

THE WAY OF SALVATION



LENTEN REFLECTIONS
FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS
on redemption, charity, & light



NEWMAN CATHOLIC CAMPUS MINISTRY
Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, 2024

THE WAY OF SALVATION

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Lenten Reflections for College Students on Redemption, Charity, and Light

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The Week of Ash Wednesday

REFLECTIONS BY
A.J. HOY, M.T.S.

Associate Director of Newman Catholic Campus Ministry
Newman Catholic Campus Minister at
The College of Wooster



Ash Wednesday

- **FIRST READING: JOEL 2:12-18**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 51:3-4, 5-6AB, 12-13, 14 & 17**
- **SECOND READING: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:20-6:2**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-18**

I'm fairly certain that you know the feeling of admitting that you have done something wrong. Perhaps you broke some social norm, or one of God's laws, or you may have even hurt someone. Whatever you did that required you to admit wrongdoing, you are not alone, and your situation is not unique. One of the earliest known character traits of humanity is moral failure. It's no coincidence that Sacred Scripture depicts the first humans as having sinned and thus "fallen" from a state of grace. Biblical authors do not detail generations upon generations of perfect people only for the line to fall away from God with one horrible generation. From nearly the beginning, humans were not perfect in their intentions, choices, actions, or in their execution of their own moral agency. Though it may sound cynical, you likely know that people (you and me included) do not always make the best or most just decisions and that our world is simply soaked with the stuff of sin.

Today marks the beginning of a decently lengthy journey towards a common liturgical end, the Feast of all Feasts, Easter. So important is this coming feast of joy and redemption that as a church we will spend the next 40 days in collective prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Our Gospel today uses Jesus' direct teaching to lay out the specifics of each of these practices. Above all, Lent is a time of preparation. I recall as a child thinking that during Lent, God wanted me to hate myself and all that was wrong with me. When I was a child, I thought as a child. I'm happy to tell you that that's not what Lent is.

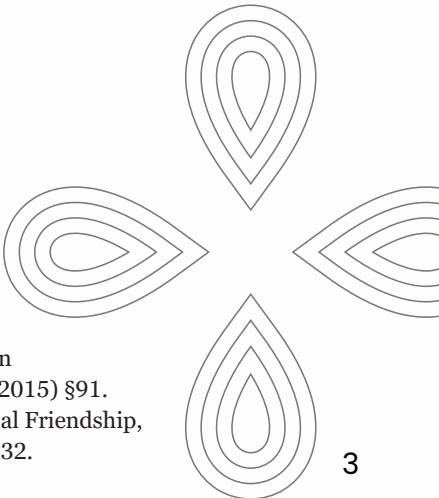
On this day we mark ourselves as sinners, people who have failed, with signs of ashes just as generations have done for centuries before us. But we do not do this for purposes of self-loathing or to degrade ourselves in the presence of God. Ash Wednesday calls us to look around at the world and realize that we are not yet in the Kingdom of God. We have not yet attained salvation from our failings. Indeed, sin and moral failure still permeate the human experience. While we beg for God's mercy as today's Responsorial Psalm states, we can only do that once we realize that we need it because we are not perfect like God is. Nothing about this calls us toward depression, self-hatred, or despair. Today, we are simply called to take stock of how far we still must travel on this way of salvation.

This resource is structured so that it can accompany you on our collective way of salvation. In reading it and praying with it, you are joining hundreds of others on this journey, collectively taking one step at a time closer to our shared end, the salvation of God. As you begin, it is important that you realize that you are not alone. As Pope Francis is fond of writing, “Everything is connected.”[1], and “No one is saved alone; we can only be saved together.”[2] This resource serves to help you be in community with others and to walk with others toward God, all the while engaging in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

As we begin this season of preparation and shared reflection in and through this resource, I ask that you keep three things in mind. First, you are loved, and you are good. Even though you may fail from time to time, you (and every person you encounter) are far more than the worst thing you (or they) have ever done. Secondly, we’re not there yet. This is not yet the Kingdom of God but that does not mean that we should stop trying. Throughout Lent, we are called to acknowledge our sins so that we can get back to building up the Kingdom of God. Our mission is to continue the work of Jesus and we can only do that if we realize that our work is not yet complete. Finally, you are not alone. We beg of God’s mercy together, we worship together, we fast together. Lent is a communal exercise precisely because no person is an island, and no one is saved alone. If you desire to walk the path of salvation, you are going to have company. Let’s get started.

- When was the last time I admitted that I was wrong? Did I do anything to fix what I had done?
- Do I ever find myself tempted to do something that I know may hurt someone or break a rule or law? What is pulling me toward that?
- Who can I walk with during this Lenten journey? Take a moment to write down the names of one or two people.

[1] Francis. *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015) §91.
[2] Francis. *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020) §32.



Thursday after Ash Wednesday

- **FIRST READING: DEUTERONOMY 30:15-20**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 1:1-2, 3, 4 AND 6**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 9:22-25**

Today, we disciples of Christ are enjoined to take up our cross and follow Jesus, knowing full well that this burden will lead to death and suffering. Yet shortly after asking us to take up our crosses, Jesus instructs that those who choose this path can rest assured in the promise that their lives will be saved in the end. The choices we make this Lent matter. The moral theologian James F. Keenan, S.J. writes of sin and the choice to sin, "Sin, therefore, is not really the choosing of the wrong or even the failure to choose the right. Antecedent to choice, sin is the failure to be bothered, which often results in wrong intentions and wrong choices." [1] Yesterday, we were marked with signs of our sin. As we stood before God and the world, we collectively acknowledged that we are human persons who have failed and that the Kingdom of God has yet to be realized in its totality. Today, we are called to get to work on both fronts.

The cross of Jesus, beyond a physical sign of earthly death and decay remains a symbol of our propensity to fail as moral agents. In this way, this device of degradation and torture is the very manifestation of moral failure. Keenan's thought is interesting here if we are to treat the cross as a sign of our collective moral failure. Very few people actually nailed Jesus to the cross. Neither you nor I did that. Does this fact relieve us of the culpability of creating crosses for others to carry and be nailed to? Certainly not. What made the cross of Jesus? At their root, crosses, those undeserved burdens placed on the shoulders of the innocent, are created because someone fails to be bothered. Very few people knowingly choose to perpetrate evil for its own sake, but each and all of us have looked the other way in the face of human suffering. In this way, we choose to make crosses for others to carry and so perpetuate the moral failure that placed the burden of the cross on the shoulders of Jesus.

- Is there a time that I have failed to be bothered in the face of human suffering? What happened? Why do I think I turned away from an Other in need?
- Have I ever been so bothered in the face of human suffering that I leveraged the privilege that I possess to help someone in need? What happened?
- What crosses have I built for others to carry through my indifference to their pain and suffering? Are there any habits that I can change that would keep me from perpetuating violence through my indifference?

[1] James Keenan, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 186.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

- **FIRST READING: DEUTERONOMY 30:15-20**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 1:1-2, 3, 4 AND 6**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 9:22-25**

I remember one Lent from my high school years when I became rather scrupulously obsessed with fasting. I fasted from all but one meal on Fridays, and then, for the entirety of the Triduum, I only consumed water. Somehow, I thought that my longing for food would transform into a longing for God. Instead, what it did was make me a grouch. I was hungry, irritable, and quite frankly I missed so many good things that happened during that Lent that by the end of it, I felt like I had altogether wasted my time. This isn't to say that fasting is a bad practice if done healthily.

Today's first reading and Gospel always remind me of that Lent of 2011. Isaiah, the prophet, proclaims that Israel is not fasting properly in our first reading. While you may be anticipating God asking them to give up more food and pleasure in order to strengthen their fast, that is not what God desires. God desires that God's creation flourish and so acknowledges that fasting which makes us grumpy, ill tempered, and poorly behaved is not worth it. The fasting God desires is fasting from those structures that get in the way of human flourishing. Today's first reading instructs us how to fast this Lent."[1] God does not desire our suffering, so let us fast from systems of oppression and injustice—building up God's Kingdom one brick at a time.

- Do I participate in systems that harm people? What might those systems be?
- Can I find ways to fast from systems of oppression in order that others might have the opportunity to flourish?
- What are two practical steps that I can take to stop my reliance on systems of oppression? Use the back journal pages to write down your resolutions.

[1] Isaiah 58: 6-7

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 58:9B-14**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 86:1-2, 3-4, 5-6**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 5:27-32**

Have you ever been in a situation when someone else was chosen to do something that you wanted to do? Maybe you thought that you would have been a better or more worthy choice. If I try, I can think of a few times in my life that this train of thought all but consumed me. Any time that we feel passed over, jealousy and disdain are natural responses. Still, just because something comes naturally, does not make it right or even just. While all sin has the ability to eat at a person, jealousy and disdain are particularly self-destructive.

In today's Gospel we encounter the Pharisees, the ultra-legalistic Jewish sect of rabbis and generally the perennial foil to the message of the Gospel. While the Pharisees' disdain for the ways and teachings of Jesus are typically attributed to their tight clinch on the interpretation and enforcement of the Law of Moses (those 613 commandments found in the Torah), in today's Gospel reading, I cannot help but also read their reactions as somewhat jealous. Here a man who identifies as a rabbi and, at times, as Messiah, is seeming to collude with people typically seen as traitors to their fellow Jews: tax collectors. How could the Pharisees not be at least a little jealous? How could the true Messiah overlook them in favor of people who they believed to be sinners?

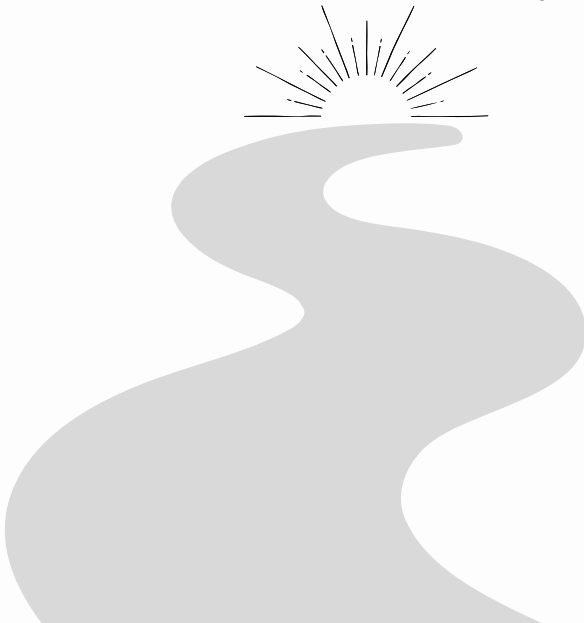
This Lent, as we are called to take a closer look at how far we still are from the Kingdom of God and how closely we hold onto the sin that permeates our lives, let us not forget the Pharisees, religious folks who saw more sin in their neighbors than in their own hearts. Before we see the sins of others, let's be honest with ourselves and own the sins that we continue to commit.

- Can I name and describe a time in my life where I have been jealous? What happened? Did I allow jealousy or disdain to consume me?
- Have I ever considered myself more worthy of honor or dignity than others? Why?
- What can I do to combat my propensity to see the sins of others before grappling with my own failings?

The First Week of Lent

REFLECTIONS BY
JOSEPH ALTO, M.A.

Associate Director of Newman Catholic Campus Ministry
Newman Catholic Campus Minister at
Cleveland State University



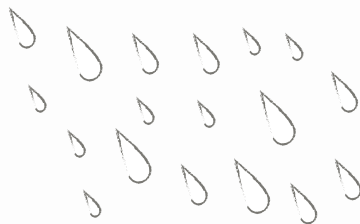
First Sunday of Lent

- **FIRST READING: GENESIS 9:8-15**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9**
- **SECOND READING: I PETER 3:18-22**
- **GOSPEL: MARK 1:12-15**

You are now four days into your Lenten journey, and I hope it has been fruitful! As this is the first Sunday in Lent, use it as a metric to measure if you have been keeping up your Lenten promises. If you have, congratulations, use this Sunday as a time of reflection, contemplating the obstacles that you may face and measures you may take when faced with those obstacles. If you are four days in and you haven't hit your Lenten mark thus far, take the same advice I provided above!

