

A religious painting depicting Jesus standing on a rocky cliff, wearing a red robe and a halo. He is looking down at a kneeling, winged figure, possibly an angel or a demon, who is looking up at him. The background shows a sunset sky with purple and orange hues, and a body of water in the distance.

# Lenten Devotional 2026

The Anglican Diocese of Ft. Worth

## An Invitation for a Holy Lent

*Dear People of God: The first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them by a season of penitence and fasting. This season of Lent provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when those who, because of notorious sins, had been separated from the body of the faithful, were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to the fellowship of the Church. In this manner, the whole Congregation was put in mind of the message of pardon and absolution set forth in the Gospel of our Savior, and of the need that all Christians continually have to renew our repentance and faith. I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word.*

The above paragraph is from the Ash Wednesday liturgy. The Officiant invites those gathered to observe a "Holy Lent." First we may ask, why?

Lent is a sanctified season consecrated to the correction, purification, and enlightenment of the total person through the fulfillment of the commandments of the crucified God.

The Christian is tasked with wrestling with the world, the flesh, and the devil with the blossoming of the fruit of the Holy Spirit arising. Those being: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-control - Gal 5:22. The days ahead are set apart for complete and total dedication to the things of God.

Then, how?

Fasting is the critical starting point. Abstaining from meat on Fridays and observing a particular fast of some kind is the rule given to us by the Church. Most people give up some form of dessert, Netflix, social media, or the like. The choice made should be relevant to you. As you gear up for Lent, take care to carefully consider what is detracting from your relationship with God. But one should also be realistic. The real object is deciding on a rule and sticking with it.

However, to live a holy Lent is not merely to “give something up,” but to return to the Lord with the whole heart. The Church commends to us a pattern of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving: setting aside extra time for Scripture and praying for others, embracing discipline of the self, and opening our hands in generosity to the poor and to the work of the Gospel.

It is the ancient and common Christian custom that the faithful would make their sacramental confession at least once per year, preferably during Lent or Eastertide. Contact your priest or see your parish calendar for confession times.

Above all, we are invited to a deeper repentance, trusting that the Father delights to welcome prodigals home.

## How to use this booklet

There is no substitute for spending time with the Lord in the pages of Holy Scripture. It is precisely how our Lord combatted the devil in the wilderness! (Matthew 4:1-11) To aid in your Lenten journey, this booklet contains an entry for every day, Ash Wednesday through Easter.

Once you have read the appointed passage, there is an original meditation based on the reading. We have the good fortune by being blessed by many wonderful clergy throughout the diocese. Some voices will be familiar while some will be new! All entries have been written either by clergy of the diocese or seminarians in training.

These short readings can be done by families around the dinner table or by individuals in times of quiet reflection.

I am eager to begin this season of repentance, prayer, and earnest meditation as one Body, fixing our eyes on Christ. I pray this devotional will strengthen you for the journey. May it prepare you, together with the whole Church, for a joyful, holy, and glorious Easter feast!

In Christ,  
Fr. Matthew Rogers  
Associate Rector  
St. Laurence Church

Cover Image:  
*Temptation of Jesus* by Gustave Dore

## Wednesday, February 18, Ash Wednesday

By Fr. Thomas Hightower

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

*"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen." - Matthew 6:5-6*

This is an interesting question for us on Ash Wednesday. Jesus seems to be questioning public acts of devotion. And here we go, today, walking around with the sign of the cross visible on our foreheads. Are we in trouble? No, Jesus is asking the question of who are you trying to please?

The criticism is not about praying in the synagogues or in the streets but instead it is a question of praying in order to be seen by others. Impressing other people is the point of what is being questioned. When we go to church to worship, we remember that the audience of worship and prayer is not ourselves. We are not there to be entertained. The audience of our worship is God. All that we do is pointed to the Lord.

Yet how often do we hear the phrase, "I don't get anything out of going to church." Worship is not about us, but about what we offer to God, the praise and adoration which is due to him.

The Daily offices of Morning and Evening Prayer are wonderfully quiet ways to pray to the Lord in our own rooms. Even if we pray the Offices along with others, the quiet rhythms of Scripture urge to slow down and welcome the presence of Christ.

By all means, pray and fast and give alms! Our Lord reminds us of the spirit in which we should keep these practices. Just remember that these devotions are meant to help you fix your eyes on your Father, who sees in secret. As we approach Lent, let us bow our heads and focus our hearts and our minds on the Lord.

# Thursday, February 19

*By Fr. Aaron Cappucci*

**Luke 9:22-25**

Jesus says that those who desire to follow Him must take up their cross daily. The cross is not emblematic of suffering in this life nor difficult circumstances to be overcome. It is not representative of those things we deny in devotion to Christ (the cross is not your Lenten fast). The cross does not represent sin but rather the sinner. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

We are by nature children of wrath, born enemies of God. Made in His image, yet fallen and dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-3). We are enslaved to sin and Satan and lovers of self. From our earliest days we cry out until our desires are met. No one needed to teach us to throw a temper tantrum; it came naturally. We are lovers of ourselves. The second greatest commandment reveals this truth, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

The command of Jesus to deny yourself is not new, it is the definitive shape of our obedience. Just as Christ denied Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross, so too must the Christian be conformed to the cross, dying daily to self and the desires of the devil, the world, and the flesh.

To follow Jesus, we must be crucified with Him. St. Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." To deny yourself and take up your cross is to be crucified with Christ. The Christian life in union and fellowship with Christ is cruciform.

Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter replied, "The Christ of God." Jesus spoke plainly, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

The cross of Christ is a gruesome necessity. Why? Jesus provides the answer in the Eucharist: it is "for you." The cross is the means whereby salvation was accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus must suffer and die before being raised from the dead on the third day. His suffering, death, and resurrection then become the paradigm for his disciples, for those who would follow him. In order to follow Jesus through the grave, we must first follow Him to the cross. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

## Friday, February 20

*By Fr. Andrew Hollinger*

**Isaiah 58:1-9a**

True fasting is done in the spirit. Elsewhere in scripture our Lord tells His people to 'rend your hearts, not your garments.' This of course does not preclude rending garments, but sets the true nature of repentance as something in which the exterior act serves the interior movement of soul. These days, there's not a lot of folks going around tearing their shirts down the middle. And if so, it's usually to show off big muscles. But for us, our relationship to repentance is one of mortification of the flesh, particularly in fasting.

It is notable that fasting, along with almsgiving, are expected of us by our Lord. This is not an outdated cultural phenomenon. Human beings must fast. Especially in such a luxurious and gluttonous place as America. Where the ruler of the individual is the belly (or other pleasures), there is no room for the God who will destroy the belly.

In filling ourselves up with every manner of delicacy, we empty ourselves out of spiritual maturity and lose the greatest weapon we have against the Enemy.

But notice, fasting is not just self-denial. It is repentance. Repentance is especially in this passage from oppression, exploitation, refusing to feed the hungry and house the homeless. Repentance and fasting isn't just meant to make us feel better about ourselves. It's to participate in the heavenly reality of the Kingdom of Heaven breaking into Earth. What great dividends even the smallest amount of faithfulness will bring in eternity.

## Saturday, February 21, St. John Henry Newman

By Deacon Thom Hunter

### Luke 5:27-32

The problem with the Pharisees was not their zeal for the Law. Nor was it their desire for moral purity. Neither of those is a bad thing!

No, the issue with the Pharisees was that they began to believe their own press. They began to believe that they really were the most zealous for the Law, and the most morally pure. Hence they missed the point of Jesus' words when he said to them, in response to their indignation over Jesus sharing a table with tax collectors and sinners:

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Jesus is not saying to the Pharisees that they are already righteous, though doubtless some heard his words in that manner! Rather, if they truly had been paying attention, they'd have realized that they, too, were sick and in need of healing, and sick with a terrible disease: pride in their own holiness.

This pride is a danger for us today, just as it was for the Pharisees. It is especially dangerous for us if we

spend time around our brothers and sisters in Christ from other traditions who do observe Lent. We can easily fall into the trap of patting ourselves on the back for being the sort of Christians who are *really* serious about following Christ, and so close our ears, and our hearts, to what Jesus is saying here, just like the Pharisees.

We are only three days into Lent, and at this early stage, it probably seems like the fast is going well. We may be proud of our success. Give it time. Something will emerge to dispel this illusion. It may be an extra dose of irritability caused by hunger. It may be resentment over how the vows we made at the beginning of this season to spend more time in prayer or to give to those in need is eating away at "our" time and "our" money.

Lord willing, we'll realize that it's easily have an inflated sense of our own holiness when we're comfortable, and in truth our condition is far more dire than we imagined. May God grant us this mercy! For it is the sick who know they need a physician, and the sinners who know they are in need of a Savior.

# Sunday, February 22, First Sunday in Lent

By Fr. John Jordan

## Matthew 4:1-11

St. Matthew tells us that "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." That detail matters. Jesus does not wander into temptation by accident. He is not reckless. He is led—by the Spirit—into a place of hunger, silence, and testing. After forty days and forty nights, Jesus is hungry. Not metaphorically hungry. Not spiritually hungry. He is physically hungry. And it is precisely there, at the point of real human weakness, that temptation comes.

The first temptation is about appetite. "Command these stones to become loaves of bread." The devil's suggestion is simple: use your power to remove discomfort. Remember: Jesus has been led here and so the temptation is to let his appetite override his trust in God's plan for him. Jesus answers, "Man should not live by bread alone." Our Lord teaches us that appetites are not ultimate. The first discipline of Lent teaches us this same lesson. When we fast, we discover how quickly we usually treat desire as necessity.

The second temptation is about control. "Throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you.'" The temptation is to force God to act.

To take matters into our own hands. Jesus refuses: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." Our Lord teaches us here that faith does not demand spectacle. Faith is getting comfortable with letting God be in control. The second discipline of Lent teaches us this also: Prayer is not about changing God's mind; it's about entering into His mind.

