

# LENT

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**FOR MARRIED COUPLES**

**2024**





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Meditations by William C. Wacker

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*We are pleased to offer this series to married couples so that they may open their hearts to God and to each other while inviting the Holy Spirit into their daily lives.*

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## Introduction

Lent is a penitential season. It is a good time to grow in love and holiness with our spouse. But it is not always easy for busy couples to find time to do Lenten practices together.

We offer this series to help you and your spouse stay connected during the holy season of Lent. All the Scripture readings are from the Catholic Lectionary for Lent. The daily readings in Lent do not change from year to year. However, since the feast of St. Joseph and the feast of the Annunciation fall on the same dates each year (March 19th and March 25th respectively), they can show up at different places in the Lenten calendar. We will use the readings for those feast days when it is appropriate. *Note: since March 25th falls during Holy Week, the Solemnity of the Annunciation will be celebrated on April 8th.*

The Sunday readings follow a three-year cycle. We have listed all the readings for the current year (in 2024, we are in Year B). The gospel readings for the first two weeks of Lent recount the stories of the temptations in the desert and the Transfiguration of the Lord. The readings are from all three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

This year we offer meditations on the first reading from the weekday Mass for the first four weeks of Lent, with a few exceptions. We will shift back to meditating on the gospel for week five and Holy Week.

A note about the inclusion of deuterocanonical readings: additions to the book of Daniel, including an excerpt from the song of Azariah in the fiery furnace, and the story of Susanna, and a selection from the Book of Wisdom, are considered inspired by the Catholics and worth reading by most Protestant denominations.

We invite you to take a short time—about 20 minutes a day—to do something for your marriage. On Easter morning, you will find greater unity, an increased appreciation for learning more about each other, and a gratitude for the small ways you've chosen to show your love and affection.

Set yourself up for success! Pick a time of day you can be consistent with. Turn off your phones and other distractions. Light a candle. Sit close together and take turns reading the parts out loud. We have selected one of the daily readings for you to read each day. It is followed by a meditation; a time for quiet reflection and discussion; a blessing; and a prayer for unity.

### **YOU MIGHT BE THINKING . . .**

“Pray together every day? Really?!”

If you miss a day or two, don't worry! Start small—say, twice a week. Remember, each effort you make to pray and talk more with your spouse is a victory. Your marriage will grow stronger, and you will be happier as a couple. You will begin to see God's grace and the Holy Spirit at work in your relationship. Your example will bring hope to the world.

“We barely see each other; we are running around crazy most days. How do we make time for this?”

Doing something is better than doing nothing at all. Maybe you just say the Lord’s prayer together and offer up what’s on your heart that day. Or you can get creative. Take a break while you’re at work, set up a time to videochat, and read through the Scripture and meditation together. Or you can set the morning alarm an extra 10 minutes earlier and squeeze in prayer together.

“How will we know our efforts are working?”

At the end of a day or a week, think back to what happened. Was there a moment when you made the choice to withhold a negative comment? Did you choose to compliment your spouse, rather than tear him/her down? Did you smile when you thought about your spouse today? Have you seen an increase in your affection? Are you holding hands more? Are you laughing more? Are you willing to give each other the benefit of the doubt? Do you find yourself wanting to text each other more? These are all signs of the Holy Spirit at work in your marriage!

“How will we keep this up for all of Lent? How can we make it to Easter?”

Ask a friend to be there for you. Tell them what you intend to do. Give them permission to ask you how it’s going. Ask them to pray for you. Set reminders on your phone every day leading right up to Holy Week—something like “Have you connected with your spouse today?” Reward yourself! With your spouse, think about a fun thing you can look forward to at the end of each week if you pray 2–3 times together. A date night, a small gift, a massage, breakfast in bed . . . you get the idea.

Trust in the Lord and begin!



## Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:12–18; 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen***

### Reading: Joel 2:12–18

Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; <sup>13</sup> rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. <sup>14</sup> Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God? <sup>15</sup> Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; <sup>16</sup> gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy. <sup>17</sup> Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, "Where is their God?"" <sup>18</sup> Then the LORD became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people.

### Meditation

"Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing." The real point of our Lenten practices is to come to know the true nature of our God. He is beyond our comprehension. We are invited to pause, to suspend our normal activities. Bridegrooms and brides are to leave the marriage bed for a time. We are to change our normal eating habits, to fast. We are called to weep for our sins and turn our hearts and our lives back to the Lord who is nothing except love. We are called to focus on who our God is: love. Focus on his mercy, his longsuffering on our behalf, his boundless covenant love and mercy (*hesed*). Let us begin our Lenten journey with great hope and expectation.

**Quiet reflection:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Deuteronomy 30:15–20; Luke 9:22–25

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Deuteronomy 30:15–20

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. <sup>16</sup> If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. <sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup> I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, <sup>20</sup> loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

### Meditation

Our culture puts a huge premium on choice. We care, above all, about freedom, self-direction, and autonomy. It is all about our personal choice. However, in our culture we have so many choices that rather than bringing freedom, choice often brings paralysis. So, narrowing the options to two should be a great help. “Today, I have set before you life and death.” But if that is so helpful, why then the command to “choose life”? Isn’t it self-evident? Unfortunately, the great lie, the false god, of our day that lures so many astray is that we are autonomous, that we can direct ourselves. The antidote to that lie is the truth that life is found in obedience to the Lord. It is found in holding fast to him and his commandments. The most fundamental and freeing choice is not “What do I want?” but rather “What does God want?” That is to choose life!

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord’s Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

**Reading: Isaiah 58:1–9**

Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. <sup>2</sup> Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. <sup>3</sup> "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. <sup>4</sup> Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. <sup>5</sup> Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? <sup>6</sup> Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? <sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? <sup>8</sup> Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup> Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

**Meditation**

This is a remarkable exchange between the Lord and his people. The prophet announces, with dripping sarcasm, that the whiny prayer of the rebellious people will not be heard. In their own minds they want to know why the Lord is not answering their prayers. They say, "We fast, and you don't see; we humble ourselves, but you don't notice." But the Lord will have nothing to do with their self-serving "religious" practices. They cover up the oppression of their workers, their quarreling, violence, and injustice, with pious practices. But the Lord is not fooled. What the Lord is looking for is justice, care for the weak, feeding the hungry, giving shelter to the homeless, clothing the naked. Doing those things will constitute the kind of fast that will be pleasing to the Lord. When our pious external actions match our humble internal disposition, he will hear our prayer and answer us. We will call and he will say, "Here I am."

**Quiet Reflection:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:9b–14; Luke 5:27–32

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Isaiah 58:9b–14

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, <sup>10</sup> if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. <sup>11</sup> The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. <sup>12</sup> Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. <sup>13</sup> If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; <sup>14</sup> then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

### Meditation

We see on display today the two great commandments: to love God with our whole heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The prophet is speaking to a people who are longing to return to their land. How might their long exile from the land end? Notice how many conditional clauses there are in today's reading. Note the formula "If you . . . then. . . ." There are two basic categories in today's reading. The first has to do with our behavior towards others. What are those conditions? We are to stop speaking evil and stop pointing fingers at each other. We are to offer food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted. The result is that God will take care of us in spectacular ways. Our cities will be rebuilt, we will have plentiful water and strong bodies, and our nation will last many generations! The second set of conditions involves our relationship with the Lord himself. We are to put him first in our lives. Practically, that meant for the Jews keeping the sabbath holy by not pursuing their own interests on that day. We can extend that to every aspect of our lives. We can join our will to his will—or to put it the other way around, we can pray to will what he wills. The result is that God will take care of us in ways we can't imagine. It is another way of saying what the Psalmist said: "Trust in the LORD, and do good, so you will live in the land and enjoy security. Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday" (Psalm 37:3–6).

