

# MARCH

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## YEAR B WEEKDAYS II

Friday, March 1, 2024  
(Lec. 234)

FRIDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
OF LENT

- 1) Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13a,  
17b-28a
  - 2) Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46
- Gospel related: CCC 445, 755, 756

FOCUS: Jesus is the cornerstone of the Church, and our lives.

If we are creating something, or building something, and we want it to be good, or be strong, then we need the correct materials. Bakers know the disaster that awaits when choosing incorrectly between baking soda and baking powder. Builders know the structural failure that awaits when a cornerstone cannot be laid perfectly square and aligned to the remainder of the building.

We set aside, we reject, the things that do not meet our needs. And since the temple was undergoing a decades-long renovation when Jesus spoke to the Pharisees in today's Gospel, his quoting of Scripture (Ps 118:22-23) would have resonated with them: *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone*, he said, and the Pharisees and the chief priests *knew that he was speaking about them*. They were angry and reacted to that, and it was only the presence of the crowds who surrounded Jesus, who believed him to be a prophet, that prevented them from arresting Jesus right there.

Why did the parable and the implication that they had rejected a cornerstone make them so angry? Part of the answer has to be that the Pharisees understood Jesus to be claiming to be the Messiah (as that is what Psalm 118 points to). But we today can see how the truth of his claim is even deeper and more accurate than the Pharisees knew.

In some cultures, and in ancient days, the cornerstone would have sacrificial offerings placed upon it in dedication to the gods for the sake of harmony and prosperity. Some cornerstones also included a bit of history, perhaps relics and artifacts of the community so that the building would be blessed. Jesus contained within himself all of human history; and he was the ultimate, perfect, and eternal sacrifice to God. He thereby created the conditions for harmony, prosperity, and blessing for the spiritual temple, the new Church.

He is the cornerstone of the Church. And we trust this cornerstone to have been laid with perfect care, because it was done so by the perfect builder. It will not crumble, it will not fail. And it is strong enough to support us wherever we are, for God himself is the foundation of the world in which we live.

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Saturday, March 2, 2024  
(Lec. 235)

- 1) Micah 7:14-15, 18-20
- 2) Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Gospel related: CCC 545, 589, 1423, 1439, 1443, 1468, 1700, 1846, 2795, 2839

SATURDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: *The Lord is kind and merciful.*

What does today's parable, which is often referred to as "the prodigal son," tell us about God's mercy and how it can help us during Lent? The word *prodigal* can have two meanings – to be wasteful or to be extravagant. Clearly, the son is wasteful, but the father is extravagant. Both meanings are evident in the parable.

The younger son *squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation*. That's an epitaph none of us would want. And thankfully, it's not the end of the younger son's story. Jesus notes that he eventually *[comes] to his senses*. Here in this moment, the son returns to the person he was born to be before he derailed his life. By coming to his senses, he can return home, recognizing the pain he had caused his father and seeking to make amends. Now, his need for reconciliation and healing is greater than his need to have his own way.

Yet the most shocking part of the parable must be the father's response and his extravagant forgiveness. Instead of words of judgment, he responds to the return of his wayward son with a loving and accepting hug – with forgiveness. Obviously, this response was more than the son could ever have hoped for or expected, but then our expectations of God can often surprise us even if they are limited by our own faults and life experiences.

In many ways, this parable is a wonderful image for the sacrament of reconciliation. Like the son, we choose through our words and actions to go off to the distant land of separation from God – the land of selfishness, pride, and excess. Like the father, God will not stop us. But when we have decided we have had enough of that land, just like the father God is waiting for our return, to receive us back, watching out for us with expectation. God does not give up on us. The whole history of salvation testifies to this fact, which is why the sacrament of reconciliation can be for us our moment of return.

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## SUNDAY, MARCH 3, 2024

(Lec. 29)

1) Exodus 20:1-17  
or 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17

2) 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

3) John 2:13-25

Gospel related: CCC 473, 575, 583, 584, 586, 994

## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

FOCUS: In the sacraments, the Lord fills us with his grace to help us love him with our whole hearts.

As we continue our journey through Lent, today's reading from Exodus enumerates the commandments God's people were to live by as part of the covenant relationship God established with them at Mount Sinai. The first three commandments shape our relationship with God, and the remaining seven shape our relationship with one another. Jesus summarized these with the great commandment: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. If we live this dual commandment of loving God and neighbor, we will fulfill the 10 Commandments.

Let's focus on the very first commandment: *You shall not have other gods besides me*. Sounds easy enough. We don't go to some other church to worship the god of rain or the god of fertility as the pagans did back in the day. We only worship God as revealed in sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition.

And yet, is it really true that we do not have other gods besides the Lord God? Because if it is true, then he is the one we seek to please first; whose commandments we seek to obey; the one to whom we turn first for guidance and help; the one around whom we organize our lives; the one who comes first in our hearts.

Each of us loves God. But maybe there are times when he doesn't *really, always* come first. The daily distractions of our lives can end up receiving all our attention. We may lack energy, and might be running low on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and so rather than pray, we watch a show or spend time on social media. Rather than share our faith with a family member, well, we'll find pretty much anything else to do instead. God, and the things of God, seem to take a back seat at times in our lives. Thank goodness we never take a back seat for him!

That is part of the reason giving something up for the six weeks of Lent is so affirming and challenging. The Lord is always attending to, caring for, and loving us. We take this time to participate in prayerful, spiritual practices that they might help us remember to whom we belong, and to whom we ought to give our "first fruits."

Fortunately, the Lord is ready to help us. Every time we receive him in the Eucharist, every time we encounter him in the sacrament of reconciliation, the Lord fills us with his grace, cleansing our hearts and strengthening them to resist the temptation of all those attachments and desires that keep us from loving God wholeheartedly. That same zeal we heard Jesus display in the Gospel story as he cleansed the temple he also has for us – for seeing us get rid of all that inner clutter that keeps us from truly and fully loving him. All we need to do is ask; all we need to do is come to him.

Monday, March 4, 2024  
(Lec. 237)  
1) 2 Kings 5:1-15ab  
2) Luke 4:24-30

MONDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
OF LENT  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Casimir)

FOCUS: God's love and mercy are unbounded.

The Lord shows his abundant and unbounded mercy through some interesting people in today's first reading. Naaman, the highly esteemed military commander, has everything going for him except for one, big thing: He has leprosy. The king of Israel is a rebellious and disobedient king (we know, because the Lord has sent a prophet, Elisha, to call him and Israel back to repentance and away from destruction and sin). We also have the prophet Elisha, who will cure Naaman of his leprosy.

Finally, and standing out from all of them, is a girl. She is described as *a little girl* who had been *captured in a raid on the land of Israel* and had become *the servant of Naaman's wife*. This means she was living in the house of a Gentile, an enemy of Israel. That makes what transpires in this story even more remarkable.

Even though she is a servant girl in a foreign land, she is aware of the existence of Elisha, the prophet, and knows he can cure Naaman: *If only my master would present himself to the prophet in Samaria, she said to her mistress, he would cure him of his leprosy.*

Her proclamation reveals a love for Naaman – a desire for his good – that comes from God. To love is “to will the good of another” (CCC 1766). This young girl, unnamed, unfree, and uncounted in society, knows the great commandments of God, including, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord* (Lev 19:18). She is unconcerned that this man is not of her people; she is undaunted to share what she knows; and she is unafraid to follow God's commandment.