The third temptation is about allegiance. "All these I will give you... if you will fall down and worship me." Here the offer is power by the means of compromise. Jesus answers with clarity: "Worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve." There are no divided loyalties in the kingdom of God. The third discipline of Lent teaches us this lesson. Almsgiving answers our Lord's call, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Our hearts are to be so aligned with God's heart that we joyfully share our treasure with those in need.

These three temptations address appetite, control, and allegiance. They are not exotic sins. They are ordinary pressures. In the wilderness, Jesus shows us what obedience looks like. If we take on the disciplines of Lent seriously, his obedience becomes ours too.

# Monday, February 23, St. Polycarp

By Mr. Nathan Beyer (Seminarian)

## Matthew 25:31-46

Often, we understand outreaches as opportunities to 'be Christ to people' - to bring them Christ's love in our actions. This is certainly true, and one of the most important roles that the individual Christian and the worldwide Church is called to.

This passage reminds us that there is another side to the coin. We are called to bring Jesus to people, but we are also called to *serve Jesus in them*. When we keep this in mind, our acts of service and outreach may be marked with greater humility, as we seek to serve others as if we were serving Christ Himself.

The works described in this passage have traditionally formed the basis for what the Church labeled the Corporal Works of Mercy - feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, and burying the dead.

All these works are important ways to tangibly show Christ's love to others and to serve Christ in them, and these works can be done in different ways by all Christians, according to the ways that God has equipped and called us. Not everyone can run a homeless shelter, but many are able to donate to local charities, participate in

parish outreaches or organize meal trains for those suffering from illness.

Early Christians understood the Works of Mercy described in this passage to have a Spiritual element to them as well. When one brings the food of knowledge to those hungry for righteousness in instructing the ignorant by the proclamation of the Gospel and catechesis; when in Baptism the candidate is clothed in the garment of salvation and given shelter in the family of the Church; when we freely forgive those who trespass against us and pray that they be loosed from the prison of sin; when we pray for the souls of the living and the dead - these are the Spiritual Works of Mercy that God has prepared for us to walk in, united to Jesus Christ and as His hands and feet on earth.

Bishop Frank Weston famously reminded his audience at the Anglo-Catholic Congress of 1923 that the same Jesus that we worship in the Blessed Sacrament is to be served in those around us. Or as C.S. Lewis said, "Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses."

## Tuesday, February 24, St. Matthias

*By Fr. Travis Province*

### Acts 1:15-26

The U.S. Marines are masters of recruiting. Their approach is often simple, but effective. One classic recruiting poster is simply an illustrated image of a Marine standing at parade rest in his Dress Blues with the word "Ready" imposed above him, and the invitation also on the poster: "Join U.S. Marines: Land, Sea, Air."

It's true that Marines pride themselves on readiness – they are ready to serve when called. Today, as we celebrate the Feast of St. Matthias, the word "ready" also comes to mind. We know that during our Lord's ministry, Matthias was following Him from the beginning until the end. During that time, St. Matthias must have been close to Christ, but he was not part of His innermost circle. We can imagine he had no idea that one day, this would change in a big way as he would be called to serve as an Apostle.

Even so, St. Matthias faithfully and diligently followed Jesus and absorbed His teaching as much as he could. By following the Lord closely and practicing what Jesus taught, Matthias became a saintly and virtuous figure among the early disciples; and when the time came, he was ready to serve.

We never know what paths the Lord may lead us along in this world. The Christian life is anything but easy, safe, or predictable. And here we have in this season of Lent a wonderful opportunity to help prepare ourselves through prayer, fasting, confession, or extra devotions for those moments when God calls on us to serve, sometimes in ways which we would never have guessed. Through the prayers of St. Matthias, may we all grow in faith and virtue this Lent and be ready to serve when called.

## Wednesday, February 25, St. Ethelbert & Bertha

By Fr. Elmer Miguel

Jonah 3:1-10-20 Luke 11:29-32

*"The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit" - Psalm 51.17a*

Is your spirit troubled? One glance at the state of the world could send you into spiritual discomfort. Even if you lived in a cave sequestered from the modern world, the brokenness of humanity would reach you. The ills of society barrage us, affecting our spiritual well-being.

The Psalmist cries out to God: "Restore to me the joy of our salvation" (Psalm 51.12). This is not a cry for the state of the world. It is a cry for God's mercy in light of the brokenness of the person. The world will be made whole when the brokenness of individuals is eradicated by Jesus Christ.

Jonah cried out God's proclamation in Nineveh, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3.4). Likewise, Jesus cried out in the midst of a Jewish crowd, "This generation is an evil generation" (Luke 11.29).

The whole city of Nineveh repented, thus they were spared from destruction.

Something greater than Jonah appeared in the midst of the Jewish crowd, and they did not recognize the Messiah.

The spirit of the Ninevites reflected the broken spirit of the Psalmist. They recognized God's holiness and their sinfulness, so they fasted from food and water, animals and all, and put on sackcloth and prayed for mercy. The spirit of the Jews who encountered Jesus was much different. They acted proudly, clinging to the Law even though the Lamb of God was walking amongst them. It's paradoxical that the chosen people of God would fail to recognize the Messiah, while an entire pagan city would humble itself before God.

The sign of God's mercy and justice has come in the form of Jesus Christ. It is a holy sign that compels us to recognize our brokenness in the light of his mercy. We must respond by proclaiming a fast, by putting on sackcloth, and calling on God's mercy to be upon us.

## Thursday, February 26, St. Oswald of York

By Fr. Burton Shadow

### Matthew 7:7-12

Persistence or perseverance in prayer is what we are called to do as Christians. It is verses 7 to 8 that I want to reflect upon, i.e. 7 *"Ask...; seek...; knock,...opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives,... one who seeks finds,...one who knocks ....opened.* It is through prayer to God that mortals receive what they ask for and deepen their relationships with Him.

Many Christians are adept at extemporaneous prayer, however, the Achilles heel is often persistence in the recitation of the Daily Office. That which often impedes us are the following: family obligations, illness, meetings, work responsibilities, emergencies, struggles with sloth, struggles with depression, lack of discipline, etc. Many parishioners are "destination parishioners", that is, they do not live in the neighborhood where their church is located and often drive more than 20 minutes to arrive at their house of worship. It's sometimes a question of accessibility to prayer with their clergy and deepening that relationship.

To that end, about a year ago, I started praying the Daily Office via Google Meet at 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. daily in Spanish.

We haven't missed a day. We started with 2 or 3 people. God blesses faithfulness and persistence because He is good. We now average 4 - 7, infrequently reaching 9 faithful. We do this often at home with our cell phones or computers as well as the 2019 BCP in Spanish. Some senior clerics in our diocese were very supportive and encouraging saying, "The church is where the Offices are to be prayed!" I would challenge that and assert that the home is where the church began in ancient Christianity. My wife Ingrid, of 32 years, said to me when I started this in Spanish, that it needed to be done in English as well. Her first tongue is Spanish.

This idea is not original and should be brought back. An astute, brilliant lay leader brought me into Evening Prayer online in English, via Zoom during COVID, because during the weekdays, there was no communal worship of God for the faithful. So he initiated Evening Prayer, and we joined him.

Jesus, the Christ, as well as the church fathers, have always called us to *persistence* and *perseverance* in prayer. So who's got the chutzpah to start this in English?

## Friday, February 27, Blessed George Herbert

*By Fr. Andrew Thebeau*

### Matthew 5:20-26

In today's Gospel, Jesus encourages us to prioritize reconciliation with our brothers in Christ. In fact, we are to take the seemingly radical action of interrupting our formal, sacrificial worship of God Himself to do so.

To help us understand, let's consider Jesus' exhortation in light of 2 Corinthians 11:17-21. First, St. Paul teaches us that by the union of human and divine natures in the one Person, Jesus Christ, we are reconciled to our Heavenly Father who made us. To be reconciled means not only to remove strife; more positively, it is to restore harmony in the relationship – it is to bring Beauty and, with it, Goodness and Truth, back into the union.

This is what Christ does for us. And we are to worship Him accordingly. Nevertheless, in Lent we remember that our original and actual sin cause disharmony in our relationship with God. One of the best instruments we have to restore harmony with God is the Sacrament of Reconciliation, commonly called Confession. The grace we receive there absolves our sin, gives us assurance of God's forgiveness, and, thereby, restores harmony. Lent is a great time to make your Confession!

Second, St. Paul goes on to teach that because we are in Christ, His ministry of reconciliation is ours too. In this light, then, we see that Jesus' encouragement to be reconciled with our brothers is an invitation to participate in His own ministry. As Anglicans, we practice this by Passing the Peace during every Mass. By seeking reconciliation with one another during our sacrificial worship, we are literally enacting Jesus' teaching. This enacting trains us to be ministers of reconciliation like Jesus. In the season of Lent we take this training further by practicing spiritual disciplines – especially, fasting, prayer, almsgiving, and study. These disciplines train our hearts to love God, love others, and die to self, all of which are necessary for the ministry of reconciliation.

The season of Lent is a season of being reconciled to God and our neighbors in Jesus Christ so that we can offer a worthy sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving at the Pascal Feast. Be reconciled, then, beloved. Become reconcilers. And the peace of God be always with you!

# Saturday, February 28

*By Fr. Jeff Stubbs*

## Deuteronomy 26:16-19

I wake in my bed on this brand-new day. I ask myself: have I heard the call of God to follow his statutes and rules this day? If I have, then today I am to answer this call by being careful to keep these commandments in my mind, upon my lips, and in my heart, because they are the words of my God to me, and they are precious.

This is not just a mental exercise, something I can fully accomplish by affirming it to be true; rather, it is something I am duty-bound to perform with all my heart and with all my soul—these laws are followed not out of fear of repercussion, but out of love for the one who calls to me. This is my response to hearing the command of God: to follow it to the best of my ability.

Have I declared today that the Lord is my God? Have I declared this today with all that I am and in all that I do, and will I obey the voice of his command? Have I then listened for the declaration that God speaks from of old to those who hear his voice—that I am his treasured possession?

Then in response, I will keep his commandments. And because I commit myself to hear this voice and to follow his commands, I will be set in praise and in fame above all else—not because I require these things of him first, but because I am willing to follow his call to greatness.