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*





## First Sunday of Lent

Genesis 9:8–15; 1 Peter 3:18–22; Mark 1:12–15

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Mark 1:12–15

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. <sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

### Meditation

The hiker set up camp for the night in a little clearing near a cave just off one of the paths that pilgrims and hikers take as they explore the harsh Judean wilderness between Jericho and Jerusalem. The low flat spots that are ideal for camping are off limits because they are dry riverbeds that could flood without warning if it rained in Jerusalem, about 10 miles away. The caves present other dangers. The hiker was a little disturbed by the foul smell in the area, but he had decided that he could tolerate it for one night. As he was getting settled, a park ranger came by and said, "You might want to find another spot to camp tonight." "Why?" the hiker asked. "That smell is the remnants of a leopard's kill, and we think that cave is his den." In Jesus' day leopards were only one of the many types of wild beasts he would have encountered in the dangerous wilderness. The caves were also the hideouts of bandits who preyed on travelers, and of violent revolutionaries. Jesus would have suffered from the temperature extremes, lack of food, threat of floods, and encounters with dangerous wild animals and humans. He went into the wilderness as Israel's king, in Israel's place. And as Israel, he was tempted. But this time Israel, in the person of her king, was faithful to the call of the Father. In Lent we hear Jesus invite us to join him in the wilderness for a time. We need not fear. Because Jesus has been faithful and poured his Holy Spirit out on us, we too can be faithful. That is Good News!

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



## First Week of Lent: Monday

Leviticus 19:1–2, 11–18; Matthew 25:31–46

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Leviticus 19:1–18

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. <sup>11</sup> You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. <sup>12</sup> And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD. <sup>13</sup> You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. <sup>14</sup> You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. <sup>15</sup> You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. <sup>16</sup> You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the LORD. <sup>17</sup> You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. <sup>18</sup> You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, **but you shall love your neighbor as yourself:** I am the LORD.

### Meditation

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus called this the second greatest commandment after “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:36–39). St. Thomas Aquinas said that to love is to will the good of the other. But what does it mean to will the good of our neighbor? See the list of “you shall nots” above. And then compare them with the expectations the Lord has for us in the last judgement in today’s gospel. Practical love changed the Roman Empire. Christians invented hospitals and other social services. Even before many medicines were discovered, the first Christians learned that food, water, a bath, clean clothes, and a warm shelter helped people get well and stay alive. All around them, people without Christian friends or family were dying. Those first believers did these kindnesses because Jesus said that to do them for the least of these was to do them for Jesus himself. Sometimes the Christians caught an ill person’s disease and died. But they did not fear death because they believed in the resurrection and life after death. Eventually, hospitals and other social services became an organized way to put into practice our Lord’s command to love one another. Today, think of some simple actions you can do as a couple to improve the lives of your neighbors, family members, and friends.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord’s Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



## First Week of Lent: Tuesday

Isaiah 55:10–11; Matthew 6:7–15

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Isaiah 55:10–11

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

### Meditation

Today's first reading is paired with Jesus' instruction on how to pray. He teaches them to pray the prayer we know as the Our Father. God will accomplish what he sets out to do. His will and purposes will be accomplished. God the Father promised that his word would go forth from him and would not return until it had accomplished what he sent it out to do. What the prophet could only hint at, but what we now know, is that his Word became a human being and that he returned to the Father, having accomplished what he was sent to do, which was to rescue fallen humanity.

As the author of Hebrews said, "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. <sup>3</sup> He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word." (Hebrews 1:1-3)

Lent affords us the opportunity to meditate on the goodness of God and his deep love for us. We can trust him like a father who has nothing but our good in mind. He is love, and love will accomplish its purpose: to will the good of the other.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

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***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

**Reading: Jonah 3:1–10**

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." <sup>3</sup> So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. <sup>4</sup> Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" <sup>5</sup> And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. <sup>6</sup> When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. <sup>7</sup> Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. <sup>8</sup> Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. <sup>9</sup> Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish." <sup>10</sup> When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

**Meditation**

Have you ever wondered if your prayers made a difference? Jesus offered the image of the widow who pounded on the door of the unjust judge; her persistence made the judge change his mind (Luke 11:8) He also told us about the judge who was bothered by the persistent widow and granted her petition because she wore him out (Luke 18:3–5). We can remember too that Jesus responded to the request of his mother at Cana (John 2). But long before Jesus preached about persistent prayer and long before he who was God incarnate responded to his mother's request, we have this story about the most wicked of Israel's enemies, responding to the preaching of the reluctant prophet whose cowardice and disobedience made a whale sick. Why did the people of Nineveh repent? They heard the word of the Lord and said, "Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish." The story which Jesus will recount in today's gospel goes on to say that God did change his mind when he saw their repentance. He does hear our prayers. He does respond to our pleas for his assistance, which, after all, are really his grace at work in our hearts moving us to pray, to repent, to love. They are our actions, to be sure, but they are moved first by his grace, which is the work of his Holy Spirit.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

**Reading: Matthew 7:7–12**

"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>9</sup> Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? <sup>10</sup> Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? <sup>11</sup> If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! <sup>12</sup> In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."

**Meditation**

She and her husband had risked everything to start a business. It started very slowly and finally grew into a very successful company. They were very generous, even when things were difficult. Unfortunately, he passed away and she was left to manage the business and eventually sell it. When she sold the company, she became a very wealthy widow. She had always been very generous, but she had never been asked for a really large gift. That is, until she was out for lunch with the headmaster of the school she and her husband had supported over the years. The school was just beginning a capital campaign and she expected to be asked for about \$50,000, a large gift by anyone's standards. But the headmaster instead asked her to consider making the lead donation for their campaign. He asked her for a gift of \$3,000,000. After she recovered from her surprise, she said she would think about the request. A few days later, they were at lunch again, and she agreed to make the lead gift. Just before they left the restaurant, she said to the headmaster, "Thank you for not asking for \$50,000. This is much better." Our Father in heaven is like that too.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Catholic lectionary, February 22, 2024, is the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter. These are the usual Lenten readings for Thursday of the first week of Lent.



### **Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

### **Reading: Ezekiel 18:21–26**

But if the wicked turn away from all their sins that they have committed and keep all my statutes and do what is lawful and right, they shall surely live; they shall not die. <sup>22</sup> None of the transgressions that they have committed shall be remembered against them; for the righteousness that they have done they shall live. <sup>23</sup> Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord GOD, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live? <sup>24</sup> But when the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity and do the same abominable things that the wicked do, shall they live? None of the righteous deeds that they have done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which they are guilty and the sin they have committed, they shall die. <sup>25</sup> Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is unfair." Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? <sup>26</sup> When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die.

