



*Invest just five minutes a day, and
your faith will deepen and grow—
a day at a time.*

Sunday, Mar 04, 2018

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT; FIRST SCRUTINY OF THE ELECT

All hands on deck

Forty days is a good chunk of time to contemplate the path we're on and whether it's leading in the direction we hope to go. Lent is our annual "periscope up" that helps us survey the moral landscape we're creating with every decision. The Samaritan woman at the well gets the opportunity to frankly regard her life when she runs into Jesus while doing her chores. Our RCIA elect also receive this gift in the prayers we pray for them in today's Scrutiny. Take time to stop living on autopilot, consider what you're thirsty for, and move forward purposefully.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Exodus 17:3-7; Romans 5:1-2, 5-8; John 4:5-42 (28). "The one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true."*

Monday, Mar 05, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Be open to the message

Once upon a time in Nazareth, Jesus' hometown community tried to kill him. Did these folks misunderstand his teaching that they felt such rage against him? Or was the problem that they understood Jesus perfectly? Jesus had suggested that his fellow citizens were not prepared to accept God's word, but foreigners might. If a preacher got up and said his words in our churches today, he might also receive a negative send-off. We like to think we're pretty good people and on the right path, but are we really open to the call to change?

TODAY'S READINGS: *2 Kings 5:1-15b; Luke 4:24-30 (237). "The citizens of Nazareth drove Jesus out of town so they might hurl him off the cliff."*

Tuesday, Mar 06, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Keep counting on forgiveness

Surely forgiveness has its limits! This is the attitude Peter betrays when he asks Jesus for a reasonable cut-off after which he is no longer obliged to forgive an offender. Peter proposes the number seven, which seems generous to him. It is also the Hebrew number for completeness and perfection, combining the indissolubility of three (as in our Trinity) and the all-encompassing four (as in the four directions or elements). Seven is plenty, Peter argues. Surely it's enough? Jesus takes his bid and multiplies it to the doubly significant 77. We cannot put limits on a divine gift.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Daniel 3:25, 34-43; Matthew 18:21-35 (238). "If another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive?"*

Wednesday, Mar 07, 2018

MEMORIAL OF PERPETUA AND FELICITY, MARTYRS

Service is the only security

Not even the deepest, fiercest parental love can secure the future of loved ones or keep them from harm. Take Perpetua, a young mother still nursing, and her pregnant servant Felicity, who were both threatened with martyrdom in third-century North Africa but determined to remain faithful; or Perpetua's father who tried to persuade her to renounce Christianity in order to save her. What parents and children can always do, however, like the Master, is to serve one another by the example of our own fidelity.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9; Matthew 5:17-19 (239). "I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."*

Thursday, Mar 08, 2018

MEMORIAL OF JOHN OF GOD, RELIGIOUS

Focus on the bigger picture

If there were ever a patron saint for people who jump to extremes and then find balance in their lives, it would be John of God (1495-1559). First he was a wild-living soldier nearly hanged after being accused of stealing from the army. After a reprieve, he was so grateful he spent two days praying before a roadside crucifix. Going to Granada in Spain, he heard a sermon by Blessed John of Avila that so moved him to repentance he became unhinged. He gave away everything and roamed the streets beating himself and begging forgiveness for his past sins. This behavior landed him in a mental hospital. The compassionate John of Avila visited him and advised him to do something for others rather than only be obsessed with himself. John of God heeded the advice and opened a house for the care of the sick and poor. Next time you feel yourself bouncing around in life, stop, center, and shift your focus from your problems to others' needs.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 7:23-28; Luke 11:14-23 (240). "Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and house will fall against house."*

Friday, Mar 09, 2018

MEMORIAL OF FRANCES OF ROME, RELIGIOUS; DAY OF ABSTINENCE

Keep the door to your heart open

Saint Frances of Rome founded the order of Olivetan Oblates of Mary. She set up a convent—the only house of the order—that remains the community's sole monastery today. Once a year, on the Feast of Saint Frances, the sisters open their doors to the public. In 2009 Pope Benedict XVI came to call. The sisters, greatly influenced by Saint Benedict, consider hospitality their main ministry and invite young women studying in university to live with them until they obtain their degrees. In the spirit of Saint Frances and the Olivetan Oblates, be open to whoever shows up at your doorstep, from underfunded students to itinerant popes.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Hosea 14:2-10; Mark 12:28-34 (241). "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

