

# MARCH

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28   29   30 (GOOD FRIDAY)

31   APR 1 (EASTER SUNDAY)

Thursday, March 1, 2018  
(Lec. 233)

- 1) Jeremiah 17:5-10
- 2) Luke 16:19-31

Gospel related: CCC 336, 633, 1021, 1859, 2832

THURSDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: Do not let the good life ruin your eternal life.

Jesus loved telling stories that made people think. In his parables, he often turned reality on its head in order to get his point across. In the process, he showed that our reality and God's reality often do not match. Today's Gospel parable is one example of this.

The reality of his day, which has comparisons to today, held that if you were rich and comfortable, most people believed you had done things right, and so you were blessed by God. Conversely, if you were poor and suffering, you must have done something wrong to bring down God's wrath on you. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus indicates that this is not always the case.

In the story, when the rich man dies, he goes to hell, but when the poor man, Lazarus, dies, he goes to heaven. Abraham, the symbol of faith and righteousness, comforts Lazarus, while the rich man languishes in torment. What a jolt this must have been for those listening to Jesus! The point was that God judges by how we act, what is in our heart, and how we relate to God. The story shows that the things of this world can become obstacles to living a good and generous life and being obedient to the will of God.

The first reading from Jeremiah echoes this theme. We hear: *Cursed is the man who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the Lord.* And the reading ends with this statement: *I, the Lord, alone probe the mind and test the heart, to reward everyone according to his ways, according to the merit of his deeds.* It sounds pretty straightforward, doesn't it?

To be clear, there is nothing inherently wrong with money or things. The problem arises when acquiring them, or holding onto them, turns our heart away from God.

During this Lenten season, we would do well to examine our own lives and see if there are worldly things that have gotten in the way of our relationship with God. Are we generous with the gifts we have received from God? Are we grateful to him for what we have, as much or as little as it may be? Do we recognize that how we live now will determine how our eternity will be? These are some of the most important things we need to resolve in our own hearts this Lent.

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Friday, March 2, 2018  
(Lec. 234)

- 1) Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a
- 2) Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

Gospel related: CCC 443, 755, 756

FRIDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: The sacrament of reconciliation is a powerful tool that expresses God's undying love for us.

The musical "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" brings to life in a whimsical way the story of Joseph – favorite of his father, Israel (i.e., Jacob), and one despised by his brothers to varying degrees. Our first reading today captures the envy and resentment of Joseph's brothers that lead them to want him dead and out of their lives forever.

The parable Jesus tells us today also captures the envy and resentment of the tenant farmers that lead to the death of the landowner's son. Matthew has Jesus use this parable as a metaphor for what is in store for him when he arrives in Jerusalem.

We know in our own lives that envy of another can quickly turn to resentment and cause irrational behavior on our part. Listen to the news or pick up any newspaper and hear about family or friends inflicting harm, or even death, on one another because of a jealous outburst left unchecked.

I trust none of us would go to this extreme, however, there is a reason *envy* is listed as one of the seven deadly sins! Lent is an invitation each year for us to reflect on our lives in the shadow of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. In light of the Father's son bringing redemption upon the earth – upon us – how are we doing in overcoming our most grievous faults before God?

It is in examining our greatest faults and planning a strategy for change that Lent prepares us for Easter. It is in seeking reconciliation that we experience resurrection in our lives. We are blessed as a faith community to have a most holy and concrete way of seeking and receiving God's loving embrace and forgiveness.

It is in the sacrament of reconciliation that we are reaffirmed in our knowledge that without any doubt we are beloved children of an awesome God. For we know God loves us despite our lack of love for ourselves at times. We know God forgives us without any reservation no matter how grievously we have offended him. Let this knowledge always be our catalyst to make things right with God, and with one another, through this powerful sacrament.

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Saturday, March 3, 2018  
(Lec. 235)

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

SATURDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
OF LENT  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Katharine Drexel,  
Virgin)

Gospel related: CCC 589, 1443, 1846

FOCUS: We are all in need of our Father's mercy.

The parable of the lost son, sometimes called the prodigal son, is one of the most well-known stories in the Bible. Its message is so powerful that the entertainment industry has used similar themes in such films as *The Godfather*, *Legends of the Fall* and *The Lion King*, among others.

The focal point in these movies is the son who leaves home. Perhaps this is because he makes for a dynamic character. Or maybe it's because we identify with the poor choices this son makes. While these stories reach us on a number of levels, none is as rich as the original that we read in today's Gospel.

Jesus begins the parable of the lost son by introducing a man who has two sons. Our attention is placed first on the father, then the actions of his sons. The father desires to give his sons everything. After his younger son squanders his inheritance, he welcomes him home and celebrates his return. The father then invites the older, resentful son to share in the great feast. As Christians, we perceive the father in this parable to be our heavenly Father – the Lord – who gives us everything, and, despite our sins, invites us to celebrate with him at the great banquet.

The younger son teaches us that no matter what we have done, we can always return to our Father. Humbly, we must acknowledge our sins, express sadness at having done wrong and seek forgiveness. The sacrament of reconciliation offers us the opportunity to restore our relationships with the Father and one another.

The parable of the lost son can help guide our examination of conscience. With whom do we identify in the story? Are we repentant of our wayward deeds? Are we resentful when another is shown mercy, or when something seems unfair? Or are we like the father – merciful and loving? In any case, we are all in need of our Father's mercy. He waits for us – eager to welcome us home.

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**SUNDAY, MARCH 4, 2018**

(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: Let us strive to have a new respect for the things of God.

The Temple and its surrounding complex on Jerusalem's Temple Mount was a very holy site to the Jews of antiquity. From the time of Solomon, this location had been a place of prayer, pilgrimage and sacrifice. It had undergone multiple attacks, desecrations, destructions and reconstructions. At the time of Jesus, Jews would have been gathering in the second Temple – built by Herod, and eventually destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

It was here that Mary and Joseph had presented their Son to the Lord and were greeted by Simeon and Anna. It was here that Mary and Joseph found their twelve-year-old Son. It was here that Jesus preached and prayed. Since many pilgrims came to this holy site to fulfill prescriptions of the law and to offer sacrifice, local merchants thought it an ideal location for doing business – changing money and selling sheep, oxen and birds for ritual sacrifices.

On this occasion, near Passover, Jesus again returns to Jerusalem and becomes rightfully angry at the sight of such commerce and chaos in his Father's house. He drives out the merchants and animals, spills the money and overturns tables. It must have been quite a sight! How had such a holy place been turned into a marketplace?

All those merchants and Jewish pilgrims would have been familiar with the Ten Commandments which we heard in today's first reading. The first three go into great detail about respect for God the Father – that there be no other gods, that God's name not be taken in vain, and that the Sabbath be kept holy as a sacred day of rest. They would have known that love and care for one's neighbor would have mattered equally. Yet, the commandments were rejected, the Temple was defiled, the poor were ignored and the Messiah in their midst was condemned to death.

We, too, live in a world in which commandments are broken and the sacred is profaned. Right and wrong seem to be blurred at times. In this Lenten season, let's think about some ways in which we can draw deep within ourselves and resolve to "turn over some tables." When should we speak out against injustice? Where can we identify idolatry? And in the privacy of our thoughts, how can we cast out the trivial and make room for the sacred? Let us resolve to begin with prayer – asking for Christ-like wisdom instead of human wisdom.

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Monday, March 5, 2018  
(Lec. 237)

- 1) 2 Kings 5:1-15b
- 2) Luke 4:24-30

MONDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: Listen to the Lord who speaks to us.

In examining any story, it is always important to notice who is speaking, or who is allowed to speak. It is also useful to observe who is listening, and how they behave.

In today's first reading from the Second Book of Kings, Naaman – a highly-esteemed and respected army commander – listens to, and follows the advice of, a young slave girl from the land of Israel. He believes her when she tells him there is a *prophet in Samaria ... who would cure him of his leprosy*. So he presents himself to the prophet, Elisha.