### **Meditation**

"That's not fair!!" more than one of my children, on more than one occasion loudly protested. The perceived injustice could have resulted from a millimeter difference in a slice of dessert (actually measured on one occasion), a five-minute difference in the bedtime for a younger sibling, or any real or imagined loss of a privilege or reward the child thought was rightfully due or granted, to an "undeserving" sibling. Here, the house of Israel is acting just like a whiny child. The Lord has just told them that they will no longer be punished for the sins of their fathers (see verses 1–20 of this chapter). Rather, they will be rewarded or punished for their own sins. And further, if the wicked repent they will be forgiven and live, but if the righteous turn away from the Lord, they will be punished and die. It is not clear what bothered them: that the Lord would be merciful to repentant sinners or that they would be held accountable for their actions. Lent is the time when we are given the opportunity to meditate on two sides of the same coin. God is both merciful and just. Let us recognize our true nature as sinners and turn to the God whose mercy knows no limits.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*





**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

**Reading: Deuteronomy 26:16–19**

This very day the LORD your God is commanding you to observe these statutes and ordinances; so observe them diligently with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>17</sup> Today you have obtained the LORD's agreement: to be your God; and for you to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, his commandments, and his ordinances, and to obey him. <sup>18</sup> Today the LORD has obtained your agreement: to be his treasured people, as he promised you, and to keep his commandments; <sup>19</sup> for him to set you high above all nations that he has made, in praise and in fame and in honor; and for you to be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.

**Meditation**

The covenant that the Lord has made with Israel and then, by extension, with us, has two sides. God has bound himself to us and promised to be our God. It is an exclusive relationship, like that of marriage. He has promised to love us unconditionally and that we would be his treasured possession. What Israel didn't know and could not even guess at is the extent to which God would go to keep his promise: the sending of his only Son to die for us. But like marriage, this covenant is between two persons, and requires us, as if in a high-stakes poker game, to go "all in" as well. We are to keep his commandments, the greatest of which is to love him, with our whole heart. We are to love him above all else and our neighbor as ourselves.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



## Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 22:1–2, 9a, 10–13, 15–18; Romans 8:31b–34; Mark 9:2–10

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Mark 9:2–10

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup> and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." <sup>6</sup> He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup> Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" <sup>8</sup> Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. <sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. <sup>10</sup> So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.

### Meditation

Before their eyes Jesus was transfigured. His clothes were dazzling white. Elijah and Moses were there talking to him. Peter mistook this for a fantastic version of the festival of booths and wanted to erect three huts right there. Then they heard the voice from the cloud say, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him." Who was Jesus? The voice from the cloud had to be the God of Israel, and his Son was surely the messiah/the king; but this Son of God was more than an ordinary king. Next to him were Moses and Elijah, who represented the law and the prophets; this king/messiah was the fulfillment of both. And as amazing as this whole vision was, they must have been greatly puzzled by Jesus' command to not tell anyone about it until the Son of Man had been raised from the dead.

Fast forward to another hill. This one is just outside of Jerusalem. Jesus is once again between two people. This time, he is naked, bleeding, and near death. On either side of him is a convicted criminal. Rather than a voice from heaven, there is a sign on the cross that proclaims his true identity: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Rather than a voice from heaven, the centurion, who saw the way Jesus breathed his last, said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (Mark 15:39)

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*





## Second Week of Lent: Monday

Daniel 9:4b–10; Luke 6:36–38

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Daniel 9:4b–10

Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, <sup>5</sup> we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. <sup>6</sup> We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. <sup>7</sup> Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. <sup>8</sup> Open shame, O LORD, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. <sup>9</sup> To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, <sup>10</sup> and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

### Meditation

The stories of Daniel were popular during the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes, who in 168 BC began a horrific persecution of the Jews that included the desecration of the Temple and led to the Maccabean revolt ( 167 BC–160 BC). It was a time of one of Judah's greatest trials. Daniel confesses that they are in this dire predicament because as a nation they have sinned. They have not listened to the prophets, and they have turned away from the commandments. Daniel acknowledges that sin and not keeping the covenant have real-life consequences. So too for us. While the immediate consequences might not entail foreign oppression and violent persecution, the damage done to our relationships is real and painful. Thankfully we have a God who is great and awesome, who keeps his covenant and has steadfast love for those who are faithful to him. We know, too, that with the coming of his Son and the sending of his Holy Spirit, his grace continues to move us and call us back to repentance. This Lent, let us respond generously to that grace.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## Second Week of Lent: Tuesday

Isaiah 1:10, 16–20; Matthew 23:1–12

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Isaiah 1:10, 16–20

Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! <sup>16</sup> Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, <sup>17</sup> learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. <sup>18</sup> Come now, let us argue it out, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. <sup>19</sup> If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; <sup>20</sup> but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

### Meditation

Again, we hear the prophet speak to a nation that is on the brink of national disaster. The Assyrian army is just over the horizon to their north and the Assyrian king is boasting, “I have removed the boundaries of peoples, and have plundered their treasures; like a bull I have brought down those who sat on thrones. <sup>14</sup> My hand has found, like a nest, the wealth of the peoples; and as one gathers eggs that have been forsaken, so I have gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved a wing, or opened its mouth, or chirped” (Isaiah 10:13-14). The prophet sees that their predicament is caused by corrupt leadership: “Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!” What is the remedy? What action can the leaders and the people take to forestall the same fate as the other nations? Repent, learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, and defend the orphan. Let their actions demonstrate that their hearts are now in the right place with the Lord, and they are living the covenant. But as always, there is both a promise and a warning: “If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; <sup>20</sup> but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” This Lent, let us heed the warning of the prophet and embrace the promise of the Lord.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord’s Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## Second Week of Lent: Wednesday

Jeremiah 18:18–20; Matthew 20:17–28

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Jeremiah 18:18–20

Then they said, "Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah—for instruction shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us bring charges against him, and let us not heed any of his words." <sup>19</sup> Give heed to me, O LORD, and listen to what my adversaries say! <sup>20</sup> Is evil a recompense for good? Yet they have dug a pit for my life. Remember how I stood before you to speak good for them, to turn away your wrath from them.

### Meditation

To understand this passage, we must read the first part of this chapter. Preaching the word of the Lord caused Jeremiah a great deal of trouble. The Lord had instructed Jeremiah to go to the potter's house and observe the potter at work. The pot he was throwing was not turning out the way he wanted; it was ruined. So, he flattened the deformed clay and started over. The lesson was that God's people were like that spoiled lump of clay and the Lord was about to remake them. Jeremiah pleaded, "Turn now, all of you, from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings" (18:11). But the people refused to listen and preferred their own way to the Lord's. The Lord was dumbfounded at their response: "Therefore thus says the LORD: Ask among the nations: Who has heard the like of this? The virgin Israel has done a most horrible thing. . . . My people have forgotten me, they burn offerings to a delusion; they have stumbled in their ways" (see verses. 13–16). The Lord then pronounced judgement on them: "Like the wind from the east, I will scatter them before the enemy. I will show them my back, not my face, in the day of their calamity" (18:17). The people did not welcome the message of Jeremiah. Rather, they plotted to kill him, and on several occasions, they nearly succeeded. Jeremiah's persecution previews what will happen to Jesus, who will also be persecuted and ultimately put to death by the religious leaders of his day. Lent is a time when we can reflect not only on Jeremiah's and Jesus' fate, but also on the risk we take when we live boldly for the Lord. Our lives and words will make a hostile world uncomfortable, but that is precisely what will ultimately bring about an encounter with the Lord.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



## Second Week of Lent: Thursday

Jeremiah 17:5–10; Luke 16:19–31

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Jeremiah 17:5–10

Thus says the LORD: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the LORD. <sup>6</sup> They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. <sup>7</sup> Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. <sup>8</sup> They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. <sup>9</sup> The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse— who can understand it? <sup>10</sup> I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.