In today's First Reading, we hear how Noah enters a covenant with God. God ensures humanity that another flood will never destroy Earth. God uses the flood to cleanse humanity of their impurities. If you were to just flip a few pages backwards, you would read that the behaviors of humanity were displeasing to God. Genesis 6: 5-7 states:

When the LORD saw how great the wickedness of human beings was on earth, and how every desire that their heart conceived was always nothing but evil, the LORD regretted making human beings on the earth, and his heart was grieved. So, the LORD said: I will wipe out from the earth the human beings I have created, and not only the human beings, but also the animals and the crawling things and the birds of the air, for I regret that I made them.[1]



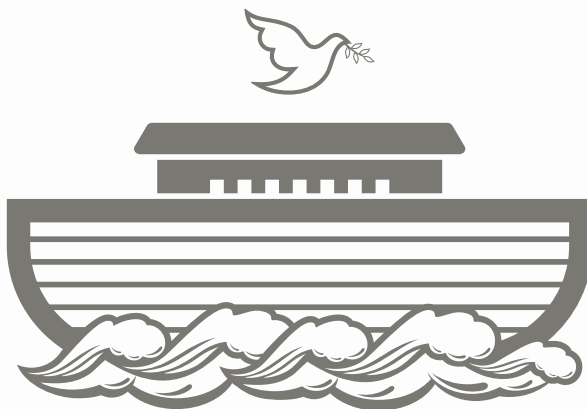
[1]Genesis 6: 5-7

Water is a universal symbol of rebirth, but the ultimate rebirth that humankind receives is in the death and resurrection of Christ. Peter's instruction in the Second Reading reminds us of that. It also reminds us that Christ has already borne the burden for us, that we are already saved. Although it is not our responsibility to save ourselves, it is our responsibility to remind ourselves that we are already cleansed and to live up to that gift Christ gave us. Jesus knew the importance of reminding oneself of the gifts they already bear. In Mark's Gospel, he tells us that Jesus spent 40 days in the desert in reflection and prayer. Although Jesus is the perfect being, it was even crucial for him to spend time reflecting on his gifts.

Lent is not a time to totally reinvent or save oneself, but a period where we should remind ourselves that we are already children of God, and that we should live up to the expectations that our Father has for us. When reflecting on my less enriching Lents in the past, a common theme I notice is that I was not reminding myself that I was already saved.

For those who are four days into Lent and don't yet feel its fruits, I wonder if you are reminding yourself that you are a child of God?

- In addition to abstaining from something during Lent, what is something that you can do daily to remind you that you are a saved child of God?
- Reflecting on your most enriching Lents, what were your behaviors that made it so enriching?
- If this is your first-time observing Lent, or your first time just taking it seriously, how may remembering that you are a saved child of God help you if/when you face temptation during Lent?



Monday of the First Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: LEVITICUS 19:1-2, 11-18**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 19:8, 9, 10, 15**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 25:31-46**

Are you a man or a mouse? This is a common exhortation that many of you have probably heard at some point. However, if this is your first time hearing it, let me explain! Essentially it is a question asking whether you are willing to be courageous or not. I have always imagined that the biblical version of this exhortation would be, "Are you a sheep or a goat?" This imagery comes from today's Gospel reading. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus states that he, like a shepherd will separate the sheep from the goats on the day of judgment. The sheep are those who obeyed God's commandments, such as the ones presented in Leviticus 19:1-2, and 11-18, but also the commandments that Christ sets forth later in Matthew 25:31-46. The goats are those cast to the left side. Basically, the goats are the ones who have not followed God's commands.

It takes a true level of courage and willpower to meet the demands set out in both the First Reading and today's Gospel passage. To follow God is an adventure and even, at some points, a risk! I am sure you all understand this, as you have probably experienced that being a Catholic/Christian on a college campus is not the most popular identity to bear. Regardless, you choose to express your faith, to live out the Gospel message! From reading today's passages, it is safe to say that God does expect much from his children, and sometimes it could seem like too much, but living like a sheep is to live up to your truest humanity. Living like a goat or a mouse may have its pleasures, but they are only temporal. Enrich your Lenten journey by doing more to live like a sheep!

- In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus gives us a series of Godly actions to perform, of these, what action/behavior is the most difficult for you to perform?
- Although what Jesus commands us can be taken literally, for many college students, you may not be in the situation to literally carry out some of the commands. With that, what is something you can do today to live out, "I was ill, and you took care of me?"

Tuesday of the First Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 55:10-11**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 34:4-5, 6-7, 16-17, 18-19**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 6:7-15**

Today's readings touch on the importance of intention when praying. As Jesus says in the Gospel, we should not, "babble like the pagans." [1] Although I am no masterful theologian about prayer, I have read some masterful theologians who discuss this topic. Hans Urs von Balthasar – my favorite theologian – wrote a book dedicated to the power of prayer. In his book, *Prayer*, Balthasar discusses how at times prayer can seem confusing and unnatural, which can make one pray, as Jesus put it, "like a pagan," babbling words, instead of praying with the proper intention behind it. [2]

Through the Lord's Prayer, God gives us the blueprint on how we should pray. Yes, we can and should recite the Lord's Prayer, with proper intention; however, we are also compelled to live out the elements of prayer in our daily lives. In another masterful work on the theology of prayer, Valentine Tomberg in his book, *Meditations on the Tarot* (yes, the title may throw you off some, but I assure you this would be one of the greatest books you ever read and it's very Catholic), Tomberg states that living out the Lord's Prayer essentially looks like putting 100% effort into all your daily tasks. [3] Could you imagine what positive strides your life would endure if you put 100% effort into each daily task? The results almost seem unfathomable. However, this is the image of life that God envisions for us, the life that God calls us to. Go live out that vision!

- Assessing your current prayer life, how intentional would you rate it?
- Think of practical ways in which you can live out the Lord's Prayer. Compile a list and share them at your next Newman night.

[1] Matthew 6:7

[2] Hans Urs von Balthasar and Graham Harrison. *Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986)

[3] Valentine Tomberg. *Meditations on the tarot: A journey into Christian hermeticism* (translated by Robert Powell) (Random House USA)

Wednesday of the First Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: JONAH 3:1-10**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 11:29-32**

Reflection by

DIANA SCHODER

Cleveland State University

Class of 2025

Today we are reminded of second chances.

After first rejecting his divine instructions, Jonah receives a second chance ashore after being swallowed and spit out by a great fish. With this second chance, Jonah obeys and begins sharing God's call to repentance with the Ninevites in today's first reading. Responding to Jonah's words, the king of Nineveh turned to sackcloth and ashes in repentance, receiving a second chance of his own.

In the Gospel, the words of Jesus emphasize the faith held by the queen of the south, the Queen of Sheba, who traveled weeks to hear Solomon's wisdom in Jerusalem. Often, our sign is much closer - a few miles to Christ in the Eucharist and a reach to the Bible. However, despite the resources we may have, actually doing what God calls us to can be incredibly challenging. Changing our lives and habits for 40 days is not meant to be easy, and we may find ourselves in need of another chance.

We can turn back to God, just like Jonah and the king of Nineveh. The Psalmist David puts words to the experience of identifying one's own shortcomings and sins, as he also turns back to God. In addition to the Responsorial Psalm's verses, by reading the entirety of Psalm 51, we can walk together with David as we turn back to God.

- Did you have a personal plan this Lent to prepare for the Lord's Resurrection at Easter?
- How have you followed through in the preparations and where might you need a second chance?
- How can you utilize the Psalms more often in your prayers?

Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, Apostle

- **FIRST READING: 1 PETER 5:1-4**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 23:1-3A, 4, 5, 6**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 16:13-19**

Today is the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter, Apostle! In either direct or indirect ways, today's readings reflect the mission of St. Peter. The First Reading provides us the wisdom that we should be someone who evangelizes others by our actions, that we should be, "examples to the flock." In today's Gospel, Jesus assigns Peter as the rock – the foundation – on which he will build his Church. You are all aware of the difficulties of being a Catholic on a college campus. Because we are in the minority, we may come across as "preachy" when sharing the Gospel.

Now, by no means am I saying that preaching on campus is bad, on the contrary. However, what I am challenging you to do this Lent is to be like St. Peter, let your actions speak for you. Let people on your campus know you are a Catholic by your behaviors. Although it is always more tempting and may feel better to vocalize the Catholic opinion about something or other, remember that Christ chose Peter as the rock to build his church on. With that, there must be something wise, holy, sacred, and practical about the personality of Peter. If Peter was the rock in which a 2,000 plus year old Church still solidly stood on, then we must try to emulate him. Offer up your daily prayer intentions today to St. Peter!

- What are some practical actions you can take on campus that are Christ-like that are noticeable?
- How can you verbally practice your faith, while silently practicing it?

Friday of the First Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: EZEKIEL 18:21-28**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-7A, 7BC-8**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 5:20-26**

Here at Cleveland State, we have a special connection with the Capuchin Friars, given that our Chaplain is one! In a unique way, this makes us connected to the life of a ministry of St. Francis. As you may know, St. Francis lived a life of excess, more attuned to the temporal rhythm of life than the spiritual. Although inspiring, Francis' journey to sainthood is not necessarily unique. In fact, I think of multiple saints (including one of my favorite saints: St. Ignatius of Loyola) that lived a life of excess and hedonism and then began to travel on the Godly path.

Today's readings help us reflect on the truism that it is not who we were, it's who we currently are or who we are actively becoming. In college, all of us make mistakes. Sometimes one can feel particularly guilty or shameful of those mistakes. Depending on where you are at in your Catholic/Christian journey, you may even believe that your past transgressions now make it more difficult to enter a relationship with God. If this is you, here is a message of comfort: remember that God forgives, and that he loves. Remember that many of the saints did not always live a saintly life. Most importantly, remember that in today's readings God tells us that wicked individuals, if they turn away from that life will not die, that they will rejoice evermore in Heaven. Use Lent as a period to turn away from the unvirtuous temptations of life!

- Do you identify with the life of Saint Francis or Saint Ignatius? If so, how? Write down this reflection in the notes section of this book or a prayer journal.
- What are the unvirtuous habits you find stuck in? What are virtuous behaviors you can commit yourself to this Lent to help you move past those habits?



Saturday of the First Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: DEUTERONOMY 26:16-19**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 119:1-2, 4-5, 7-8**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 5:43-48**

Who do you hate? Well, hopefully no one! How about this, who do you really not like? Who is someone that very much annoys you? Who is someone that you think is a deplorable person? It's not a pleasant thought to spend our mental bandwidth on, but that person is exactly who Jesus tells us to love. I think it's always difficult to wrap our heads around how a God we love can also love the one who is our greatest enemy. Loving those who aggravate us is a command from the Lord and, as Moses reminds us in the First Reading, it is our duty to observe the statutes and decrees of God! During my graduate studies, I remember learning about the famous Protestant theologian, Karl Barth. Barth discusses the importance of even loving those who just committed heinous crimes during the Second World War. Barth, understanding the nuances of the situation, compelled his reader not to understand love as sheer acceptance of the enemy, but as a more profound notion of love, where you pray and remember them.

We are not God; it is not our place to prescribe people to Heaven or Hell. Although there are clear-cut laws and commandments the Church has, even this does not permit us the right or ability to speak on God's behalf. Here is a Lenten challenge to end week 1: think of the person who you dislike, who has wronged you - someone that may have lied to you, broken your heart, or maybe even worse - and spend time praying for that person. I think a serious argument can be made that loving your enemy can satisfy the three pillars of Lent: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. For example, it satisfies fasting by fasting from hateful speech, and almsgiving by offering up right intentions on the individual's behalf. So, there may not be a better practice to implement this Lent than loving one's enemy.

- Are you willing to pray for an enemy? If so, plan for how you will pray for them.
- Is there anyone you are not willing to pray for? If so, explore why that is. Do you think they are out of God's graces? Remember, one cannot out sin God. It's difficult when the person is not sorry for their sins but remember that prayer can aid the person back on the right path.