Today, I commit to being holy to the Lord, his treasured possession, something for his use alone, because nothing else has claim over me. The world has no claim because the Creator of the world has called me out of it. I have been set apart, claimed by him because he exchanged his life for mine. I am his and he is mine. Therefore, I follow his commands with my whole heart and soul because I am his, and I have heard him this day.

Whether or not I accomplished this yesterday, I will do it today. And tomorrow, when I wake up, I will strive to do it all over again, until this day becomes eternity.

## Sunday, March 1, Second Sunday in Lent

*By Fr. Sam Wilgus*

**John 3:1-16**

The moon hangs above the ancient city, its streets lit dimly by pilgrims' fires. A Pharisee threads his way past tents and lean-tos. There's one visitor in town for the feast whom he's anxious to meet, though wary, perhaps, to be seen in his company.

Finding the man, the Pharisee addresses him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." The Rabbi hears respect in these words, even reverence. The Pharisee's appraisal of the man he's talking to isn't wrong.

A teacher? Yes. A miracle worker? Also, yes. Come from God? God is with him? Yes and yes—and in ways the Pharisee can't yet comprehend. The Pharisee has come to the Rabbi with his traditional categories. For there had been teachers in Israel; there had been miracle men. Many of them, it could be said, came from God, and God was with them. The greatest of them bore names like Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. In the eyes of this Pharisee, the Rabbi in front of him ranks among the fellowship of the prophets.

But while a prophet is not without honor, there's more to be said about this Rabbi. The Pharisee and his

categories need to be shaken, his eyes need to be opened wider. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The Pharisee furrows his brow and scoffs. Birth is, after all, a one-time event. But the Rabbi insists: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Still listening but clearly confounded, the Pharisee simply asks, "How can these things be?" The Rabbi chides him gently. Leaving behind the head-scratching language of second birth, he pivots to self-description. Plumbing the depths of scripture, he deploys sacred images and phrases: Daniel's divine "Son of Man" and Moses' brass serpent lifted high above the poisoned people.

Not daring another expression of confusion, the Pharisee is silent. And in the darkness of that night, the Rabbi whispers an invitation offered in love. It is an invitation to faith in the One whom all the prophets longed to see: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

## Monday, March 2, St. Chad of Lichfield

*By Mr. Patrick Estes (Seminarian)*

### Daniel 9:4b-10

Have you ever tried to climb to the top of a slide? Whether or not you have done this yourself, you have at least seen another person try. Some of us (myself included) have attempted this, slipped, and fallen to the bottom. For a moment, disregard the basic playground rule that we are not supposed to climb up the slide. Now, imagine that all humanity is climbing an enormous slide. We are all capable of climbing that slide, but inevitably we slip and fall along the way. Right beside the slide is an alternate pathway: an enormous staircase. This staircase has been carefully designed by people who tried the slide, learned from their falls, and chose a more structured way to ascend the steps. They reached the top not by human ambition, but by taking the stairs step by step.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, do not miss the message. Choosing the staircase is choosing a devout life in the Church, while climbing the slide is to rely on our own footing. Our capability to climb in the first place is only due to the grace of God.

To slip is to sin and to fall is the distance that sin creates between us and God. The staircase is nothing other than the commandments and

ordinances that God has given through servants and prophets who spoke in His name.

The prophet Daniel in today's reading confesses corporately, "we have sinned...we have not listened...and to us belongs confusion of face." That confusion of face is the understood to be the shame we realize when we have fallen. In this moment, we can quit climbing, or we can learn from our mistakes as we more carefully ascend the steps. Daniel's response displays what these steps might look like in his confession, as he turns to God's righteousness and repents of the people's disobedience. His example calls us to honest confession, to trust in God's mercy, and to follow the path of persistent and humble practices.

As we continue in our Lenten discipline, let us remember to earnestly make our General Confession at Mass and receive God's promised mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. For God's commandments and the Church's practices are not a burden, but a stairway of grace. They are practical, loving instructions, given by God through his servants and prophets, that lead us to lives of charity and faithful obedience.

## Tuesday, March 3, Blessed John & Charles Wesley

By Fr. Brent Christian

Isaiah 1:10, 16-20

*"Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!" - Isaiah 1:10*

Someone once pointed out to me that God brings "comfort to the afflicted, and affliction to the comfortable." I have found this to be true in life. It's easy to read a text like Isaiah 1:10 and think of all the other people the prophet must be addressing—those people "over there," but certainly not me! But here, Isaiah is identifying God's people with Sodom and Gomorrah; which, to state the obvious, is not a good thing (Genesis 18-19).

Isaiah rebukes those comfortable in worship, but whose actions betray a lack of love for others. As God's people, we are called to consider if our actions align with our worship. When we gather for worship, we hear the summary of the law: love God, love your neighbor. You can't keep just one of the two commandments and be faithful to God. You can't love God while harming others, and you can't love others without being fully devoted to God.

Isaiah calls us to examine where our actions toward others don't align with our claim that we "love God."

He proclaims: "learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." Then come and offer prayers to God in worship (Isaiah 1:15-17).

Like many of the prophets, Isaiah isn't all doom and gloom, but offers an invitation: "Come now, let us reason together...though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land..." (Isaiah 1:18-19). The transition from being identified with Sodom and Gomorrah to now eating the good of the land is remarkable—the difference is the work of God to forgive sins and a response to live in light of that forgiveness.

The word of affliction we often hear in Lent is intended to wake us up from the slumber of our comforts, so that we can live in the reality that all our sins have been forgiven through Jesus Christ our Lord. May we heed the word and live!

## Wednesday, March 4

*By Fr. Cooper Morelock*

### Matthew 20:17-28

Jesus asked James and John, "Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" This comes right after Jesus is given an incredible request: "Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." I have to be honest, it feels a little arrogant, a little prideful, and it doesn't help that James and John had their mom ask the question for them. In this light, Jesus' response is appropriate. The sons of Zebedee had no notion of the trials that awaited Jesus, trials that they would eventually share in as disciples of Jesus. Were they ready for what was about to happen?

Jesus and his disciples are heading to Jerusalem one last time. His disciples imagine that Jesus will finally ascend the throne of his ancestor, David, and all the messianic prophecies will be fulfilled. But Jesus knows what truly lies at the end of this road: betrayal, torture, a cross, death. The Messiah will give himself for the world, and this cup spoken of means that Jesus expects the same from his followers.

Throughout our lives, and especially during Lent, we must constantly remind ourselves that God does not desire a comfortable life for us. Rather, he wants lives that have been crucified.

In that sense, we also are on a journey to Jerusalem. A journey where each of us must taste the bitter cup of death before we receive new life. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15: "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies."

Of course, we will all die, but what's truly needed is death before death. Putting to death any part of us that has no part in Christ is absolutely essential on this journey. It is a lifelong process of intentionally allowing one's being to be molded and transformed into the image of Jesus. There's nothing comfortable about this process. It's quite painful. Are you able to drink that cup? Embrace the bitterness of death right now on this journey, and you'll find that cup grow sweeter, cooler, more nourishing as you progress towards Jerusalem. That bitter cup of death shall become, for us who endure, the cup of everlasting life.

# Thursday, March 5

*By Fr. Timothy Taylor*

## **Jeremiah 17:5-10**

Lent is one of my favorite seasons in the liturgical year. And it's not because I enjoy suffering or inflicting pain and discomfort on myself. Instead, I appreciate the space that Lent creates for me to reflect on my life and examine it in light of God's truth. It's a season where we're exhorted to say no. We are to say no to distractions, no to self-indulgence, and no to cheap entertainment.

And though I say no very imperfectly and very inconsistently, I appreciate the intention of the season. It's a time for me to examine my heart, my activities, and my mind and to see where I've drifted away from God. It's a time of repentance and renewal.

In Jeremiah 17, God tells us that there are two groups of people: those who are blessed and those who are cursed. Those who are cursed walk the path that leads to death. Their hearts are lured away from God, and they focus on themselves and their own needs and desires. Those who are blessed walk the narrow way that leads to life. Their hearts are turned towards God, and their trust is in him.

And every day, we make decisions that lead us down one path or the other. Sometimes we make these decisions unconsciously and find ourselves in far different places than we expected.

But God is gracious, and he has made provisions for us to keep us on the path of the blessed. Lent is one of those gifts. It's a time to examine our hearts and repent. It's a time to grow in holiness and a time to replace habits and practices that are unhelpful or sinful with those that will help us grow in grace and the knowledge of God. Confession, stations of the cross, Lenten devotions, fasting, acts of charity – all of these are good things that return us to the path of the blessed and keep us on it.

And as we take advantage of this season and grow, God will work in us, and we will bear fruit. And the path that we are on will lead us to eternal life and communion with God and the saints. So let us make good use of this season, walk the narrow way, and obtain the life that God has promised to us through his Son. Amen.

# Friday, March 6

*By Fr. Bill Estes*

**Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a**

"They conspired against him to kill him," we read regarding Joseph's brothers in Genesis 37:18.

Joseph's brothers are jealous of him, because of the favor that their father has for him, and because of that jealousy, they conspire to kill him. It's only because of Reuben that Joseph is merely abused and left to suffer (and possibly die) rather than murdered. And then it's only because of Judah that he is pulled back up from the pit and sold into slavery.

God had great plans for Joseph, although that probably wasn't his first thought when being thrown into the pit in the wilderness.

We also know the story of The Exodus, and God's deliverance of his people out of slavery into freedom, and eventually into The Promised Land. But it all begins here. Just as there can be no resurrection without death, there can be no deliverance from slavery without first becoming a slave.

Joseph's slavery, although real, turned out to be relatively brief on one level, although he couldn't have known beforehand that would be the case. He earned favor with Pharaoh, and gained great.

The more difficult slavery would come later for the Israelites, and under a different Pharaoh.

But none of this happens without Joseph first being sold into slavery. Through him and his prophecies, he not only saves his father and brothers from starvation, but also earns Pharaoh's blessing to move his father, Israel (Jacob), and brothers to Egypt, where they are initially blessed and begin to multiply. The Israelites who we read about in the Exodus story are their descendants. The twelve tribes of Israel are named after Joseph and his brothers, as each of them is patriarch of one of the tribes (Manasseh and Ephraim collectively making of the tribe of Joseph).