### Meditation

Today's reading is paired with the story of Lazarus and the rich man. When the rich man wanted Father Abraham to send someone back from the dead to warn his family, Abraham said, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). When Jesus was telling this parable, he must have had passages like this one from Jeremiah in mind. In addition to challenging how we care for the poor who are in our midst, the prophets remind us that we must be careful about what we put at the center of our lives. If we trust money, power, or even other human beings more than we trust the Lord, we will be like a shrub planted in a desert: dusty, dry, and fruitless. However, if we trust in the Lord, we will be like the tree planted by a stream. Our roots will always have access to life-giving water. Here again are the two choices we always have: trust in the Lord and live, or trust in anything else and be disappointed.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



## Second Week of Lent: Friday

Genesis 37:3–4, 12–13a, 17b–28a; Matthew 21:33–43, 45–46

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

### Reading: Genesis 37:3–4, 12–13a, 17b–28a

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. <sup>4</sup> But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him. <sup>12</sup> Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. <sup>13</sup> And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." <sup>17</sup> So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. <sup>18</sup> They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. <sup>19</sup> They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. <sup>20</sup> Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." <sup>21</sup> But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." <sup>22</sup> Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. <sup>23</sup> So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; <sup>24</sup> and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. <sup>25</sup> Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. <sup>26</sup> Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? <sup>27</sup> Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. <sup>28</sup> When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver.

### Meditation

This is not the last time we will read of the selling of a righteous man for silver coins. Joseph was betrayed and sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. Jesus will be betrayed by a trusted companion. Both stories illustrate that the desire for money, power, prestige, or honor distorts our relationships and leads to the destruction of those very relationships that sustain our lives. Sadly, in the end we do great harm to ourselves. But God's economy is mysterious, and his mercy is limitless. God was able to turn those acts of betrayal and what looked like disaster into salvation. Joseph rose to a position of power and was ultimately able to rescue the brothers who had betrayed him from the devastating famine that engulfed their homeland. Jesus, betrayed by his close friend, mounted the cross, his unlikely throne, died—and then beyond all hope rose from the dead and defeated our most hideous enemies: Satan, sin, and death. The story of Joseph's betrayal and the subsequent salvation of his family sets the stage for an even greater act of salvation for the whole human family.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## Second Week of Lent: Saturday

Micah 7:14–15, 18–20; Luke 15:1–3, 11–32

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Micah 7:14–15, 18–20

Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock that belongs to you, which lives alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land; let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old. <sup>15</sup> As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, show us marvelous things. <sup>18</sup> Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in showing clemency. <sup>19</sup> He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. <sup>20</sup> You will show faithfulness to Jacob and unswerving loyalty to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old.

### Meditation

Today's first reading is paired with the extraordinary story of a father's love for his two sons. One of them wandered away and was stunned by his father's mercy and love, and the other waited outside the banquet, sulking because he objected to his father's love for his wayward brother. But for those of us who live in the long story of Israel—the story of our sin, punishment, and ultimate experience of God's covenant love and mercy—the Father's love should not be a surprise. We saw it when he rescued us from Egypt. And with the prophets, we believe that there will be a new Exodus, a new rescue from our sins. Indeed, he will have compassion for us, as the prophet says. He is not like us. He is not fickle or capricious. He is steadfast in his love and commitment. He delights in forgiving our sin and granting clemency. This Lent, let us meditate on the extraordinary love and mercy of our God. Let us turn with our whole hearts to the God who will cast our sins into the depths of the sea!

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.





## Third Week of Lent: Sunday

Exodus 20:1–17; 1 Corinthians 1:22–25; John 2:13–25

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: John 2:13–25

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup> Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup> He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." <sup>18</sup> The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" <sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup> But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup> After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. <sup>23</sup> When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people <sup>25</sup> and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

### Meditation

The Temple was the unique dwelling place of God on earth. It was a central symbol in the life of every Jew of Jesus' day. But it had become corrupt, and its leaders were wicked. In one of the most disruptive actions of Jesus' public life, he brought the sacrificial system to a temporary halt. It was a prophetic action that announced the end of the sacrificial system, which would happen when the Temple was destroyed. More than that, Jesus was replacing the Temple, as the unique dwelling place of God on earth, with himself. In his own death and resurrection, Jesus would do for Israel and the world what only God could do, that is, rescue humanity as he had promised long ago. Lent reminds us that our symbols are important, but not as important as the one toward whom those symbols point!

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

**Reading: 2 Kings 5:1–15a**

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. <sup>2</sup> Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. <sup>3</sup> She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." <sup>4</sup> So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. <sup>5</sup> And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel." He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. <sup>6</sup> He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy." <sup>7</sup> When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me." <sup>8</sup> But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." <sup>9</sup> So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. <sup>10</sup> Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." <sup>11</sup> But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! <sup>12</sup> Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. <sup>13</sup> But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" <sup>14</sup> So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean. <sup>15</sup> Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel."

**Meditation**

In today's gospel, Jesus said, "There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." That simple statement brought the whole story we have above to the mind of those who were steeped in the Scriptures. A simple line could evoke the whole story and would invite the listeners to find themselves in that story. Today, say with Naaman, the king of Aram, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel."

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*





**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

**Reading: Matthew 18:21–35**

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"<sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."<sup>23</sup> "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves."<sup>24</sup> When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him;<sup>25</sup> and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made.<sup>26</sup> So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'<sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.<sup>28</sup> But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.'<sup>29</sup> Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'<sup>30</sup> But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.<sup>31</sup> When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place.<sup>32</sup> Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.<sup>33</sup> Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?'<sup>34</sup> And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.<sup>35</sup> So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

**Meditation**

A typical day's wage for a servant was one denarius. Subtracting for holidays, festivals, and sabbaths, he would earn about 300 denarii each year. If he gave it all to repay his debt, in 20 years he would have paid back about 6,000 denarii, which would equal 1 talent. He would only owe 9,999 more talents and at this rate would be free of his debt in a mere 200,000 years! The scandal is that this ungrateful servant who was owed by his fellow servant 100 denarii, was unwilling to forgive a debt worth only four month's wages. If we are to forgive according to the measure we have been forgiven, compare 200,000 years' worth of wages to four months' worth of wages. Lent is the season when we are humbled by the debt we have been forgiven and encouraged to forgive those who owe us much less.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

**Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1, 5–9**

So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. <sup>5</sup> See, just as the LORD my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. <sup>6</sup> You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!" <sup>7</sup> For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him? <sup>8</sup> And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today? <sup>9</sup> But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children.

**Meditation**

In our vocation as parents, we set boundaries for our children. We do that when they are young to protect them and, in many cases, to keep them alive. But just as important as keeping them alive and physically safe are the boundaries we set for their spiritual and moral health. We teach them to be kind and charitable. We teach them to share with each other and care for the less fortunate. We teach them that it is important to be truthful. We teach them so many life lessons in the hopes that they will internalize them and in doing so will have a good life and, more important, attain eternal life. We hope that our example leads them to want to have their own personal relationship with the Lord. Further, we live our lives in the public arena. Our marriages and our families are always on display. When we witness to the great love and mercy of our God, others will see it and, to paraphrase the Scripture, say, "Surely this is a wise and discerning family." For what other family has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him?

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

**Reading: Jeremiah 7:23–28**

But this command I gave them, "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you." <sup>24</sup> Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but, in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels, and looked backward rather than forward. <sup>25</sup> From the day that your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day; <sup>26</sup> yet they did not listen to me, or pay attention, but they stiffened their necks. They did worse than their ancestors did. <sup>27</sup> So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. <sup>28</sup> You shall say to them: This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips.