When the prophet Elisha tells him what to do in order to be cured, Naaman does not actually listen to, and follow his advice. He *hears* what Elisha says, but he does not *believe* it, and he leaves angry, saying, *I thought that he would surely come out and stand there to invoke the Lord his God, and would move his hand over the spot, and thus cure the leprosy*. He has had a direct interaction with the prophet of the Lord, about whom he has been told, and yet he resists the truth of the words (until convinced by his servants later, as we hear).

Our Gospel reading presents a somewhat comparable situation. Saint Luke portrays Jesus as (but of course not *just* as) a prophet like Elijah and Elisha. He speaks, and the listeners are the people in the synagogue. They, like Naaman, *hear* the words the prophet speaks to them, but they do not *believe* them. Like Naaman, they grow angry. Unlike Naaman, however, who left Elisha's presence, the people turn on Jesus and try to kill him. But Jesus manages to leave *their* presence, instead.

Two different stories, with similarities. As Jesus said: *Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place*. What are we to make of these examples of who speaks, who listens and how they behave?

During these Lenten days, we can ask ourselves if we sometimes react in unhealthy and even sinful ways, as those in the Gospel reacted. Do we hear but not believe? Do we allow ourselves to be encouraged toward faith by others, as Naaman was? Or do we just metaphorically hurl Jesus headlong off *the brow of the hill* on which our lives are built, as the people in the synagogue attempted?

We know how the story ends – we are beneficiaries of the Gospel. We know, as Naaman did, *that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel*. So let us give thanks to this God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and pray to always hear and listen to him.

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Tuesday, March 6, 2018  
(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: We are called to forgive as we have been forgiven by God.

After an argument or fight with my brother, Mom would invariably say, "Now tell each other you're sorry, shake hands and make up with one another." Ugh! I hated that. I was right and he was wrong. Why should I be the one to say I was sorry? Why should I extend my hand in forgiveness? It felt much better to be angry, and to forgive even once was just about all I could stomach. I don't know that I could repeat that process seven times, let alone seventy-seven times.

In today's Gospel, Peter must feel pretty smug in making the suggestion that he forgive his brother seven times. From our human perspective, seven times seems like quite a bit. When Jesus responds that we are called to forgive not seven times, but seventy-seven times, he is using a number that seems beyond our ability to imagine, much less enact, when it comes to the work of forgiveness.

We know in our own lives that the call to be people of forgiveness is not easy. Sometimes it requires all the strength we have to muster up the courage, as well as the words and actions, that must follow. To us, it may seem superhuman at times. This is where Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant proves so helpful.

When it comes to forgiving others, we must first remember just how forgiving and merciful God is to each of us. If God is so willing to forgive us, even when the debt of our sin is huge, how much more should we be willing to take the right step and forgive those who have harmed or hurt us? A good way to put this into practice is to regularly seek out and receive the sacrament of reconciliation or penance.

In that sacrament, we may be tempted to focus only on how bad we have been. Instead, we should focus on how good God is, that he freely and lovingly offers us the gift of his forgiveness. All we have to do is to seek it out.

As we recognize God's goodness and mercy shared with us again and again, we will find it easier to forgive others, not just once, not just seven times, but seventy-seven times. Our Lenten journey is not only about becoming more conscious of God's forgiveness of our sins, it is also about becoming more deliberate in putting that great and loving gift of divine forgiveness to use, just as it has been given to us.

Wednesday, March 7, 2018  
(Lec. 239)

- 1) Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9
- 2) Matthew 5:17-19

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

Gospel related: CCC 577, 592, 1967, 2053

FOCUS: We give thanks for our history and for our faith.

There is a poignant image, often played out in movies or found in books, of families gathered around a dining room table or bonfire. In these scenes, an older relation is telling the long-told tale of the family's history, with anecdotes of triumph, heartache, survival and loss. The legacy of who they are, where they came from and how they are supposed to live becomes entrenched in their lives through this telling and retelling.

We can well imagine this same type of setting in today's first reading from Deuteronomy. Out in the wilderness of the desert, Moses is speaking to the people and reminding them of their legacy.

*Now, Israel, Moses says, hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. Moses continues, Observe them carefully, for thus will you give evidence of your wisdom and intelligence to the nations. Who else is as close to God as we are? he asks.*

Be careful, however, Moses adds, not to forget what you have heard and seen. Do not let these statutes and decrees *slip from your memory as long as you live, but teach them to your children and to your children's children.*

The people of Israel heeded Moses' words, and it is to their children and ... children's children (times many tens of generations, including us), to whom Jesus is speaking in today's Gospel. The setting is both ancient Galilee, and here – right where we are. Like the Israelites, we, too, are hearing, in a sense, the story of who we are, where we came from, and how we are supposed to live.

Jesus says, *Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.* This is a message of hope for a *promise*, not just a law, fulfilled. For in the person of Jesus, we have the embodiment of God's wisdom that was given to the nation of Israel. In the person of Jesus, we have a God who is so close to us as to become one of us, and dwell within and among us.

So as we listen to these words, gathered around this table of Word and sacrament, let us give thanks for our Christian history and for the gift of telling and re-telling our story: the faith that has been handed on to us from our ancestors, their children and their children's children.

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Thursday, March 8, 2018  
(Lec. 240)

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

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

Gospel related: CCC 385, 700

**FOCUS:** We must be mindful to not just hear, but truly listen to God's Word and take it to heart.

Do we merely hear God, or do we listen to him? There's a difference between the two. Hearing is simple: a sound enters our ears and goes to our brains. But to listen, what we hear has to go from our heads to our hearts and requires action. The ancient Israelites, both in Jeremiah and Jesus' times, heard God's message to them but did not listen. Their hearts were hard.

In the first reading, the Lord commanded – not requested, but commanded – his people: *Listen to my voice; then I will be your God and you shall be my people.* When they stopped listening to God, they soon turned their backs to him and no longer acted like his people. Jeremiah was sent as a young man to prophesy to the ancient Israelites, who were disobeying the commandments and offering sacrifices to other gods.

Like the Israelites, we don't always listen to God. We may worship false idols and disobey the commandments that exist *so that [we] may prosper.* But that doesn't mean he stops pursuing us. Our God loves us, his people, too much to abandon us. He sent prophet after prophet after prophet to the Jews before sending his only Son. Since their hearts were hardened, though, they did not respond to Jeremiah and they even accused Jesus of working with the devil.

When the crowds accused Jesus of colluding with Beelzebul, Jesus refuted them by pointing out that their accusation was nonsense. He said, *A kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste.* But Jesus, as always, takes it a step further: if he was driving out demons by the power of God, that meant something big – that the kingdom of God was here. Everyone, then and now, has a choice to make: are we with Jesus, or not? He does not leave room for a lukewarm option. Either we listen to him, taking his words to heart, and we dedicate our lives to being a follower of Jesus, or we hear him and simply don't care, like the ancient Israelites. And that, Jesus says, means we are against him.

Let us pray that the Lord God will soften our hearts so that we can not only hear his voice, but truly listen to him. Over the next few days, let's commit to setting aside some time, even just five or ten minutes, to sit in silence and listen to what God has to tell us, and to rejoice that we are God's people – in the words of our psalmist today – *the flock he guides.*

Friday, March 9, 2018  
(Lec. 241)

- 1) Hosea 14:2-10
- 2) Mark 12:28-34

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

Gospel related: CCC 575 CSDC 40, 112

FOCUS: You shall love the Lord with all your heart.

When the voice of God speaks through Hosea in today's first reading, the prophet produces the image of the beautiful Lebanon cedar to describe those who are "wise enough to understand" God's message. But the metaphor of the Lebanon cedar would have suggested much more to the people Hosea was addressing than a mere reference to a local source of shade and beauty.

The cedars of Lebanon have deep roots – like all who hear and take the Word of God into their hearts, where it will flourish. But the roots not only have depth, they also have strength and durability – much like the faith of someone who turns to God in confident hope in the midst of suffering and adversity. And the sweet-smelling Lebanon cedars can live for several thousand years – like the Word of God that is passed down from generation to generation by the Church and its believers.