God often uses trials and sufferings to bring about good and even blessing. It's his nature to do so. We see that through great biblical stories such as this one, but then we struggle to see the same during our own trials and sufferings. When we endure difficulties, the story of Joseph serves as a great reminder to us that we have a loving and merciful God, who is actively at work in our lives to bring about good, even when we can't clearly see him at work.

## Saturday, March 7, St. Perpetua and her Companions

*By Fr. Michael Mobley*

**Luke 15:1-3, 11-32**

I often hear people say that they are trying to find God. However, the truth is that God is more concerned with finding us, than we are with finding him. We see that fact so clearly presented to us in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The father is waiting and watching everyday for his son to return.

"But while [the son] was still at a distance, his father saw him . . ." The father saw him at a distance because he was always watching for his son. He had not written his wayward son off or forgotten him. Rather, he loved his son unconditionally and longed for him to return home.

This is such a beautiful picture of God our Father. When we, his sons and daughters, callously turn our backs on Him and journey into a far country of sin, our heavenly Father patiently waits and watches for us to realize the folly of our sinful choices and return to our home with him.

During the Season of Lent, we can take comfort in God's unconditional love and mercy towards us. God is not vindictive or indifferent towards his children. Nor does he treat us as our sins deserve.

Therefore, if we find ourselves in a far country away from God consumed by sin, we only need to acknowledge, confess, and repent of our sins. This is how we turn, like the son in the parable, towards home. And as we do this, we will find our Father running towards us to receive us with open arms.

My friends, let us approach our heavenly Father without fear of condemnation this Lent. Our Heavenly Father's greatest desire is our reconciliation with him. May we live a holy Lent as we prepare for Easter by confessing our sins, knowing that our God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

## Sunday, March 8, Third Sunday in Lent

*By Fr. Timothy Matkin*

### John 4:5-42

After discerning that Jesus had prophetic power, the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well brought up the age-old controversy about the proper place to worship: "We worship here in our own temple," she told Jesus, "but you Jews insist that people have to go down to Jerusalem."

Jesus responded that the day will soon come when that won't be relevant. It won't matter whether people look to Gerizim or Jerusalem or anywhere else. We live in that blessed time. Worship does not depend on place or time or ethnic group—it depends on Christ and whether or not we are joined to him.

True worship is no longer bound to the Jerusalem temple because Jesus is the new temple and we are his mystical Body. He is the covenant sacrifice, and that sacrifice is made present wherever his people gather for Mass. True worship means living in Jesus, offering ourselves along with Jesus in his sacrifice, and drinking deeply of the waters of grace that come through Jesus.

God is spirit, and our relationship with him is a spiritual one. He is the source of living waters that we need

for eternal life. But we need to admit our thirst, and ask him for a drink. When we drink deeply from the well that is Christ within us, when we drink deeply of the waters of grace that God gives us at the altar, we come to realize that there is one God and Father above, there is one great high priest standing at the altar—his Son Jesus, and there is one great adoring congregation—the Holy Spirit, dwelling in our hearts.

True worship is a lifestyle that is short on words and long in deeds. True worship is an attitude of the heart. True worship is empowered by the Spirit given to dwell in our hearts. True worship is a great responsibility and requires great labor.

The sacrament offered to us is Christ himself—body, soul, and divinity. He is the well of living water, giving us the water of eternal life. When he abides in our hearts, he is our well of life-giving water. Draw near to the well of living water this Lent. Prepare your hearts to meet and to welcome the Lord Jesus once again. When you see him, tell him that you're thirsty, and ask him for a drink.

# Monday, March 9, St. Gregory of Nyssa

*By Mr. Scott Perry (Seminarian)*

## 2 Kings 5:1-15

Naaman the Leper. ~ I was once in a church service during which a small boy, held by his mother, pointed toward the altar and shouted, "God!" Whether in reaction to a depiction of Christ in the marble, a peculiar attention to the words about Christ's presence in the bread and wine, or a simple (if perfectly accurate) apprehension of his presence with us always (Matthew 28:20), it was a striking reminder that "out of the mouths of babes and infants, God has prepared praise" (Matthew 21:16, Psalm 8:2); that it is from sources we do not expect, even in ways we would not want, that God sometimes redirects our attention to himself and to his saving work.

In the story of Naaman, it is from a captured little girl, through the persuasion of Naaman's wife, that he is directed toward his healing by the prophet Elisha. It is not his own wisdom that directs him so, and his "wisdom" exercised in the pursuit proves totally wrongheaded: a "mighty man of valor" (verse 1), and a proud man, he arranges a journey to Israel through the highest ranks of power, and arrives in splendor with riches in hand. But it will not be the king of Israel who heals him, and his riches are irrelevant. When

Elisha instructs him to wash seven times in the Jordan, he balks, expecting instead a dramatic display of divine power (or at least cleaner water!). Finally his servants convince him, and through this string of surprises, and through his abasement, is his restoration: "like a little child, he was clean."

The Church Fathers see in this story a picture of baptism: just as there is a "smallness" and simplicity about the incarnation—God coming to us as a babe in a manger—so God receives us into his Church and imparts his grace to us through the simple stuff of water.

May we attend, this Lent, to the ways in which God calls us to humility, to faith, to hearing his word and keeping it (Luke 11:28), for our restoration; God to whom we pray in the baptismal rite, "by water and the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon your servants the forgiveness of sin, received them as your own children by adoption, made them members of your holy Church, and raised them to the new life of grace. Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit, that they may enjoy everlasting salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

# Tuesday, March 10,

*By Fr. Mark Polley*

## Matthew 18:21-35

Our Gospel reading today comes during a series of teachings and parables from our Lord – discipline, marriage, commandments, and generosity.

The teaching of today is on the topic of forgiveness. To be sure, every one of us have sinned against God and others, and every one of us have been sinned against by someone else. They are intimately related, and our Lord knows this. In the prayer he taught us, the relationship and the equation is made clear: “And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

The challenge is that forgiveness is not optional. Whether big or small, intentional or not, frequent or seldom – our one option is to forgive those who have sinned and hurt us. The beautiful thing is that this is because God forgives us! St. Paul writes that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus – and He shows his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 8:39 and 5:8, paraphrased).

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant is Jesus’ teaching answer to St. Peter’s question: “How often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?” We might say, “What’s the least I have to do...what’s the minimum?” The parable that

follows is not about the least we have to do – but the most we are called to do. The most we can love; the most we can have mercy; the most we can forgive.

Perhaps we can close today by offering practical suggestions on becoming a better forgiver: First, keep your own sins frequently before our mind’s eye, knowing that we are all sinners in need of the forgiveness of God. Second, forgive others quickly. Don’t give time for sins and offenses to both settle and percolate: seek forgiveness and reconciliation quickly. Third, forgive through a concrete act or concrete sign. Write a note, make a phone call, give a gift or flowers, offer your own presence. Forgiveness is most effective when it becomes concrete. Finally, make use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation – especially during this season of Lent. God bless you.

# Wednesday, March 11

*By Fr. Andrew Brummett*

## Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9

In Deuteronomy 4:5, Moses points out that he has taught the people of Israel "statutes and rules, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land." The people had heard the Ten Commandments that God spoke (Deut. 4:13), but the people asked for Moses to stand before God on their behalf to hear the rest of what God had to say (5:22-27). God approved their request and told Moses to stand before Him to learn the "whole commandment and the statutes and the rules that you shall teach them" (Deut. 5:28-31).

Understanding the difference between the "Ten Commandments" and the "statutes and rules" helps us grow in our understanding of how to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The Ten Commandments (better translated as the "Ten Words" or Decalogue, found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5) are actually ten timeless principles to help us love God and others. The many case-laws that God revealed to Moses (Exodus 21-23) and that Moses teaches to Israel (Deut. 6-25) are specific contextual applications of those ten timeless principles.

As timeless principles of how to live according to God's character, the Ten

Words are not merely for ancient Israelites or Jews. These principles are transcultural in nature. That is, they apply to all humans, all societies, and all cultures in all places and at all times. The case-laws sometimes don't apply to us in our world because there are differences culturally between the Ancient Near East and our society today, but the general principles absolutely apply. Nevertheless, some case-laws do apply to us because our world is still very similar to theirs and human nature is a constant throughout history. Case-laws that our society deeply desires to make contextual, especially those regarding men, women, and sexuality, these are the ones that are the most transcultural in nature, because they are rooted in human nature itself, that "male and female [God] created them" (Gen. 1:27).

Discerning with the help of the Holy Spirit how the Ten Timeless Principles apply in our cultural context is the work of the Church in every generation and among every people group. We, like ancient Israel, will be regarded as a "wise and understanding people" when we understand and put these into practice, thus becoming more like Jesus.

# Thursday, March 12, St. Gregory the Great

By Fr. Charles Humphrey

## Luke 11:14-23

Luke 11:14-23 shows Jesus casting a demon out of a man who cannot speak. Many rejoice over this obvious miracle, but others respond that the power at work in Jesus is not from God but from the Devil. And this is where the battle for the hearts of men takes place: not simply in illness or affliction, but in how we interpret the work of God when it confronts our assumptions.

Jesus goes on to explain that the claim he drove out demons by the power of demons, was not only illogical, but failed to apprehend the moment entirely. The accusers missed the beauty of God's kingdom breaking into the world, displacing the illegitimate powers that had ruled over this fallen Earth for far too long.

The "strong man" of this world was well armed, on guard and believed his house was secure. But Jesus spoke of one who was stronger than the "strong man", of one who invaded, overpowered, and reclaimed what had been held captive. This was not polite religion. It was rescue, a liberation that would absolutely succeed, but come at the unimaginable cost of the cross.

Lent invites us to locate ourselves honestly within this story. We may prefer to occupy the neutral ground,

to admire Jesus from a distance without committing ourselves. But in the fight for the souls of men, Jesus does not allow a neutral space. *"Whoever is not with me is against me."* And this is not a threat, but a diagnosis of our situation.