**Meditation**

There is a temptation in the modern world to relegate religion and the practice of our piety to the private sphere. That unfortunately is a seriously mistaken notion. What we do, how we live, how we speak, how we care for one another is always on display. This passage from Jeremiah functions as something like a final warning for the whole nation. They had, as a nation, become dysfunctional. Worse, they had adopted the practices of the neighboring pagan nations, to the extent of even offering child sacrifice (7:31). The nation was in serious danger of being destroyed; indeed, in 587 BC, the Babylonians destroyed the Temple and deported a vast number of the people into exile. As elsewhere, the warning is paired with a promise: "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you." We are called to live our lives and practice our faith in the public arena. The hope is that our witness will function as a leaven in the society God has called us to transform. Our society is dysfunctional in many of the same ways ancient Israel was. We have added some of our own twists with the advent of modern technologies, but the fundamental issue is the same: will we obey the Lord who only desires our good, or will we abandon him, to our great harm?

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

**Reading: Hosea 14:1–9<sup>2</sup>**

Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you and return to the LORD; say to him, "Take away all guilt; accept that which is good, and we will offer the fruit of our lips. <sup>3</sup> Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; we will say no more, 'Our God,' to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy." <sup>4</sup> I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. <sup>5</sup> I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily, he shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon. <sup>6</sup> His shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like that of Lebanon. <sup>7</sup> They shall again live beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom like the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon. <sup>8</sup> O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; your faithfulness comes from me. <sup>9</sup> Those who are wise understand these things; those who are discerning know them. For the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

**Meditation**

It is hard not to hear the incredible longing of the Lord for his people to repent. He offers the very words we can say to restore our relationship with him. "Take away our guilt, and in its place take all we have to offer; take our lives." The prophet, who in his own life took back an unfaithful wife (all of chapter 2 and 3:1–2) as a prophetic action to show God's incredible covenant love for us, reminds us that there is no salvation other than in the Lord, "Assyria shall not save us." What is on offer is nothing less than restored creation and new life. Meditate on the images Hosea uses: orphans finding mercy, lilies in bloom, blossoming trees with their fragrance filling the air, fine wine, evergreen trees, and creation healed. What is truly remarkable is that for us as Christians, the new creation, promised by Hosea and the other prophets, has burst into the present evil age. We now long for its fullness, but until then, we can experience it in our lives and families in the power of the Holy Spirit who transforms us and makes us new.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> The numbering of the verses in the NRSV is slightly different than that in the Catholic lectionary.



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

**Reading: Hosea 6:1–6**

"Come, let us return to the LORD; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. <sup>2</sup> After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. <sup>3</sup> Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth." <sup>4</sup> What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early. <sup>5</sup> Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. <sup>6</sup> For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

**Meditation**

St. Paul saw in this passage the promise of Jesus' resurrection on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:4). For us it is an assurance that the Lord's appearance is as sure as the dawn that comes in the morning, and the spring rains that water the earth. He will bring life for us. But there is that same sobering note that we have heard all during Lent. The promise is paired with a warning. This time replace the names Ephraim and Judah with your own name. Ask yourself if your love is like that of Ephraim, who is the northern kingdom of Israel, or the southern kingdom of Judah. Is it fleeting like the morning dew? Only you can answer that in the quiet of your heart. What the Lord wants from us is steadfast love, not piling on pious practices. He desires intimate, personal love, like the ways in which husbands and wives love each other, not a multiplication of sacrifices. That is not to say that pious practices and sacrifices are wrong or bad, just that they are not the goal of the spiritual life. What the Lord is after is for us to be one with him.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



## Fourth Week of Lent: Sunday

2 Chronicles 36:14–16, 19–23; Ephesians 2:4–19; John 3:14–21

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: John 3:14–21

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. <sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

### Meditation

The story of the serpent being lifted up can be found in Numbers 21:5–9. God's own people had rebelled against him and as punishment, poisonous snakes slithered into their camp, and many died from their bites. In response to their cries and Moses' prayer for help, God instructed Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. If a serpent bit someone, and that person looked at the bronze serpent on the pole, he or she would live. The story John is telling is not only about Israel's rebellion and salvation. It is a story about the rescue of all humanity. It is not a bronze serpent that is to be "lifted up." It is God's own son, lifted up on a cross for all to see and believe in. Lent is the time when we think deeply about what it means to look at Jesus lifted up on the cross. In this great sacrifice we see the full measure of God's saving love. To trust him, to believe in him, is to come into the light, to be saved.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.





## Fourth Week of Lent: Monday

Isaiah 65:17–21; John 4:43–54

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Isaiah 65:17–21

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. <sup>20</sup> No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. <sup>21</sup> They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

### Meditation

What were the people of Jesus' time looking for? Were they simply looking for a political messiah? The answer is complicated. Many were longing for a king who would rescue them from the hated Roman overlords. But that is not the whole story. There was a deeper, more profound, more all-encompassing desire that is here articulated here in the book of Isaiah. When God finally acts, he will return in glory to the Temple; he will defeat our most powerful of enemies, sin, Satan, and death. That day will be nothing less than a new creation. The world will not end, time will not cease. Rather there will be a new heaven and a new earth. God and man will dwell together in a renewed and transformed creation. Isaiah's vision gives us a partial glimpse of its glory. There will be no more weeping, infants will not die shortly after birth, there will be no homelessness. There will be an abundance of wine and food to eat. This Lent we are preparing for the moment when that new creation will burst into this present age. Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection will mark the beginning of the age to come. It will be an age far beyond what Isaiah could imagine.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

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**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

**Reading: Ezekiel 47:1–9**

Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple; there, water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. <sup>2</sup> Then he brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and the water was coming out on the south side. <sup>3</sup> Going on eastward with a cord in his hand, the man measured one thousand cubits, and then led me through the water; and it was ankle-deep. <sup>4</sup> Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was knee-deep. Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was up to the waist. <sup>5</sup> Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be crossed. <sup>6</sup> He said to me, "Mortal, have you seen this?" Then he led me back along the bank of the river. <sup>7</sup> As I came back, I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on the one side and on the other. <sup>8</sup> He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. <sup>9</sup> Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes."

**Meditation**

The Temple of Solomon had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC. Prior to its destruction, the prophet had seen the glory of the Lord leave the Temple (Ezekiel 3:12). Then, while still in exile in Babylon, Ezekiel saw a vision of a new Temple. Out of this Temple flowed a stream of water. As the stream continued to flow out from the Temple, it grew wider and deeper. Life flourished on its banks. The river flowed into the Dead Sea and turned the saltiest body of water on earth into fresh water. It was a river of life flowing from the Temple. In a few short weeks we will read of blood and water flowing from the pierced side of our crucified Savior. Jesus is that new Temple. From his pierced side flows the river of life that will ultimately make all things new. In his vision, John saw "the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him" (Revelation 22:1–3).

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*





## Fourth Week of Lent: Wednesday

Isaiah 49:8–15; John 5:17–30

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

### Reading: Isaiah 49:8–15

Thus says the LORD: In a time of favor I have answered you, on a day of salvation I have helped you; I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages; <sup>9</sup> saying to the prisoners, "Come out," to those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves." They shall feed along the ways, on all the bare heights shall be their pasture; <sup>10</sup> they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them. <sup>11</sup> And I will turn all my mountains into a road, and my highways shall be raised up. <sup>12</sup> Lo, these shall come from far away, and lo, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene. <sup>13</sup> Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones. <sup>14</sup> But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me." <sup>15</sup> Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.