The Second Week of Lent

REFLECTIONS BY
ROBERT KOONCE

Associate Director of Newman Catholic Campus Ministry
Newman Catholic Campus Minister at Oberlin College
and Conservatory



Second Sunday of Lent

- **FIRST READING: GENESIS 22:1-2, 9A, 10-13, 15-18**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19**
- **SECOND READING: ROMANS 8:31B-34**
- **GOSPEL: MARK 9:2-10**

We have an odd story put in front of us in today's first reading. Really odd. Abraham and Sarah go through life longing to have children, then become blessed by God with one son, only to have the same God ask Abraham to take the child to Moriah and offer him up as a sacrifice. It's a head scratcher for sure.

So, how do we parse this out, reconciling it with an image of a loving, tender God?

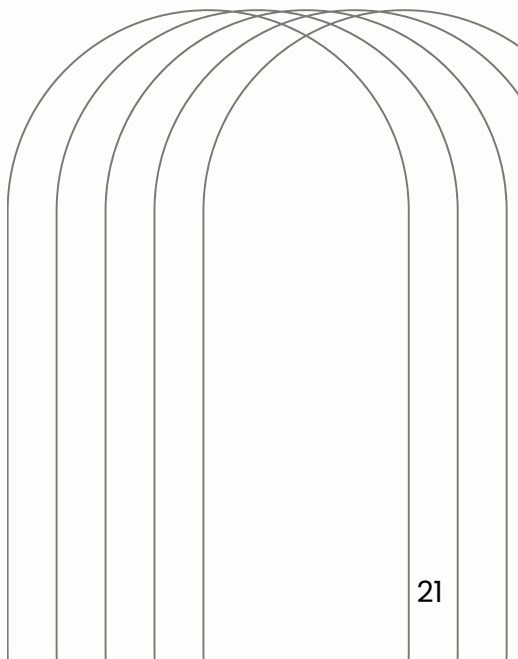
I had a friend who often used to say that context is worth 40 I.Q. points. Once we grasp the context of something, we instantly gain insight into the deeper reality of the issue. So, what's our context?

The beginning. That's our context. Here God is in the early stages of setting the foundation for what will become a lasting covenantal relationship with his people. That foundation is rooted in the jarring, hard to stomach truth that nothing of this world truly belongs to us. Nothing. Not even our own children. All of it – all creation, all people, all relationships, every last bit of everything belongs to God. And He teaches this to Abraham in bold, loud colors by asking him to do something horrendous. But, Abraham trusts in deep ways. In part of the passage that isn't included in the selection for today's reading, Isaac (Abraham's son) takes stock of the scene. He goes through the checklist of things needed for an offering – wood, fire, knife, so forth – and asks his Dad about the sheep. After all, it's odd that such a crucial ingredient to a good offering would be missing. Abraham replies, not in a lie, but in a statement of faith, "God will see to the sheep for the offering, my son." [1]

[1] Genesis 22:8

It would be understandable to read this passage and think of God as demanding and controlling. But Abraham's response reveals that this isn't about God's greediness, but his generosity, and how crucial it is for us to remember that generosity. That remembering keeps us rooted and is ultimately best for us. When we forget that God is the source of all that is, we can slip into thinking that we are the ones in charge. Then the works of our hands, our efforts (fame, wealth, power, pleasure) become our central obsession and gradually we turn in on ourselves, becoming a shriveled version of what God intends for us. Thus, he teaches Abraham this most fundamental lesson in such stark terms. We must never forget the source of our life if we ever hope to be a source of renewal in truth, beauty, and goodness in this world.

- How often do you take a moment and express gratitude for the easily overlooked things in life?
- Do you tend to shy away from doing things that are difficult, but important?



Monday of the Second Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: DANIEL 9:4B-10**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 79:8, 9, 11 AND 13**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 6:36-38**

Asking for forgiveness is essential to receiving it. In today's readings in Daniel and Psalm 79, the authors are pleading for forgiveness. But, why the fuss? If God is all-knowing and all merciful, do we need to say things out loud to him that he already knows? Well, yes. But, it's not for his benefit that we speak, rather for ourselves. The honesty opens up a space within us which can be filled by God's mercy. His mercy never forces itself upon us, and we need to make room for it by emptying ourselves of all the clutter. This emptying should make us more humble as we realize our relative weakness and our need for God's presence in our lives.

Hence, the admonition from today's Gospel that we are to be merciful like God has been merciful to us. But it's not just mercy we are being called to, but real generosity. St. Augustine famously described sin as "incurvatus in se" translated as "curving inward to one's self." When we order our lives using our own perspectives, wants, or desires as reference points, we break our relationship with God and ultimately with others. This break is a severing of spiritual life support and we cease to be nourished. Like in Sunday's reflection, we end up replacing God with our own idols. Sin isn't just the breaking of rules – it's the slow starvation of our souls. God does not want us to starve. He longs for us to feast on love and mercy, but we have to make room in our hearts before that feast by acknowledging our brokenness and being generous to others.

- In interacting with friends or coworkers, do you find it easy or hard to own up to your own mistakes?
- Have you ever had the experience of feeling happier after you've helped a friend?

Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 1:10, 16-20**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 50:8-9, 16BC-17, 21 AND 23**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 23:1-12**

As humans, we just love being critical of others. We regularly blame them in the workplace, in our schools, and in our neighborhoods for the many things they do to make life worse for the rest of us. We shout at politicians, gossip about our supervisors, and protest injustices all the time. The world's problems are always someone else's fault.

There is a well known story that at one point in the early 1900s, the Times of London asked its readers to submit letters responding to the question, "What's wrong with the world?" Apparently, the great Catholic author, G.K. Chesterton replied with a very short note,

Dear Sirs,
I am.
Yours Truly,
G.K. Chesterton

It is always easier to blame someone else and completely miss our own personal role in the world's troubles. Today's readings remind us how dangerous this is for us. We are the only ones who can fix what's wrong within ourselves – we can't "fix" anyone else. And, since we are sinners, why don't we just start working on ourselves as the first step to fixing what's wrong with the world?

- Think back to a frustrating situation with a teacher, friend, or even supervisor. Do you remember only what that other person did wrong or are you open to how your actions may have made the situation worse?
- Is there someone in your life whom you have hurt and haven't yet apologized to? What is preventing you from taking that step?

Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: JEREMIAH 18:18-20**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 31:5-6, 14, 15-16**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 20:17-28**

Jeremiah never had it easy. Called by God when he was young (and before he felt ready), he was given an impossible mission of converting his own people who had turned from the covenant to the worship of (and child sacrifice to) a pagan god, Baal. He was persecuted in countless ways, but was driven, not just because he was doing what he was told but because “His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.”[1]

He simply couldn't remain indifferent to the evils of his world because he was charged by an intimate encounter with the Lord. This call, felt deep within him, granted him authority, but not earthly power. Jesus, too, walks this path saying in today's Gospel passage that “the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”[2]

Following the Gospel is not the path to political victory, cultural relevance, or popularity. Those are projects and concerns that are human in origin and ultimately don't lead to anything lasting or deeply meaningful. Be wary of calls to simplify the Gospel or accommodate it to current fads – following Christ is not meant to be easy. With that said, it's not meant to be a path in wretched misery either. The suffering of discipleship is the suffering inherent in growth and generosity. Is it easy to become a top level musician or a loving parent? No. Are there joys along the way? Yes, of course. But to grow and in order to care for others, we have to be willing to let go of our self-centered comforts and pour ourselves out.

Today's readings tell us to be ready. Discipleship is hard and it comes with a cost. Still, life in Christ's footsteps is the only true way to enter into the total self-giving love that God invites us into for all eternity.

- Have you had the experience of not wanting to do something difficult (like exercise, performing, or public speaking), doing it, and then feeling immensely satisfied afterwards?
- What is one small thing you can do this week to be more loving, more studious, or more prayerful? Do it!

[1] Jeremiah 20:9

[2] Matthew 20:28

Thursday of the Second Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: JEREMIAH 17:5-10**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 1:1-2, 3, 4 AND 6**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 16:19-31**

Whom do you listen to? Today's readings are not holding back. They are challenging us to really examine where we seek guidance, where we plant our hopes, and where we place our identity. Jeremiah clearly states where we shouldn't put any of that: "cursed is the man who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the Lord." [1] Such a person is like a lifeless bush in the desert, but the one who places his trust in the Lord is a tree with deep roots that can withstand anything.

Jeremiah's call to follow the Lord is not a call to blind adherence to the rules, but an invitation to drink deeply of waters that give eternal life. He doesn't want us to settle for less, not because we will live a less pleasant life, but because we will be choosing death. So, when we root ourselves in human identities (political parties, sexuality, nationality, etc.) we are like a desert bush with no access to water – we have sold ourselves short. That is not a pleasant message to hear, and it seems impossible to live out. The reality is that living according to our human based identities, projects, and desires makes it utterly impossible to enter heaven.

The gospel passage shows how. Jesus puts before us an image of two men, one wildly successful on human terms and smug in his success. The other impoverished, marginal, and forgotten, living on the rich man's doorstep. In the afterlife, with their roles reversed, the rich man pleads from Hell for God to warn his brothers by sending the poor man back from the dead, but God denies him this request saying that if they won't heed Moses and the prophets, then they won't listen to a dead man brought back to life. If they are living lives where they intentionally tune God out, nothing can get through. And, God will respect their decision to be rooted in sandy, lifeless soils for all eternity.

So, pine for living waters, long to be rooted in God's ways, and you will have life and have it abundantly.

- Do an audit of what you listen to and read. How much of it is of God and how much of it not?
- Is there one thing that is definitely not of God in your life (in music, recreational activity, bad habit) that could be removed or improved as a start to centering your life more on Him?

[1] Jeremiah 17:5

Friday of the Second Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: GENESIS 37:3-4, 12-13A, 17B-28A**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 105:16-17, 18-19, 20-21**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 21:33-43, 45-46**

In many cases the scriptures tell stories from cultures greatly distant from us in time and language, and we often have to reconstruct that context to get to the deeper meaning at play. Not today. Today's passages bring us into contact with an emotion we know all too well. Jealousy. It is a terrible force in our lives. The readings highlight two cases of jealousy's horrible impact – brothers selling their own kin into slavery because of their fathers' love and tenants killing the landowner's agents and family simply out of envy.

Jealousy distorts everything and causes such destructive behavior. It comes from our losing perspective and turning our imagination and attention from gratitude into desire. We see people with more money, more success, more relationships than we have, and we can't help but want those things for ourselves. The psalm gives us a path out of this downward spiral in its responsorial verse, "remember the marvels the Lord has done." Be mindful of the Lord. Be mindful of His generosity, His tenderness, His love for you. Be wary of human rewards – they are not stored up in heaven.

It's easy to miss what God deems important, especially when we prioritize our own happiness or prosperity above all else. We have to train ourselves to want to see the world as God does. That perspective allows us to see the folly of wanting more things in favor of simply resting in the Father's love. That treasure is offered freely to everyone and is worth more than anything the world could even imagine. Savor that and be free.

- In your time on social media, do you often find feelings of jealousy creeping in? Ask yourself, is it healthy to spend so much time indulging in other people's presentation of their lives?
- How often do you express gratitude to God, family, or friends for simple things?

Saturday of the Second Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: MICAH 7:14-15, 18-20**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 15:1-3, 11-32**

The Gospel passage from today is the familiar parable of the Prodigal Son. It's really an astounding story. God's mercy is too overwhelming and reckless to capture in a concise theological statement, so a compelling story is the best way to help us begin to grasp the breadth and depth of His passion for us. If we have lived long enough, we probably have found ourselves in the position of each of the story's main characters. We have had to be patient with friends or children who have insisted on doing something stupid, we have done something thoughtless despite being cautioned against it, we have been relieved when someone we love comes to their senses, and we have felt the jealousy of the elder brother when others appear to have gotten away with doing something wrong. But, at the heart of the story is the wildly reckless way the father runs to his son. God is running towards us and wants to take our sins and cast them all "into the depths of the sea." [1]

Those depths are a fantastic place for our sins to be sent. In the first creation story in Genesis, God creates, not from nothing, but from the formless chaotic void. The depths of the sea are frequently used as a poetic trope to represent that chaotic original state. That chaos has no power over God – his merest whisper brings it into order. So, not only does he take our sin away from us in his overwhelming mercy, but he imprisons that sin in a place of chaos where it exists as a powerless lump unable to withstand the pressure of whispers. So, in a single act God can flex both absolute power and tender mercy. What a delight that such a force is on our side and wants nothing more than for us to be open to his love.