Lent exposes not only obvious wrongdoing but subtler loyalties—habits, fears, and distractions we have allowed to take up residence in the house of our lives. The question is not whether we are busy or successful or even religious, but who truly rules the space within us.

The one who confronts the strong man is also the healer who restores speech and life. Jesus Christ, the one stronger than the "strong man", came not to bind the world, but to free it from oppression. To choose Christ, to fall under his authority and Lordship, is not to lose ourselves, but to be gathered, to made whole, and given back our place as those who bear His life and light.

In this Lenten season, pray for the courage to recognize where God's kingdom is pressing in, to renounce rival loyalties, and to place ourselves fully on the side of the one who is stronger than all that binds us.

# Friday, March 13

*By Fr. Alan Horton*

## Hosea 14:2-10

Our lesson for today comes from the final chapter of the Book of the Prophet Hosea. Hosea was prophesying primarily to the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the tumultuous years leading up to their exile and destruction at the hands of the Assyrians. The life of Hosea served as an object lesson to Israel, as God instructed him to take a "wife of whoredom," framing Israel's relationship to God as that of an adulterous wife to a faithful and loving husband who relentlessly pursues his beloved. The bulk of the book is filled with oracles of judgment and prophecies of punishment. But here at the end, Hosea offers a message of restoration and reconciliation.

The lesson of Hosea's lopsided marriage demanded that Israel view their sins not simply as rule-breaking or poor decision-making, but as unfaithfulness. In placing their trust in foreign powers or military might, they wounded their relationship with God.

In the worship of other gods, they turned their backs on their first love—the one true God who desired nothing more than to love them, heal them, protect them, and provide for them.

We too must view our own sins in the same way. Whenever we choose to place our trust in the things of this world—wealth, power, or influence—instead of God, we mirror the unfaithfulness of Israel. Whenever we pursue our own selfish desires through dishonesty or the exploitation of our neighbor, we turn our backs on the God who has bound himself to us in love.

And yet Hosea reminds us that God's capacity for forgiveness knows no bounds. God, like Hosea, has redeemed his bride at great cost. When we return to him in repentance and renewed faithfulness, God reconciles us to himself, restores what has been broken, and causes life to flourish once again. In his infinite love and mercy, God is ever eager to forgive, drawing us into the peace and security that only he can give.

# Saturday, March 14

By Fr. Sergio Diaz

## Luke 18:9-14

In this Lenten season, we place ourselves in God's presence. We quiet our inner selves, breathe calmly, and ask the Lord for the grace to see ourselves as He sees us, without masks or justifications. "Lord, open my heart to hear your Word and allow myself to be transformed by it."

Jesus presents us with two attitudes of the heart.

*The Pharisee* stands before God full of self-assurance. He prays, but he does not dialogue with God: he compares himself to others, he exalts himself, he justifies himself. He follows the rules, but his heart is closed. He doesn't need conversion... or so he thinks.

*The tax collector*, on the other hand, doesn't even dare to lift his eyes. He acknowledges his poverty, his sin, his need for mercy. His prayer is brief, sincere, and comes from the depths of his heart.

### Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, today I come to You as I am, with my strengths and my weaknesses. Deliver me from spiritual pride and give me a humble and sincere heart. May I not boast in my works, but always trust in your mercy. Like the tax collector, today I say to You: have mercy on me, Lord, for I am a sinner. Amen.

During Lent, this parable challenges us powerfully:

- From where do I present myself before God?
- From my merits or from my need?
- Do I compare myself to others to feel "better"?
- Do I recognize that I need God's mercy every day?

God does not reject the repentant sinner, but He does resist the proud heart. True conversion begins when we stop justifying ourselves and begin to trust fully in God's mercy.

### Personal Examination

In silence, we can ask ourselves:

- What attitudes of the Pharisee do I discover in myself?
- What is difficult for me to acknowledge before God?
- Am I humble enough to ask for forgiveness and change?

This is a good time to offer our weaknesses to the Lord, without fear.

## Sunday, March 15, Fourth Sunday in Lent

By Fr. Joel Hampton

John 9:1-13, 28-41

Today, the Gospel for Mass depicts Jesus, while establishing His Kingdom, encountering a man blind from birth. Never in his life has he seen light. Jesus shows His gracious and sovereign rule in choosing this man, to make manifest the Glory of God.

In St. John 8:12, Jesus says that He is "the light of the world." This man born blind is a sign and symbol of each of us sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. The blind man cannot see and never has. His light is only and always darkness.

"Behold, I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin hath my mother conceived me." So Psalm 51:5 says, and so we confess, kneeling, on Ash Wednesday, a reminder that we are spiritually blind, by nature.

None of us can see the light until God opens our eyes. In the Church, baptism is spoken of, among other images, as our illumination, the enlightening of our eyes, in the gift of new life through the creative act of the Holy Spirit in the font. Jesus, all gracious and all sovereign, wills the healing of the man born blind.

In an act of re-creation, reminiscent of Genesis, Jesus takes the shapeless, formless earth and, rather than making man, remakes a man. He spits on the soil, makes clay, and anoints the eyes of the blind man, sending him to wash in the Pool of Siloam.

St. John doesn't tell us precisely when this act of re-creation occurs, only that the man born blind returns from Siloam seeing. The man born blind but now sighted believes that the One Who performed this miracle is the Son of Man. Jesus is our gracious and sovereign Lord and King.

As loyal and faithful subjects, where He sends, we go, what He commands, we do. Jesus is our only hope in life and in death.

St. Paul writes to St. Timothy (II Timothy 1:8-10a) that Jesus is He "who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which *now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.*"

# Monday, March 16

By Mr. Clifton Rogge III (Seminarian)

## Isaiah 65:17-21

One of our existential ironies as finite creatures is that we are allergic to change. Change implies a reconfiguring of particular certainties we have come to rely on. Routines, relationships, any sense of automation and control wanes as change cycles through our life. And yet the changing colors of autumn, or the verdant flourishing of springtime fields emerging from winter's barrenness, bring about pleasant feelings. Moreover, the birth of a child, a profound change in one's life, is one of the most joyous occasions. These indeed are moments of change, but they are moments marked by God's presence: the splendorous beauty in autumn, the hope of renewal in spring, and the wonder of God's image in human life.

Encountering God in a season of change reduces our allergic reaction such that we welcome change with gladness. It is not change itself therefore that causes us to resist its inevitability. Rather, it is what has plagued change since the Fall that gives us pause: the reality of loss, diagnosed aptly in the title of Milton's epic poem, *Paradise Lost*. Adam and Eve underwent change in the form of loss when they turned from God,

transitioning from the reality of goodness to the reality of sin, the *privatio boni*. In a world burdened by sin, change is an inevitable as loss. Stability thus becomes our attempt to retain the good.

To upset that stability, to change, is to upset what we believe to be good and right. But consider that God issues forth change in the creative act. Genesis 1 begins with light and moves to the creation of earth, living creatures, and human beings. Change as God wills it is the propagation of life. The change that God brings to our soul in baptism is the propagation of himself to our mortal being through the Spirit of his Son. There we are changed from finite to eternal life.

God has promised to do the same to all of creation when Christ returns to reign on earth, where our mortal bodies will be "changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52), fulfilling the resurrection of our bodies made possible by the resurrection of Christ Jesus. The change that God will bring at the end of time indeed involves loss, but it is replacement rather than subtraction, death replaced with life, sorrow with joy, ruin with paradise.

## Tuesday, March 17, St. Patrick of Armagh

By Fr. Kurt Hein

### Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12

*"Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold... the water was trickling out on the south side... And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes." - Ezekiel 47:1,2,9*

I treasure memories of playing in the waves of the Atlantic Ocean as a small child. It was great fun until I failed to properly anticipate the incoming waves. Then the power of the ocean would smash me into the sand and fill my mouth and nostrils with stinging salt water. Drinking ocean water is a very unpleasant experience.

In a vision, the prophet Ezekiel sees fresh water pouring forth from the side of the Temple. The water quickly expands into an ankle-deep spring, then a knee-deep stream, then a waste-deep river, and then finally becomes an impassable torrent. This supernatural water floods the arid desert, bringing with it abundant plant and animal life until it transforms even the salty sea into fresh water teeming with fish. Wherever the river goes, there is life.

The season of Lent can become a walk through the spiritual desert. In the disciplines of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving we reencounter the great dryness and bareness of our spiritual lives.

We begin with noble intentions to bring our bodily desires into submission, but those desires rise up to rule over us.

"Because of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright." On this journey of life, we need Jesus! We stand in perpetual need of the supernatural living water, which flowed from Christ's pierced side upon the cross. The river which began as a trickle on mount Calvary, flows through 2,000 years of his Church to become a mighty torrent. The waters of baptism continue to flood the nations with forgiveness and transform the selfishness of parched hearts and brackish souls into a fruitful garden of eternal life.

When we fail, let us remember our baptisms by confessing our sins and drinking deeply of the Christ's forgiveness and empowering Spirit, for "everything will live where the river goes." Amen.

## Wednesday, March 18, St. Cyril of Jerusalem

*By Deacon Kerwin Wade*

### John 5:17-30

Today we remember St. Cyril of Jerusalem, an early 4th Century Bishop and defender of the Nicene Faith, a Pillar of Faith and known for his catechism and exposition on the Eucharistic Liturgy. For his learning he was recognized as a doctor of the church in 1883 by Pope Leo XIII. For today we read John 5:17-30.

This portion of St. John's gospel focuses on the relationship between Jesus and His Father. Jesus being in the Father and the Father in the Son.

St. John points out that he can do nothing without the Father. What struck me is in the last verse, "I (Jesus) can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just because I seek not My own will but the will of him who sent me." (John 5:30).

During Lent one of the main purposes of this season is to seek a closer relationship with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. The Holy Church has given us the means to do such.

Whether it is reading the scriptures, helping the poor and needy (either physically, mentally or spiritually), self discipline, (the taking on or giving up) , and by prayer we strive to become closer to God. We also have the gift of the Church's teachings and the Church's liturgy. Through the Book of Common Prayer, we have a gift that the Church has given us, focusing on Scripture, Prayers and Liturgy. Our guide is in one book and not necessarily in the numerous books of St. Cyril.