We are in the third week of Lent, just past the halfway mark in this season of repentance and joy. Let us not waste this opportunity to hear God's promises of love, healing and forgiveness. This is the Good News proclaimed to all of us today, no matter how far we've stumbled or how far we've drifted. We can choose to return to the Lord – right now.

In the Gospel today we heard these words from Jesus: *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, and You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no greater commandment than these.* May we be "wise enough" to hear, repent and respond to the Lord, who in return makes each of us this personal promise: *I will love [you] freely.*

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Saturday, March 10, 2018  
(Lec. 242)

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

Gospel related: CCC 588, 2559, 2613

SATURDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: Humility and love are what God desires.

Oh, how easy it is for us to look at the heart of the Pharisee and see what an abomination self-righteousness is – but how difficult it is for us to see it in our own lives! It is likely that most of us are pretty good people, and not as arrogant and presumptuous as the Pharisee, but if we are honest we have to admit that we do have moments when we are not that far from his attitude. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could imitate more often the humility of the tax collector?

In today's Gospel, the tax collector's humility is being held up as a model over and against the pride of the Pharisee. As an elite religious leader, the Pharisee would be expected to exemplify upright and virtuous behavior. Indeed, he should not be greedy, dishonest or adulterous. Neither should he be pompous, arrogant and conceited in his self-reflection, especially in reference to the tax collector.

The contrast of the two is foreshadowed in our first reading, from Hosea. Speaking through Hosea, God says to his people, *Your piety is like a morning cloud, like the dew that early passes away ... it is love that I desire, not sacrifice.* The Pharisee, whose privileged life revolved around piety and sacrifice, was unable to identify his own faults, or to acknowledge his blessings from God. The tax collector, whose life was most likely a difficult one, understood himself completely: a sinful man, who loved the Lord and depended upon his grace and mercy.

By honoring the tax collector in this parable, Jesus is once again turning cultural norms upside down. The Gospel message he brings to the world is that his kingdom is much different than what people would expect. Time and again, Jesus shows us that there is discipleship potential in everyone; no one should be dismissed. As long as we are aware of our sins and turn toward God, there is always hope.

It is good for us to keep this in mind as well, to prevent us from making judgments about people and situations, as with the Pharisee and the tax collector. It challenges us to think beyond raw emotion to the teaching and example of Christ, and to think and act in humility and with mercy.

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**SUNDAY, MARCH 11, 2018**

(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, 679, 706, 2130 CSDC 3, 64

**FOURTH SUNDAY  
OF LENT**

**FOCUS:** God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so everyone who believes in him might have eternal life.

At the heart of Catholicism the world over are the cross (which is bare), and the crucifix (which is the cross with the body of Jesus affixed to it). Both symbolize and signify the redemptive action of Jesus Christ, each in its own particular way. A cross or crucifix hangs around the neck of countless people in our world who give no other outward sign of being religious. Teachers of young children report that when they offer the youngsters a selection of holy cards and ask them to choose one, time and again children choose the picture of Jesus on the cross.

Why are the cross and crucifix so important, and so central? Why, after two thousand years, has the cross – either bare or with the body of Jesus upon it – lost none of its fascination and power? The best answer is also the simplest: The cross and crucifix are a depiction of how much God loves us; they are a revelation of how much he has always loved us and desired relationship with us.

Our first two readings today set the stage for this revelation. First, we hear about the constant transgressions of God's people, and yet God never stopped loving them, even in his discipline of a seventy-year-exile (tough love indeed!). Paul reaffirms this as he says, *God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ.*

As we heard in today's Gospel, *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.* This is more than a catchphrase held up on poster-board for TV cameras at sporting events. It is the sum and summary of our salvation history. Through Jesus Christ, all of our transgressions before God are washed away in God's mercy. Sin and death are overcome through his sacrifice of love on the cross.

The cross *means* something. The crosses and crucifixes that adorn our necks and sanctuaries depict how much God loves us. So as we continue in this Lenten season, perhaps we can spend some time thinking about that. And in doing so, we might also reflect on what, in our own lives, demonstrates how much we love God in return.

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Monday, March 12, 2018  
(Lec. 244)

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

MONDAY OF  
FOURTH WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: The Lord's word gives life to those who believe.

"I'll believe it when I see it." We often say this after being told something we don't think is possible. Maybe it contradicts past experience, or defies our logic and understanding. Today's Liturgy of the Word causes us to ponder a slightly different twist on this expression: "I'll see it (have life) when I believe it."

In our first reading, Isaiah prophesies a world renewed. People enjoy long lives in this new world, and weeping and crying are replaced by rejoicing and happiness. After the many trials the people of Israel faced, it's easy to imagine that they may have responded to this news of Isaiah with, "We'll believe it when we see it."

In our Gospel today, Jesus addresses our human desire to see things for ourselves. He was returning to Cana in Galilee where he had earlier turned water into wine at a wedding. Waiting was a royal official who asked Jesus to heal his son who was near death in Capernaum. Jesus first says to the man, *Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe.* After the man pleads once more, Jesus tells him, *You may go; your son will live.*

The son does live, and the man *and his whole household came to believe.*

Belief is a prerequisite for many of the miracles Jesus performed during his ministry. Scripture often describes the persistence of faith demonstrated by the people who seek his help. In this case, the royal official carried a small seed of belief, which Jesus recognized. With the man's persistence, perhaps borne out of a *desire* for true faith in who Jesus was – even if he did not yet quite fully understand it – that seed had fertile ground.

So when he heard (notice he had not yet *seen* for himself) that Jesus had healed his son, that seed yielded a fullness of faith that encompassed his family. And so when they next saw the son – full of belief in the power of God – they saw the new life that had been given to the boy. They truly saw, because they believed.

The Lord's word gives life to those who believe. We find our proof in the signs of the Gospel and in the miracles that continue to happen today. Like the royal official, we can bring our needs, and those of our loved ones, to Christ through the power of prayer – our intimate conversation with the Lord. And, as he promises, all will have life in his name.

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Tuesday, March 13, 2018  
(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 true healing for both the sick man and for all who come to him in need.

It is well established by scholars that the Bethesda Pool in Jerusalem had many healing properties for the ancient Jews. Tradition was that whenever the waters became disturbed, they became therapeutic and healing for those who immersed themselves. Today's Gospel tells of one who waited more than thirty years for this event, only to find that the pool is not what would heal him.

As the man waits, he finds himself before Jesus. Knowing his plight, Jesus asks him: *Do you want to be well?* Now for the first time, the man is able to articulate his hopes as well as his frustrations – yes, he wants to be healed, but given his disability he is unable to move quickly enough and there is never anyone to help him. Clearly, as of yet, he has no idea who Jesus is or what he can do for him. Yet he is obedient to his command to *Rise, take up your mat, and walk!*

In that moment of encounter, his life is changed. Not only is he healed of his physical disability but he is restored to fullness of life: family relationships, community and faith. Gone is the very thing that has prevented him from living his life fully and instead he has the possibility of a rich and meaningful life.

By complementing this Gospel with the text from Ezekiel, the Church wants us to realize that Christ alone is the source of healing and life for all who come to him and immerse themselves in him. Where Ezekiel was blessed with a vision of the outpouring of God's healing and life, the sick man in our Gospel encounters that healing reality in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Like Ezekiel and the sick man we, too, are invited to immerse ourselves in Christ this Lenten season. But unlike the sick man who waited in vain for the stirring waters, we do not have to wait for Christ. For Christ is always with us, waiting and longing for our return to him. As we stand before him in our prayer and our reception of reconciliation, we, too, hear those words, *Do you want to be well?* That is our chance to say yes!

Just as the waters of baptism once re-created us in the image of Christ and gave us a share in his abundant divine life, so all our Lenten practices prepare us to be restored to that initial innocence and beauty. As we encounter Christ in this Lenten season, let his mercy and forgiveness wash over us, removing all spiritual tarnish that prevents us from walking confidently and upright in his light and life.

