



CLEMENT HARROLD

Journey Through
LENT

Reflections on the
DAILY MASS READINGS

Journey Through LENT

Reflections on the
DAILY MASS READINGS

Journey Through LENT

Reflections on the
DAILY MASS READINGS

CLEMENT HARROLD





Emmaus Road Publishing
1468 Parkview Circle
Steubenville, Ohio 43952

©2022 Clement Harrold
All rights reserved. Published 2022
Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 978-1-64585-195-0

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from The Revised Standard Version Second Catholic Edition (Ignatius Edition) Copyright © 2006 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Excerpts from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, second edition, copyright © 2000, Libreria Editrice Vaticana—United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. Noted as “CCC” in the text.

Cover design and layout by Patty Borgman

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Day 1: Ash Wednesday	1
Day 2: Thursday after Ash Wednesday	3
Day 3: Friday after Ash Wednesday	5
Day 4: Saturday after Ash Wednesday	7
First Sunday of Lent	9
Day 5: Monday of the First Week of Lent	12
Day 6: Tuesday of the First Week of Lent	14
Day 7: Wednesday of the First Week of Lent	16
Day 8: Thursday of the First Week of Lent	18
Day 9: Friday of the First Week of Lent	21
Day 10: Saturday of the First Week of Lent	23
Second Sunday of Lent	25

Day 11: Monday of the Second Week of Lent	27
Day 12: Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent	30
Day 13: Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent	32
Day 14: Thursday of the Second Week of Lent	34
Day 15: Friday of the Second Week of Lent	36
Day 16: Solemnity of St. Joseph	38
Third Sunday of Lent	41
Day 17: Monday of the Third Week of Lent	43
Day 18: Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent	45
Day 19: Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent	47
Day 20: Thursday of the Third Week of Lent	49
Day 21: Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord	51
Day 22: Saturday of the Third Week of Lent	54

Fourth Sunday of Lent	56
Day 23: Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent	58
Day 24: Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent	60
Day 25: Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent	62
Day 26: Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent	64
Day 27: Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent	66
Day 28: Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent	68
Fifth Sunday of Lent	70
Day 29: Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent	73
Day 30: Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent	75
Day 31: Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent	77
Day 32: Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent	79
Day 33: Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent	82

Day 34: Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent	85
Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion	87
Day 35: Monday of Holy Week	90
Day 36: Tuesday of Holy Week	93
Day 37: Wednesday of Holy Week	95
Day 38: Holy Thursday Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper	97
Day 39: Good Friday of the Lord's Passion	100
Day 40: Holy Saturday	105
Bonus Material	
Promise & Fulfillment Series	108
Lord, Have Mercy: The Healing Power of Confession	109
First Comes Love: What Is the Catholic Gospel?	112

The Family Prayer: Understanding Our Father	115
The Lamb's Supper	118
Consuming the Word	121
The Fourth Cup	124
Endnotes	127

DAY 1

Ash Wednesday

Reading I: Joel 2:12–18

Psalm: 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 12–13, 14 and 17

Reading II: 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2

Gospel: Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18



Here at the beginning of our Lenten journey, Holy Mother Church pulls no punches.

In the first reading from the prophet Joel, the people of God are told to put aside what they are doing and assemble together in repentance. In the second reading, St. Paul reminds us of the hope and salvation which Jesus Christ has brought. In the Gospel reading, that same Jesus Christ invites and challenges each one of us to embrace the Christian ideal, by almsgiving, prayer, and fasting—the three pillars of Lent.

The key to unlocking this Gospel lies in the first reading: “Tear your hearts, and not your garments . . .” (Joel 2:13). This is the interpretive key which beats like a quiet but continuous drumbeat throughout the entire Old Testament. The whole

law, the prophets, the Incarnation, and the Cross, our almsgiving, our prayer, our fasting—all of these are ultimately about one thing: allowing God to win over our hearts.

Just as the Israelites were forced to wander in the desert for forty years, and just as Jesus went out for forty days before beginning His ministry, so too we should see these next forty days as an occasion for enormous spiritual growth. Let us pray for the grace to have our hearts purified, renewed, and set afire this Lent.

What practical steps shall I take to grow in almsgiving, prayer, and fasting this Lent? What goals am I setting, and how can I push myself while also remaining realistic?

DAY 2

Thursday after
Ash Wednesday

Reading I: Deuteronomy 30:15–20

Psalm: 1:1–2, 3, 4 and 6

Gospel: Luke 9:22–25



There is a direct connection between today's first reading and the Gospel. In the passage from Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the Israelites that sin has consequences. Every time we commit a sin, and especially mortal sin, *we become less ourselves*, and we allow spiritual death to get a foothold not only in our own lives but even in the lives of our descendants.

The stakes could not be higher—a truth which becomes apparent in the Gospel, when Jesus reveals that it is precisely because of our sin that He must suffer greatly and be killed for our sake. So much for the bad news . . . What's the Good News?

The Good News is Good Friday, that earth-shattering destination toward which our Lenten journey heads. The Cross is the answer to man's sin. Jesus died so that we wouldn't have to;

His physical death obviated our spiritual death. But the war is not over yet even if Christ's final victory is assured. The effects of sin and death linger still, and our free will remains. But unlike sin, which makes us less ourselves, it is in and through the Cross that we truly *find ourselves* and discover the fullness of life. So we choose to take up our cross daily, and we follow Him.