Saturday, Mar 10, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Pray, don't pose

Jesus could be pretty hard on people who seemed to be praying for the wrong reasons, like certain Pharisees who made a big show of praying in public so others could see how holy they were. Christ preferred to praise those who stood at the back of the crowd and prayed with humility. Why? Because exalting oneself is the opposite of true prayer. Prayer can't be something that impresses others. It also can't be something you fake or just go through the motions with. Prayer starts with the one who prays but then turns that person toward God and others. And that's the meaning of humility, too: not living for oneself.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Hosea 6:1-6; Luke 18:9-14 (242). "All who humble themselves will be exalted."*

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Sunday, Mar 11, 2018

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT (LAETARE SUNDAY);
SECOND SCRUTINY OF THE ELECT**

Be the change

Having facts on hand is not equivalent to “getting it”: that is, really perceiving the ramifications of what we know. We all suffer from a rash of too much information. What are we supposed to do about famine, stranded refugees, all the humanitarian crises of our era? What’s to be done about natural disasters, gun violence, global warming, and children neglected and abused in our own cities? Jesus comes to heal our blindness, and to bring us into the light. Once we see, we are called to do.

TODAY’S READINGS: *1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41 (31).* “*You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.*”

Monday, Mar 12, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Take Jesus at his word

What caused an anxious parent of a dying child to accept Jesus’ word as sufficient? “Your son will live” is not medicine. These four words are not magic. Yet they were enough because of the authority of the one who spoke them. Do we believe in the words of Jesus in the same way? Try living as if you do. Start with accepting that your sins are forgiven. This is the miracle of new life that Jesus promises us now and when his Kingdom comes.

TODAY’S READINGS: *Isaiah 65:17-21; John 4:43-54 (244).* “*The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way.*”

Tuesday, Mar 13, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Bathed in grace

Not long before Jesus heals the sick man at the pool, he encounters the Samaritan woman at the well. The stories have much in common. Neither knew who Jesus was or the power he possessed, but Jesus knew everything about them—and offers to wash away their troubles, in fact, without them having to ask or repent first. Both were afflicted and shunned for a long time, coming to the water alone with nobody to help them. Jesus goes ahead and heals them, before they have a clue. But isn’t that just like God? Giving us what no one else will give? Giving it to us before we have the sense to ask? Our job: Tell others of God’s amazing grace.

TODAY’S READINGS: *Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; John 5:1-16 (245).* “*Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your mat and walk?’ But the man did not know who it was.*”

Wednesday, Mar 14, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Extended hours

God worked to create the world in six days and then rested on the seventh. Thereafter, all creation was called to rest on the seventh day and to observe with God a sabbath of holiness. But the gospel reminds us that God’s work continues even after quittin’ time. Jesus therefore ignores the whistle and stays at his post, doing the work of

God even as the world rests from its labors. God’s mercy and compassion know no rest. They continue as long as human weakness is in need of healing. Followers of Jesus, therefore, punch in at Baptism and stay on the job until the work is done.

TODAY’S READINGS: *Isaiah 49:8-15; John 5:17-30 (246).* “*Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is still working, and I also am working.’*”

Thursday, Mar 15, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Keep the focus where it belongs

As Lent proceeds, one of the temptations that can sidetrack us is to start feeling pretty good about ourselves: I am keeping my resolution, I am praying more, I’ve asked God to forgive my sins. Soon our hands folded in prayer become fingers pointing at others: *They gossip, they lie and steal, they are weak and sinful.* We may not be that obvious, but the readings today show that the religious leaders were quick to misjudge. We can’t let the good that Lent is doing for us evaporate by failing to embrace and love others.