In this milieu of God's compassionate love, whereby he has sent the prophet Elisha to redeem his people, the place where his mercy takes hold in this story is in the body of a hostile pagan, not a faithful Israelite. In today's Gospel, Jesus says *to the people in the synagogue at Nazareth ... there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed but only Naaman the Syrian*. False sacrifices and pious ritual did not cleanse those who were already of the Lord, but the love of God shared by a little girl brought new life and mercy to one who now claimed the Lord for his own.

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Tuesday, March 5, 2024  
(Lec. 238)

- 1) Daniel 3:25, 34-43
- 2) Matthew 18:21-35

Gospel related: **CCC** 982, 2227, 2843, 2845

TUESDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: *Good and upright is the Lord; thus he shows sinners the way.*

The season of Lent is an opportunity to actively consider the concept of forgiveness – the great mercy of God and the ways we are called to imitate this mercy in our own lives.

In today's Gospel, for example, Jesus tells a parable comparing the kingdom of heaven to a king who wants to settle his accounts. A debtor is brought before him who owes an amount so large it would be impossible to repay. He begs for more time, and the king forgives his loan completely. Though he no longer owes the king anything, he immediately seeks out another servant who owes him a much smaller amount. He begins choking him, demanding repayment. When the other servant begs for more time, he refuses and has him thrown in jail.

This behavior is patently absurd. How could he demand repayment for a debt so small, when his immeasurably larger debt has already been forgiven? And yet the moral of the story is that this is exactly how we act when we refuse to forgive one another. At the end of the parable, the master sentences the unmerciful servant to unending torture. Jesus warns that his heavenly Father will do the same to us, unless we forgive each other from the heart. Hard-heartedness has eternal consequences.

Just like the servant in the parable, our entire debt has been forgiven by God. Jesus took on the sins of the whole world when he died on the cross for us. Relative to this, any offense done to us is minor. Therefore, let us remember that God's mercy has no limits. No sin is so large that it cannot be forgiven by God. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we must learn to forgive one another as God has forgiven us.

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Wednesday, March 6, 2024

(Lec. 239)

1) Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9

2) Matthew 5:17-19

Gospel related: CCC 577, 592, 764, 1967, 2053, 2763

WEDNESDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: As followers of Jesus, we are set apart by observing God's commandments, thus bearing witness to our faith.

For many of us growing up, there was a fear of standing out, especially during those dreaded middle-school years. We wanted to dress like the other kids at school, use the same vernacular, and of course play the same sports or activities. Blending in was key to adolescent survival.

Not so for the ancient Israelites. One of the main purposes of the law was to set the Israelites apart from everyone else, as it also revealed the holy character of the eternal God. The law regulated almost every area of life, from diet to cleanliness to personal interactions. No law was trivial, for each stipulation differentiated the Israelites, allowing them to witness their faith in the one true God to others.

As Moses instructs the Israelites in today's first reading, *Observe [the statutes and decrees] carefully, for thus will you give evidence of your wisdom and intelligence to the nations, who will hear of all these statutes and say, "This great nation is truly a wise and intelligent people."*

This was not about vanity – being set apart for the sake of being set apart and admired. The witness they gave and what other nations saw was in praise of the Most High God. God who had brought them out of slavery to the Promised Land, and who had set apart and cherished his people that they might flourish in covenantal bond with him.

Yet they wandered, turned away from his promises, disobeyed his commands, and offered unworthy sacrifices.

What the law, weakened by the flesh, was powerless to do (Cf., Rom 8:3), Christ did in taking on flesh and enlivening us with his Spirit. Only *in* him and *through* him – not by our own merits or acts of righteousness – are we able to "obey and teach these commandments." Jesus is, as he tells us in the Gospel, the fulfillment of the law.

The commandments of God bring us life, and by following them we provide a powerful witness to the Gospel. Jesus entered human history as the manifestation of God's perfect love, gathering all the commandments into one in himself. Baptized into his life, we, as his disciples, are set apart – not blending in but standing out.

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Thursday, March 7, 2024  
(Lec. 240)

- 1) Jeremiah 7:23-28
- 2) Luke 11:14-23

THURSDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
OF LENT  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saints Perpetua and Felicity,  
Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 385, 700

FOCUS: Listen to God's voice.

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus drives a demon out of a man who had been not able to speak because of it. He is healed by Jesus and gains his voice. We heard the story, but what is interesting in its telling is that it spends far more time on the crowd's reaction to Jesus' miracle than the miracle itself. Some dare to accuse Jesus of doing the devil's work. Others ask him for further signs.

The focus on the great miracle that has happened has shifted away from the healing. It is the prophecy of Jeremiah from our first reading, fulfilled: They hear but they do not really listen. They did not pay heed, and *walked in the hardness of their evil hearts*. Why were they so confused at this sign of God's healing love? What made them consider the prince of demons as the source of something beautiful and life-giving?

Each of us has our own answer to those questions because, like those in the crowds surrounding Jesus, we, too, fall prey to distractions, sin, and blindness. We are – at times – the ones of whom Jeremiah prophesied: *This is the nation that does not listen to the voice of the Lord, its God, or take correction. Faithfulness has disappeared; the word itself is banished from their speech*. We doubt, we challenge the Lord to show us something, we question his ways.

But still we come to the Lord. We come to him in prayer, in worship, and in liturgy. And he in his generous and loving mercy awaits us and welcomes us – ornery or pious, angry or grateful. We come and we are reminded: The Word of God came to us and became like us so that we may become like him. We will celebrate together the sacrament that is the Eucharist, his Word made flesh. Let us listen to his voice, and pay heed to his comforting assurance: *The Kingdom of God has come upon [us]*. We are the Lord's, and we are safe in his arms.

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Friday, March 8, 2024  
(Lec. 241)  
1) Hosea 14:2-10  
2) Mark 12:28-34

FRIDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
OF LENT  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint John of God,  
Religious)

Gospel related: **CCC** 129, 202, 228, 575, 2196 **CSDC** 40, 112

FOCUS: God's mercy offers healing, refreshment, and freedom.

*Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.*

The commandment to love others is clear, uncompromising, and irrevocable. To love is to step into something radical and life-changing. The One who loved us first and who is love itself has demonstrated that to us from the beginning of time. In today's first reading from the prophet Hosea, we get a glimpse of what the love of God looked like for the people of Israel.

Hosea is calling out to the people of Israel with a message of repentance. "Turn back to the Lord," he says. Repent for all you have done, approach the Lord with fearlessness and confidence that he will welcome you.

For God said: *I will heal their defection ... I will love them freely ... I will be like the dew for Israel.* This message is one of healing, freedom, and refreshment.

Returning to God is about healing and reconciliation, not about punishment or fear. God promises to love the people freely, to be like dew for them. Dew – the most gentle way of providing water and life. God extends this same healing and freedom to us. The people of Israel were called back to God, and so are we.

As God's love for his people is healing and gentle, so we are called to love with gentleness. We, too, can seek healing in our relationships and offer forgiveness to those who have harmed us. In doing so, we can experience the freedom of God's healing love and share that healing with others. As we turn to the Eucharist, we lift up all those areas of our lives in need of healing and pray that God's gentle mercy will transform our lives into ones of freedom.

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Saturday, March 9, 2024  
(Lec. 242)

- 1) Hosea 6:1-6
- 2) Luke 18:9-14

SATURDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
OF LENT  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Frances of Rome,  
Religious)

Gospel related: **CCC** 588, 2559, 2613, 2631, 2667, 2839

FOCUS: *Come, let us return to the Lord ... he will heal us.*

The prophet Hosea preached against the growing idolatry among the Jewish people in the Northern Kingdom of Israel some seven centuries before the birth of Jesus. We heard him in our first reading, extolling all, *Come, let us return to the Lord*. He assures the people that the same God who has punished them will also forgive them.