Wednesday, March 14, 2018  
(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: Hear God's voice and understand the freedom to act as a child of God.

One of the greatest bonds known throughout all of humanity is the bond between a mother and her infant. This bond begins in the womb, continues in birth and ideally carries on throughout life. It is this bond the author of today's first reading uses to speak of the bond between the Creator and the greatest of all his creation – us.

The author admits there is the possibility that a mother might forsake her child, but is emphatic that this is not the case with God. The human condition leads us to stray, but God never strays. In fact, although we might try, we cannot outrun the Lord.

In our first reading today, prisoners hear the call to come out, and in the Gospel Jesus tells us those in tombs will also hear the call to come out. Hearing God's voice from within the prison cell – from within the tomb – is a most powerful image.

God's grace cannot be imprisoned; it cannot be kept out of the cold dark tombs of our sinfulness. To be caught up in sin is to be imprisoned; to be caught up in the most serious of sins is to be entombed. But – you knew there was a but coming, right? But God can't stay away from us, for it is not in God's nature to do so.

Even if a mother could forget her child, God cannot. For to do so would mean God is not then God! We are blessed this is so because we will never be able to save ourselves. But we *are* called to be God-like. Made in the image and likeness of God, we are called to be imitators – practitioners if you will – of God's love.

Lent affords us each year the opportunity to roll up our spiritual sleeves and get at the business of reorganizing our "to-do list" when it comes to our relationship with God, with God's people – the Church – and with the community around us.

So let us come out of the prisons of our sins – the tombs, if need be – and be free. Free to love in the way God intended us to love. Free to love in the way we were created by God to love.

\* \* \*

Thursday, March 15, 2018  
(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: Jesus makes God known and knowable.

Very often when we hear the story of the Hebrew people and the molten calf, we think they are rejecting the Lord and wanting to worship an animal. This is really not correct, however. They are still worshipping the Lord. But they do not want him to be a God who is a spirit whom they can't touch and see; they do not want him to be transcendent and ultimately unknowable. They want to be able to "see" God – to touch him and have him restricted to a particular physical space and time. In other words, they want to control who the Lord is through personifying him with the molten calf.

The Hebrews were forbidden to make idols because doing so allowed them to determine who God was and who he wasn't. They wanted to reveal God's nature, rather than God revealing his nature to them. God is transcendent, beyond space and time, untouchable and ultimately unknowable. The molten calf is a rejection of God because it is a rejection of his nature. Therefore, it must be destroyed. The Lord calls for the annihilation of all the people who are trying to control him through the molten calf as well. However, as we know, Moses intercedes for them.

Through the centuries, the Lord tried to reveal who he was through the prophets. However, since he is ultimately unknowable – beyond our ability to understand – the messages of the prophets still failed to reveal who he was, and the people were still tempted to fall into idol worship. In God's desire to make himself finally knowable and close with his people, the Word is made Flesh in the mystery of the Incarnation (Jn 1:14).

And so we have Jesus who, in his own actions, words and his very self, makes the Father known. Yet, as we see in today's Gospel, the people still do not understand, or believe. Jesus scolds the crowd for not accepting the testimony of John the Baptist, or the works and signs he has performed. Then Jesus states, clearly: *I came in the name of my Father, but you do not accept me.* For a community long awaiting the Messiah, these should have been words of comfort and consolation – if they truly believed all that had been taught before. Instead, they were words of division and discord.

We are blessed to hear those same words today: *I came in the name of my Father.* In our acceptance and belief of what those words mean – that God has fully revealed himself to us, and has become one like us in order to save us – we are assured that Jesus has, in fact, made God known and knowable. As we prepare ourselves to receive the Eucharist in a few moments, let us give thanks for this opportunity to know God: in our hearts, minds and bodies.

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Friday, March 16, 2018  
(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: God will give us a humble and contrite heart and forgive our sins if we let him.

Gossip is incredibly contagious. Once a bit of juicy news is put out there it can spread like wildfire, especially over the internet. It takes only one small ember to fly through the air to ignite an inferno. But why do we have a tendency to gossip? Many times our words begin as a minor mistruth. We blurt it out to draw attention to ourselves, not thinking about any negative consequences. Maybe our words get a laugh or they make us sound clever. Maybe our moral compass goes askew and our words are just downright mean.

Today's passage from the Book of Wisdom offers insight into the underbelly of human nature. We hear how the thinking of the people had turned to destructive bantering. We see how their wickedness had blinded them. From our perspective, we know that their rage had gotten the best of them. Mistruths, accusations and petty sayings had led to evil thoughts of torture and death for someone who spoke the truth to them. Their reaction is extreme. While our reaction to the truth may not be as drastic, we can still see bits of ourselves in the mistruths that were thrown around in this reading.

In today's Gospel, Jesus finds himself in a similar situation. Some people are highly offended by his teachings in the Temple in Jerusalem. So enraged are they that they want him dead. They speak out, using hearsay and rumors, as a means of drawing more people into their cycle of hate. They say: *Is he not the one they are trying to kill?* Why were they fomenting such evil? It was because Jesus told them the truth that he was sent from the Father. For them, this was blasphemy and the sentence was death. What may have begun as a small rumor had now grown into a complex web of evil.

We can easily forget that mistruths of all degrees can take on a life of their own and have devastating consequences. Or, for that matter, not just gossip, but any sin we carry around. They begin small, but have the potential to get too big to handle. The wonderful thing about Lent is that we have the opportunity for God to bring about change in our lives. God is ready at all times for us to turn to him and receive his forgiveness. The sacraments of the Eucharist and penance provide us with special opportunities to do just that – if we approach God with a contrite heart, and admit our sin and our need for God's forgiveness.

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Saturday, March 17, 2018  
(Lec. 249)

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

SATURDAY OF  
FOURTH WEEK  
OF LENT  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Patrick,  
Bishop)

Gospel related: CCC 574, 575, 588, 595

**FOCUS:** Blessed are they who have kept the word with a generous heart and yielded a harvest through perseverance.

Division and discord are never fun. It would not take a single one of us more than a few seconds, if asked, to think of an example or incident of discord we have witnessed in the last twenty-four hours. Whether it is on a small project team, or between and among nations, the difficulties often arise from pride, a failure to properly see the picture before us, or even a basic misunderstanding of what we see.

The prophet Jeremiah knows division and discord. He had the unpopular and difficult task of preaching a convicting message to the crumbling nation of Israel. The people were not receptive, to say the least – failing to believe, and hatching plots against him that ranged from ruining his reputation to wanting to kill him.

This sounds a bit like the experiences of Jesus, too. We hear about one incident, in today's Gospel, that exemplifies this. Some in the crowd who heard Jesus speak thought he was the Prophet, promised by God from generations before. Others thought he was the Christ – the messiah who would bring about God's final kingdom. Still others thought neither of these things, casting aspersions on Jesus' geographic origins (Galilee) and – in the case of the Pharisees – scolding one of their own, Nicodemus, for asking them to consider the possibility that Jesus could be the Christ.

We know how Jesus' earthly story concludes: the divisions and discord led to a plot, and its successful implementation, to kill him. We also know that this *conclusion* is not the *end*. For it is in his rising from the dead that Christ completed the mystery of our salvation and redemption, freeing us from sin. This is the Good News! This is the message we come to hear, and which we are commanded to share.

Today's liturgical feast celebrates one who is famous for sharing the Gospel message, and it really has nothing to do with green beer or corned beef and cabbage. Saint Patrick was a missionary and bishop who faced his own difficulties, from enslavement to his preaching of the Gospel to people who were less than receptive, at times, to the message. He faced daily threats of murder, fraud and captivity. Yet he never lost faith in the power of God or his message in Jesus Christ.