- Which character in the story of the Prodigal Son do you identify the most with? Why?
- Do you often harbor feelings of resentment against people who have wronged you and not been adequately held accountable? Is your resentment making the situation better?

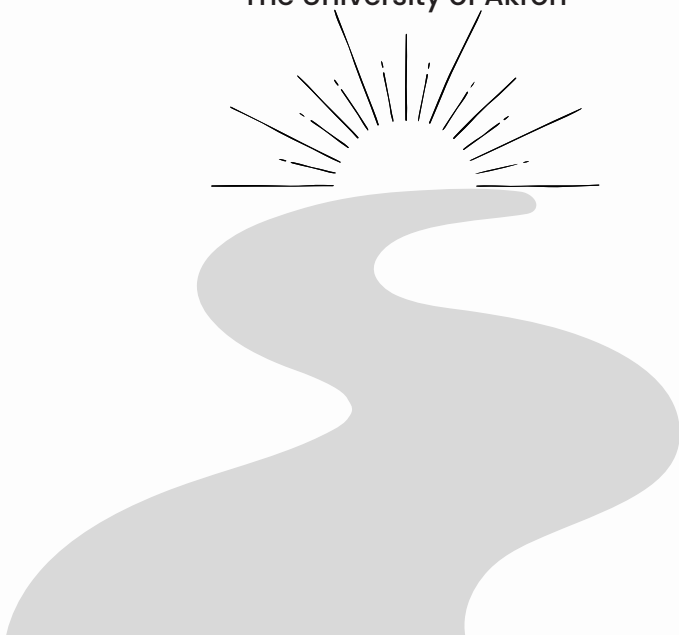
[1] Micah 7:19



The Third Week of Lent

REFLECTIONS BY
JOHN SZARWARK

Associate Director of Newman Catholic Campus Ministry
Newman Catholic Campus Minister at
The University of Akron



Third Sunday of Lent

- **FIRST READING: EXODUS 20:1–17**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 19:8, 9, 10, 11**
- **SECOND READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18–25**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 2:13–22**

The first reading provides us with the guidelines or commandments of Our Lord God. One may recall the biblical references we know in the theatrical portrayal of the Lord presenting to the Israelites his commands while viewing the Movie “The Ten Commandments” that starred Charlton Heston as Moses and Yul Brenner as Pharaoh. One may further recall the time spent memorizing these commands for one’s preparation for First Eucharist. As a pledge of our commitment to our Lord, these guides are those which the Lord has commanded that we follow “down to the thousandth generation....”[1]

Each of the verses of the Responsorial Psalm, provide us with the Lord’s trustworthiness, wisdom, purity, and truth in his endeavors. “The words of everlasting life.” Securing our faith in the Lord and his promises.

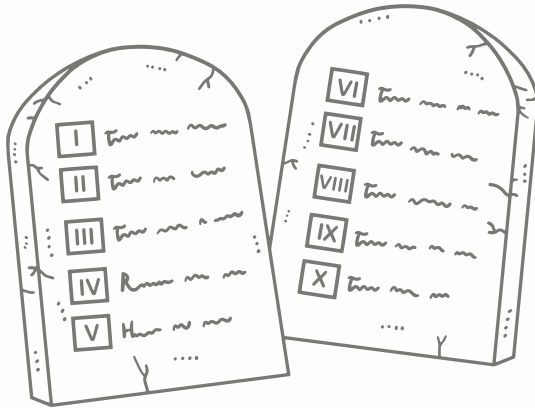
Our second reading, 1 Corinthians shows the reader the distinction between Jew and Greek faith beliefs that are more human than divine. Paul states that Christ is the power and wisdom of God, The Divine second person of the Trinity.

This Gospel verse is the first indication to the reader of Jesus’ means of redeeming his people. The purpose for which Christ was born: to fulfill the completion of the building of the temple. At this point, the temple was still under construction after 40 plus years. To the Jewish people the temple, the law and the oneness of God represent the three pillars and the Jewish faith. But, without the completion of the temple, the faith is still not finished, not ready to be put into action. The Jewish people are waiting to complete a temple building—brick and mortar, as a requirement for belief. Jesus, on the other hand, is the cornerstone of a figurative

[1] Exodus 20:6

temple. God sent his only Son to redeem the world. Jesus provides, in some way, the first indication as to the way the redemption of the world will occur through him.

- Take another look at the Commandments/Guides of God included in the book of Exodus. Are they still the same as what you recall at the same of your First Eucharist?
- Do we as Catholics hold the physical building as representative of our faith? Or the current reality of the general community in which we live?
- What might the pillars of your faith life be?



Monday of the Third Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: 2 KINGS 5:1-15AB**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 42:2, 3; 43:3,4**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 4:24-30**

Naaman, a highly esteemed commander of the army of Aram has one flaw, he was a leper. His King sent him to Israel to be cured. Naaman thought himself highly esteemed, and based on his reputation, believed that Elisha should have approached him and cured him of his leprosy without his own participation. Naaman's ego was preventing him from being cured by not following Elisha's instructions to go and wash in the waters of Israel. But with the intercession of Naaman's servants they convinced Naaman to follow the extraordinary request of Elisha. Having washed in the waters of Israel Naaman was cured. Naaman declares, "There is no God in all the earth except in Israel." [1]

Today's reading finds the psalmist lamenting his inability to behold God. In his many forms: running water, God's face, God's light and fidelity, God's dwelling place, his holy mountain. Once he beholds and experiences all these forms of God he gives thanks to God. We on the other hand have faith in Jesus Christ to ensure that we know, love and serve God. The psalmist reminds us to praise the Lord, for we have been rescued. We are told that the Lord's anger lasts only a moment, but the Lord's good will lasts a lifetime.

Our Lord realizes that his own neighbors in Nazareth do not recognize him as the Messiah. Those who did recognize the saving power of the Lord God were from outside the neighborhood. In their ignorance in recognizing that the Lord God sent Jesus to redeem the world, the members of the synagogue do not accept Jesus as the Christ. They choose, instead, to get rid of him rather than be open to Jesus; the peace that has eluded them for generations.

- Have you ever encountered the same attitude Jesus experienced of his neighbors and members of the synagogue? How did you handle the situation?
- In your faith-life have you realized that Christ is the one true God? What situation or action supports this realization?

[1] 2 Kings 5:15

Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: DANIEL 3:25, 34-43**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 25:4-5AB, 6 AND 7BC, 8-9**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 18:21-35**

In today's reading we meet Azariah, who has been sent into the furnace by King Nebuchadnezzar because he refused to worship the golden statue. Azariah and two companions, who also refused to worship the statue, are about to be burned for their transgressions. However, Azariah and his companions are saved through the intercession of Daniel. God sends an angel into the furnace to protect and save them of their fate. Having witnessed the three endure the furnace and live, Nebuchadnezzar and his whole kingdom became believers.

Today, the psalmist requests that the Lord make known to him the Lord's ways so that he might practice what the Lord has provided for us as an example. He acknowledges that the ways of the Lord are true, and just.

Today's gospel asks us to consider forgiveness and compassion as major concepts for relating with our neighbors. Jesus offers a parable to illustrate forgiveness from the Father. A king is settling his accounts with his servants. The king shows mercy to a servant who owes him a huge amount. Without hesitancy, the king is willing to wait for his settlement. The servant is relieved. The same servant, in turn, approaches one of his debtors to collect a settlement. The debtor begs the servant for more time. The servant has his own debtor thrown in prison. When the king hears what his servant has done to collect his debt, in anger, he sends him to prison until his debt is paid back in full.

Jesus uses the parable as an illustration of the Father's relationship with us. "So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart"[1].

- Is there someone who needs your forgiveness? How might you offer your forgiveness?
- Are you in need of forgiveness? How could you go about making amends? Might you consider turning to the sacrament of reconciliation?

[1] Matthew 18-35

Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: DEUTERONOMY 4:1, 5-9**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 147:12-13, 15-16,19-20**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 5: 17-19**

Reflection by
THOMAS BAREFIELD

University of Akron
Class of 2024

In the first reading for this day, we hear in the Old Testament about the laws given by Moses. The laws that came down from God are not laws to bind us but are there to set us free. The laws laid out in the Old Testament are like road maps showing Moses and the Israelites the path to follow in life.

The Psalmist praises and supports the actions of the Lord and the blessings he bestows on his people. The Psalmist indicates the Lord has not shared his ordinances to any other nation and only made them known to Israel.

In the Gospel today, we hear about Jesus fulfilling the law and affirmed the need for it. This law is freely given by God and is for us to freely choose to partake. These laws are to help us in building up our relationship with God. Throughout these days leading to his resurrection are we willing to freely journey to God and follow the path he has laid out for us?

- Lent may be a good time to review the commandments and guides that the Lord has provided to Moses and the Israelites. Is there a commandment that you struggle to meet?
- We are all called to build the Kingdom of Heaven. What ways are you helping to build the Kingdom? In order to build the Kingdom, what help might you need from the Lord?

Thursday of the Third Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: JEREMIAH 7:23-28**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 11:14-23**

Jeremiah's narrative laments the attitude of the Israelites. They have not obeyed or paid heed to the Lord. Even with the assistance of the Lord's servants and prophets the people of God still have not obeyed or paid heed. The people do not listen or take suggestion. They have no faith.

The Psalm refrain tells the people that if "today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts." [1] We are being asked for a change of heart, to listen to the voice of the Lord and open our hearts to his words. If we listen to God's voice, we will always have his mercy.

In today's gospel, Jesus is working miracles and driving out demons. Again, Jesus tells them that his power comes from the Father. In their disbelief, the crowd suggests another source for the power. They do not believe that someone as simple, and one of their own, is able to drive out demons. They suggest His power comes from Beelzebul.

Jesus addresses their argument and insists that his power comes to him from the Father. In our readings this week Jesus spends a lot of time explaining who He is and where his power comes from. In the end he tells the people, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." [2]

- Where is God calling you to be faithful? Relationships? Work? School? Career choice?
- In what ways do you show your faithfulness to the Lord?



[1] Psalm 95

[2] Matthew 11:23

Friday of the Third Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: HOSEA 14:2-10**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 81:6C-8A, 8BC-9, 10-11AB, 14 & 17**
- **GOSPEL: MARK 12:28-34**

Hosea is called to us to return to the Lord asking forgiveness for our sins. God's promise of the restoration of Israel is confirmed. We repent for our sins, and in return we are shown love and compassion.

The psalmist reminds us that the compassion and the mercy of the Lord will not come easy. Listen to the Lord and you shall have the best of what the Lord can offer.

Jesus, as the Father's redeeming force for the life of his people throughout history, followed the commands of the Father. When confronted by the scribe in our gospel reading, Jesus again quotes the commands of the Father. Some know this as the Golden Rule, to love the Father and to love your neighbor. Upon hearing this, the scribe agrees and recites what Jesus has just said. Jesus then tells everyone that the scribe is not far from the Kingdom of God and that quieted any further questions of the audience.

- Considering the reading from Hosea, is there something in your life that needs healing, forgiveness or restoration? What might you ask of the Lord to help you with this?
- In today's gospel Jesus tells us to love God and our neighbor. Which of these is easiest for you? How might you go about improving the one that is more difficult?