### Meditation

Think of the difficult times in our lives: trips to the emergency room with a very sick child, a spouse, or a parent. Think about the overwhelming grief that comes with the unexpected death of a relative or close friend. Think about the inevitable financial setbacks that occur in life. How often have we been tempted to say, "The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me?" In those moments, we must trust that the Holy Spirit is speaking these words to us in those darkest of moments: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you." While it may not change the circumstances or make things magically work out, we need to cling to the promise that our God is with us, we are not alone. He will bring about the salvation promised in the first part of today's reading. We will find salvation in him and in him alone.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

**Reading: Exodus 32:7–14**

The LORD said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; <sup>8</sup> they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" <sup>9</sup> The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. <sup>10</sup> Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation." <sup>11</sup> But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. <sup>13</sup> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" <sup>14</sup> And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

**Meditation**

Moses was delayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights (Exodus 24:18) and the people lost heart (32:1). They persuaded Aaron to make gods for them. The golden calf resembled the gods of Egypt and the gods of the Canaanites, and they wanted those gods to go before them. They offered sacrifices, had a sacred meal, and "rose up to revel." The last word is a polite euphemism for sexual activity and the sacred prostitution associated with pagan worship. Like elsewhere (see Hosea 2), their idolatry is compared to adultery. They were unfaithful to the covenant promise they had made at the foot of the mountain (Exodus 24:7). Now God intended to punish the covenant breakers. But in a truly remarkable turn, Moses interceded for the wayward people and reminded the Lord of the covenant promise he had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. That was the unilateral, one-sided, unbreakable covenant that he had promised to the patriarchs. In response to Moses' intercession, "the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he had planned to bring on his people." Of the many lessons that can be drawn from this story, one of the most important is the power of our intercessory prayer. We should never lose heart when we pray for even the most difficult of situations that afflict all our families.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



### **Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### **Reading: Wisdom 2:1,12–22**

For they reasoned unsoundly, saying to themselves, "Short and sorrowful is our life, and there is no remedy when a life comes to its end, and no one has been known to return from Hades.<sup>12</sup> Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; he reproaches us for sins against the law, and accuses us of sins against our training.<sup>13</sup> He professes to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a child of the Lord.<sup>14</sup> He became to us a reproof of our thoughts;<sup>15</sup> the very sight of him is a burden to us, because his manner of life is unlike that of others, and his ways are strange.<sup>16</sup> We are considered by him as something base, and he avoids our ways as unclean; he calls the last end of the righteous happy, and boasts that God is his father.<sup>17</sup> Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life;<sup>18</sup> for if the righteous man is God's child, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries.<sup>19</sup> Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance.<sup>20</sup> Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected."<sup>21</sup> Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray, for their wickedness blinded them,<sup>22</sup> and they did not know the secret purposes of God, nor hoped for the wages of holiness, nor discerned the prize for blameless souls.

### **Meditation**

The wicked reasoned very poorly. They say that there is nothing after this life. Because of that there is no reason to be good. There will be no judgment after death, no punishment or reward in an afterlife. To test their belief, they propose a little experiment: Let's grab an innocent person, torture and kill him. They reasoned that if God was really the righteous man's father, God would rescue him from their clutches. So, they condemned the innocent man to a shameful death, apparently proving their point. But they did not know that God works in mysterious ways. They did not, and to this day do not, know what God has in store for the righteous. We know that this story is really about the truly innocent and righteous person who was unjustly condemned and killed on Good Friday. The wicked could not see that God really was this man's father. They did not understand that on the other side of his son's cruel death, the Father would restore his Son to life and to his rightful place in the Godhead. What started out as a cruel joke, a sinister plot, was reversed and transformed into the most exquisite act of love the world has ever seen. It was nothing less than the salvation of the whole world.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



## Fourth Week of Lent: Saturday

Jeremiah 11:18–20; John 7:40–53

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Jeremiah 11:18–20

It was the LORD who made it known to me, and I knew; then you showed me their evil deeds. <sup>19</sup> But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. And I did not know it was against me that they devised schemes, saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered!" <sup>20</sup> But you, O LORD of hosts, who judge righteously, who try the heart and the mind, let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.

### Meditation

Jeremiah anguished over his call to be a prophet. He tried to resist, but God's word was like a burning fire inside and he could not hold it in (Jeremiah 20:8–9). He faced death on many occasions and felt like a lamb being led to the slaughter. There were plots against him and a whispering campaign to destroy him. Even his close friends were watching and waiting for him to stumble (20:10). Jesus faced an even more pernicious campaign of public ridicule. In today's gospel, the crowd not knowing he had been born in Bethlehem, claimed to know that the Messiah could not come from Galilee. They were demanding that he be arrested. It was part of an ever-intensifying campaign to do away with him. And Jesus would be led as a lamb to slaughter. He was, after all, the Lamb of God who had committed his cause to God, his Father.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



### **Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

### **Reading: John 12:20–33**

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." <sup>22</sup> Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. <sup>27</sup> Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say— 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." <sup>29</sup> The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." <sup>30</sup> Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." <sup>33</sup> He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

### **Meditation**

I grew up helping my grandfather tend his enormous vegetable garden. Some of my fondest memories as a young boy involved planting lots of seeds: beans, carrots, cucumbers, radishes, sweet corn, and onion sets in what seemed like never-ending rows. He had strawberry beds, rhubarb plants, and a thick stand of raspberry bushes. I learned that those tiny seeds would undergo a transformation and become a bountiful harvest throughout the summer and into the fall. The plants and the harvest bore no resemblance to the tiny seed that had been planted. But the transformation was wondrous to behold. Jesus uses the garden to illustrate an important lesson for us as well. A grain of wheat must die; it must be transformed to bear fruit. Then the wheat berries must be transformed again, ground into flour to make bread. Jesus is inviting us to join him in the mystery of transformation, which is never easy. If we cling to our lives, our ways, we will never produce fruit. But if we allow ourselves to be transformed, imagine the bountiful harvest that can come from our lives: children, communities, healing, and ultimately the kingdom of God made visible.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

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**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

**Reading: John 8:1–11**

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. <sup>2</sup> Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. <sup>3</sup> The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, <sup>4</sup> they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. <sup>5</sup> Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" <sup>6</sup> They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. <sup>7</sup> When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." <sup>8</sup> And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup> When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. <sup>10</sup> Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" <sup>11</sup> She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

**Meditation**

How do religious leaders catch a woman in adultery? And where is the man? The law prescribes the death penalty for both (Leviticus 20:10). This clearly isn't about justice; it's a trap for Jesus. If Jesus agrees that she is guilty and calls for her to be stoned, a riot will ensue, and Jesus will be arrested for inciting violence. The Romans did not permit the Jews to carry out capital punishment, and they dealt severely with those who caused unrest. But if Jesus goes against the law of Moses, he will be discredited. The impossible choice is between provoking Rome and following Moses. It is not recorded what he wrote in the dust, but when stood up he offered them the same choice: provoke Rome or follow Moses. They knew that the first one to throw a stone would be arrested by the Romans. Jesus had shamed them into slinking away. But then he revealed the real justice and mercy of God. He said to her, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and do not sin again."

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.