Perhaps this is the lesson from the readings today. From the earliest days of our covenant with God – through the ministry of Jesus, the witness of Saint Patrick, and up to and including our own modern-day prophets (small p!) and preachers of the Gospel – God has blessed us with faithful and generous hearts whose witness has yielded a bountiful harvest through their perseverance. May we be encouraged by these stories – and may we persevere in our own witness to the Gospel.

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**SUNDAY, MARCH 18, 2018**

(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: Jesus Christ is the new covenant.

In the Old Testament, covenant commitments were typically sealed in blood and with sacrifice. In today's first reading, Jeremiah prophesies a new covenant that the Lord will make with his people – the power of which can make the whole world into the New Israel. That covenant came in the person of Jesus.

The central saving act of Jesus Christ was his shedding of blood as a sacrifice for us – dying on the cross in order that we might share in God's life. Through the blood of that covenant all of us, Jew and Gentile alike, can share in God's divine life.

As Christians, we can enter into that new covenant in this Mass. In the fullness of Jesus Christ – body and blood, soul and divinity – present in the Eucharist, God shares his life with us, and offers us the opportunity to respond. And so we do. We receive the body of Christ from the table of the Lord, and receive the blood of Christ from the chalice of our salvation given to us in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The shocking thing is that in order to fill us with his life-giving blood, Jesus had to die. This is at the core of the Mass – it is what Mass is all about. Without it being the real blood of Christ, the Mass would be nothing more than an empty ritual. Instead, it is a joining of heaven with earth; it is the union of God's divine life with human life.

In the Old Testament, that call for union was found in the voices of the prophets and in obedience to and observance of God's laws. But that union was somewhat distant. Now it is restored in the blood of Christ who, in the words of our second reading, *was made perfect, [and] became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*

Christians see God through the lens of love, something more profound than mere obedience. The Incarnation of God the Son calls us into a relationship of love, where we are to know God not just with our minds, but more importantly, with our hearts.

God is love, and love always seeks union. In Jesus Christ that union is perfected, impossible to be broken even by death itself. In fact, it is through the sacrificial death of Christ that we find the ultimate union God seeks with us. Such is the profound reality of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who continues to pursue union with us in the blood of his cross, *draw[ing] everyone to [him]self.*

\* \* \*

Monday, March 19, 2018  
(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

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

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

FOCUS: Saint Joseph is a model for us to follow in faith.

It's unfortunate we don't know more about Saint Joseph, whose feast we celebrate today. Today's Gospel is one of the few references to Jesus' noble foster father, but even with little information that the Scriptures provide us about Saint Joseph, we can find in him a model of inspiration and trust in God's plan for our lives.

Today's Gospel reminds us that the Blessed Virgin Mary is not the only member of the Holy Family to have received an angelic visit. As this mysterious visitor comes to Joseph, a message of trust and hope is shared with him, and with all of us, in turn. Into the midst of a situation that would seem designed to confuse and bewilder any of us, the angel's message offers Joseph a path that will help him to safely guide his betrothed and the child within her womb through a set of circumstances that might have otherwise driven them apart. If that had happened, Mary would have been subjected to horrific treatment, and Joseph's house would have been the target of scandal.

So what does this teach us about Saint Joseph? First, it teaches us that Joseph is a person of deep faith who trusts in God and is willing to allow that trust to guide him and his little family even when circumstances and events don't seem to make any sense. Joseph's faith is simple and strong, and it provides him with the willingness to bend his will to God's will.

Second, we learn that Joseph is a person of deep love and devotion. He does not want anything scandalous to happen to Mary, his beloved, or to the child who is in her womb. His love and devotion, combined with the gift of his faith, allow him to extend a mantle of care over someone who is at one of the most vulnerable times in life. The particulars of the situation may not fully make sense to him, but this does not prevent him from sharing his loving strength with someone who is vulnerable.

Finally, we learn that Joseph does not allow himself to be frozen in fear. He is a person of action whose actions are governed by God's deep and abiding love. He does not allow himself to be overwhelmed, but instead actively chooses to listen to and respond to the Word of God in his life.

Although we do not know much about Saint Joseph in a biographical sense, we know and can learn a great deal from him, and his example of faith, love, devotion and loving action. Let us pray that when we are faced with situations in our own lives that may confuse us or not make sense to us, that Saint Joseph can be a model for us to follow.

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Tuesday, March 20, 2018  
(Lec. 252)

- 1) Numbers 21:4-9
- 2) John 8:21-30

Gospel related: CCC 211, 603, 653, 1693, 2812, 2842, 2825

TUESDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK  
OF LENT

**FOCUS:** God's healing mercy and love is always available when we face our faults and their consequences.

God gave the Israelites victory over their enemies. He gave them manna to eat in the desert. He provided for them every step of the way. In spite of this, they failed to trust him. We're told in today's first reading that as a result of their complaints against God, they suffered from poisonous snake bites. It wasn't until the Israelites *suffered* that they acknowledged their wrong. Once they did this, God instructed Moses to make an image of a snake and lift it up on a pole. When the people looked at the consequences of their unbelief, they were healed.

The scene in today's first reading foreshadows Jesus' crucifixion, also alluded to in the Gospel. Jesus told the Jewish authorities they would die in their sins for failing to believe what Jesus' words and miracles declared – that he was one with the Father, the great I AM. Jesus said when they saw him lifted up, they'd see the truth. Then they would understand that, in obedience to his Father, Jesus offered himself to save us from our sins.

The Israelites were healed by looking at the snake representing the results of their sin. Like them, by looking at Jesus on the cross and acknowledging that he died for our sins, we open ourselves to healing. How can we receive God's forgiveness if we don't know we need it? Wounds don't heal if we pretend they're not there. We have to let our sins see the light of day. We don't do this to wallow in guilt. We can't love God, others and ourselves the way God wants us to if we're busy drowning in remorse. The purpose of facing our sins is to look beyond our own resources for the healing God provides.

Lent is a good time to reflect on the ways we've convinced ourselves that we know better than God. Let's consider how we've hurt ourselves or others by not trusting God and by doing things our way instead. We bring our faults to the cross so we can experience God's mercy, poured out for us in Jesus' act of self-giving love.

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Wednesday, March 21, 2018  
(Lec. 253)

- 1) Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95
- 2) John 8:31-42

Gospel related: CCC 89, 549, 588, 601, 613, 1744, 2466

WEDNESDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: *The truth will set you free* – but are you prepared to act on that freedom?

In today's Gospel, Jesus utters his famous words: *If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* Freedom is an ideal of many people these days – but what does freedom mean, and are we ready to face its responsibilities?

While many people today see freedom as the ability to do whatever they want, the Church casts it in the light of responsibility and obedience to God. As the catechism states: "The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no freedom except in the service of what is good and just. The choice to disobey and to do evil is an abuse of freedom and leads to 'the slavery of sin'" (1733). Remaining free in this sense by doing what is right offers us the ultimate joy and freedom – being children of God and enjoying God's love and beauty for all of creation.

Jesus tries to make that case in the Gospel with the religious leaders, who claim the freedom of Abraham's sons while, at the same time, plotting to kill Jesus. While claiming to be free, they are acting as agents of sin and death. They refuse to listen to Jesus, the son of God, who can offer them true freedom in the service of God.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the first reading, by contrast, are exhibiting true freedom: they freely and even joyfully choose to allow the king to throw them into the fiery furnace rather than betray God. They do so with absolute trust in God – leaving it completely up to the Lord whether or not he will rescue them. In this way, they prove themselves to be free from earthly powers in their service of God and of good.

Most of us will probably not face the same dire consequences that Jesus and the three young men did: crucifixion or death in a hot, fiery furnace. But by remaining truly free – offering our lives in service to God and to the good of the world – we might face consequences such as unpopularity, rejection by family and friends or some other cost. But we will find the inner freedom to face those consequences or greater ones only if we keep our minds and hearts focused on Jesus, as his true disciples who live in his word.

In these last days of Lent, take time to immerse yourself in Jesus, in the Word of God, so that he, the Truth, can set you free – free to be the beloved children of God.