Saturday of the Third Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: HOSEA 6:1-6**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 51:3-4, 18-19, 20-21AB**
- **GOSPEL: LUKE 18:9-14**

Hosea keeps the relationship between the Lord and his people in mind even though his people tend to stray. The people know that if they truly repent, their God will be with them. Repentance must be true and strong and not just lip-service. “For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”[1] Also in this reading, we have a foreshadowing of how Jesus will save us. The Lord binds our wounds, revives us after two days and on the third he will raise us up....”[2]

The response “it is mercy I desire, and not sacrifice” is a direct reference to Hosea 6:6. This is just a reinforcement of the love the Lord has for his people when they repent and respect the words of the Lord and his prophets.

The comparison of the tax collector and the Pharisee in the Gospel is a good example of the culture that surrounded the Jewish community at the time. Those in power (Pharisee) maintained a type of superiority over the majority of people. Tax collectors, on the other hand, were not accepted because they were Jewish citizens who worked for the Roman Empire. They were considered lower than dirt. In this story, the tax collector asks for Jesus’ assistance in a humble way. Recognizing that he does sin and is repentant. The Pharisee, on the other hand, offers an inventory of why he is not like everyone else. He does not see his own need to repent. Jesus tells the people that on the day of judgment, the tax collector will be exalted and the Pharisee will be humbled.

- During Lent, take your own inventory. For what are you in need of repentance? Consider the sacrament of reconciliation as an option.
- Has there been a time when you thought you were better than someone else? How have today’s readings impacted your thinking?

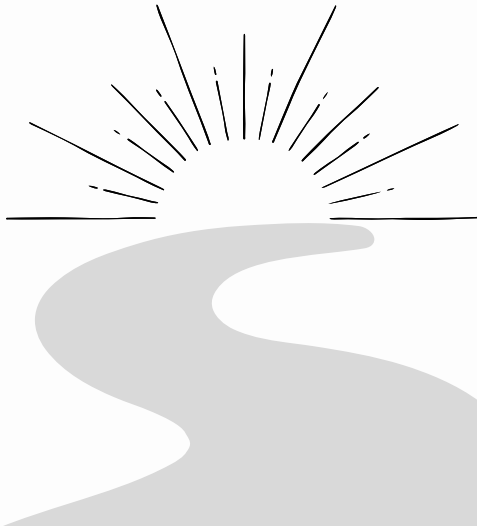
[1] Hosea 6:6

[2] Hosea 6:3

The Fourth Week of Lent

REFLECTIONS BY
**JOANN RYMARCZYK-
PIOTRKOWSKI, D.MIN.**

Director of Newman Catholic Campus Ministry
Interim Newman Catholic Campus Minister at
Baldwin Wallace University



Fourth Sunday of Lent

- **FIRST READING: 2 CHRONICLES 36:14-16, 19-3**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 137:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6**
- **SECOND READING: EPHESIANS 2:4-10**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 3:14-21**

I have five adult children and four grandchildren. In every parent-child relationship there comes a time when the child exercises their autonomy. Around the age of 6 or 7, each of my children had a consequence of their own making that they blamed on me. When my youngest was about 6, he was late for school. While I was the driver, it was he who kept us from taking off on time. He blamed me for making him late to school. He hopped out of the car, gave me a scowl and did not exchange our customary kiss goodbye. I remember thinking, “the last one has turned against me.”

I immediately phoned my husband to share this morning's story. I was half laughing and half upset. I told him that the last one had turned against me! We laughed, but I knew in my heart that this was a turning point that comes in every parent-child relationship. My husband was the first one home that night. He pulled our son aside and said, “I heard you didn't kiss your mother this morning. She was so upset about it, she called me! Was it your fault you were late to school? I think you owe mom an apology.”

Well, for three days, my son avoided me, didn't make eye contact and stepped around me. During those three days my love for him never changed. And when he finally came to apologize, I welcomed him with open arms.

Reflecting on that moment, I came to realize that this is the relationship we have with God. When we have exiled ourselves from the Lord, He is there waiting for us with open arms with mercy at the ready. Today's readings illustrate the numerous times that God is there waiting for us with open arms.

In our first reading, the people of Judah have spent years living lives of infidelity to the Lord. After decades of separation from their God and their home, the Lord still provides for them through Cyrus, King of Persia. God was there waiting for them, still loving them.

In our second reading St. Paul reminds us that our God is rich in mercy and that we have been saved by grace. Even our faith in God is a gift from God. While there may be times where we lose our faith, God never loses faith in us!

Finally, in the Gospel we see just how much God loves and how much God gives us. God gave us Jesus! The gospel writer tells us that in spite of our infidelity, Jesus did not come to condemn the world, He was sent to save the world.

During this time of Lent, we are called to recognize when we are not living up to the potential that God sees in each of us. Once recognized, we just need to ask forgiveness and God will welcome us with open arms.

- Is there something for which you need forgiveness? Name it and imagine God waiting for you with open arms.
- Is there someone you need to forgive? What are some ways you can prepare yourself to offer that forgiveness?



Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 65:17-21**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 30:4, 5-6, 11-12A AND 13B**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 4:43-54**

One of the things I like to do when preparing scripture reflections is try to figure out why the Church put the readings of the day together. Here on the fourth Monday of Lent we have readings from Isaiah and the Gospel of John.

Yesterday we talked about God's faith in humanity. Today we hear more about what the Lord has in store for us. God is creating a new heaven and a new earth. We can look forward to always rejoicing and happiness in what God creates for us. We are told there will be no more weeping or loss of life. We are promised houses and fruit of the vineyards.

The psalmist reminds us to praise the Lord, for we have been rescued. We are told that the Lord's anger lasts only a moment, but the Lord's goodwill lasts a lifetime.

In today's Gospel we meet Jesus preaching in Cana. Here is God, come to our rescue in the person of Jesus. A royal official asks Jesus to come and heal his son. I envision a Jesus eye-roll in the moment where he states, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe." [1] But the man persists. He does not want a sign of wonder, he truly believes that Jesus can save his child from death. The official's faith moves Jesus to send him back to his son, who will live. Upon his return, the official learned that his son did in fact recover almost at the same time of day as his conversation with Jesus. He and his whole house came to believe.

Going back to my quest to discover why these readings are together, it seems to me that Isaiah was foretelling the new heaven and the new earth and in the Gospel we see that Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise. As you move through your Lenten journey, pay attention to the signs in your life where the Lord has offered you healing in mind, body or spirit.

- Describe a time when you felt the Lord leading you to something new. Did you go willingly? Or did you go grudgingly?
- How will you respond to the Lord's call the next time?

[1] John. 4:48

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: EZEKIEL 47:1-9, 12**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 5:1-16**

It seems as though the Old Testament readings this week all describe the Lord's goodness toward us. In the reading from Ezekiel, God is revealed in living water. Ezekiel shares how he wades into the water provided by the Lord. Ezekiel goes on to say that this living water will produce vegetation that will be food and medicine for all. Likewise, the Psalmist describes a stream whose water "gladdens the City of God."^[1]

John's gospel today finds Jesus preaching in Jerusalem near a pool of water, where people often descend into the pool for its healing qualities. Jesus encounters a man who had been ill for many years, and asks him if he wants to be well. The man explains how his many attempts to get to the pool have been thwarted because others can move faster and get there before him. Jesus tells the man to rise, take up his mat and walk. The man was healed without going down and getting in the pool!

In Ezekiel, God reveals himself to humanity as living water. We know that water is essential for all life and that, in addition to its sustaining properties, refreshes us, quenching our thirst. In John 4:10, Jesus takes up the name associated with this water imagery. He announces himself as the true source of living water, from which all who drink it, will live forever. It is not lost on me that Jesus heals the ill man right next to the pool instead of having him go in. The man became a believer that day. As believers, when we drink of the living water that is Jesus, we become conduits of this living water for others.

- Is there something in mind, body or spirit where you need the healing touch of the living water that is Christ? Name it and ask for healing.
- In these final weeks of Lent, how can you be the conduit of living water for others?

[1] Psalm 46:5

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 49:8-15**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 145:8-9, 13CD-14, 17-18**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 5:17-30**

In our first reading from Isaiah, God reminds us of our covenant. We are called to break forth in song for the “Lord comforts his people and shows mercy to the afflicted.”[1] When Israel felt that they had been abandoned and forgotten by the Lord, God spoke through Isaiah saying, “Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.”[2] As a reminder, the psalmist tells us the “Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.”[3]

John’s Gospel is further along in the story we began yesterday. Jesus has healed a man on the Sabbath and the man has walked away carrying his mat. The religious leaders of Jesus’ time (the Pharisees) take issue with Jesus because the man should not have been carrying anything on the Sabbath. At the end of yesterday’s Gospel, those religious leaders start to question Jesus about working on the Sabbath.

Harkening back to Isaiah, Jesus reminds them of God’s work until now and then he tells them he is at the same work now. He tells them he cannot do anything on his own, but only what the Father asks. Where God spoke through Isaiah about God never forgetting us, Jesus reveals that the work of the Father who raises the dead and gives life, has been extended to Him who gives life to whomever he wishes. At the end of this exchange, Jesus says that he only does the will of the Father, the one who sent him. This exchange is the beginning of the end of Jesus here on earth. The religious leaders find his claiming equality with God a problem.

- Jesus responds to the love of the Father by teaching and healing. Is there someone in your life whose love inspires you? In what ways?
- How has the Love of God inspired you? What has your response been to that love?

[1] Isaiah. 49:16

[2] Isaiah. 49:18

[3] Psalm. 145:8

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: EXODUS 32:7-14**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 106:19-20, 21-22, 23**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 5:31-47**

I am the oldest of eight children. Growing up, the dinner table always seemed to be the place where my mother told my father all the things we did wrong that day. After that, my dad handed out the punishments. As the oldest, there were times where I came to the defense of my younger siblings. Sometimes my father actually listened and either skipped the punishment or gave a lighter one.

Today's reading from Exodus recounts a time when God has lost patience with God's people. Moses implores God to rethink destroying the people. Moses reminds God of the covenant with the people. "Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, and how you swore to them by your own self." [1] Hearing Moses' reasoning, God relents and does not punish the people as he had threatened.

John's Gospel continues the story of Jesus' healing of the ill man on the Sabbath. The religious leaders take issue with Jesus for healing, ordering the man to carry his mat and claiming himself equal to God. In today's exchange, Jesus reminds the leaders that they believed in him, when John announced his arrival. Then Jesus reminds them that even the scriptures testify on his behalf. And to round out his argument he refers the religious leaders right back to Exodus and the story that is in today's first reading.

God is in relationship with humanity. In every relationship there is give and take. In the instance of the first reading, reminded of the covenant with the people, God essentially changes God's mind. In the second reading, Jesus is offering testimony that speaks of the relationship that God has with humanity, but the religious leaders are unmoved. They choose adherence to the law over a continued relationship with God.

- In what ways are observing Lent to bring you into closer relationship with God?
- What areas in your human relationships need attention? In what ways will you give that attention?

[1] Exodus. 32:12

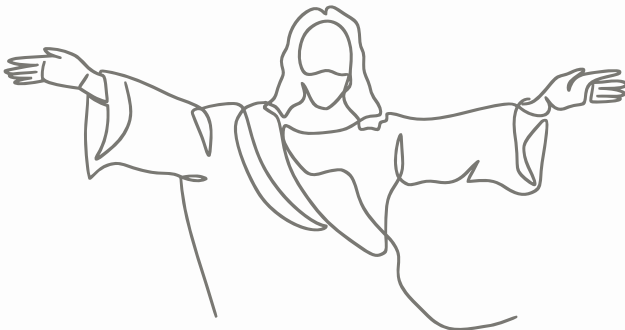
Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: WISDOM 2:1A, 12-22**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 34:17-18, 19-20, 21 AND 23**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 7:1-2, 10, 25-30**

We are nearing the end of the fourth week of Lent and now the readings are moving us toward the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Today's reading from the Book of Wisdom almost lays out word for word what will happen to Jesus in the coming weeks. Yet the wicked will see only His shameful death, not his glorious resurrection.

In John's Gospel we find Jesus in Galilee, his home region in the North of present-day Israel. After his run in with religious authorities in Judea, Jesus left because they were trying to kill him. John tells us that Jesus went, in secret, to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. People recognized Jesus and were surprised that he was walking about freely. Rumors had spread that he was marked for death, yet the religious authorities said nothing to him. The people began wondering if the authorities had come to realize Jesus is the Christ. Once again, Jesus tries to move the hearts of the people, saying "You know me!"