## Fifth Week of Lent: Tuesday

2 Samuel 7:4–5a, 12–14a, 16; Romans 4:13, 16–18, 22; Matthew 1:16, 18–21, 24a  
Feast of St. Joseph

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

### Reading: Matthew 1:16, 18–21, 24a

Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. <sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>24</sup> When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

### Meditation

It seems a bit out of place to be recalling the Christmas story in Lent. However, the feast of St. Joseph today and the feast of the Annunciation on Saturday give us a chance to reflect on the dignity of marriage and family. When God was free to do anything that he wanted, what he chose to do is revelatory. In this case, he chose to become a human being and entered the world by becoming part of a human family. He underscored, for all time, the importance of having a father and a mother. The complementarity of husband and wife provided two indispensable ingredients in the human life of the incarnate Son of God. While his conception was out of the ordinary, Jesus the human child needed to be brought up by a loving father and mother. Let the blending of the two seasons, Lent and Christmas, cause us to marvel at the complementarity of Joseph and Mary. Only a man could do what Joseph did. Only a man could be the human stepfather of Jesus. Only a woman could do what Mary did. Only a woman could be the mother of God. God told Joseph that his only Son needed a stepfather, and Joseph said, "yes!"

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation.*

*Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

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*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

**Reading: John 8:31–42**

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." <sup>33</sup> They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup> The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. <sup>37</sup> I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. <sup>38</sup> I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father." <sup>39</sup> They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, <sup>40</sup> but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. <sup>41</sup> You are indeed doing what your father does." They said to him, "We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself." <sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me."

**Meditation**

Ethnic identity, that is, being a child of Abraham, was one of the most important Jewish symbols after Temple and Torah—and now we hear Jesus challenge that central symbol. Again, this scene would be laughable if it didn't end in attempted murder. Hear the angry crowd shout, "We are not illegitimate. We know who our father is. Do you, Jesus? We've heard the rumors about Joseph and Mary." "Abraham is our father. We have one father, God himself." Oh, the irony. They are talking to the only-begotten Son of the Father and calling him illegitimate. Jesus responds that if God were really their father, they would welcome him, because they would be brothers. Alas, their father is really not either Abraham or God; rather, their father is the devil himself, as Jesus will point out in the next few verses of this chapter. Jesus is challenging their ethnic identity. If they were legitimate children of Abraham, they would be doing what their father did: they would believe in Jesus. But they are acting like their real father, the devil. This can't possibly end well for Jesus.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

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## **Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

## **Reading: John 8:51–59**

[Jesus said,] “Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.”<sup>52</sup> The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’”<sup>53</sup> Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?”<sup>54</sup> Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, ‘He is our God,’<sup>55</sup> though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word.<sup>56</sup> Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.”<sup>57</sup> Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?”<sup>58</sup> Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.”<sup>59</sup> So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

## **Meditation**

“How can you promise that someone won’t die? Even Abraham and the prophets died. Who do you think you are? Do you think you are you greater than Abraham?” I suppose it is unfair to expect the crowd to have read the prologue to John’s Gospel, where we learn that Jesus is the Word of God come to dwell with humanity. It is also not fair to expect them to have read chapters 20 and 21, where we learn about the resurrection. But they could have trusted Jesus, who had already proven himself to them. In time they would have found out the whole truth. It is tragically ironic that they are looking at Abraham’s God and asking him if he thinks he is greater than Abraham. Well, yes, he is. But is that what Jesus is really claiming? Yes! “Before Abraham was, **I am.**” They try to kill him, but it isn’t time yet.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord’s Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

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**Reading: John 10:31–42**

The Jews took up stones again to stone him. <sup>32</sup> Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?" <sup>33</sup> The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God." <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'?" <sup>35</sup> If those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods'—and the scripture cannot be annulled—<sup>36</sup> can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'? <sup>37</sup> If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. <sup>38</sup> But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." <sup>39</sup> Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. <sup>40</sup> He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. <sup>41</sup> Many came to him, and they were saying, "John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." <sup>42</sup> And many believed in him there.

**Meditation**

It is winter now. This scene follows what Jesus said about being the good shepherd. He was co-opting another of their great national festivals: Hanukkah, the festival that celebrates the cleansing of the Temple at the time of the Maccabean revolt. Why were they trying to kill him this time? Well, he had just said that he and the Father are one. The central prayer of Judaism, the prayer they would have said every day, is "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is **One**." Jesus has said, "Before Abraham was, **I am**." And now he says, "The Father and I are **One**." With his word and actions, Jesus is saying that the Temple is corrupt, and Yahweh has returned to make things right. Only, the Temple is not a building. The Temple, the unique dwelling place of God on earth, is a person. It is Jesus. The Temple building will be judged and destroyed, but he will be vindicated as the true Temple.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

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**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

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**Reading: John 11:45–56**

Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. <sup>46</sup> But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. <sup>47</sup> So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. <sup>48</sup> If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." <sup>49</sup> But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! <sup>50</sup> You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." <sup>51</sup> He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, <sup>52</sup> and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. <sup>53</sup> So from that day on they planned to put him to death. <sup>54</sup> Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples. <sup>55</sup> Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. <sup>56</sup> They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?"

**Meditation**

Prophecy is not really about revealing the future. The prophets of Israel did much more than that. They delivered God's word to their own people. It is appropriate that the high priest would prophesy. Again, the irony is that Caiaphas the man meant one thing and Caiaphas the high priest/prophet meant something else entirely. What did Caiaphas the man mean? He meant that Jesus had become a political nuisance, and therefore he must go. Revolution was in the air and the people were expecting a Messiah. They longed for a king to lead them in a battle that would overthrow the hated Romans. The Romans were nervous because the city was being flooded by pilgrims, whose hopes for deliverance were well known to them. Whether Jesus posed a real threat to Rome was not Caiaphas's concern. He was afraid that the Romans would react as they usually did to would-be kings, with great violence. The Romans were brutal in putting down insurrection. He knew that it would be better for one man to die than to provoke the Romans' brutal reaction. He was right, but for the wrong reason. Jesus and his Father had something else entirely in mind.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

**Unity Prayer:** *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



## Palm Sunday

Procession: Mark 11:1–10

Isaiah 50:4–7; Philippians 2:6–11; Passion: Mark 14:1–15:47

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Mark 11:1–10

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup> and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" <sup>4</sup> They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup> some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" <sup>6</sup> They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. <sup>7</sup> Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup> Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! <sup>10</sup> Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

### Meditation

Over 175 years before that first Palm Sunday, the Maccabees had entered the newly cleansed Temple amid waving palm branches, shouts of praise, hymns, and songs because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel (1 Maccabees 13:50–51). The prophet Zechariah (9:9) had proclaimed long ago that the King would arrive triumphant and victorious, riding on the back of a colt. All of Israel's great hopes were expressed in and culminating in this dramatic entry into Jerusalem. As they had hoped and prayed, David was returning to the throne, and their enemies would be defeated. Can you imagine the hope, the expectation, that was being lived out in that moment, in that prophetic action? We know that Jesus was acting like he was the king! More than that, in this action, God, himself, was riding into Jerusalem to claim his rightful title as king, and to defeat the great enemy of humanity, death. He was riding in to establish his kingdom on earth.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

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**Reading: John 12:1–11**

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. <sup>3</sup> Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. <sup>4</sup> But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, <sup>5</sup> "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" <sup>6</sup> (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) <sup>7</sup> Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup> You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." <sup>9</sup> When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup> So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, <sup>11</sup> since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