As St. Cyril expounded upon the liturgy, we have that same gift given to us to grow in our closeness to God, using the Book of Common Prayer and through the Liturgy of the church. So we do not seek with our own will but with Him who sent Him. With Him and through Him and by Him we can do his will in Earth as it is in heaven and grow in our closeness to Him during this season and throughout the year.

## Thursday, March 19, St. Joseph

By Fr. Joseph Francis

Luke 2:41-52

In case you didn't know, the company "Sock Religious" makes some wonderful saint-themed socks. I have maybe a dozen different pairs. If you look on the bottom of the foot, most pairs have a quote from the saint depicted on the leg. For example, the St Dominic socks say, "Arm yourself with prayer rather than a sword."

If you look on the bottom of the St. Joseph pair, however, you will see this: " " -St Joseph.

The reason for the *empty* quotation is that the foster-father of Our Lord does not say a single word in the Gospels! I didn't believe it the first time someone told me that. But I checked, and it is correct. In the Bible, St Joseph is a man of actions, not a man of words. He listens to the prompting of God, and he reacts with obedience and faith. We may fruitfully ponder the substance of his inner life, but ultimately, we know him simply by what he does outwardly. He responded to the message of the angel.

He embraced Our Lady and takes the infant Christ to be his own. He was a righteous man who lived according to the Law.

In the flight to Egypt, he led his family away from danger. He searched diligently for Jesus and found him in the Temple. He raised Christ, and the Son of God became obedient to his earthly father by adoption.

Though he fades from the biblical story, St Joseph no doubt died in the care of Our Lady and Our Lord - and thus becomes the patron of a good death. He is the guardian of the Holy Family, and so his is the guardian of the mystical family of Christ's Church. Though men in particular ought to look to St Joseph as an example of fatherhood (both spiritual and biological), all Christians may find in him a faithful intercessor.

A traditional title for St Joseph is the "Terror of Demons." Why? Because evil flees from faithful men and women who hear the word of God and act upon it. St Joseph - pray for us!

## Friday, March 20, St. Cuthbert

By Fr. Jeffrey Poirot

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

*"But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from." So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know." John 7:27-28*

Think for a moment about the sermons you have heard over the years, the many times you have read Sacred Scripture, studied it and prayed with it. Think of the countless Sunday School classes you have attended and even spiritual writings you have spent time with. All of those things have helped you to know who Jesus is. Yet is all of that enough? Or is there more?

Through our journey of faith we get to know Jesus and so it can be quite common for us to think that we know Him well and how Christ works in our lives and in the world around us. However, when we begin to believe that, have we become just like the crowd in this Gospel?

Have we begun to actually place limits on Christ and how He works in our lives and in the lives of others?

Jesus is telling the crowd that they think that they know him and where he is from but as we know, it is God the Father who sent Jesus and with God the Father and Jesus there are no limits to them.

Let us take a moment to reflect on whether we have put limits on the working of Christ in our lives. Have we put limits on the forgiveness of Christ? Have we put limits on the love of Christ for ourselves or for those that we find it difficult to love? Have we put limits on how Christ can change us during this Lenten season to be a people who have grown in faith, hope and love?

## Saturday, March 21, Blessed Thomas Cranmer

*By Fr. Jonathan Mohler*

### Jeremiah 11:18-20

Jeremiah speaks from a place of painful clarity: "It was the Lord who made it known to me, and I knew; then you showed me their evil deeds." The prophet discovers that faithfulness does not shield him from suffering. In fact, it is precisely his obedience that exposes him to danger. He is like "a gentle lamb led to the slaughter," unaware of the plot against him until God reveals it. Yet even in this moment of betrayal, Jeremiah does not turn inward or lash out. He turns toward God.

What stands out in this passage is not Jeremiah's fear, but his trust. He entrusts his cause to "the Lord of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind."

Jeremiah does not deny the reality of the threat, nor does he pretend that faith makes the pain less real. Instead, he places his vulnerability in God's hands. His call for vengeance may seem startling, but what he is really asking is for his trust to be vindicated. The Lord is a righteous judge, and Jeremiah is surrendering to his righteous judgment.

This movement—from fear to trust, from threat to surrender—is deeply familiar to anyone who faithfully serves the Lord.

Much of our ministry happens out of sight, without applause, and sometimes without understanding. There are days when the work feels heavy, when motives are questioned, or when the cost of faithfulness feels higher than expected. Yet like Jeremiah, we are invited to bring our whole selves—our labor, our wounds, our hopes—before the God who sees.

Jeremiah reminds us that God sees what others overlook. God sees the faithfulness that happens in the shadows. God sees the hands that prepare the holy things. God sees the heart that keeps showing up, even when the work is costly. And he judges righteously.

To entrust our cause to God is to believe that nothing done in loving faithfulness is wasted. It is to believe that our labor—however hidden—can become a prayer. In Jeremiah's surrender, we glimpse our own calling: to offer our work to the God who sees, and in that offering, to discover that we are already held. This trust, this surrender may not make it better. It may even make it worse, but the righteous judge sees. To whom else could I commit our cause?

## Sunday, March 22, Fifth Sunday in Lent

By Fr. Jeffrey Logan

John 11:1-44

*"Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." – Romans 5:3-5*

Recently, I enjoyed a dinner with some parishioners and a couple of students from the Brazos Fellows (a year long program featuring prayer, study, work, and community connected to Christ Church Waco).

The subject of Hell became a lively, all-evening, round-table discussion. Much of the discussion centered on what Hell was, who was there, and how bad was it (think picante sauce- mild or hot!), however an interesting side topic was about the Lord's discipline on believers versus consequences of one's sins, a knotty issue of discernment, and a question seemingly arising from Hebrews 12:5-6.

My response was to look at the cause of the discipline: something I have done (sin's consequences) or something whose cause is out of my control (potentially God's discipline).

That doesn't fully answer the question, but opens to the discernment door as to the purpose of the discipline.

Discipline, self-imposed or heavenly, is a means to purify, prepare, refine, distill, and improve. We are on a journey towards eternalness, but which way are you heading? The Lord is working on and with us to bring His redeemed to His glory. Lent is a wonderful season to remove impurities of our souls, clarify our hearts and minds, rectify our relationship with the Lord, and concentrate on the joys to come! In this way, we ensure we are moving towards heaven, not slouching away from His glory.

Do not regret God's discipline, for like any good parent, He is assisting to make the present life better and prepping us for the one to come. Come, Lord Jesus!

## Monday, March 23, St. Gregory the Illuminator

By Fr. Jacob Hootman

### John 8:1-11

And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

This episode from life of Christ describes the attempted stoning of a woman accused of an act of adultery. The plain sense of the text would indicate that she was actually caught in the act, and in Leviticus 20:10, the prescribed punishment for adultery is death. This should be a fairly open and shut, though by modern standards brutal, application of justice. She has sinned - she is condemned to death.

The Pharisees seek to test Christ - their stomach for public execution was not that much greater than ours - and so they ask him:

*Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?*

They think they've caught him in a trap - that Jesus, a man regarded for his compassion, might be forced to condemn her to death.

His response is informative:  
*Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.*

In this, he acknowledges several things. First, she is guilty of sin. Secondly, as Saint Paul would say, the wages of sin are death. His third point, however, is perhaps the most prescient. He asks, Who is not without sin?

The crowd slowly leaves, and Jesus has one final interaction with the woman:

*Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."*

So too, beloved, is it with our sin. We are all guilty of violating the law of God in some way or another, but in Christ is found the grace of forgiveness and absolution. To conclude, I am reminded of the verse from 1 St. John 8, which has given me for some time the interpretation of this text:

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

## Tuesday, March 24, St. Gabriel the Archangel

*By Fr. Scott Wilson*

**John 8:21-30**

Do you love this world? Or do you love God? Do you love the things of this world? Or do you love Jesus? One cannot have it both ways.

In I John 2, the apostle John admonishes Christians, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world." And St. James writes, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility towards God?" (James 4:4).

The world in which we live belongs to Satan. Satan has an authority in this world. We live in this world temporarily, but we must pass on through this world to the next. And while we are here in the world, we must be careful not to get too wrapped up in what it has to offer.

Christians are here on this earth on a temporary status. We live in this world, we have been sent into this world. But we are living here for only a period of time, serving as agents of God's light and love. And we must be careful not to get too attached to anything this world has to offer. I feel like living in this world is a little like if I were to visit a cactus store. I can look, admire what I see, be impressed with what they have produced. But I must be very careful not to touch. It will hurt.

In this passage of scripture from John, chapter 8, Jesus says to the Pharisees, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world; I am not of this world." Jesus is of the kingdom of heaven above. And when we believe in him and are baptized, the Holy Spirit moves into our lives and begins transforming us. God makes us of His kingdom, so that we are no longer of this world, but of the kingdom of God. We are here and will remain for an appointed period of time, because we are sent here to represent the kingdom of God to the rest of the world.

The period of Lent is a good time to remember we must never allow ourselves to be too attached to this world or the many things it has to offer. But keep in mind the admonition of Paul always to, "Set our mind on the things above - the things of God's kingdom - not on the things that are on earth." Jesus will care for us, protect us, and provide for us while we are here. "Trust Me," He says. So we live our life for Him now, representing him and his kingdom to all of the fallen world. Then, we shall live with Him into eternity.

## Wednesday, March 25, Annunciation of Our Lady

By Fr. Dwight Duncan

Luke 1:26-38

*When I find myself in times of trouble  
Mother Mary comes to me  
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be  
And in my hour of darkness  
She is standing right in front of me  
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be*

So sang Paul McCartney, of Beatle fame. When asked to whom he was referring, he spoke of a dream, at a troubled time in his life, in which his mother, Mary, who had died of cancer when he was 14, appeared, telling him, "It will be all right. Just let it be." He awoke, comforted and inspired.