- As you proceed toward Holy Week, can you say that you know Jesus? How do you know Him?
- In what ways can you begin to grow your relationship with the Lord?



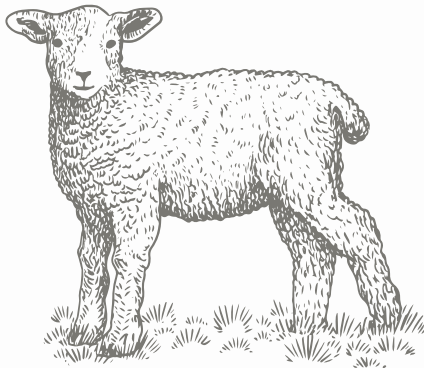
Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: JEREMIAH 11:18-20**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 7: 2-3, 9BC-10, 11-12**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 7: 40-53**

Jeremiah's story seems to be a foreshadowing of what is going to become of Jesus. Jeremiah sees himself as a trusting lamb led to slaughter. He is just now realizing that people were hatching plots against him. In the end, he puts his trust in God. The psalmist also speaks of taking refuge in God. Where Jeremiah asks to witness the vengeance God takes on his enemies, the psalmist asks for justice because he is just.

John's Gospel finds Jesus still preaching and teaching but now there is division among the people. Is Jesus a prophet? Is he the Christ? Based on scripture, the people can't believe that the Christ will come from Galilee. They have been taught that the Christ will come from Bethlehem and come from King David's lineage. Thus this division among the people made it easy for the religious authorities to plot against Jesus. In the coming weeks, scripture will reveal Jesus' journey to the cross and resurrection.

- In today's gospel there are many players; the crowd, the Pharisees, the guards, Nicodemus. Who are you in the story? What makes you say that?
- Think of a time when you took refuge in the Lord. What was that like for you?



The Fifth Week of Lent

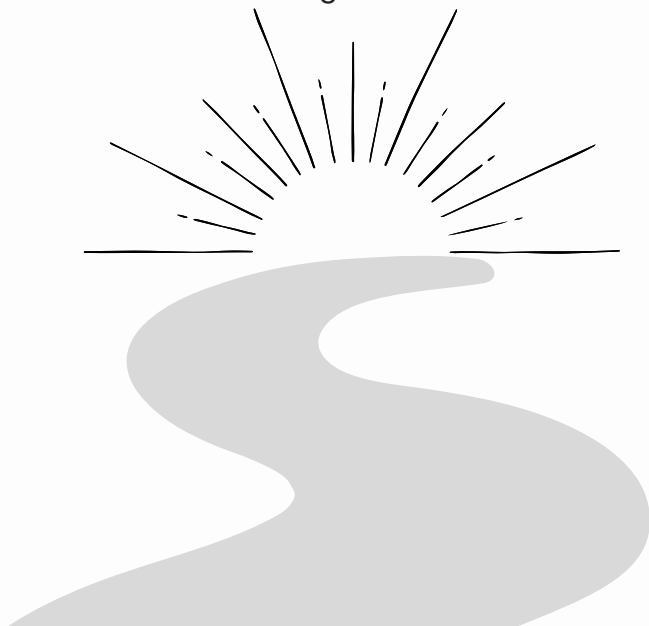
REFLECTIONS BY

A.J. HOY, M.T.S.

Associate Director of Newman Catholic Campus Ministry

Newman Catholic Campus Minister at

The College of Wooster



Fifth Sunday of Lent

- **FIRST READING: JERIMIAH 31:31-34**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15**
- **SECOND READING: HEBREWS 5:7-9**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 12:20-33**

This way of salvation is long and as we make our way through the back half of Lent, we are starting to get glimpses of the end. I recall a time from my high school years when I both loved and hated watching crime shows with my family. As is often the case, these shows would detail some crime and the subsequent investigations. Often, as we would watch, someone in my family would gasp and exclaim, "I know how it's going to end!" Maybe you've had a similar experience with spoilers. In today's readings, if we did not already know the end of the story, we could find quite a few spoilers.

Pope Francis loves to mention the joy that Christians exhibit because we know the end of the story of salvation. In a 2016 homily he taught, "The Christian identity card is joy, the Gospel's joy, the joy of having been chosen by Jesus, saved by Jesus, regenerated by Jesus; the joy of that hope that Jesus is waiting for us, the joy that - even with the crosses and sufferings we bear in this life - is expressed in another way, which is peace in the certainty that Jesus accompanies us, is with us."^[1] Knowing that we will soon recall Jesus' Last Supper, passion, death, and resurrection should color the way that we live our lives. Knowing the end of the story should have some impact on the way that we engage the story of salvation. For Pope Francis, knowing that the redemption of the world is at work is the source of immense joy.

[1] Pope Francis. Homily of May 23, 2016 (New York, NY: America Magazine, 2016). <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/pope-francis-christians-live-gods-love-joy-astonishment>

Our first reading today begins with the promise of a new covenant unlike those that have preceded it. Immediately, we should be drawn to think of the Gospel, the marrow of this new covenant. The same reading from Jeremiah concludes with the promise that “All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.”[1] It is precisely the work of salvation and the ends of salvation that are described in the prophecy of Jeremiah, that we should know God, and that God would forgive and forget our failures. While the prophecy of Jeremiah seems quite far away if imagined in the grandiose displays we typically attribute to prophecy, the reality is that these facets of salvation are present in the work of the church at this very moment.

The church’s very mission is salvific—that is, the church exists to bring about the salvation of the world. We can come to know God in and through the practice of our faith as members of the corporate Body of Christ. Through the work of the church, we are capable of not only glimpsing upon God in the Eucharist, but also in welcoming God into our very selves through our consumption of God’s word, the Eucharist, and in and through the community of the Body of Christ, the church itself.

What’s more, in the sacrament of Reconciliation, we are afforded the ability to enter dialogue with God about our failures. So much of this road of salvation has asked us to deal with the fact that we are capable of failure. Reconciliation allows us to do this with God, and for God to assure us that we are forgiven. Although still a mystery, God and God’s mercy are knowable in and through life in the church. What joy this should elicit that we, although not yet in the fullness of the Kingdom of God, are capable of experiencing glimpses and facets of salvation in the here and now. Indeed, because of the salvific acts of Jesus through his passion, death, and resurrection, the Kingdom is already here in our midst, even if not yet in its fullness.

- Does knowing the story of salvation affect the way that I live my life? Should it?
- How might engaging the church’s work help to bring me further along on the path of salvation?
- Can I walk this path alone, just me and God, or do I need others to walk with me? Why do I think this way?

[1] Jeremiah 31:34

Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: DEUTERONOMY 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62
OR 13:41C-62**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 23:1-3A, 3B-4, 5, 6**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 8:1-11**

Today's readings are admittedly traumatic. They exhibit the second-class status of women in both the time of Judges and the time of Jesus. Both readings, although connected also by accusations against a singular woman regarding some sexual impropriety, detail the facets of a purity culture that cares more about sexual purity and sexual sin than about human flourishing or justice. So, what are we to take from these readings as we walk on this path of salvation?

The thread that ties all of today's readings together is the notion that God's care and justice are distinct from the ways that we are often quick to engage. In today's first reading, Susanna did nothing that could be considered wrong, yet, she is still framed for a "crime" that she did not commit. Were it not for God's intervention, Susanna would have certainly been killed by her neighbors. God knows the full truth of all matters and so God knows the fullness of justice. Yet as creatures of God and people desiring to be in deep communion with God, we also often desire to exact justice as if we were God. In both the first reading and the Gospel today, we see how this propensity to act swiftly in the name of justice without full knowledge can be dangerous and lead us to habituate ourselves in the vice of injustice. How often do we aim to punish others in the name of justice without first taking into consideration the injustices we commit repeatedly? This Lent, let us be imitators of God's care and justice—which prizes mercy and forgiveness over vengeance and quick temper.

- When have I perpetuated injustice in the name of justice? Can I name and own one time that I have been too quick to judge and too harsh in my judgment of someone else?
- How do I feel about justice that does not exact vengeance or that is not cathartic?
- What is one habit that I can work on to make myself less likely to quickly judge others for what I perceive to be failings?

Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary

- **FIRST READING: 2 SAMUEL 7:4-5A, 12-14A, 16**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 89:2-3, 4-5, 27 AND 29**
- **SECOND READING: ROMANS 4:13, 16-18, 22**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 1:16, 18-21, 24A**

Today the church celebrates Saint Joseph as the husband of Mary, the Mother of God. While I could easily fill this space with platitudes about what makes a good husband and father, I'm not sure that will best serve us on this way of salvation. I think today, what Joseph has to offer us is a model of courage. Together we have walked this way of salvation for nearly six weeks. In that time, we have been asked to come to terms with our failure, our poor intentions, and our apathy. As terrifying as it is to deal with the times when we have failed and the times that we continue to fail, we cannot become discouraged. This is where Joseph's example is especially helpful.

Our Gospel excerpt today comes from the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew's audience, who were primarily Jewish, would have been familiar with the customary practices of marriage in the time of Jesus. Still, Matthew finds the need to explain how the marriage of Mary and Joseph survived the pregnancy and birth of Jesus before the couple shared a home. It also gives us insight into the character of Joseph. Imagine for a minute finding out that your beloved was pregnant with a child that was not yours. Would you be dismayed? Certainly, you may even throw your hands up in the air and want to quit. This is Joseph's first instinct. Yet God intervenes, and Joseph is given reason to have courage. When things become hard is precisely when we have the opportunity to exhibit courage, which is at its core simply doing difficult things well in spite of their difficulty. Surely it was not easy for Joseph to be a husband and father in the way that he was, but instead of being discouraged and giving up, Joseph persisted in courage. Joseph's courage enabled him to walk the path of salvation. May we be courageous like Joseph today and every day to come.

- Have I ever been courageous? Can I name one time that I have done difficult things well despite their difficulty?
- Have I ever run away from something that I perceived to be too difficult? Why did I do that?
- Do I get discouraged easily? What are two things that I can do today to build habits of courage in my life?

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: DEUTERONOMY 3:14-20, 91-92, 95**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: DEUTERONOMY 3:52, 53, 54, 55, 56**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 8:31-42**

Growing up, I loved to sing. Throughout my childhood, I relished the time that I spent preparing for pageants, choirs, and performances. As I read today's first reading, I was reminded of a song I sang with my high school choir about God's faithfulness. "He Never Failed Me Yet" mentions the ordeal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego featured in our first reading. Throughout the song, the chorus rings out "He never failed me yet!" Calling us to contemplate the times when we have witnessed God's fidelity and salvific power, the song calls us to faithfulness to the God who is always faithful.

Today's readings center on deliverance born of faithfulness. In our first reading, the three faithful companions are saved because of their faith, yet, in our Gospel, Jesus is calling people to faith who are not responding. It's important to recognize that the Gospel of John has long been used by Christians to justify anti-Semitic ideologies, specifically under the accusation of deicide, killing God. Tragically, the passage we read today has historically been used by white supremacist Christians to justify mistreatment of Jewish people. This is one of the consequences of bad theology. Here, what has often been used as an indictment against Jewish people for centuries is actually an indictment of unbelieving Christians. Jesus tells his followers, "my word has no room among you."^[1] Jesus is begging us to exhibit the faithfulness that makes room for his word in our lives this Lent. Jesus wants us to sing of his faithfulness. It is the only way to walk the path of salvation.

- Is there room for Jesus' word, life, and teaching in my life? If so, where have I made room and where could I make more room? If not, am I prepared to carve out space for Jesus' word in my life?
- Have I ever felt like God has failed me? What happened?
- What does faithfulness look like for a college student in 2024?