TODAY’S READINGS: *Exodus 32:7-14; John 5:31-47 (247).* “*You search the scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them; it is they that testify on my behalf.*”

Friday, Mar 16, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY; DAY OF ABSTINENCE

Learn your origin story

Where Jesus came from was always a source of trouble. King Herod went after all the babies around Bethlehem because of the prophecy that said the next king would come from there. People later scoffed to hear that Jesus was raised in Nazareth—a town that didn’t get any respect in cosmopolitan Jerusalem. Some also complained that Jesus came from anywhere at all, because the Messiah’s origins ought to be a bit more mysterious. But no one seemed to get where Jesus was coming from in a cosmic sense: from the One who sent him. Are we as clear about our origins?

TODAY’S READINGS: *Wisdom 2:1a, 12-22; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30 (248).* “*We know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.*”

Saturday, Mar 17, 2018

MEMORIAL OF PATRICK, BISHOP, MISSIONARY

United we stand

Until the mid-1800s most Irish immigrants in America were middle-class Protestants, but in 1845 Ireland’s Great Potato Famine forced nearly 1 million of its poor Catholics to flee to America’s shores. Open and hostile anti-Catholicism made it difficult for the new arrivals to find work and be accepted in American society. What helped the Irish Catholics, they soon discovered, was their large population, which when organized gave them political power. There is strength in numbers whether it is in fighting prejudice or showing compassion. Get yourselves and others organized around a just cause and become a force to be reckoned with.

TODAY’S READINGS: *Jeremiah 11:18-20; John 7:40-53 (249).* “*Never before has anyone spoken like this man.*”

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Sunday, Mar 18, 2018

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT; THIRD SCRUTINY OF THE ELECT

Yes, we can!

Maybe it feels like something's holding you back: lack of education or funds, past decisions or old wounds, complicated relationships or too many responsibilities. But in the big picture, only two things impede our liberty: sin and death. If we could get beyond those two, we walk into perfect freedom. The good news is, we can! In today's Scrutiny, we celebrate how the "death-dealing" power of evil gives way to the "life-giving sacraments" that make it possible for us to walk free of every episode of death. What binds you? Jesus is calling you to freedom.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ezekiel 37:12-14; Romans 8:8-11; John 11:1-45 (34).* "O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them."

Monday, Mar 19, 2018

SOLEMNITY OF JOSEPH, HUSBAND OF MARY

Seek some fatherly advice

Jesus taught his disciples to pray "Our Father . . ." We are blessed in the name of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Saint Joseph, the husband of Mary, was a generous and strong father who always put the well-being of Mary and Jesus first. He stands as an inspiration for parents, and he points to the kind of parental love God has for us. He is also a powerful intercessor. Catholics call Saint Joseph the patron saint of the entire church. Pray to Joseph today in your own words for the wisdom and courage to care for the people and responsibilities in your charge.

TODAY'S READINGS: *2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16; Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22; Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a or Luke 2:41-51a (54d3).* "Di you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Tuesday, Mar 20, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Integrity is the best calling card

There are countless guides on how to write the perfect résumé. Nearly all suggest that you include lots of credentials and personal referrals of influential people. After all, it's who you know and what qualifications you bring to the table that matter, right? On the other hand, what would a prophet's *curriculum vitae* look like? Here we are seeing a different kind of *vita*, where personal integrity carries the day. In the gospel the Pharisees want to see a traditional résumé of Jesus, but many people believed in Jesus based on the power of his witness. Listen carefully to what Jesus is saying and do your best to honor it in your own life.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Numbers 21:4-9; John 8:21-30 (252).*
"Because he spoke this way, many came to believe in him."

Wednesday, Mar 21, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

God's got nothing to prove

W. C. Fields used to exclaim in his films, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego!" No doubt Fields enjoyed using these exotic biblical names as an expression, but behind them are three actual characters from Hebrew scripture. The Babylonian king had commanded them to worship the statue of a god or face immediate execution. Their response was an interesting one. Of course they wouldn't bow down, and if God saved them, so be it. But if not, they *still* wouldn't deny their God. Now that's faith—both the willingness to give up their lives but also their affirmation

that God did not have to prove anything to deserve their trust. Faith does not begin with what God will do for you if you believe. It starts with believing because God *is* God.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95; John 8:31-42 (253).*

"Jesus then said to those . . . who believed in him, 'If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples.'"