Not surprising. It has been so for millions of folk down the centuries, for at those words, spoken by a young Jewish maiden to an emissary from God, God was able to enter the world he had created out of love and which had turned its back on him ... and, as one of his own creatures, woo that world back to himself, even from a bloody cross. Never would that have been possible, if not for that maiden's "Let it be to me according to thy word."

**That** maiden: Mary by name, and by grace, the very Wisdom of God ... that one soul among all souls whose love for God wanted what he wanted: to tabernacle himself in our midst so that he might raise us up to his ... forever.

**That** maiden, whose courage, joined to her love, empowered her to embrace a great storm of soul all her days, because of her willingness to carry, to nurture and to support all his days the child begotten as the Son of God, and son of Mary.

A fine Anglican theologian, John MacQuarrie, has said: "What we see in Mary, we ought to see in the Church." Which brings it home to you and me: What we see in Mary, we ought to see becoming present in every member of the Church. Lent is a time for us to step forward, to go down deeper, into what it means for us to be God's children, brethren of Jesus ... for our love for God and our courage in submitting to him and allowing him to enter the world through us to expand towards the breadth of Mary's.

And the possibility of that being achieved with us can be greatly aided by our going to the mother Jesus gave us from the foot of his cross, asking her: "Mother, help me, that it may become with me for God as it was with thee by thy word."

**Let it be.**

# Thursday, March 26

By Fr. Kenneth Clark Lopez

## John 8:51-59

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." - John 8:58*

John, more than any other evangelist, records the sour arguments that went on between Jesus and the religious establishment of His day, who seem to constantly attack Him and attempt to draw Him into various rhetorical traps. In today's example, Jesus seems particularly direct and forceful in just such a discussion.

His interlocutors abruptly accuse Jesus of being a Samaritan, not a Jew, then immediately ask if He is possessed by a demon. This begins a discussion that Jesus uses to assert His divinity - a prominent feature of John's Gospel.

But here, let's take a step back and view the wider picture of this scene. On one side, we have carefully educated Jewish religious authorities angrily claiming any argument or smear they can imagine in order to rebuke Jesus. On the other side is Jesus Himself, the Creator of all things, the God who spoke to Abraham, the God who gave Moses the Law, the King of the universe. And He rebukes the authorities by speaking His own divine name - a word that the Jews recognize to be so taboo that it cannot be uttered for almost any reason.

The picture becomes comical: the Jews can only see in terms of rule and regulation, of prophet and law, and they use it exclusively to argue against the author of the law and the voice of the prophets. And that fulfillment of the law, Jesus Himself, violates none of those laws Himself, only breaking their strongest taboo in declaring Himself to be the I AM, the God who is perfect existence.

It is important to take care in our study of scripture and Theology. But we would lose every possible value from knowledge of our Savior if we remove ourselves from Him and following His word in humility. We lose all benefit of knowing anything true if we imagine any of it to be from ourselves. We have, through Jesus Christ alone, the perfect gift of eternal life. But it is important to see the forest for all of the trees of scripture, of theology and of reality. One thing is needful: to accept the perfect Word, Jesus Christ, True God and True Man; all else must flow from that singular font of reality. All else is downstream. We can enjoy the gift of life both now and forever, not because we know, not because we do, but because HE IS.

## Friday, March 27, Blessed Charles Henry Brent

By Fr. Andrew Petta

### John 10:31-42

*The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" - John 10:31-32*

It is always striking at the end of one of the most profound and pastoral teachings of Jesus, in John 10, that we arrive at this response of the people. We can often try to justify it contextually by pointing to the profound "I am" statements that precede it in verses 22-30. While it does provide context, it does not dismiss the reality that the response to Jesus does not leave much middle ground beyond either embracing Him or expelling Him from their lives.

In verse 34, as Jesus quotes Psalm 86:2, if human judges are called 'gods' in the way they adjudicate and make decisions, how much more is this title befitting of the Son of God. In pointing to the authority of the Scriptures, in verse 35, and its reliability, those listening then must either accept or reject the One consecrated (v. 36) and sent into the world for the very purpose of its redemption. Those gathered are confronted not simply with the acceptance of an intellectual choice but the embracing of the authority of Jesus, to whom the whole of the Scriptures point. Embracing Him as God beyond a mere title or simply as adjudicator of decisions in their

lives would reorder their very lives. It would lead them to see He fulfills the Law in Himself, calling them to follow Him among all the religious sects and schools of the day, and among all the leaders in the culture of the day.

Today the same is no less true, inciting a response from us daily. We must embrace Him in faith, but also through the very ordering of our days. Where does the authority of Jesus lead us to want to dispense of Him? Where does it meddle in our calendar, checkbooks, and culture? Where do we need to lay down our stones of our own expectations, machinations, and making and follow Him more closely as those in verse 42 did?

In these final days of Lent, as we reflect upon the reason for which Jesus came, to redeem us, we are called to wrestle with these questions not simply in the perseverance in Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. But to consider how such practices will reshape us during Eastertide and beyond as we embrace Him as both Lord and God of our lives.

# Saturday, March 28

*By Fr. Salvador Ordonez*

**Ezekiel 37:21-28 John 11:45-56**

After Jesus raises Lazarus, Saint John tells us that the miracle does more than amaze the crowds. It awakens faith in many, and it awakens fear in others. The chief priests and Pharisees gather a council, anxious about what Jesus will do next and what will happen to them if the people keep believing in him.

At the center stands Caiaphas. He speaks a true prophecy he does not understand: that "it is expedient that one man should die for the people." He hears those words only through the lens of his own anxiety. If Jesus dies, perhaps he can preserve his position, his influence, his fragile sense of control. The death of the Messiah, to him, is not salvation but a strategy.

It is easy to shake our heads at Caiaphas, but his fear is not so foreign. We, too, feel the tremor that runs through carefully laid plans when Christ draws near and calls us to follow. We fear what obedience might cost: our comforts, our habits, our cherished sins, even the story we tell ourselves

about our lives. We want God to bless the life we already have, not to lead us into a life we cannot yet imagine.

Yet the Gospel reveals that the death of Jesus is not a threat to what is truly good in us; it is the revelation of love. On the cross he lays down his life for the world, and in doing so he unmasks our fears for what they are: a reluctance to trust love more than we trust our own control. "Hereby perceive we the love of God," writes Saint John, "because he laid down his life for us."

As we draw near to Holy Week, the question presses on us: what in us must die with Christ? He has already died for you, for me. Now it is our turn to die to envy and pride, to greed and lust, to the quiet resentments and stubborn self-will that keep us from loving as he loves. In these days of preparation, ask him plainly: "Lord, show me what must die, that your love might live more fully in me, in my home, and in your Church."

# Palm Sunday, March 29

*By Bishop Kieth Ackerman*

**Matt 21:1-11**

Upon retiring as Bishop of Quincy, Bishop Iker informed me, "I need you to serve at St. Timothy's." It was a great honor. Their Palm Sunday liturgy was extraordinary, featuring a Donkey, a colt, numerous men dressed as Roman soldiers standing on the church roof, and a long process with various banner bearers, and Flabella (ostrich feather plumes.)

The event required much preparation. Many people were asked to serve. (Bishop Ackerman needs you.) From praying for good weather to planning for singing music outside in a long procession, to checking that the three men who would sing the Passion were ready. It was a very busy time.

Having had the privilege of being in the Holy Land fifteen times, and walking the Palm Sunday route each time, I remember wondering in the midst of my first Palm Sunday at St. Timothy's if the first Palm Sunday had been this complicated.

We really don't know, do we? How spontaneous was it? Was the route predetermined? Did the Apostles know where their place in the procession was? Was there any quibbling over whether olive

branches were better than palm branches? Did the people understand the significance of this event? Was there an early morning rehearsal? Of course, these questions are both unanswerable and even irrelevant in terms of what was really happening.

The only Begotten Son of God was making His triumphant Entry into the Holy City of Jerusalem. Who could possibly know what would happen in the next few days. "Hosanna to the Son of David," the crowd shouted. Days later the crowd would shout again. However on this day they shouted "Hosanna" (save us). In just a matter of days that is exactly what He did.

When the two disciples were sent by Jesus to secure the donkey and the colt, He told them that if asked, they simply needed to say, "The Lord needs them." Very few of us have ever been given something freely by just saying those words. Those are the words that Jesus is speaking to you today.

No rehearsal required. The Lord needs you. He needs your hands, He needs your voices, and He needs your heart. What is your response to the Lord this Palm Sunday?

# Monday, March 30, Monday in Holy Week

*By Fr. Randall Foster*

## Mark 14:3-9

At the beginning of every Eucharist, we are reminded of the Great Commandment to “love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Lent calls upon us to examine the ways in which we have failed to manifest that all-encompassing love for our Lord.

In the Anointing at Bethany we meet a woman who seizes the opportunity to show just such total devotion to our Lord in a dramatic gesture. She pours out her love for our Savior in physical form, sacrificing an alabaster jar of pure nard to anoint him beforehand for burial.

This woman displays spiritual discernment of uncommon clarity. While the bystanders see only the waste of a valuable resource, she alone understands what is ahead for Jesus— the agony of the cross and the silence of a borrowed tomb — and she gives extravagantly in response.

Knowing that Christ will soon yield up His own precious life for her, she offers a costly ointment in return. But her most valuable gift is her love, the unbridled gratitude of her soul.

Each Lent we have an opportunity to follow in this holy woman’s footsteps, lovingly offering up our lives anew as Christ’s Passion awaits. Tearing through the veil of sin that obscures the truth of His saving love, we are sharpening our own spiritual discernment by repentance, prayer, and acts of self-denial.

At the same time, Lent calls upon us to show our devotion through positive acts of love and service. As we approach the annual commemoration of our Lord’s precious death and burial, may we be given the grace— as the woman with the alabaster jar was—to offer up that which is most precious within us for His honor and glory.

## Tuesday, March 31, Tuesday in Holy Week

*By Fr. Sandy Herrmann*

### Corinthians 1:18-31

In this passage from I Corinthians, the Apostle Paul presents a profound paradox: the message of the cross is “foolishness” to those who are perishing, but to those being saved, it is the very power of God. As we reflect on this passage during Tuesday of Holy Week, we are invited to step into the mystery and humility of Christ’s sacrifice, recognizing that God’s wisdom and power are revealed in ways that upend human expectations and values.