The people to whom Hosea was preaching were simply going through the motions of their faith and their fulfillment of responsibilities toward the law. They offered incense and sacrifice at all the required times, but these were empty gestures. Too many were breaking the first commandment by offering sacrifice and worship to lesser gods in other temples at the same time. The Lord spoke through Hosea saying, *It is love that I desire, not sacrifice*.

Those to whom Hosea spoke were not unlike the Pharisee in today's parable. He had no love for God or his fellow human beings because he was too in love with himself. Even his prayer reeked of arrogance and pride.

For Jesus, the least of all is the greatest of all. Even though the tax collector was hated by the people in the town because they were all in his debt, his prayer is heard because it is honest and true, without embellishment. He admits sin and turns to God for mercy.

At times, we find ourselves wanting a pat on the back from God and others because of how much good we do or how much we pray. No matter how good we think ourselves to be, God is always greater. Likewise, no matter how sinful we feel, God is always more merciful. Wherever we are, let us heed Hosea's invitation: *Come, let us return to the Lord ... he will heal us*.

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## SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 2024

(Lec. 32)

- 1) 2 Chronicles 36:14-16,19-23
- 2) Ephesians 2:4-10
- 3) John 3:14-21

Gospel related: **CCC** 219, 444, 454, 458, 678, 679, 706, 2130 **CSDC** 3, 64

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

FOCUS: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.*

Many of us are committed to certain Lenten practices this holy season. Perhaps we are working to add more or certain types of prayer into our faith life. Perhaps we have given something up. Whatever they are, each could be categorized as a certain type of gift. We are giving God our time or giving up something out of love for him. Any good Lenten practice is, in some way, a giving of ourselves, our desires, our effort, to God.

It is but a small gesture of love in return for the love we have been given. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.* Let us be clear. God does not “need” anything from us, but he wants us. He created us, he loves us, and he desires to be in relationship with us for eternity.

And so our Church asks us to offer these gifts of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to him. Why?

One reason is that these gifts are acts of love. They are acts of relationship. Just as a child gives a parent a thousand gifts – wilted dandelions, scraps of paper, or bits of nature found outside – it is not the gift that matters, but the love with which it is given. The parent does not need that half a seashell, but oh, the love that it contains! These gifts are beautiful and good, not for any utilitarian value, but because of the way they bind us together in relationship.

Another reason we are asked to offer these gifts is this: Anything we give to God rebounds back to us, transformed by his perfect goodness. Anything we give to God is poured back out on earth, filled with his glory. Therefore, our small spiritual sacrifices can be poured back out on us and others for the sanctification of the world.

One final reason we offer our humble gifts to God is simply gratitude. We recognize that all is gift. As the Letter to the Ephesians reminds us, God has poured out *the immeasurable riches of his grace*. *It is not from you; it is the gift of God.* And so, in gratitude, we offer back what was given to us. We recognize the source of all these good things, the source of strength who helps us reject any bad things we are giving up, and we joyfully draw near to the giver of all these good gifts in the spiritual practices we take up in this season.

As we approach the most precious of all of these gifts in this Eucharist, may we be strengthened for our Lenten journey. May we be filled with the gratitude and the love which can strengthen us in our Lenten practices. And may we be drawn closer to God who loved us so much that he gave us his only Son.

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Monday, March 11, 2024  
(Lec. 244)

- 1) Isaiah 65:17-21
- 2) John 4:43-54

MONDAY OF  
FOURTH WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: Ask God for the big things, as well as the small.

Today's Gospel story of a royal official asking Jesus to cure his son, who is some distance away, is a remarkable occurrence. Jesus was already viewed by the religious and civil officials as a troublemaker. They feared he might lead an uprising against either the religious leaders or against the Romans.

Thus it was a somewhat dangerous act by the official, as well. Should Jesus heal his son, it would make Jesus even more famous and beloved, which also would make him more powerful. In spite of the potential backlash, the official made the request, and Jesus granted it.

Jesus did not require the official to renounce Rome, nor did he require that the request be made public. In other words, there were no conditions imposed on the one seeking the miracle. All that was needed was faith, and the Roman official had it and acted upon it.

Asking Jesus for what we need is therefore not only something he wants, but that which we are instructed to do when he teaches us how to pray (Cf., Luke 11:1-4): "Give us this day our daily bread" is not just about food, or physical nourishment, but spiritual life and the necessities for flourishing as a disciple in the kingdom.

There is something even more significant and poignant about asking for help on behalf of someone else. It is not us wishing for them to be as we wish them to be, but earnestly and honestly lifting up their true needs before the Lord – interceding in prayer for them.

Into this space, God enters. God's care and healing are still present today. God loves us and wants to show that love in many ways. Look for the ways God is clearly working in your life, and answering prayers. Ask God for the big things, as well as the small. Share your stories with others and even if the answer is not what you expected, rejoice anyway. Rejoice because you know that God loves you and is by your side through every difficulty.

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Tuesday, March 12, 2024  
(Lec. 245)

- 1) Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12
- 2) John 5:1-16

Gospel related: CCC 575, 583, 594

TUESDAY OF  
FOURTH WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: Jesus is the source of life.

Water is necessary for life. In Ezekiel's vision of the new Israel, he sees a stream flowing from the temple that will restore fertility to a land that was once arid. What starts as a trickle grows into a river with the power to make saltwater fresh. The trees along this river will grow fruit every month, and their leaves will provide medicine. Every sort of living creature shall multiply wherever the river flows. The river represents a return to Eden. And the temple is its source.

In today's Gospel, Jesus travels to the temple to celebrate a Jewish holy day. While in Jerusalem, he visits a pool where many have gathered in hopes of being healed. Jesus singles out a man who has been ill for 38 years and asks him if he wants to be well. After the man explains that he has not been able to make it into the pool by himself, Jesus says to him, *Rise, take up your mat, and walk*. And immediately, the man does as Jesus says. Jesus does not take him to the pool to be healed, but heals him with his words.

Jesus is himself the bountiful, flowing, healing water of Ezekiel's prophecy. He is the living water from whom, if we drink, we shall receive eternal life. While he does not say this to the man here, he has already begun speaking of it.

In the chapter of John's Gospel just prior to today's passage, Jesus told the Samaritan woman that he could give her *living water* (Jn 4:10). He tells her, *the water I shall give will become ... a spring of water welling up to eternal life* for the one who drinks it (Jn 4:14). Later, Jesus will state in public: *Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink* (Jn 7:37).

We see in today's readings that Jesus is the source of life. As necessary as water is for biological life, so God is necessary for the life of the soul. Jesus offers himself as our true food and drink each time we receive the Eucharist, sustaining us on our journey toward eternal life. May we open our hearts to receive this healing refreshment.

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Wednesday, March 13, 2024  
(Lec. 246)

- 1) Isaiah 49:8-15
- 2) John 5:17-30

Gospel related: **CCC** 574, 589, 594, 612, 635, 679, 859, 994, 998, 1038, 1063, 1470, 2824  
**CSDC** 259

WEDNESDAY OF  
FOURTH WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: In Christ Jesus we have found the source of salvation and life.