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Thursday, March 22, 2018  
(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: Those who keep the words of Jesus in their heart live in the light.

We have all heard the adage, “if a deal looks too good to be true, it probably is.” Especially if we get a lot out of the arrangement without, seemingly, putting much effort into it. The problem with these types of agreements is that all parties involved are human beings. Imperfect, tempted-by-sin, humans.

How fortunate we are, then, that *the* most important deal, that is, covenant, of our lives has God, who is perfect love, as the other party. God, who formed us into being and created us to be with him, seeks us out in our fallen humanity to establish a covenant uniting us forever to him.

We first hear of this covenant in today’s reading from Genesis. Here God signifies the importance of the undertaking by informing Abram that he is to be given a new name: *Abraham*, which means “father of a multitude.” (Sarai, incidentally, will have her name changed by God to “Sarah,” which means “princess.”) These name changes have a clearly expressed symbolism and indicate that something new is about to happen, (or has happened), and that the recipient is a whole new person in a new relationship.

Following this name change, God makes approximately twelve promises (depending on how we parse them out) to Abraham. They are all good promises to him and his descendants: for fertility, growth of nations, land, etc.; and to be their God for ever and ever. In return, Abraham and his descendants (which we are) have only one job: we *must keep [God’s] covenant throughout the ages*. What a deal! And unlike human ones, this deal is *not* too good to be true – it is simply good, *and* true.

God has always been faithful – even when we have not. Throughout all of history, God never forgot his people or his covenant. And in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, we have his finally revealed assurance of that faithfulness. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the unforsaken covenant made with Abraham is transformed into a new covenant. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, who remains here with us, we have the strength and graces necessary to fully keep up our end of the bargain.

Jesus says, *I do know [the Father] and I keep his word*. Therefore, *whoever keeps my word will never see death*. So let us live our lives, doing the *one thing* we have to do in order to reap the benefits of this deal that seems too good to be true – but is not.

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Friday, March 23, 2018

(Lec. 255)

1) Jeremiah 20:10-13

2) John 10:31-42

FRIDAY OF

FIFTH WEEK

OF LENT

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Turibius of Mogrovejo,

Bishop)

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

FOCUS: Lead holy, faithful lives to give witness to the Gospel.

The Jewish crowd, gathered around Jesus in this scene from the Gospel of John, was ready to stone him because he spoke the truth about the unity he shared with the Father. They thought he was being blasphemous, identifying himself as God, so he pointed them to the work he did in the Father's name as proof they should believe him. The Jews present tried to arrest him again, and as the Gospel tells us, Jesus escaped them and went back across the Jordan.

This powerful event is worthy of our own reflection, because there are many people still today who reject the truth about Jesus. It is simply too much for them to step outside their own ideas and accept that not only was Jesus a real human who walked this earth, but that he also was divine. What might it take for them to believe? In a recent movie called *The Case for Christ*, the lead antagonist, Lee Strobel, was faced with the reality that it took more faith for him to hold on to his atheism in the face of the facts of Christianity than it would for him to convert!

The stubbornness of the crowd in the Gospel, in the face of hard evidence by Christ, has its parallels today in the hearts of many who are unconverted. It is our mission, as members of the Church, to be steadfast in presenting the Gospel to others by the witness of our lives.

We must use the gifts God has given us to become coworkers in his vineyard – drawing others to him. Jesus did not step away from the work the Father gave him to do, but took it up in union with the Father so that it could be accomplished. Think about the natural gifts you have been given and ask God to show you how they can best be used to build up the kingdom. Our gifts are not for us alone, but are to be used to benefit others.

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Saturday, March 24, 2018  
(Lec. 256)

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

Gospel related: CCC 58, 60, 548, 596, 706, 994, 2793

SATURDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: God keeps his promises.

At the time of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, around 586 B.C., the Israelites, who had by that time split themselves into two kingdoms, were dispersed throughout the empire. Their ruling class was separated, their city destroyed. The prophet Ezekiel is the lone voice for the Israelites. He brings the message of hope to them, the promise of the Lord to unite them into one nation, deliver them from their sins and make an eternal *covenant of peace* with them: *My dwelling shall be with them; I will be their God and they shall be my people.*

Fast-forward a few hundred years. The Israelites are still waiting for the Lord to fulfill his promise. They are living in less-than-ideal circumstances and under the oppressive rule of the Roman Empire. They have little hope for a better life. It is into this world Jesus arrives, with his message of love, mercy and justice. It is here Jesus brings the Good News of the kingdom of God. He rubs elbows with tax collectors and the poor, he heals the sick, and just prior to today's Gospel passage, he raises Lazarus from the dead.

His actions terrify this ruling class of scribes, Pharisees and other Jews who are enjoying a comfortable lifestyle courtesy of their collaboration with the Romans. As John explains it plainly: *The chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and said, "What are we going to do? This man is performing many signs. If we leave him alone, all will believe in him and the Romans will come and take away both our land and our nation."*

The Jews appear more concerned about losing their creature comforts and their status than they were about losing their souls. They decide Jesus has to go. As Caiaphas puts it, *it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish.*

We know how this story turns out. Jesus celebrates his Last Supper on Holy Thursday, suffers and dies on Good Friday and rises from the dead on Easter Sunday. We commemorate all of these in just a few days when we reach the end of our Lenten season. The readings today give us a chance to look back at how we have kept our promises to God this Lent and reflect not just on where we have fallen short, but also on the times when God has kept his side of the bargain and carried us forward.

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## SUNDAY, MARCH 25, 2018

Procession with Palms: (Lec. 37)

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

Mass Readings: (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: *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*

One cannot help but notice how different our two Gospel passages are in tone and sentiment. We begin with Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem to the adulation of the crowd, and follow it with Mark's account of his passion, ultimately at the behest of the same crowd.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, he is now the focus of Israel's deepest hopes and dreams. Frenzied shouts of joy – *Hosannas* – pierce the air as he is acclaimed as the one *who comes in the name of the Lord and* successor to David. Jesus is given the royal treatment – a carpet of cloaks and leafy branches. As the procession grows, one can only imagine the crowd's reaction. Voices swell and fill the air; people join in the rejoicing and commotion, some finding themselves swept along in all the excitement.

Then all of a sudden the mood is changed. The Passion Narrative announces that the king has been downgraded to a common criminal, condemned and led out for execution. The victory confetti and branches are replaced with whips, spits and choking dust. The colt is gone and instead, Jesus carries a heavy and awkward beam, upon which his broken and bloodied body will be hoisted up in death.

The crowd has changed from celebration to execution: the procession of palms to an execution march as the shouts of joy are now drowned out by the sound of the lash. Cries of *Hosanna* have become *crucify him*. How fickle the crowd can be! How quickly it can change!

Perhaps our Holy Week question is where would we be in this great drama? How faithful have we been to Christ this past year? What have we done to strengthen our faith? How deep is our loyalty to Christ in a world where faith is so easily mocked and his name so easily denigrated and abused?

Over the past year, many of us will have made great strides. Some of us will be exactly where we were one year ago. Some of us have blossomed into people of strong and hope-filled faith. But are some of us more like the scriptural fig tree – barren and fruitless?

As we journey this Holy Week, let us keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, who is focused, patient, consistent and faithful in doing the will of God. He does not yield to the winds of popularity or give into the power of the crowd or the empty demands of this world. He knows his mission; he is determined to be faithful to the very end. He is obedient to death – even death on a cross.

This is our holiest week; it demands our attention and even more our participation. Here is our opportunity to share in Christ's passion, for that is the only way to share in his resurrection.

Monday, March 26, 2018  
(Lec. 257)

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

Gospel related: CCC 2449 CSDC 183

MONDAY OF  
HOLY WEEK

FOCUS: Christ's resurrection is the fulfillment of God's promise.

