abounds. Each morning, as I wake up and open my
mind and heart long before I open my eyes, I think about and pray for the needs of the world. First, I pray for the pope and bishops of the world. Second, I pray for our president and our congress. After that, the needs are endless! The news from the night before has alerted me to kidnappings, killings, wars on every continent, innocent people being exiled or slaughtered for their Christian faith. What can I do? ... I have very little money to donate. I have virtually no political power to influence people. The one thing I do possess, however, is deep faith. I pray to Jesus that he would intercede to bring peace to people of the world, especially to the innocent people who get caught in the crossfire of angry people. The beloved Pope John XXIII used to pray at the end of the night, “Jesus, I’m tired. I’m going to bed. The protection of your people lies in your hands.”

During these last three weeks of Lent, may I suggest that each of us consider praying the rosary daily for personal conversion and for Mary’s intercession to her Son to bring his peace to the world. This was Mary’s message to believers when she appeared in southern France in 1858 as Our Lady of Lourdes.

Friends, sin is real, and salvation is real too. Trust in Jesus, who came to save everybody. Follow him. Go and sin no more.