Today's Gospel passage reminds us of a basic truth of faith – that the work of redemption is essentially God's work, entrusted to his Son, who then invites us to participate in it. In addition to being the judge of all humanity, Christ is also the source of grace and the conduit of mercy for all to draw from.

One of the great struggles of the life of faith is overcoming the false idea that we must work for salvation. Over and over again, people fall for the belief that they must correct their lives and overcome their faults and failings before presenting themselves to the Lord. If that were true and the burden of the work of salvation falls upon the individual, then why would we need a Savior – why did Christ die for our sins?

This Gospel puts this false notion to rest. Yes, we are commanded to change our lives, to repent and confess our sins and to respond to God's grace, but we are to do so in the sure and certain hope that God is indeed gracious and merciful, and that in him alone can we find forgiveness and life. The promise of that mercy should, in the words of the psalm, lift up all who are bowed down.

This Gospel is a source of encouragement as we continue our Lenten journey. Jesus tells us that the mission of redemption comes from the very heart of the Father – it is God's will that we be saved. And, as the prophet Isaiah says: Like a mother who will not forget her child, God will never forget us; he will never turn his back on us, no matter how broken we are. All God asks of us is a contrite heart and a hope-filled spirit, and in Jesus he will do the rest. Through him we can put behind us our past faults, and look forward to the promise of life eternal.

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Thursday, March 14, 2024  
(Lec. 247)

- 1) Exodus 32:7-14
- 2) John 5:31-47

Gospel related: **CCC** 548, 582, 702, 719

THURSDAY OF  
FOURTH WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: Through and in Christ we witness to God's immense love.

Who is a reliable witness? Who is not? How do we know?

In the first reading Moses, a prophet chosen by God and rejected temporarily as God's spokesman by those following him, challenges God's intention to consume his people with his wrath. Moses argues with God. "If you destroy these people, that will be your legacy among the Egyptians," Moses essentially says to God. "Is that the story you want told of you, one of destruction and breach of promise?" And God relents.

God's leading of his people out of Egypt and slavery, to flourish in the Promised Land and be his people as he was their God, is the story that was under way. Moses was a witness to this. As human history continued, the covenantal bond grew and the law arose as a way of regulating the behaviors of all who were in relationship with God. Other nations witnessed the way the nation of Israel was set apart, and made for the glory of the one, true God.

Jesus himself came to bear witness, literally in human flesh, to the love of God, and the legacy and enduring nature of God's promises. He spoke of the importance of witnessing and of the evidence by which we can judge the truth of it. John the Baptist, he says, was a reliable witness, and he (Jesus) himself is even more so. He says the works people have seen him do testify to the goodness of God and his desire to give them real life, both now and after the death of their bodies. Jesus asks, "Where is the love of God in you if you do not see this evidence and believe what you see?"

Jesus told us he is the way, the truth, and the life. He is truth himself and whatever he testifies to, and we witness from him, is perfect truth, goodness, and beauty. So today, let us humbly come to this table with a prayer to have both our eyes and our hearts opened so we may, by our actions, be reliable witnesses to God's immense love.

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Friday, March 15, 2024

(Lec. 248)

1) Wisdom 2:1a, 12-22

2) John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Gospel related: CCC 583

FRIDAY OF  
FOURTH WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: Our hope is in the Lord who protects us.

Today's Gospel has a deep sense of foreboding and trouble surrounding Jesus. He is doing what he can to avoid those who are out to persecute him. He knows he faces powerful enemies, and so he tries to be secretive to not confront them.

When he *is* confronted by them, however, he does not retreat from his mission. He anchors down, professing that he has been sent by the Father: *Yet I did not come on my own, but the one who sent me, whom you do not know, is true. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.* And even when they do try to detain him, he slips from their midst successfully. In the face of great adversity, the Father is with him.

We might consider what our reactions are when we face great tumult in our lives. It is natural to want to avoid difficult situations or run away, but we might think of what it would take to respond as Jesus does with conviction and faith. We must trust that the Lord is always with us, especially in times of great adversity. Jesus has revealed to us how much God loves us and wants to protect us.

As we continue with our celebration of the Eucharist, let us give thanks for our merciful and generous God. May our physical and spiritual practices this Lent bring us to a greater understanding of his love and protection of us. And may we work to share this great gift of the Lord's compassion with others.

\* \* \*



Saturday, March 16, 2024  
(Lec. 249)

- 1) Jeremiah 11:18-20
- 2) John 7:40-53

Gospel related: **CCC** 574, 575, 588, 595

SATURDAY OF  
FOURTH WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: The Lord is always present to guide our ways.

Jeremiah, like Moses, was never crazy about the idea of being a prophet. And why would he be? Hard proclamations to human beings about their bad behavior are rarely received, then or now, with open minds and hearts. But Jeremiah became a courageous prophet, and for his troubles was mocked, humiliated, and even lowered into a cistern filled with mud (Cf., Jer 38:6). And yet, with some occasional and at times even understandable misgivings, he continued to rely on God to judge the situation justly and act for the good of all, difficult though that may have been to watch the results.

How could a prophet of God be treated so poorly? The simple answer is because we sin. Our free will allows us to disobey the Lord, and to act with pride and self-satisfaction when humility and sacrifice are called for. The Gospel passage gives us a particular insight into this as the crowd reacts to Jesus' teaching on the last day of the feast of Tabernacles. This was a day when water was brought from a special pool and poured on the altar of the temple to celebrate the Exodus from Egypt. Jesus had used this joyful celebration (in the verses just prior to today's passage) to explain that *he* is living water, the liberation sent from God, the fulfillment of God's history of gracious actions for them.

Why didn't everyone believe him? Some did, we read, but others relied only on their own literalistic religious ideas, such as, *the Christ will not come from Galilee, will he?* They harden their hearts so they will not have to see God's surprising goodness acting not only in their cherished traditions but, more importantly, in their very midst.

We will recognize this hardening of hearts, this rigidity that does not want to see even *good* change, for it is still in our midst, and sometimes, in our own hearts. The only solution is to allow God to guide our judgments in every moment. Let us come to this altar today, continuing our Lenten repentance, asking to be broken open to see justly God's actions in our midst.

\* \* \*

**SUNDAY, MARCH 17, 2024**

(Lec. 35)

1) Jeremiah 31:31-34

2) Hebrews 5:7-9

3) John 12:20-33

Gospel related: **CCC** 363, 434, 542, 550, 607, 662, 786, 1428, 2731, 2795, 2853 **CSDC** 570

**FIFTH SUNDAY  
OF LENT**

**FOCUS:** The Lord asks us to serve him, even through trials or suffering.

In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant the Lord will establish with his people. And why was the Lord establishing a new covenant, we might ask: What happened to the old one? As Jeremiah describes and as we see throughout the Old Testament, the recurring problem was disobedience. The Israelites failed, time and again, to obey the Lord's commandments, rebelling against the Lord, choosing instead to follow the ways of their neighbors, or to live as they chose.

So the Lord God established a new covenant, one that was established in the blood of Christ, through his sacrifice on the cross. As we hear Jesus say in today's Gospel, this is why he came into the world. *Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.* Here he is foretelling not just his death, but the kind of death he would undergo. His mission is not just one of suffering, however, but that he might be raised into new life, and through him, through his resurrection, all might be offered salvation, eternal life.

The path Jesus followed that led to his passion, death, and resurrection was born in obedience to the Father. Jesus' words: *Yet what should I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'?* call to mind his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, *not what I will but what you will* (Mk 14:36b). His words epitomize that obedience, that willingness to do the Father's will even when it is hard, even when it involves great suffering. It is this obedience that the author of Hebrews highlights as the key to Jesus' sacrifice and the imitation of this obedience, the key to our salvation.