The act of anointing is a powerful ritual, used by many cultures and traditions. To anoint refers to both the physical act of smearing or rubbing oil (or an oily substance) on to another; and to the act of choosing another, perhaps by divine election, as a leader, a successor or a ruler.

Both Scripture readings today speak of anointing. In this portion of Isaiah's Servant of the Lord poems, we hear a prophecy about God's servant, whom God upholds and upon whom he has put his Spirit. This chosen one, the anointed one, *shall bring forth justice to the nations* and he will be *a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.*

The mission of the servant – the anointed one – is important. Historically, the Church has attributed this as referring to Christ, and we know that Christ indeed fulfilled this divine mission. In today's Gospel, for example, while dining at the house of his friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus, others are present. These are the people to whom he has been preaching and who have seen him perform healing miracles. Lazarus has even been brought out from the confinement and the dungeon of the grave, as Jesus had raised him from the dead.

The apex of this Gospel story, of course, is Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet with oil. Whether Mary thinks that Jesus' mission was a divine one that was foretold by Isaiah is not for us to say. What she certainly *does* think, understand and respect, however, is what she has already seen and heard Jesus do: heal others and raise her brother from the dead. Her respect and love is expressed in the physical act of rubbing his feet with oil. For her it has the motif of respecting Jesus as friend, rabbi and teacher. For us, of course, it has the motif of preparing Jesus for burial.

So as we continue in this Holy Week, let us prepare ourselves for Jesus' burial – specifically for what it signals to follow: the fulfillment, in Christ's resurrection, of God's promise of an anointed servant who would bring salvation to the people of his covenant. Mary may or may not have fully understood yet whose feet she was anointing, but we do. And we give thanks that through our own baptism we, too, are anointed – marked as Christ's own forever – and welcomed to the Eucharist as recipients of the promise.

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Tuesday, March 27, 2018  
(Lec. 258)

TUESDAY OF  
HOLY WEEK

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

FOCUS: God hears all our cries and is present to us.

This past hurricane season, in the fall of 2017, was especially brutal. The worst-hit islands in the Caribbean suffered extreme destruction.

This is why the very first words today from Isaiah stand out so much: *Hear me, O islands, listen, O distant peoples*. For those who live on those Caribbean islands, or suffer from other grievous human conditions in near and distant lands, this choice of address is especially poignant.

Our passage today is from the Second Song of the Servant of Yahweh. This Servant has been called “from the womb” for a distinctive mission that is like the prophet Jeremiah or Moses. That special role is the transformation of the Israelites and the ability to persuade them to follow him. While his mission is the restoration of Israel, he will also be a *light to the nations*. This universal mission means that salvation will reach to the ends of the earth.

This mission is about to be fulfilled in today’s Gospel. Jesus makes known his betrayal by Judas and denial by Peter. In the midst of such acknowledgement he says, *Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him*. And while his disciples do not yet fully understand, we know that God will raise Jesus from the dead, manifesting the fullness of his glory and offering abundant life for everyone.

These are not offered simply as platitudes for those who are truly in dire straits and suffering. Natural disasters, war, poverty and separation from homeland – these are all part of the world to which Isaiah spoke these words of hope, as they are a part of the world today. Now, however, we have the fulfilled promise of the loving God who deeply cares for us: that no matter what kind of death or destruction ravages this planet, he has overcome all. The kingdom of God is at hand.

As members of this kingdom, both established at hand and not yet fully realized, we share in the burden of those who are suffering. Called not just to pray, but to manifest in charity, corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and other physical contributions as we are able, for those in need. By our embodiment of the Spirit of God in our midst, we provide not just physical relief of suffering, but a tangible reminder that God hears their cries, and is present to them: *Hear me, O islands, listen, O distant peoples*, salvation has come for you.

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Wednesday, March 28, 2018  
(Lec. 259)

WEDNESDAY OF  
HOLY WEEK

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

FOCUS: We are all in need of salvation.

Judas Iscariot is one of the most notorious men in history. Dante's *Inferno* places him in the lowest part of Hell. Christians around the world make effigies of Judas, then burn, hang, flog or blow them up with fireworks. His name is used, offensively, to express frustration and disgust.

Today's Gospel chronicles the covert bargain Judas strikes with the chief priests to betray Jesus. This isn't documented to cast eternal shame on Judas. Rather, his story is told so we may gain insight into our Lord's plan of salvation and examine our consciences to uncover the ways we betray Christ's love.

It is suggested that the sin of greed, or avarice, motivated Judas to turn on Jesus. After all, it is he who approaches the chief priests. Judas agrees to the sum of thirty silver pieces to hand over Jesus. This is the amount referenced in the Old Testament prophecy of Zechariah (11:12-13). We see further evidence of the Lord's plan at work when Jesus says *The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him*. These events are *written* in God's plan of salvation.

While Judas' betrayal is prophesied, his sins cannot be overlooked. Jesus says of the one planning to betray him, *It would be better for that man if he had never been born*. Judas tries to conceal his deceit by asking, *Surely it is not I, Rabbi?* He cannot bring himself to address Jesus as Lord.

After Jesus announces that someone will betray him, all of the disciples question who it is. Jesus doesn't single Judas out. Instead, he says it is the one *who has dipped his hand into the dish with me*. All of the disciples would have done this since they were eating together. And, as later passages reveal, Judas is not the only disciple who is disloyal to Jesus.

Reflection on today's Gospel challenges us to consider the sins and temptations in our own lives that cause us to betray Christ's love. We are all sinners, and we are all in need of his salvation. Judas' actions led to Jesus' arrest, but it was because of the sin of humans – our sins – that he was nailed to the cross.

Both our first reading and Jesus' reaction to Judas' betrayal teach us that a true Christian perseveres in the face of adversity. Instead of focusing on our own wants and needs, let us keep our sight on the Lord's plan for our lives. Prayer, reconciliation and the Eucharist are ways the Lord helps us serve as loyal disciples. Human sin led to Jesus' death, and it's through his love that we live.

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Thursday, March 29, 2018  
(Lec. 39)

- 1) Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14
- 2) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
- 3) John 13:1-15

**THURSDAY OF  
HOLY WEEK  
(HOLY THURSDAY)**

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

**FOCUS:** Tonight, Jesus hands on to us our heritage: the call to give of ourselves through humble service.

Tonight, as we celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper, we enter into the sacred time of the Triduum – our recollection for the next three days of Jesus' saving life, death and resurrection. As the Jewish people hold the Passover celebration of the Exodus story as their perpetual institution, so are we Christians called each year to commemorate the sacred events of Jesus' final days on earth – leading to the triumph of his resurrection on Easter.

Tonight, we recall – with solemnity, awe and gratitude – Jesus' institution of the Eucharist on the night before his death. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul recalls Jesus' loving transformation of the bread and wine into his body and blood, which will be so soon sacrificed for humanity in Jesus' brutal death. Knowing that his betrayer has already left the room and is preparing to hand him over, Jesus opens his heart in a remarkable gesture of love for all time. In a very short time, we will be sharing in this love that Jesus pours out for us every day as we come to Communion.

But both the Jewish and the Christian traditions call for more than rituals and remembrances – as important as they are. The people at the time of Moses were told to eat the Passover feast with their loins girt, sandals on [their] feet and ... staff in hand, to eat as those who are in flight – ready to flee Egypt and face the unknown. In the same way, Jesus reminds us that we must prove our love for him not only through the holy ritual of the Eucharist, but also through loving action.

Jesus, the night before his death, took on the role of slave to wash his disciples' feet. He calls on us, too, to humble ourselves in service to one another and to those most in need in our world – and to be humble enough, like Peter, to accept the service of others when we are in need. We must be ready every day to celebrate the feast of Jesus' love for us in the Eucharist and, in the strength of the Eucharist, to continue our own pilgrimage as servants of the people of God and of the world.

As we conclude the sacred portion of this Triduum – the Mass of the Lord's Supper – we will have the opportunity to remain with Jesus in the altar of repose. As we prepare to commemorate Jesus' death on Good Friday and celebrate the ultimate triumph of the Resurrection during the Easter Vigil, let us take the time to recall the incredible love that Jesus has for all of us. His love was poured out for us through the sacrifice he made on the cross and daily, through the Eucharist.