[1] John 8:37

Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: GENESIS 17:3-9**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 105:4-5, 6-7, 8-9**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 8:51-59**

What is a covenant? I recall asking myself this as I sat through a lecture in a joint graduate class between the school of theology and ministry and the law school at Boston College. Half of the class was filled with theologians, like me, and the other half were law students. I'd like to imagine that we were all a little lost for at least half of the semester. Still, we kept coming back to the contractual nature of a covenant and the relationship that a covenant establishes and aims to maintain. Our first reading today reminds us of the covenant that made Abram into Abraham. In this covenant, God made promises and so did Abraham on behalf of himself and his progeny. It is this covenant that crowns a series of successive covenants found in the book of Genesis, which progressively become more and more specific.

If we fast forward to the time of today's Gospel passage, we find Jesus preaching a perfection and fulfillment of the covenants of the past. Imagine the shock of a covenant that would surpass the promises of God's covenant with Abraham. Jesus' promises are more than numerous descendants, going beyond what was known to be physically possible, Jesus offers life eternal. Without the benefit of knowing Jesus as our Savior, can we honestly say that we would be eager to follow a street preacher who told us we would never have to die if only we followed him? I'm not sure that I would sign that contract. But a covenant isn't just a contract, it signifies and aims to maintain an enduring relationship—it is a far less sanitized transaction than simply signing a piece of paper. Today, the covenant of Jesus is still open to us. Still, without a relationship with Jesus, the covenant's promises are hard to believe. Our Christian belief and practice cannot be reduced to the mere signing of a baptismal certificate. We need to keep seeking out the relationship that our covenant seeks to foster and maintain, a relationship with God that will conquer even death itself.

- What are some obligations that I have taken on? Do any of them resemble a covenant that establishes mutual claims of fidelity?
- Do I see myself as ready to take on covenantal obligations and relationships? Why or why not?
- Can I be a Christian without seeking a relationship with my God?

Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: JERIMIAH 20:10-13**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 18:2-3A, 3BC-4, 5-6, 7**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 10:31-42**

Throughout the Gospel of John, the most highly symbolic of the four Gospels, Jesus is often identified by his status as the miracle working Messiah, Savior of Creation. This tendency of John's, to identify Jesus with his divine attributes, is what theologians call a "high Christology." Today's Gospel exhibits John's propensity for high Christology well enough. Still there is another theme that runs through the Gospel of John that might be more helpful for us to examine on this path of salvation.

John writes in scenes (pericopes) that often detail Jesus saying or doing something that raises a red flag or two regarding Jewish law. Everywhere Jesus goes, he seems to be stirring the pot or offending people. Usually, John details Jesus trying to talk folks down, as he does in today's Gospel passage, still, Jesus rarely seems to be successful. Many times, the pericopes end with folks picking up stones or trying to arrest Jesus. What has perplexed me for some time is that somehow, Jesus always manages to escape until he is finally arrested, tried, and put to death on the cross. I think today's first reading can help to understand Jesus' repeated deliverance from almost certain death. Jeremiah writes, "For he has rescued the life of the poor..."[1] In preaching the Gospel, Jesus repeatedly puts himself in harm's way. Yet, his narrow escapes are not included as evidence of lucky breaks. Jesus is spared because of God's propensity to deliver those who do God's will. The next time you are in a situation and things are looking bad, consider turning to God, who rescues the life of the poor.

- Can I recall a time when I could not see a way out of a bad situation? What happened? Where was God?
- Have I ever lived the Gospel in ways that others found threatening? Did I do or say something that challenged the status quo?
- What does God's deliverance look like? Can I think of a time when I have experienced deliverance? Was God there?

[1] Jerimiah 20:13

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent

- **FIRST READING: EZEKIEL 37:21-28**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: JEREMIAH 31:10, 11-12ABCD, 13**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 11:45-56**

As we continue to walk together throughout this Lent, it is important to take stock of where we are and how far we have come. This evening begins the holiest week of the liturgical year as we celebrate Palm Sunday. Our readings have led us through the Gospel of John and are now preparing us for Jesus' passion. Still, today's readings are interesting and essential. They are tied together by references to the unification of God's people. While all three readings specifically reference the people of Abraham's covenant, we know now of the possibility of a wider unification fostered by the new covenant of Jesus. Much broader than the unification of a single nation, religious group, tribe, or ethnicity, this new covenant seeks a unity that extends to all creation, indicative of the psalmist who wrote, "How good and how pleasant it is, when the people dwell together as one!"[1]

Unity has long been desired by people. Almost 700 years separate today's first reading and Gospel, and another 1900 years separate us from the writing of the Gospel of John. Still, we long for the unity of the new covenant, long promised, but not yet fully realized. This small expanse of 2500 years in human history still illustrates the enduring legacy of longing for unity with our neighbors. Would it not be great if we could imagine a way forward where unity that surpasses all division was prized for the peace that it could create? This is the promise of the Kingdom of God, where divisions cannot exist, because all are united in God, who cannot be divided. Often, we fail at creating unity, sacrificing someone or something for the sake of bringing others in. But this unity remains at the surface and does not extend to the ends of the earth as the Kingdom of God will one day. We cannot throw people away in the name of unity, otherwise we are no better than the Sanhedrin, who plotted against Jesus for their own security under the guise of a unity that never came.

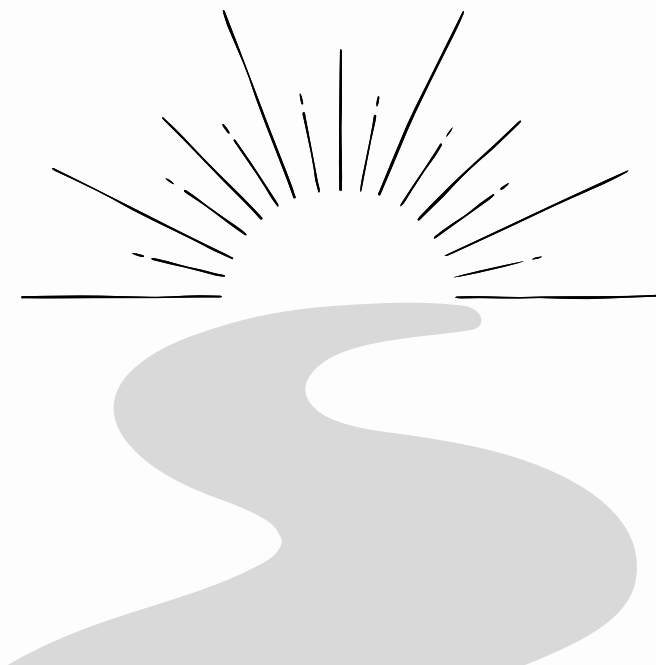
- When have I tried to unite others? Did the unity fostered require someone to be excluded or thrown away?
- Is the unity of the Kingdom of God actually possible? Why?
- Why might unity matter as we walk this path of salvation? Can anyone be saved alone?

[1] Psalm 133:1

Holy Week

REFLECTIONS BY
STEPHEN PERRY, M.A.

Associate Director of Catholic Campus Ministry
Newman Catholic Campus Minister at
Case Western Reserve University



Palm Sunday

- PROCESSION: MARK 11:1-10
- FIRST READING: ISAIAH 50:4-7
- RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24
- SECOND READING: PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11
- GOSPEL: MARK 14:1-15:47

Today, we recall the fateful day when God himself knowingly began his march toward death at the hands of his own people. We have spent these last six weeks reflecting on the arc of salvation history and, to understand the gravity of this moment, it is helpful to look back to how the story began.

Before all things[1], the Triune God existed eternally. During this “time” before time, God lacked for nothing. He existed in a constant, unimpeded exchange of perfect love among his three Persons. He needed nothing from what he would go on to create, so his decision to create was an act of pure generosity. The Lord desired to share his perfect existence with beings outside of himself, and so granted existence and life to the cosmos as an unmerited gift.

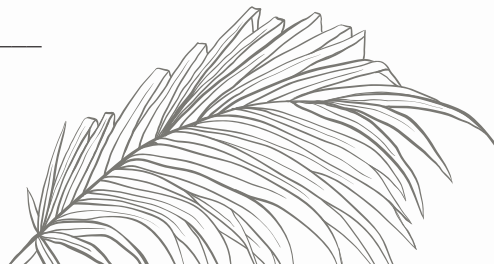
If this were where the story ended, it would make sense to me. If it is within your power, why not share such a glorious life with more people? Beginning today, we get a poignant answer to that question. God knew before he ever endeavored to create that making the cosmos, making humanity, would lead to the moment we read in the Gospel today. He knew humanity would reject him, and he knew precisely what it would cost him to redeem them.

If I were God, this would have been a dealbreaker for me. God had nothing to gain by this, because “our praises add nothing to [his] greatness[2],” but had everything to lose. Yet, despite having total freedom to put a stop to this, our second reading reminds us that he freely chose to “[empty] himself...becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross”[3] on our behalf.

[1] Cf. Colossians 1:17

[2] Eucharistic Prayer IV

[3] Philippians 2:8



Now, let us zoom in. Everything that I have written in this reflection about creation as a whole is true of you and me as individuals as well. The Lord created us in an act of pure generosity, knowing from before all time that we would reject him and that redeeming us would come at a great personal cost. We have spent this Lenten season reflecting on and atoning for the various ways we have rejected God in our lives, and in my experience doing this can amplify feelings of unworthiness before the Lord. This week, as you accompany Jesus on his march into Jerusalem, do so comforted by the knowledge that from the moment God imagined you, he knew he was going to do this for you, and determined you were worth the cost. God has called you worthy and proven his conviction of that fact by the deeds we celebrate this week. God never errs in his judgment.

- What difference does it make to consider that God knew all the ways you would reject him before he made you, and chose to create you anyway?
- God created you to share in his perfect and eternal life, take some time today to meditate on what you imagine it will be like to experience that life in its fullness.



Monday of Holy Week

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 42:1-7**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 27:1, 2, 3, 13-14**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 12:1-11**

It is natural to focus on ourselves, even in our relationship with God. Because of this tendency, it is easy to see ourselves as unworthy of the salvation that Christ brings. When you fix your gaze on the bruised reed, you think it is only a matter of time before it breaks. When all your attention is on the smoldering wick, you simply await the moment when it will be quenched.

Today's reading from the Old Testament impels us to focus instead on Christ. When we do this, we recall that salvation is not about us nor what our deeds have merited; rather, it is about the one who comes "to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement"[1] and who does so with unlimited power and mercy.

The life of the Christian is not about earning salvation. The scriptures are clear that it has already been bought and paid for. The life of a Christian is about responding with love to what was freely given in love. When we do this, we "co-operate" – literally "work together" – with the God whose work is efficacious.

As we continue to march toward Good Friday, let us look to Mary in today's Gospel as a model, who was so fixated on Christ that she poured out a year's wages worth of oil on his behalf without hesitation.

- How can you fix your gaze on Christ this week?
- In what ways is God calling you to "co-operate" with him?



[1] Isaiah 42:7

Tuesday of Holy Week

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 49:1-6**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 1-2, 3-4A, 5AB-6AB, 15 & 17**
- **GOSPEL: JOHN 13:21-33, 36-38**

A common theme in our two main readings today is the relationship between human despair and divine hope. The prophet Isaiah puts words to what Christ was likely thinking as he reclined at table with his friends, anticipating what was to come that night: "I [have] toiled in vain, and for nothing, uselessly spent my strength." [1]

Though, in his divinity, Christ knew how this story would end. I must imagine that, as a human, this was a time of great despair. He had spent his life and ministry doing nothing but serving his people, yet, enabled by one of his closest friends, that same people was preparing to put him to a brutal death.

But if we understand the reading from Isaiah to be putting words to Christ's thoughts in this moment, we must note that it does not end in despair - far from it! Christ looks through the darkness to see the light piercing through on the other side. Jesus knows that after his suffering, his Father will raise him from the dead, and he will be able to say, "I am made glorious in the sight of the Lord, and God is now my strength!" [2] Despite the despair he rightly feels in that moment, Jesus does not lose sight of the divine hope brought by his Father's promises.

In Christ, those same promises now belong to us. Whenever our lives on earth bring us to despair, let us follow in the model the Lord sets for us here, trusting that we are ultimately in the hands of the Father.