But obedience is a difficult pill for us to swallow, especially when that obedience involves accepting suffering. No one wants to suffer. No one wants to see their loved ones suffer. But none of us will leave this earth without experiencing suffering. Sometimes we suffer as a consequence of our sin – the times we disobey God and his laws or times when we act imprudently. Other times, we suffer because of the sin of other people. Yet other times, we suffer because we live in a fallen world which includes illness and death of loved ones and calamities such as natural disasters. And some of us will suffer much more than others.

But this suffering doesn't have to be pointless or meaningless. God has the power to use it for his purpose – to bring about goodness and life through it, as he did with Christ's suffering. What he asks of us is that we remain obedient, that we not rebel and turn away from him. And to help us do so, Christ nourishes us with his own body and blood, with his very self, that we might grow in his likeness, grow in obedience to God, and remain with him forever.

\* \* \*

Monday, March 18, 2024

(Lec. 251)

- 1) Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17,  
19-30, 33-62  
or 13:41c-62
- 2) John 8:1-11

MONDAY OF

FIFTH WEEK

OF LENT

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem,

Bishop and Doctor

of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 583

FOCUS: Jesus is just and merciful.

It's not all that hard to imagine the tone of the scribes and Pharisees in today's Gospel. It's reminiscent of a schoolyard bully who runs to the teacher with a story that conveniently leaves out his part of the drama; or a courtroom lawyer in a police procedural drama who approaches a witness with a smirk, only to realize in the exchange that he does not, in fact, have the whole story.

The scribes and Pharisees bring forth to Jesus a woman *caught in the very act of committing adultery*. The Pharisees did this to try to get a response out of Jesus so they could have some charge to bring against him. They wanted to bring a charge against him by pointing out someone else's sin.

How often can we fall into the role of the Pharisee in pointing out someone else's sin for condemnation without examining our own hearts? This is at the heart of what Jesus is illustrating here. Immediately after the Pharisees say, *teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery*, Jesus bends down and begins to write on the ground with his finger. He responds to their questioning with silence and eventually stands up and gives a piercing response: *Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her*. None of them threw stones because they knew they were not without sin.

We cannot throw stones either, although each one of us could probably point out a time in our life where we have wanted Jesus to condemn someone because of their sin without examining our own hearts. It is really an act of pride and judgment on our part when we point fingers at other people's sin without acknowledging that we, too, are sinners.

Jesus is just and merciful. He does not come to condemn, but to convict for repentance and a change of heart. Perhaps today, we can ask Jesus to convict us of the areas in which we sin and give us the grace for repentance and a true change of heart where we need it.

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**Tuesday, March 19, 2024**

(Lec. 543)

- 1) 2 Samuel 7:4-5a,  
12-14a, 16
- 2) Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22
- 3) Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a  
or Luke 2:41-51a

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 430, 437, 452, 486, 497, 503, 517, 531, 534, 583, 1507, 1846, 2196, 2599, 2666, 2812 **CSDC** 259, 378

**SAINT JOSEPH,  
SPOUSE OF THE  
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY  
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: Through Joseph, God fulfilled his promise to David.

Today, we celebrate Joseph's role as the husband of Mary, the adoptive father of Jesus, the humble servant of God, the protector of the Holy Family, and the patron of the universal Church. This is a bit of a mouthful! And these are great and important honors. They are all the more indicative of God's beautiful, salvific plan when we consider the following: Joseph is mentioned in only 45 verses in the New Testament – by name only in Matthew and Luke, when they tell the story of Jesus' birth, and twice in passing in John (1:45 and 6:42). Mark and the other New Testament books never mention him, and he is never quoted.

This isn't just information for fun, or a wiki fact page. We have no idea whether there may have been other mentions or quotes from him in texts that were lost to time. In a sense, all of that is irrelevant. In another sense, it is essential: God works through Joseph to complete his redemptive actions for humanity.

The first reading give us a glimpse of how this will come to be, as the Lord instructs Nathan to tell David that his house and his kingdom shall remain before God forever. The Jewish expectation of a messiah who is a son of David arises from this prophecy. It will be fulfilled by Jesus' birth.

In outlining *how the birth of Jesus Christ came about*, Matthew shows the linear, multigenerational connection between David, the second king of Israel who was responsible for uniting the kingdom of Israel, and Jesus Christ: the final, greatest king of Israel, in fact, of the universe.

This connection is important not just for showing us who we are as the Lord's own, but that God is faithful to his promises. Many, many people have disobeyed, many circumstances and acts of rebellion and disobedience have occurred, but the Lord has never wavered in his love for us and his desire to be fully reunited to us.

So Joseph, a humble carpenter, was the one chosen, the one present at that time in human history, to be the adoptive father of the Son of God. He was a man of integrity and compassion, as seen in his actions in today's Gospel. He was also a man of humility and obedience, and unquestioning loyalty to the Lord. Joseph, a son of David, adopts Jesus as his own son, thus fulfilling the promise that the messiah will belong to the family of David.

Abraham was promised to be the father of all nations. David was promised to be the king of an eternal kingdom. Despite "all the sins and infidelities of David and his successors, this

tradition culminates in Jesus Christ,” the son of David, God’s anointed one (*CSDC* 378). Jesus is the king of the eternal kingdom of God. He is the Messiah who saves us from our sins.

Like Abraham before him, Joseph trusted the promises made to him by the Lord through the message of an angel. His faith is an example for all of us. And because of his role in the life of Christ, the Church holds him up especially as a light for men: fathers, brothers, godfathers, guardians. May that light shine among us, reflecting the goodness God gives us, and show us the path when darkness surrounds us.

\* \* \*

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

(Lec. 253)

1) Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95

2) John 8:31-42

Gospel related: CCC 89, 549, 588, 601, 613, 1741, 2466

WEDNESDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: The truth can sometimes be difficult to hear.

Today's first reading is so remarkable that all of us should ponder it and realize how awesome God is. He not only saves the three men from the *white-hot furnace*, he dispatches a messenger to be in there with them: *Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent his angel to deliver the servants who trusted in him.*

This seems to be the way our generous God acts. For while we walked in the fires of death – due to sin – he dispatched a messenger – he sent his own Son – to walk among us. In the same way that he didn't just quench the fire around the three men, God didn't simply "reboot" creation from outside of it. He entered into it, body, blood, soul and divinity, to walk among us so as to save us. Unlike King Nebuchadnezzar, however, many did not – and still do not – see God clearly among us.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is speaking with people who seem open to his message. They are interested, but not convinced. When Jesus offers to set his listeners free by giving them the truth about God and his love for them, they argue that they have never been enslaved by anyone. The flames are so bright they cannot see clearly into the furnace; their enslavement to sin is so robust they do not even recognize the notion of freedom incarnate before them.

Have we ever experienced anything like this? Been so lost, blinded, or misguided that we have missed what is right in front of us? Are we so entrenched in our ways that we refuse or are unable to consider a new interpretation of an old idea? It is easy to miss the point of something we do not want to hear.

As we move through the last days of Lent, let us open our hearts and minds to hear the truth Jesus is telling us. Let us hear his words of love and salvation. Let us see our Savior among us, walking beside us in fire, desert, and storm. And give thanks to God.