While the world prizes wisdom, eloquence, wealth, and strength, Saint Paul insists that God chose what appears weak, foolish, and despised to demonstrate His glory. The cross, a scandal and stumbling block to many, stands as God’s definitive statement about the nature of true wisdom and strength. It is in the suffering, humility, and apparent defeat of Jesus that we encounter the greatest victory—God reconciling the world to Himself through love. This is not the wisdom of philosophers or the power sought by rulers, but the radical, upside-down wisdom of a God who meets us in our brokenness and offers redemption through self-giving love.

Saint Paul’s words challenge us to examine our own hearts. Do we, like the Corinthians, sometimes chase after worldly status, intelligence, or accolades, forgetting that our identity is found in Christ alone? The reminder that “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise” invites us to embrace humility and dependence on God. Our worth is not measured by achievements or social standing but by God’s gracious call. In Christ, we are made new—not because of human merit, but because of God’s initiative and love. We love because Jesus first loved us.

Holy Week only comes once a year and it is the best time to meditate on these truths. As we journey with Jesus toward the cross, we are called to lay aside pride, self-reliance, and the desire for worldly approval. We are invited instead to marvel at God’s wisdom revealed in weakness, to find hope in Christ’s suffering, and to boast only in the Lord. In doing so, we open ourselves to the transformative power of the cross, which continues to confound the wise and offer salvation to all who believe.

## Wednesday, April 1, Wednesday in Holy Week

*By Fr. David Klein*

### Matthew 26:1-5,14-25

Holy Week is the most sacred week of the Christian year, with each day filled with words and events surrounding the final days of Jesus' earthly life. Today, Caiaphas gathered with his chief priests and elders to discuss how "to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him." It's also the day Judas made plans to betray Jesus. (Matt. 26:14-16) The betrayal is the focus of this meditation, and it has given Holy Wednesday the name "Spy Wednesday."

Jesus was betrayed with thirty pieces of silver. This amount is stipulated in Mosaic law as compensation for a slain slave. (Ex. 21:32) Clearly this is how Judas and the Temple hierarchy saw Jesus. The deal led to Jesus' arrest and execution. As described in the Gospel of Luke, Judas pointed out Jesus by giving him a "kiss" (Luke 22:47-48), a gesture usually meant to express peace between two people.

As we hear once again the details of the betrayal, Matthew wants us to consider our own actions and thoughts that have easily led us astray from Christian principles, like Judas. Matthew earlier contrasts this as the "narrow gate" and the "wide and easy road." Following Jesus is not easy—it has never been. Instead of choosing the narrow and more

challenging gate we opt for the easy less demanding way. As followers of Christ, we must always exert ourselves, even struggle daily, to enter the "narrow gate" and attain eternal life. (Matt. 7:13) Paul likens this to being an athlete who must prepare, train diligently, and stay dedicated throughout the contest. (1 Cor. 9:24)

It's easy to give in to compromises in life. Although Judas had positive intentions at first, good intentions by themselves don't lead to a successful outcome. True desire requires persistence, challenges, growth, and unwavering faith in God's word and sacraments to stay focused on the goal—God's advancing kingdom. Regardless of our past or what the world speaks around us, we can always receive grace upon grace (Jn 1:16), forgiveness and real renewal through faith in the power of the cross.

The answer to the challenges we face in life will be found within a few days. We will soon come together before the cross again. Christian living is about allowing the power of that cross to cultivate newness of life within our soul and forge fellowship with our risen Savior, both in this life and in the life to come.

# Maundy Thursday, April 2

By Fr. Richard Daly

1 Cor 11:23-34 & John 13:1-15

*"If only I could just see and touch you, Lord.  
If only I could have been there when you lived on the earth.  
I know I would love you more.  
I know I would serve you as you commanded."*

On this night that He was betrayed, the Lord Jesus institutes for us the Holy Eucharist as an "anamnesis" of His passion. We often translate this Greek word as, "remembrance". That is not accurate. The word can best be defined as, "making an event really present again".

We think and pray in such a linear fashion. Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday were events that happened way back then. However, our Lord assures us, He promises us, that these are not events that happened back then. Rather, at the Holy Eucharist, we ARE THERE. We are in the Upper Room. We stand at Golgotha. We keep vigil at the tomb. We see Him alive and risen.

Jesus' words, "Do this in remembrance-anamnesis of me," makes His past saving acts really present and operative in our time. We are in the Upper Room eating the same bread and drinking the same cup that the Twelve ate and drank.

Our worn, tired feet are washed by Jesus the same way as the Apostles' feet. We hear His voice speaking just as personally to us as to His chosen followers, mandating us to serve one another in obedience to Him.

On this Maundy Thursday, look not with your mind's eye but see with your eyes of faith that He is nearer to us than our next breath. Jesus leaves us an ever-present memorial-anamnesis of His passion in the Holy Eucharist. He is not far away, but intimately near us where we can see and touch Him. Embrace that this great Mystery is His constant gift of grace and love to us.

Be present! Be present, O Jesus Christ, our great High Priest as You were present with the Disciples in the upper room, and be intimately, and lovingly present to us in the Bread and the Wine.

# Good Friday, April 3

By Fr. Ivor Kraft

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 & John 19:1-37

We call this Friday "Good" because The Passion and Death of our Lord is the revelation in time and space of the great mystery of love that the Living God is in Himself. It is an event that occurs above all between God the Father and God the Son in, with and through God the Holy Spirit. It is an event that those who surround our Lord during his Passion - Pilate, the soldiers, the chief priests, the women, the mob, not to mention his disciples who denied, betrayed and abandoned him - were only tangentially involved in and didn't even begin to understand.

The cross is the summation and climax of all that our Lord came into the world to do. It is his sacrificial self-offering in the Holy Spirit to the Father out of love for both the Father and for us. The Lord's crucifixion is his self offering in love to the One who had sent him into the world to make that offering, promising that He would not abandon him to death but raise him on the third day and give him victory over all his enemies and ours.

The Passion and Death of our Lord is his redeeming act. It is neither coincidental nor accidental that the first chapter of the Book of Genesis ends with these words. "And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the hosts of them... and God rested of the seventh day from all his work which he had done."

On the Friday we call "Good," our Lord finished all his re-creative work, offering the Father all that our first parents refused to offer him in the Garden of Eden, and "...then he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done."

Taken down from the cross at the end of the sixth day of the week our Lord entered the tomb to sleep the sleep of death and observe the perfect Sabbath, thus fulfilling the Law of Moses in order that he might become the firstborn of the New Creation. (Col 1)

This Friday is, has been, and always will be, Good Friday.

# Holy Saturday, April 4

*By Fr. Bill Crary*

**Job 14:1-17**

Life can be claustrophobic sometimes, like being shut in during an ice storm. Will the sun ever shine? Will I ever be free to walk around outside? When will it be safe to drive? I do not enjoy being constrained. In recent days other people's illness has touched my life. Why are they stricken? Will they be well and whole again?

The book of Job is not an easy read, but its main message is highly significant; suffering is not always a punishment for sin. Righteous people can experience significant pain and disappointment that is beyond our comprehension. It can teach us to trust the sovereignty of the Lord even when he seems distant or in some cases unfair.

The book of Job is the story of a very wealthy and righteous man who lost everything, money, family, and possessions and even his health due to a divine wager between God and the accuser (Satan) that Job's piety is due only to his blessings and not because of his faith. For this, Job endures tremendous suffering, and through it all, refuses to curse God. Meanwhile his misguided friends claim that his pain and suffering is the result of hidden sin.

In this state of pain and depression, Job considers death to be final for humans, while seemingly dead trees may sprout again! In fact Job asks God to hide him in the world of the dead (Sheol) until his wrath passes.

As we conclude Lent, it is important to take stock and recognize that Job had to navigate through his dreadful suffering without knowledge of Christ's resurrection, the one new thing ever to come into the world.

Jesus reminds us that the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil are very real, and in certain moments, seem overwhelming. However they can be resisted through our fidelity to the Lord Jesus. Job received a glimpse of this when the Lord inspired Him to explain in Job 19:25 "I know that my redeemer lives!" As Christians, our situation is far superior to Job's. By baptism we are dipped or plunged into the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. He lives in us and we live in him. Put another way, the servant is inseparable from the master. As followers of Christ, we should have the courage and fidelity of Job.

# Easter Sunday, April 5

*By Bishop Ryan Reed*

## Acts 10:34-43

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!  
The Lord is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!  
We rejoice this morning with that great proclamation. Our lesson from Acts offers a glimpse of the implications... the result of Christ's triumph.

This is one of the great "aha" moments in the life of the church. Peter finally knew what Jesus meant in the Great Commission when he said, "Therefore go, and make disciples of all nations". The Gospel was not just for the Jew but for everyone.

Having been given a vision shortly before entering the house of Cornelius, Peter begins to preach by saying, "truly I understand that God shows no partiality".

He then lays out the Gospel in two succinct verses, 38 and 39.

Peter doesn't just focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus he begins by telling about the power of the Kingdom of God which had come in the person of Jesus Christ. The Incarnation must be held together with the cross and empty tomb as the "saving act" of God.

We all know what happens next in the story.

As Peter lays out gift of the forgiveness of sins offered only in the name of Jesus, the Holy Spirit falls upon the household of Cornelius. The Kingdom of God comes in power and all who received the Spirit were baptized into the Body of Christ.

As you think back on the journey of Lent, look forward as well.

I encourage you to ask yourself two questions from the this reading in the Book of Acts. First, as a believer, do I recognize that everyone I see deserves to hear the Gospel. Regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, social class, or nationality, the Gospel is for everyone for "God shows no partiality." Second, have I embraced the power that comes from following Jesus, being Baptized, and finally filled with the Holy Spirit. The love of Jesus has the power to transform lives if we are open to God's Spirit who is alive in us.

"His power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine." (Ephesians 3:20)

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Anno Domini 2026