**Meditation**

Jesus did not have to come to Jerusalem to restore his friend Lazarus to life; he could have healed him from afar as he did for the royal official's son. He did not have to stay in the vicinity after he restored Lazarus's life. He could have gone back to the relative safety of the land on the other side of the Jordan River. Yet here he was, eating with his dearest friends, only a couple of miles and a few days from his death. Jesus knew what would happen and he chose to provoke the issue now. This was the feast where God would once again act to rescue his people from slavery. This time the blood on the doorpost would be that of the true Lamb of God. But today he was eating with friends, intimate friends—and one of them would betray him. Did Jesus not know about Judas? He must have. But there would be one more meal with Jesus. There would be one more opportunity to get to know him. Mary saw him and anointed him with perfume that was worth about a year's wage; what a gift. Judas was a thief and squandered his last chance. Jesus must have loved Judas even to the end.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

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**Reading: John 13:21–33, 36–38**

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." <sup>22</sup> The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. <sup>23</sup> One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; <sup>24</sup> Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. <sup>25</sup> So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" <sup>26</sup> Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. <sup>27</sup> After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." <sup>28</sup> Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. <sup>29</sup> Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor. <sup>30</sup> So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night. <sup>31</sup> When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. <sup>32</sup> If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. <sup>33</sup> Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' <sup>36</sup> Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward." <sup>37</sup> Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." <sup>38</sup> Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times."

**Meditation**

"And it was night." Three little words in Greek bring us back to the first chapter of the Gospel of John. The light shines in darkness, but the darkness has not overcome/arrested/understood the light. But now it is night. Satan has had his way with Judas. Judas, an intimate companion of Jesus, will betray him. The darkness will do its best to extinguish the light. But darkness will not win in the end. In this holiest of weeks, we suffer with Jesus, but we are full of hope in the resurrection. Good Friday is part of the story, but it is not the end.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

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### **Pray**

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### **Reading: Matthew 26:14–25**

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests <sup>15</sup> and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. <sup>16</sup> And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him. <sup>17</sup> On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" <sup>18</sup> He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" <sup>19</sup> So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal. <sup>20</sup> When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; <sup>21</sup> and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." <sup>22</sup> And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" <sup>23</sup> He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. <sup>24</sup> The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." <sup>25</sup> Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."

### **Meditation**

We know he was a thief, but is three months' pay enough money to betray a friend? Judas would probably have had to move out of town, perhaps to a foreign land, and start all over. Three months' pay is not a lot of money. If it were not for the money, what could cause Judas to betray a friend? Was he angry that Jesus would really not be the kind of messiah he had hoped for? It's possible that Judas was expecting to manage the king's treasury, where he could certainly have skimmed a lot of money. Did that anger and disappointment lead to betrayal? Did Judas have nationalistic hopes that were clearly going to be disappointed? We are left with the story: greed, shattered dreams, spite and betrayal of a friend. All of which would lead to despair and to two deaths, Jesus' and his own.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

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**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

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### Reading: John 13:1–15

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.<sup>2</sup> The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper<sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,<sup>4</sup> got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.<sup>5</sup> Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.<sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"<sup>7</sup> Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."<sup>8</sup> Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."<sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"<sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you."<sup>11</sup> For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."<sup>12</sup> After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?"<sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am.<sup>14</sup> So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.<sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

### Meditation

We often take our shoes off when we visit someone's house, because we don't want to track mud and dirt into our friend's home. Now imagine a time when you must walk everywhere because there are no cars or trucks. You have open sandals instead of shoes and socks. There are horses, donkeys, oxen, and sheep all over the place. The roads must have had a lot of icky stuff on them and it would be hard not to step in it! When you arrived at your friend's house, they would make sure that there was water for you to wash your feet. If they were a really good host, one of their slaves would do the unpleasant job of washing your feet for you. But the host would **never** wash your feet. What was Jesus saying about himself when he did the lowly work of a slave? What does he say about us, when he invites us to imitate him?

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

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**Reading (excerpt): John 19:5, 14–22**

So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "**Here is the man!**" <sup>14</sup> Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "**Here is your King!**" <sup>15</sup> They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." <sup>16</sup> Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; <sup>17</sup> and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. <sup>18</sup> There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. <sup>19</sup> Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." <sup>20</sup> Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. <sup>21</sup> Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" <sup>22</sup> Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

**Meditation**

The chief priest had been prophetic, but did not know it. Now Pontius Pilate is prophetic, but he doesn't know it either. John began his gospel by deliberately echoing Genesis 1:1, "in the beginning. . . ." Now on the sixth day of the old creation, Pilate announces that Jesus is the true Man bringing to a conclusion God's act of rescuing his creation and establishing a new creation. Pilate, who is ironically the cruel representative of Caesar, the enemy king, announces to the Jews that the one they had longed for all these centuries is here. "Here is your King!" Only the Jews couldn't see it. They rejected their king and opted for Barabbas, which means "son of the father." They could have had their king, who was the true Son of the Father. We too can have the Son of the Father as our true king.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

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## Holy Saturday, Easter Vigil

Genesis 1:1 – 2:2; Genesis 22:1–18; Exodus 14:15—15:1; Isaiah 54:5–14; Isaiah 55:1–11; Baruch 3:9–15, 32-4:4; Ezekiel 26:16–17a, 18–28; Rom 6:3–11; Mark 16:1–7

### Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

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### Reading: Mark 16:1–7

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup> And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup> They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. <sup>5</sup> As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

### Meditation

What a strange story. This is not at all what we expected. Jesus was not a bright light. He was not shining like the radiant heavenly being we expected from Daniel 12 or Wisdom 3. He was not even dressed in the brilliant white clothes of the Transfiguration story. We could not have made up the story this way. And we certainly would not have had women be the first witnesses. Why, you ask? Because women did not have legal standing in court. In this strange story, Jesus is embodied but different—like a normal person, he ate fish and was solid, but not like a normal person at the same time, because he appeared in rooms as if he could walk through walls. He appeared and disappeared—not like a normal person! He was solidly physical, recognized and yet not recognized. It is like he belonged to two dimensions at once: heaven and earth, the human and divine dimensions of reality. We have the whole Easter season to contemplate the great mystery. But today, the tomb is empty! He is risen! Alleluia!

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

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### Reading: John 20:1–9

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." <sup>3</sup> Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

### Meditation

By resurrection, what the Scriptures mean is that our dead physical bodies will no longer be dead. We will come out of our tombs; our bodies will be transformed, and we will never die again. The Jews at the time of Jesus believed that the general resurrection for all the righteous would happen at the end of the present evil age. God would act in a definitive way to set the world to rights. He would defeat his enemies, establish his kingdom, and transform all of creation. Resurrection did not mean finally escaping this evil world. It did not mean "escaping this evil physical body that is holding me back from real communion with God." It did not mean being with God in eternal bliss as a disembodied spirit—which, quite honestly, is the prevailing belief in much of modern America. To return as a disembodied spirit is to be a ghost or an angel (see Acts 12), but that is not resurrection. Resurrection is defined as the transformation of this body, never to die again. And it is as integral to the doctrine of the Incarnation as the line in John 1:14, "the Word became flesh." If there is no resurrection of the body and he is somehow alive only spiritually, then Jesus did not become a real human being. The tomb has to be empty, or it's not a resurrection. That was why the unlikely alliance of the chief priests and Pharisees risked violating Sabbath to ask Pilate to put a guard on the tomb. They knew it wasn't about ghosts and disembodied spirits; it was about the body. But people had to see him alive, or it was only a cruel story. The empty tomb and appearances of the risen Jesus go together.

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The Tomb is Empty

He is Risen!!!