\* \* \*

Thursday, March 21, 2024  
(Lec. 254)

- 1) Genesis 17:3-9
- 2) John 8:51-59

Gospel related: **CCC** 473, 574, 590

THURSDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: *Whoever keeps my word will never see death.*

Traditionally referred to as “Our Father in Faith,” Abraham appears in both of today’s readings. The first reading from Genesis recalls how God chose the elderly Abram and made with him a new covenant, promising to make him the father of a great nation. To seal this relationship, God gave him a new name – Abraham – and promised to give him the land of Canaan as a perpetual possession. In return, Abraham and his descendants were to keep the covenant and to worship the one true God. It is this covenant that became the foundation of the Jewish faith.

Yet as we know, the Chosen People often strayed from the covenant, and time and again the Lord had to intervene and remind them of their obligations and even to renew the covenant. Again and again, he would send prophets to heal the rift and restore Israel to right relationship with its God. Later, when Moses was chosen to lead the people out of slavery, the Lord revealed himself using the title I AM.

As Christians we believe that the final renewal of this covenant came in the person and mystery of Christ. This time, instead of sending another prophet, the Lord sent his only Son. Revealing his true identity to the Jewish people, Jesus used the same title: *I AM*. Not understanding or recognizing who he is, the Jews accuse him of blasphemy and attempt to stone him.

In using this title, Jesus not only reveals his divine identity but also the faithfulness of God, a faithfulness that has been evident from the time of Abraham to our day. The same God who first called Abram out of the Land of Ur, who chose Moses to lead his people and anointed David king, is now with us through his Son, and the same steadfast and caring presence is offered to us as we journey through this Lenten season and through life. For we are certain that God indeed remembers his covenant, and whoever keeps that covenant will never see death.

\* \* \*

Friday, March 22, 2024

(Lec. 255)

1) Jeremiah 20:10-13

2) John 10:31-42

Gospel related: CCC 437, 444, 548, 574, 582, 589, 591, 594, 1562

FRIDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: God's good works are all around us.

As we approach Holy Week, we see the mounting tension between Jesus and the Jewish authorities in John's Gospel. Jesus expresses in no uncertain terms that he is the Son of God sent by the Father to do his works. Jesus is either who he says he is, the presence of God among us, or he is a blasphemer, a man making himself God's equal. Jesus escapes arrest in this passage, but because the Sanhedrin could not see in Jesus the fulfillment of God's promises, he will be put to death as a blasphemer (see CCC 591).

The prophet Jeremiah suffered a similar fate. In today's first reading, we hear that even his friends have turned against him and seek to trap him. In spite of this, Jeremiah trusts that God is on his side *like a mighty champion*. Having entrusted his case to the Lord, he sings the Lord's praises, as if the victory were already won.

Today's readings invite us to examine whose side we are on. Are we a friend of God or do we oppose God's word? Do we believe that Jesus is who he says he is? Because the people of Israel did not heed Jeremiah's word and repent, Jerusalem fell, and its people were sent into exile. Hundreds of years later, the Jewish authorities did not heed the prophecy of John the Baptist. They could not see Jesus' works for what they were – signs that Jesus was truly God's Son.

God's good works are all around us, we need only open our eyes to see and our hearts to believe. In this season of repentance, may we remember that resurrection is coming. May we sing praise to God, who has already won the victory for us.

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Saturday, March 23, 2024  
(Lec. 256)

- 1) Ezekiel 37:21-28
- 2) John 11:45-56

SATURDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK  
OF LENT  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Turibius of Mogrovejo,  
Bishop)

Gospel related: **CCC** 58, 60, 548, 596, 706, 2793

FOCUS: The Lord has not forgotten his people. He has gathered them from all sides.

Division and separation are never good things, unless we're doing math problems or flying formation aircraft. Today's Scriptures speak to us of reconciliation and reunification. The prophet Ezekiel offers hope to the people of Israel who have been forced out of their homelands. They have been scattered into foreign countries and separated from their loved ones. The Lord will bring them together, never again to be divided. He will cleanse them from sin and they will live on the land that has been promised to them. He will make a covenant of peace with them. Most important, the Lord says: *My dwelling shall be with them.*

The hope that Ezekiel offered and the covenant the Lord promised are found in Jesus of Nazareth. He is the dwelling of God among us. In our Gospel today, however, no one in the Sanhedrin believes that. They see him as a threat to the current status quo of uneasy peace with the Romans. If he causes trouble, the Romans will crack down on the "religious problem" and they will lose money, land, and power. Only Caiaphas speaks truth, as he prophesies that Jesus will die for the nation, so as *to gather into one the dispersed children of God.*

We enter Holy Week in a world that still suffers division, scattered peoples, and transgressions of every kind. But for the people of God, who are in the world but not of it, this is a time to give thanks for the gift of the Savior who fulfilled the promise of God. We are reconciled to the Father. He has gathered us from the distant lands and united us in Christ. And we live in the hope that one day we will live with him in the eternal sanctuary of heaven.

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## SUNDAY, MARCH 24, 2021

(Lec. 37)

- 1) Mark 11:1-10  
or John 12:12-16

(Lec. 38)

- 1) Isaiah 50:4-7
- 2) Philippians 2:6-11
- 3) Mark 14:1–15:47  
or 15:1-39

Gospel related: **CCC** 443, 444, 473, 474, 585, 597, 603, 1009, 1328, 1335, 1339, 1403, 2605, 2701, 2849 **CSDC** 183

## PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

FOCUS: We are united with Jesus, who shows us what it means to sacrifice for love.

Today we cover more ground with Jesus than on any other Sunday. We begin with Jesus at Bethpage, preparing for his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Once in the city, Jesus joins the disciples in the Upper Room for the Last Supper. Later, he awaits his fate in Gethsemane. After his arrest, he is taken to the high priest, then to the governor. Finally he is scourged at the praetorium, crucified at Golgotha, and buried in the tomb.

On this circuitous journey from Bethpage to Golgotha, so much changes, and so much is lost. Jesus goes from hailed hero to crucified criminal. He loses his status, his friends, and his dignity. His disciples face losses as well; they lose their courage, their leader, their sense of security. Jesus predicted his passion more than once, but never in specific terms. Neither the disciples nor Jesus himself knew exactly what it would take from them.

On our journey with Jesus through life, we, too, experience changes and loss. We often make sacrifices out of love for children and grandchildren, our parents, and other relations. We give to, and do for, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and fellow parishioners. And we all experience loss living on this earth, some more than others.

Jesus is with us in our loss, and he knows what it means to sacrifice for love. He emptied himself, becoming human to be with us, to love us, and to show us how to love like him. He surrendered his hero status and humbled himself out of love, even to the point of accepting death as a crucified criminal.

In the face of loss, we can be like the disciples or we can join in love with Jesus. At the Last Supper, the disciples denied that they would betray Jesus, or that their faith would be shaken. Still, they could not stay awake with him in Gethsemane, and they fled as soon as he was arrested, leaving the women alone at the cross and burial.

Unlike the disciples, Jesus does not flee. The sorrow and distress he exhibits in Gethsemane are real. He prays that his cup should pass, but ultimately he accepts God's will. He surrenders to his fate and all he is to lose. He does so out of obedience to his Father, and out of love for us.

Jesus' passion is our passion too. We journey together through loss – never alone, but always united with him. In this Eucharist we recall the Last Supper and how he shares himself with us out of love. Gathered as one with him through this sacrament, we face together whatever losses may be.