In turn, let us give him the gift of ourselves now, in the years to come, and in eternity. We know that we can count on Jesus' love for us each day – especially as we receive Communion – and that he will strengthen us as we continue our own pilgrimage of faith, love and service.

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Friday, March 30, 2018  
(Lec. 40)

- 1) Isaiah 52:13–53:12
- 2) Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9
- 3) John 18:1–19:42

**FRIDAY OF  
THE PASSION  
OF THE LORD  
(GOOD FRIDAY)**

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

FOCUS: Today we reflect on the cross to remember just how much Jesus loves us.

As we spend time today reflecting on God's love, we walk with Jesus through the way of the cross. We hear the Passion Narrative and remember all that Jesus suffered on this day all those years ago. We venerate the cross as the means of our salvation. And in reflecting on all these things, we remember that we call today "Good" Friday because God can bring good even out of the worst sufferings – if only we will unite them to him and his cross.

The way of the cross is a vivid reminder to us that Jesus is always with us; in the good times and the bad, through the joys and sorrows of life, he is always with us. When we are abandoned by friends, we remember that he was, too. When we fall while carrying our cross, we remember that he did, too. When all seems hopeless at the death of a loved one, we remember that he died too. But in all these things he rose victorious, for the love of God conquers all things.

If we ever doubt God's love for us, we need simply look at a cross. Jesus shows us that he loves us that much. He shows that our life, our salvation, is worth dying for. In the agony in the garden that we heard in the Passion Narrative, we see that Jesus freely chose to die for us. He freely chose the passion because we are worth it. He was scourged for our sins and carried the weight of the cross because of our transgressions. He stretches his arms wide on the cross and opens his side to the lance, that he might pour out his abundant love upon you and me. That is Jesus' love for us – one of complete self-gift and self-sacrifice. If we ever doubt God's love for us, we need simply look at a cross.

There are many times as we go through this life that we will suffer, that we will go through difficult times, that we are forced to carry a cross. But we never do this alone: Jesus has done it first, and he is with us through all of our sufferings, all our trials, and helping us to carry every cross. And even greater than just being with us, he will bring good out of all those situations – like he did with the cross – if only we will turn it all over to him.

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Saturday, March 31, 2018  
(Lec. 41)

**HOLY SATURDAY  
- EASTER VIGIL**

*Nine readings are assigned to the Easter Vigil: seven from the Old Testament, and two from the New. If circumstances demand in individual cases, the number of prescribed readings may be reduced. Three selections from the Old Testament, both from the Law and Prophets, should be read before the Epistle and Gospel. In any case, the reading from Exodus about the escape through the Red Sea (reading 3) should never be omitted.*

- 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 422, 515

**FOCUS:** The empty tomb fills our hearts with faith in the risen Lord.

The Easter Vigil is the holiest night in all the year, and yet Christmas Eve seems to get all the attention. It is interesting to note that Christmas was not celebrated on the Roman calendar for more than three centuries after Jesus' birth at Bethlehem. But the celebration of Jesus' resurrection stretches back twenty centuries. Christmas Eve is popular because we are the ones who receive gifts. During the Easter Vigil, we receive what is perhaps the greatest gift of all – the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. Yes, the empty tomb fills our hearts with faith in the risen Lord, and the hope that one day we, too, might rise from the dead.

This is also the night when the elect are baptized and candidates are received into full communion with the Church. They are welcomed into the faith in a grand liturgy that plays on themes of darkness, light and water to prepare them for the great gift of the sacraments. In addition to being the holiest night of the year, the Easter Vigil is also the longest Mass of the year, and with good reason, as we hear Scriptures that retell Salvation History.

We hear all of these readings because they tell us our story of creation and salvation. In the Book of Genesis, we hear seven times "And God saw that it was good," reminding us of the glory of God first found in nature. In the second reading, also from Genesis, we see a test of faith and the ultimate sacrifice of love as Abraham is willing to kill his son if that be God's plan. Abraham's faith is rewarded as he is promised to become the father of a great nation. This story reminds us that God sacrificed his own Son for love of us on the altar of the cross.

In the Exodus reading, 600,000 Hebrew men, women and children cross the Red Sea on dry land. One side of the water represents 430 years of slavery, blood, sweat and tears. On the other side is the promise of freedom in the Promised Land. Twelve hundred years before the baptism of Jesus, God in Sacred Scripture is showing us that in the waters of baptism, we all can be free from slavery to sin, and through water, look to that day when we will know true freedom in the Promised Land of heaven.

The fourth and fifth readings are both taken from Isaiah, written nearly eight hundred years before the coming of the Messiah, to show us that God would send a Redeemer to give us God's mercy

– not his wrath – and that we who come to him, through his Son, will have an abundant life, greatly blessed by the Father. For the benefit of those to be baptized and confirmed who have recently completed their instruction in the faith, the Prophet Baruch tells us that it is both wise and life-giving to live by God's commandments, for the law endures forever while those who forsake the commandments experience spiritual death.

In Ezekiel, we return to the prominent theme of water and baptism, and God's promise to sprinkle clean water upon us, to put a new heart within us, and a new spirit. The Letter of Paul to the Romans tells us that we who die with Christ in baptism will one day share with him in the newness of life.

In the Gospel, the women of Jerusalem come to the empty tomb and become the first to be made aware of the Resurrection. They are instructed by the angels to go tell the disciples the good news. This is what we are all called to do when we have encountered the risen Lord – to go tell others that light has conquered darkness, and death becomes new life – in Christ.

In the darkness of this holy night, let the empty tomb fill our hearts with faith in the risen Lord, and let us behold and share the light of God's love burning forever in the sacred heart of that risen Lord.

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**SUNDAY, APRIL 1, 2018**

(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 (41)

**EASTER SUNDAY  
OF THE RESURRECTION  
OF THE LORD  
- SOLEMNITY**

Gospel related-John: **CCC** 515, 640; Gospel related-Mark: **CCC** 333, 641, 652, 2174

FOCUS: When we come to the empty tomb and look in, what do we see?

The fact that Easter falls on April First this year will not be overlooked by the most cynical of nonbelievers concerning the resurrection of Jesus. Saint Paul, in the first chapter of his first letter to the Church of Corinth, refers to the cross as a stumbling block for some and an absurdity for others (1:23).

Those of us gathered here, however, embrace the cross; we see right through the pain and agony of the cross to the glory of the Resurrection. For like Mary Magdala, Peter and the Beloved Disciple, we have come to the empty tomb, we have peered deep inside and we believe.

Like Mary, Peter and the Beloved Disciple, we arrive at our understanding of the resurrection of Jesus at different speeds, each at our own pace. In Saint John's account, Mary Magdala first thought someone stole Jesus' body, and Peter was perplexed at what he saw. The Beloved Disciple is the first one to grasp what has taken place.

If the Gospel message ended at the cross, you and I would not be here today. The stories about all the good works, all the miracles, all the teachings of Jesus would be collecting dust on a shelf somewhere. Oh, he would have been seen as a wonderful and compassionate prophet, but he would not be seen as he is today, as the glorified and risen Son of the living God.

Every day, we have a decision to make as followers of the Risen One. Each day, we must decide whether we will be observed helping to roll the stone away or trying to keep the stone still in front of the tomb. By our actions – by our witness in the workplace, in our homes and among our neighbors – are we fools for Christ, or do we hang back and let someone else do the heavy lifting?

Last night, all around the world, the universal Church grew by leaps and bounds as thousands of new Catholics were welcomed among us as they celebrated the Easter sacraments. Now, on this most sacred of days, each of us will renew our baptismal promises. Once again, we will reject evil and embrace the living God. Let us not doubt, let us not be perplexed. Let us instead come, peer deep inside the empty tomb, and believe. Alleluia!

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