- When was the last time you experienced despair? If it was in the past, how did the situation resolve?
- How can you grow in your trust of the Father's promises to you?

[1] Isaiah 49:3

[2] Isaiah 49:5

Wednesday of Holy Week

- **FIRST READING: ISAIAH 50:4-9A**
- **RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 8-10, 21-22, 31 AND 33-34**
- **GOSPEL: MATTHEW 26:14-25**

“It would have been better for that man if he had never been born.”[1] I long found Jesus’ words here unsettling on many fronts.

Maybe it is just. I mean, Judas did betray God himself. But then again, he was not the only disciple who betrayed Jesus during his Passion. Even Peter, upon whom the Lord promised to build his Church, abandoned and denied Jesus three times.

So, what sets Peter and Judas apart? How can it be that two men betrayed Jesus, and the Lord says of one of them “it would have been better for that man if he had never been born” and of the other “On [you] I will build my Church”[2]? I would contend that what differentiates these two men is not the gravity of their offenses against Jesus, but rather what they did when they came to regret their decision.

As you likely know, when Judas realized he could not undo what he had done, he gave into despair. Rather than opening himself up to the Lord’s mercy, he decided he was irredeemable and took his own life. Peter, on the other hand, so trusted in the Lord’s mercy that when he saw the resurrected Jesus from his boat on the sea, he jumped into the water, rushed to his friend and master, and thrice proclaimed that he loved him.

If Judas had trusted in God’s mercy as Peter did, I am sure he would be in the communion of saints with his eleven friends. But Jesus foresaw he would not and as a result he would condemn himself. As we prepare to celebrate the Paschal Triduum, let us be ready to, like Peter, rush to the side of the Lord and proclaim our love for him.

- Have you ever had a friend who thought they committed a sin so grave that the Lord could not forgive them? What would you have said to them?
- How can you grow to receive the Lord’s gifts of mercy and salvation more like Peter?

[1] Matthew 26:24

[2] Matthew 16:18

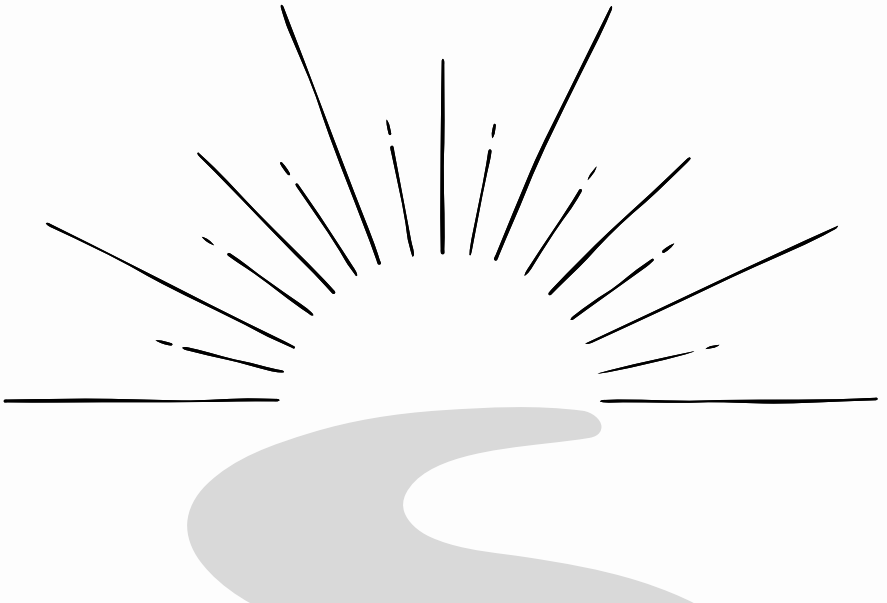


The Paschal Triduum

REFLECTIONS BY

A.J. HOY, M.T.S.

Associate Director of Catholic Campus Ministry
Newman Catholic Campus Minister at
The College of Wooster



The Paschal Triduum

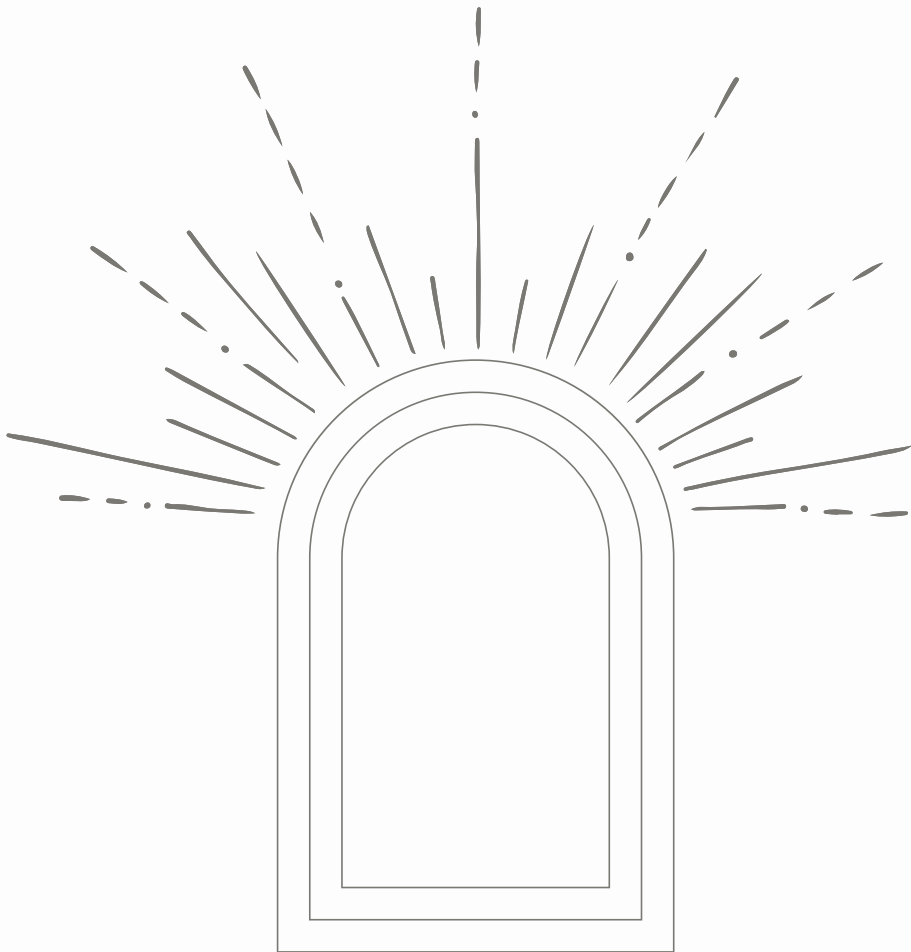
Throughout the next three days, the church celebrates one continuous liturgy. What begins on Holy Thursday with the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the commemoration of the institution of the Eucharist is only completed on the eve of Easter Sunday as we proclaim the resurrection of our Lord. While your attendance at this days-long liturgy is by no means obligatory, we encourage you to attend the liturgy as you are able. What follows is a brief reflection on the journey of the Triduum.

Throughout this Lent we have walked together along the way of salvation. We have certainly not traversed this path completely. Still, walking with one another and with our Lord, who himself is the way, is the nature of Christian life. As the church gathers to commemorate Jesus' last supper with his friends, we also come to learn his ways. The liturgy of the Triduum that begins on Holy Thursday not only recalls Jesus' institution of the Eucharist, that is Jesus eternally with us, but also remembers (anamnesis literally "un-forgets") Jesus' servant leadership. This night, we wash one another's feet, just as Christ the Servant, our savior, washed the feet of his friends. In the last day of his life, Jesus gave us his body and blood as food and drink for our journey, that we should never have to walk this way of salvation alone. After commemorating that first Eucharist, we accompany Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane, proclaiming, Sing my tongue the Savior's glory.

Good Friday brings the trial and death of Jesus. Our liturgy continues today. Notice there is no introduction, no sign of the cross. Good Friday is also the only day of the year during which there is no consecration of the Eucharist. Although we take and eat Christ's body today, we do so from reserve. Today we hear the Passion of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, according to St. John, and venerate the cross of Jesus, without which we would not know salvation. There is something powerful in venerating this device of cruelty and torture. It speaks to the transformative power of Jesus' love and sacrifice. As we depart, Jesus is dead, and we are left waiting.

Holy Saturday brings with it more waiting. Jesus is dead. He is not yet risen. There is something beautiful that resonates in the waiting we experience today. In many ways the church is a Holy Saturday people. We live in the breach of already and not yet. Jesus has come and gone but we are still waiting for him to come again. We know the love and mercy of Jesus, but we do not yet know if fully. Now we see through a cloudy lens, but only in the resurrection will we see fully. As we wait today, don't rush to push off the discomfort of sitting in the chasm between what was and what will be. Let the already and not yet rush over you. It is our present moment.

As the sun sets on this day of waiting, in churches all around the world a new light rises from the same ashes that were smeared on our foreheads as a sign of our death and repentance just 7 weeks ago. This new light is the light of Christ, risen from the dead. He is the light of the world. He walks with us. He is the way of salvation.



The Exultet

Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven,
exult, let Angel ministers of God exult,
let the trumpet of salvation
sound aloud our mighty King's triumph!
Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her,
ablaze with light from her eternal King,
let all corners of the earth be glad,
knowing an end to gloom and darkness.

Rejoice, let Mother Church also rejoice,
arrayed with the lightning of his glory,
let this holy building shake with joy,
filled with the mighty voices of the peoples.

It is truly right and just, with ardent love of mind and heart
and with devoted service of our voice,
to acclaim our God invisible, the almighty Father,
and Jesus Christ, our Lord, his Son, his Only Begotten.

Who for our sake paid Adam's debt to the eternal Father,
and, pouring out his own dear Blood,
wiped clean the record of our ancient sinfulness.

These, then, are the feasts of Passover,
in which is slain the Lamb, the one true Lamb,
whose Blood anoints the doorposts of believers.

This is the night,
when once you led our forebears, Israel's children,
from slavery in Egypt and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea.

This is the night
that with a pillar of fire banished the darkness of sin.

This is the night
that even now, throughout the world,
sets Christian believers apart from worldly vices
and from the gloom of sin,
leading them to grace and joining them to his holy ones.

This is the night,
when Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld.

Our birth would have been no gain, had we not been redeemed.

O wonder of your humble care for us!

O love, O charity beyond all telling, to ransom a slave you gave away your Son!

O truly necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!

O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!

O truly blessed night,

worthy alone to know the time and hour when Christ rose from the underworld!

This is the night

of which it is written:

The night shall be as bright as day, dazzling is the night for me, and full of gladness.

The sanctifying power of this night

dispels wickedness, washes faults away,

restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners,

drives out hatred, fosters concord, and brings down the mighty.

On this, your night of grace, O holy Father,

accept this candle, a solemn offering, the work of bees and of your servants' hands,
an evening sacrifice of praise, this gift from your most holy Church.

But now we know the praises of this pillar, which glowing fire ignites for God's
honor,

a fire into many flames divided, yet never dimmed by sharing of its light,

for it is fed by melting wax, drawn out by mother bees to build a torch so precious.

O truly blessed night,

when things of heaven are wed to those of earth, and divine to the human.

Therefore, O Lord,

we pray you that this candle, hallowed to the honor of your name,
may persevere undimmed, to overcome the darkness of this night.

Receive it as a pleasing fragrance,

and let it mingle with the lights of heaven.

May this flame be found still burning by the Morning Star:

the one Morning Star who never sets, Christ your Son,

who, coming back from death's domain, has shed his peaceful light on humanity,
and lives and reigns for ever and ever.

R. Amen

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EDITOR:

A.J. Hoy

EDITORIAL TEAM:

Steve Perry and
Joann Rymarczyk-Piotrkowski

**COVER ART AND BOOK
DESIGN AND LAYOUT:**

Mary G. Hoy

COPY EDITING:

Alex Piotrkowski



1404 E. 9th Street, Cleveland, Ohio
44114
216-696-6525

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