Monday, March 25, 2024  
(Lec. 257)

- 1) Isaiah 42:1-7
- 2) John 12:1-11

Gospel related: **CCC 2449 CSDC183**

MONDAY OF  
HOLY WEEK

FOCUS: Serve one another in humility and love.

Isaiah prophesies the arrival of a servant of the Lord, his chosen one with whom he is pleased. It depicts the radical humility of the servant, *[bringing] forth justice to the nations, not crying out, not shouting*, who does not break a bruised reed or quench a wick that is failing. He will lead everyone in opening their eyes to the truth of God's way of justice, which is compassion. It is a humbling vision for all of us.

This humility was embodied as foretold, in the divine person of the Son, Jesus. Jesus was indeed God's chosen servant on earth; God gave him his Spirit and was well-pleased with him. We, too, by virtue of our baptism, share in the life and mission of the Church.

What does that mean for our daily lives? It means learning to put the needs of others before our own. It means helping to build up the body of Christ with our words and actions. Mary's actions in today's Gospel are some of the first toward this end. She anointed Jesus' feet with *a liter of costly perfumed oil*, and then *dried them with her hair*.

In so doing, she imitates the humility she has seen in Jesus. It takes a vulnerable, servant's heart to care for another's feet. Her choice of expensive oil, and the amount of it, expresses at least a nascent understanding of Jesus' importance to the world, and the homage due a king. It even lends an intimate, human moment of foreshadowing of Jesus' death. She is caring for him in a tender moment of friendship, and in her own way is sharing in the life and the mission of the Church-not-yet-begun.

God has given us gifts and abilities, and he expects us to discern, accept, and share these gifts with others. Perhaps we are in a position to be a servant to another, or to allow another to serve us should we need it.

Let us ask the Lord to send us his grace to fortify us in this important work.

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Tuesday, March 26, 2024  
(Lec. 258)

TUESDAY OF  
HOLY WEEK

- 1) Isaiah 49:1-6
- 2) John 13:21-33, 36-38

FOCUS: We all fall into sin, but the mercy of Jesus can draw us back to him.

This week, we are journeying with Jesus through his final days before his passion, death, and resurrection. In today's Gospel, we join Jesus at the Last Supper. He is reclining at table with his disciples, and is *deeply troubled*. Jesus knows what is about to happen, that his time is at hand. Judas will betray him and not repent; Peter would deny him and repent.

Toward the end of the Gospel, Jesus asks Peter a question that all of us might do well to ponder: *Will you lay down your life for me?* Following Jesus is a joy, and a challenge. It is a commitment that involves sacrifice and, at times, hard work. Temptations, falls, sin, brokenness, woundedness will always be present. There are times when we will deny Jesus. There will be times where we will turn our backs to him. There will be times when we leave the cross on the ground and refuse to pick it up and follow him. The question that follows is, will we repent, turn back to him, and take the next step with him?

Judas betrayed Jesus and did not repent. He did not pick up his cross and follow Jesus. He did not seek a relationship with him again. Peter denied him and repented. Peter recognized his shortcomings and his sin and came back to the Lord with a repentant heart.

What do we do when we fail and sin against Jesus? Our choices include true repentance in our hearts, or indifference. The former leads to reconciliation and new life, and the latter directs us on a path upon which we do not want to linger! The Lord looks upon us with mercy, as he did Peter. We can call on him for help to return to him and to light our way.

Wednesday, March 27, 2024  
(Lec. 259)

WEDNESDAY OF  
HOLY WEEK

1) Isaiah 50:4-9a  
2) Matthew 26:14-25  
Gospel related: CCC 610, 1339

FOCUS: In surrendering himself to death, Jesus secured for us the gift of life.

In many cultures and nations, today is often referred to as Black Wednesday or Spy Wednesday, the latter referring to today's Gospel passage when Judas offered to betray Jesus to his enemies for 30 pieces of silver. From that moment on, the Gospel tells us Judas looked for an opportunity to hand him over.

In all of the experiences of Jesus' passion and death, by far the worst must have been that sense of betrayal, and the growing isolation from those around him. This must have been particularly true as Jesus experienced denial and desertion by the Apostles. Only John, the youngest of the Twelve, remained faithful; even Peter, the one he had chosen as a future leader, would be incapable of standing by him.

Today's Gospel articulates that growing sense of isolation and betrayal. Despite the fact that he had chosen Judas, shared with him the mysteries of the kingdom, and allowed him to witness the power of God's word and presence, Jesus knew that he would betray him. But Jesus does not allow this to deter him; he is steadfast in doing the Father's will.

As we stand on the cusp of the Triduum, we see this betrayal and Christ's response: The humility Jesus showed and the sacrifice that Jesus made were for us. We have our lives to give him in return, knowing we, too, face the same temptations and experience the same failures as those who surrounded him. When have we preferred the silver of this passing world to the promise of life in Christ?

As we enter into this sacred time, we do so knowing the whole story of Christ's faithful love and his willingness to die for our sins – allowing us to celebrate even in the darkness of these Gospel events. Once again we are reminded of God's steadfast love and mercy – his desire to enter willingly into the pain and suffering of human experience and to bring to it his goodness and light.

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Thursday, March 28, 2024

(Lec. 39)

1) Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

2) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

3) John 13:1-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 423, 447, 520, 557, 609, 616, 622, 730, 1085, 1269, 1337, 1380, 1524, 1694, 1823, 2843 **CSDC** 484

THURSDAY OF

HOLY WEEK

(Mass of the  
Lord's Supper)

FOCUS: We are called to be Eucharistic people.

Lent is over, and we now enter into the solemn passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is good for us to be in this holy place to give thanks to God.

Tonight we remember that Jesus offers himself to us through the gift of the Eucharist. It is his thanksgiving to the Father, and Jesus invites us to share in that thanksgiving through our participation in the Eucharist. It is not a passive act, for we are called to emulate Jesus by sharing in his life, death, and resurrection. It may not always be easy to continue Jesus' mission, but it is full of blessings that culminate in our heavenly reward.

In the celebration of the Eucharist, we remember the sacrifice of Jesus, who took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. He said to them, *This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.* Baptized into his life and death, and formed as his own body (the Church) here on earth, we, too, are taken, blessed, broken, and given to share Christ in the world.

In the same way that Jesus traveled from village to village during his ministry, we cannot just keep to ourselves. We are social beings called to enter into relationship with one another, entering into one another's lives. We experience conversion and transformation through one another, helping each other draw closer to God.

Jesus goes out to all the world to share his Good News, and he commands us to do the same. As he humbled himself, bowing down to wash the feet of his disciples, we humble ourselves in service to all who are in need of God's mercy.

When Jesus returned to the Father, the Holy Spirit was sent to be our Advocate. God did not leave us bereft and alone, but gave us his Spirit so that through the Spirit, all might come to know the Son and the Father. At our baptism and confirmation, we are sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Each of us has been uniquely created by God and imbued with wondrous gifts. We learn how to use those gifts, and share them with the world, to give glory to the Lord.

Jesus is the Eucharist, but when we completed our initiation into his way of life, we accepted that we would also become a Eucharistic people – taken and chosen, blessed, broken, and given. Jesus gave his life for the world. In thanksgiving to God the Father, we, too, must give our lives so that the world may come to know the God of Life.