Thursday, Mar 22, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

How well do you know God?

"How well do you know me?" quizzes—with questions like, "What's my favorite band/movie/song/video game? Where would I most like to be? Who are my heroes?"—have long been lighthearted ways to test or strengthen friendships. With Lent particularly set aside for repentance and renewal, it's a good time to take a "how well do you know God" quiz. Ask yourself: Based on scripture and tradition, what do I know to be God's likes and dislikes? Who are the people with whom God has found favor? Where am I likely to find God? Your search for answers will no doubt test and, let's hope, strengthen your friendship with God.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 17:3-9; John 8:51-59 (254).* "Jesus answered, ' . . . You do not know him, but I know him.'"

Friday, Mar 23, 2018

MEMORIAL OF TURIBIUS OF MOGROVEJO, BISHOP; DAY OF ABSTINENCE

Timely advice

"Turibius the Tireless" could be the nickname of today's saint. As a Spanish missionary and later bishop in 16th-century colonial Peru, he traversed a 176,000-square-mile diocese—three times—to attend to those in his charge. His favorite saying is one we do well to keep in mind: "Time is not our own, and we must give a strict account of it." Keep a simple time log for a week, and you'll learn something about your priorities. You might be surprised by how much time is frittered away. Not that downtime is all bad, mind you—relaxing and recreating are also part of God's plan. But keep in mind that time is a nonrenewable resource. How will you spend your precious allotment?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 20:10-13; John 10:31-42 (255).*

"Many there began to believe in him."

Saturday, Mar 24, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Be the voice of the voiceless

Each year, on March 24, the International Day for the Right to the Truth Concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims is observed. This annual observance pays tribute to the memory of Monsignor Óscar Arnulfo Romero, who was martyred on this date in 1980. Archbishop Romero was actively engaged in denouncing violations of the human rights of the most vulnerable individuals in El Salvador. "Each one of you has to be God's microphone. Each one of you has to be a messenger, a prophet." These fateful words of Romero speak of what it means to be a person of faith. Faith must be lived out. Romero preached the gospel by how he lived. His life broadcast the Good News, calling others to lives of holiness and humility. Your life can speak volumes, too; it's simply a matter of letting God make of you a microphone.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ezekiel 37:21-28; John 11:45-56 (256).* "He prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation."

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Sunday, Mar 25, 2018

PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Guilty as sin

Time for a confession. We did it. We're the ones who denied Jesus somewhere between three times and 77 times, just since Lent began. We sold him for a wad of cash, or a comfortable lifestyle, or a moment's peace. We took a snooze when Jesus asked us to pray. We kissed him in public, but looked the other way when he was abused. We twisted his words to suit our purposes, mocked him with thin praise, ran when he needed a friend, hid to save our skins. Lord, have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Procession: Mark 11:1-10 or John 12:12-16 (37); Mass: Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Mark 14:1—15:47 (38). "They began to be distressed and to say to [Jesus], one by one, 'Surely it is not I?'"*

Monday, Mar 26, 2018

MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK

Rise up in faith

Talk about "life-threatening": Sometimes vitality itself is the threat! Such was the case with Lazarus, who was looking mighty good for a dead man after Jesus called him out of the tomb. So the religious authorities put Lazarus on their hit list along with Jesus. Next time, Lazarus might stay dead; however, nobody reckoned on Jesus. Although you'll never see the bumper sticker announcing it, "Resurrection happens," too. Our new life in Christ should be highly visible—not to mention equally troubling—to those who prefer God-inspired troublemakers to be quiet and lifeless.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 42:1-7; John 12:1-11 (257). "The chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many were believing in Jesus."*

Tuesday, Mar 27, 2018

TUESDAY OF HOLY WEEK

Salvation is always at hand

Who looks for Jesus? People who are suffering, mostly. The sick, outcasts, and sinners are always running after Jesus, hoping for relief from their pain. So when the Greeks start looking for Jesus, we know something's changed. These folks are doing well—they're just in town for the Passover festival. The only reason such folks could want Jesus is as Jesus predicts: God's saving plan gathers momentum when the outside world is onto the gospel. We, too, normally seek Jesus when things are going wrong. But salvation is often closer when need is not all that compels us.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 49:1-6; John 13:21-33, 36-38 (258). "The Greeks came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'"*

Wednesday, Mar 28, 2018

WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK

Resist the temptation to sell out

If you want an example of how the gospels tell the same story differently, then you need go no further than Judas' betrayal of Jesus. Only in Matthew does Judas get 30 pieces of silver in advance for handing Christ over to the authorities. That Judas is greedy we know. "What will you give me?" he asks up front. Here's the lesson: Once you've been paid off, it's a lot harder to back out. Who is currently running interference for something you'd rather not do? Who is fronting for your choices so you don't have to account for them? How do you work up the nerve to say no

to these abdications of responsibility for which you may have to pay a much bigger price later?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 50:4-9a; Matthew 26:14-25 (259). "They paid him 30 pieces of silver. And from that moment Judas began to look for an opportunity to betray Jesus."*

Thursday, Mar 29, 2018

EVENING MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (HOLY THURSDAY)

Time for some church hopping!

On this day it is traditional in parts of the Catholic world to visit seven churches, a practice that may have originated in Rome. In the Philippines and parts of Latin America the tradition is called *Visita Iglesia* ("church visit") and involves reciting the Stations of the Cross at the various stops along the way. In Singapore the Lord's Prayer and other prayers are recited seven times at each church visited accompanied by festivities and a "last supper" before the Good Friday fast. In India 14 churches are visited, one for each Station of the Cross. Why not partake in this tradition and make it your own?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15 (39). "When he had washed their feet he . . . said to them, 'Do you realize what I have done for you?'"*

Friday, Mar 30, 2018

FRIDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION (GOOD FRIDAY); DAY OF FAST AND ABSTINENCE

Be kind—it's always possible

At the risk of sounding cynical, it's pretty easy to look around and conclude that one of the things human beings do best is inflict suffering on one another. In ways big and small, people look to their own interests at the expense of others. Christ's Passion draws attention to suffering, both what he endured because a group of leaders put their own power and security ahead of everything else, and what people have endured ever since for similar reasons. Yet Christ gathers up all suffering and death in his own. The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus forever ended meaningless suffering and death. All sacrifice, all loss, now has ultimate value because Christ offered himself for sacrifice and rose again. You can participate in this redeeming sacrifice by exercising kindness wherever you find suffering.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 52:13—53:12; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1—19:42 (40). "When you make his life an offering for sin . . . through him the will of the Lord shall prosper."*

Saturday, Mar 31, 2018

HOLY SATURDAY

Sit in the dark and see the light

In his 2004 Easter Vigil homily, Pope Saint John Paul II said we must renew our dedication to the service of the gospel: "If this mission may sometimes seem difficult, call to mind the words of the Risen Lord: 'I am with you always' (Matt. 28:20). Certain of his presence, you shall fear no difficulty and no obstacle. . . . His Body and his Blood will nourish you and sustain you on your daily journey to eternity." Still feeling uncertain of Jesus' presence? Attend the Easter Vigil. Sitting in total darkness that becomes total light as the brazier fire is set and the Paschal candle lit is bound to rekindle your faith in the Light of the World.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Vigil: Genesis 1:1—2:2; Genesis 22:1-18; Exodus 14:15—15:1; Exodus 15:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 17-18; Isaiah 54:5-14; Isaiah 55:1-11; Baruch 3:9-15, 32—4:4; Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28; Romans 6:3-11; Mark 16:1-7 (41). "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth. He has been raised; he is not here."*

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