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Friday, March 29, 2024

(Lec. 40)

1) Isaiah 52:13–53:12

2) Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

3) John 18:1–19:42

Gospel related: **CCC** 217, 440, 478, 495, 501, 544, 549, 559, 575, 586, 595, 596, 600, 607, 608, 609, 624, 641, 694, 726, 730, 964, 1225, 1432, 2471, 2561, 2605, 2618, 2677, 2679

FRIDAY OF  
THE PASSION  
OF THE LORD  
(GOOD FRIDAY)

FOCUS: We rejoice in Jesus Christ, our unexpected Lord.

Those who had long awaited the Messiah expected a military person, someone who would fight the Romans, forcing them to leave Israel, and then lead them into prominence as a righteous nation above all nations. The Messiah would be a warrior-king, endowed with wisdom and excelling in leadership. He would be blessed and highly favored. Everyone would know it was he.

Except they didn't. The Messiah arrived, unexpectedly as it were, in a cave in a small town. An infant, born of a woman and yet, the Son of God. The Word of God in human flesh. Scripture after Scripture foretold his coming, and even Gentiles came from afar to celebrate his birth, the newborn king. Still, there were expectations for the Messiah ... and these weren't it. The infant would grow into a wise and erudite young boy, a teacher from an early age. His public ministry began with fishermen, not soldiers. He sought out the poor, not those who could finance his mission. And very few recognized who he was, because he was "unexpected."

This concept of an unexpected Messiah, or perhaps more accurately, a Messiah who is not-as-was-expected, runs throughout today's Scriptures. In the first reading, Isaiah prophesies the coming of the Lord's servant. It is descriptive and blunt. The servant did not seem like much growing up, the song says. He was not rich or physically attractive or charismatic as an adult. Then, the song continues, we noticed something about him: He was always interceding for others, paying no heed to his own health or safety. And he suffered at the hands of humans for that, and violently. But he never gave up his mission to intercede, to care, to love in the unexpected ways and places that God does.

Our Gospel writer also articulates that this unexpected man, who did unexpected things, was indeed the one all had hoped God would someday send. He was no earthly king and he was no temple priest. His family had no influence. But salvation history is full of God doing things in ways we would not expect, so perhaps we might wonder why this would be different?

The Messiah, Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, set off on his mission of reconciling all of humanity to the Father. To preach and proclaim the Good News of salvation; to heal, comfort, and challenge. He sought to intercede where he could, to love whomever he could, and call to repentance all who did not follow the commandments of God.

This was a mission that would fly in the face of religious authorities and could only end badly. And it did. The religious elders and leaders sought to silence or even kill him. The Roman authorities *would* torture and kill him for it, and even some of his closest friends would pretend not to know him.

We should not let the story of our Messiah become so familiar that we no longer experience or comprehend how gracious and generous God is, and how he meets our every need without playing to, although often exceeding, our expectations. This Christ Child would indeed be a King – King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. He is the most high priest, whose eternal sacrifice has redeemed the world.

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Saturday, March 30, 2024

(Lec. 41)

## HOLY SATURDAY EASTER VIGIL

- 1) Genesis 1:1—2:2 or 1:1, 26-31a
- 2) Genesis 22:1-18 or 22:1-2,9a, 10-13, 15-18
- 3) Exodus 14:15—15:1
- 4) Isaiah 54:5-14
- 5) Isaiah 55:1-11
- 6) Baruch 3:9-15, 32—4:4
- 7) Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28

### **New Testament Readings**

- 8) Romans 6:3-11
- 9) Mark 16:1-7

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 641, 652, 2174

FOCUS: Jesus is risen, alleluia, alleluia!

*Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.*

On this most holy night, we rejoice at Christ's resurrection from the dead. Christ breaks the prison bars of death, sets captives free, and reconciles us with the Father. Tonight is a night of rejoicing. It is a night of hope. It is a night of coming to truly realize that Jesus Christ is who he says he is, and he will do what he says he will do. He rose from the dead as he promised. He gives us new life.

The Resurrection is both an event in human history, and an event not subject to time. The Logos, the Word of God, the second person of the Trinity, became Incarnate to rescue us from the bondage of sin and death. Jesus himself became sin who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). He took on all the sin of the past, present, and future, and destroyed it so that it no longer has dominion over us, or holds us captive. He truly set us free from Satan. And, in being raised from the dead, he has conquered death. By virtue of our baptism, we are grafted onto Christ and so we, too, witness to the Resurrection. We encounter the risen Christ in the Eucharist, and at an appointed time we will be raised with him to everlasting life.

Imagine we are journeying to the tomb with Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, and Salome that Easter morning. What would our thoughts have been? Would we have been eager to see if what he said would actually be true? Or would we have been doubting? We can all go through moments of doubt, or even wondering if God will fulfill his promises. Today's Gospel reminds us that God does fulfill his promises, and that he will never abandon us.

Jesus continuously provides moments of rising to new life in our lives. He is continuously setting us free from sin through the sacrament of reconciliation, reigniting our strength with reception of the holy Eucharist, and speaking to us through his word.

As we begin this holy Easter season, let us ask for the grace to fall more in love with the resurrected Jesus in the Eucharist. Let us ask him to continuously reveal himself to us, that every time we receive him, we recognize that we are tasting a bit of heaven.

Christ the Lord is risen! Alleluia, alleluia!

## SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 2024

(Lec. 42)

1) Acts 10:34a, 37-43

2) Colossians 3:1-4

or 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8

3) John 20:1-9

or Mark 16:1-7 (Lec. 41)

Gospel related: CCC 333, 515, 640, 641, 652, 2174

## EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD

FOCUS: This Easter, we can *see and believe*, saying yes to the celebration of this sacred mystery.

Saint Peter begins his address by telling his listeners: *You know what has happened all over Judea*. We, too, know the story of Jesus being raised from the dead. And because we have heard it many times, we may be somewhat unmoved by what we are here to celebrate:

*A man who was put to death by hanging him on a tree was raised on the third day. The disciples ate and drank with a man who rose from the dead.*

This is truly amazing.

Here it might be helpful to step back to the part of the story we hear in John's Gospel wherein Mary of Magdala, Peter, and the beloved disciple encounter the empty tomb.

These friends of Jesus had heard him talk about his death. Jesus had told them that he would rise after three days. Like us, they had heard. But *they did not yet understand*.

If our hearts are not moved by the story of the Resurrection, it could be that we, like these friends of Jesus, do not yet understand.

We may not understand how the death of someone 2,000 years ago has any bearing on our lives now. We may not understand that the love our hearts long for is stronger than death. We may not understand that the Resurrection means that nothing can separate us from God's presence and help. There is so much we may not yet understand.

And yet, like the beloved disciple, today we can *see and believe*. We can say yes to being moved, yes to the celebration of something we don't completely understand.

How do we go about saying "yes"?

First, these questions cannot be understood in a single day or in isolation. Perhaps we need to *seek the wisdom of others*. This could mean looking at our parish resources or reaching out to a family member, neighbor, or member of the clergy. It could look like setting up a regular time with a friend to talk and pray over questions together. When we take a concrete step to move from simple wondering into active seeking with the help of others, the living Christ will bring his light to our search.

Second, in the particularly graced moments when the Eucharist is consecrated and given in Communion, we can *talk to Jesus*. He is alive. He is here. Let us ask Jesus what he wants to

give us that is new in this Easter season. Ask him to help us understand the mysteries we are wrestling with this morning. Bring our needs, our hurts, our questions, and our joys to the living Christ.

Today we celebrate in a particular way that the risen Christ is truly present. Not even death could keep him from us. So mighty is his love that he transformed the evil of the cross into a blessing through which he can eternally unite us to God. He is here. He is risen! Alleluia!

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