How can I develop a more acute sense of the evil of sin and the damage it does in my life? How can I also avoid excessive scrupulosity, realize that I can't conquer sin on my own, and instead entrust everything to Jesus?

DAY 3
Friday after
Ash Wednesday

Reading I: Isaiah 58:1–9a

Psalm: 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 18–19

Gospel: Matthew 9:14–15



Today's readings remind us that in the pursuit of Christian perfection, we neglect fasting at our peril. Admittedly, we need to remember that fasting is only ever a means to an end. One could think here of a Manichean or Gnostic approach which views the body as evil and enjoins fasting as a method for subjugating man's tainted physicality. This is not the Christian vision!

However, fasting *does* remain a vitally important means of sacrificing legitimate bodily goods for the sake of some higher good. Fasting is the recognition that because of the Fall, our desires have become disordered, and oftentimes our lower appetites (desires for food, sex, sleep, and so on) are no longer subject to reason. As such, fasting, together with prayer, is a powerful spiritual weapon in fighting our

sinful inclinations and reordering our hearts toward God.

Waging spiritual warfare with prayer only, absent fasting, is like trying to train for a marathon without bothering to eat well. Indeed, from a biblical perspective, prayer devoid of sacrifice is stunted, and in tackling more deep-seated vices, it risks becoming impotent. Recall the words of Christ: “And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29). The Gospel today reminds us that in these days when the bridegroom has returned to the Father, fasting is our Christian obligation.

This Friday let us recommit ourselves to this ancient practice, remembering that the ultimate sacrifice which the Lord desires of us is a contrite spirit and a humble heart. All our prayers, fasting, and witness should flow from this.

What concrete steps can I take to make fasting a regular part of my Christian life?

DAY 4

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Reading I: Isaiah 58:9b–14

Psalm: 86:1–2, 3–4, 5–6

Gospel: Luke 5:27–32



It is remarkably easy to diagnose vices in other people. Exhibiting the same level of scrutiny toward ourselves is decidedly less appealing. Such is one of the lessons we ought to take from today's Gospel reading. Clearly, Jesus is speaking somewhat ironically when He observes that, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Luke 5:31).

The reason for this is that Jesus was speaking these words to the Pharisees and scribes—to the class of people who viewed themselves as perfectly spiritually healthy—all the while knowing their desperate need for the Divine Physician. In a subtle but pointed way, Jesus is accusing them of being guilty of far deeper and more serious sins than those of the tax collectors and "sinners" whom they were so quick to condemn.

What is scary about this episode is that the scribes and Pharisees seem so unaware of their faults not because they're naive and innocent but because, over time, they've made a habit of dulling their consciences and giving in to their pride. This is easy for us to see as third-party observers. But it begs the question: How do we know we aren't guilty of the same spiritual blindness exhibited by the scribes and Pharisees?

This is worth reflecting on. Not as grounds for scrupulosity or despair but rather as an exercise in self-knowledge. Through this exercise we can come to a deeper understanding of our own faults and failings and thus to a deeper conviction of our total dependence on Jesus Christ's healing grace. If we will do this, then, as the prophet Isaiah reminds us today, "He will renew your strength, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails" (Isaiah 58:11).

What are the vices in my life which I am least aware of? How can I begin to address those vices which are most rooted in my temperament and which I am therefore least likely to confront?

First Sunday of Lent

Reading I: Deuteronomy 26:4–10

Reading II: Romans 10:8–13

Psalm: 91:1–2, 10–11, 12–13, 14–15

Gospel: Luke 4:1–13



St. Luke offers us the model for our Lenten journey when he tells us that Jesus was led into the desert for forty days of prayer and fasting. It was during this time that Jesus had His first face-to-face showdown with the devil. That same devil who had incited Herod to try to destroy the Christ Child in Bethlehem now comes before the Holy One under the guise of gentleness and compassion.

We should pay close attention to the form the three temptations take, for it is here in the arid wilderness of the Judean Desert that Jesus begins His life's work of total submission to the Father. The devil tempts Jesus using the same tactics He used in the Garden of Eden and the same tactics he continues to use today.

It is the age-old lie whispered into our ear—by sinning we will become like God. We see this in the Garden (see Gen 3:5), and we see it in our

day-to-day lives. Every time we sin, the message we send with our actions is that we wish God were not so; we choose to put ourselves in the place of God such that *we* become the final arbiters of good and evil. Whereas Sacred Scripture promises we will become partakers of the Triune godhead through divine adoption, the devil constantly prods us to become *like* God, “without God, before God, and not in accordance with God” (CCC, 398).

Likewise in the desert, Jesus is faced with the temptation of *Look how much good you could do, look at all the problems you could solve*, if only you will commit this one little act of disobedience. Jesus faces the prospect of ending world hunger, of ruling all the kingdoms of the earth, of bringing countless souls to believe in Him, and to achieve all this without having to suffer the looming Passion which awaits Him. The devil only asks one thing of Him: “All this will be yours, if you worship me.” In other words, Jesus can achieve all the good in the world if only He will turn away from God.

Yet despite his best efforts, the devil fails. Jesus remains obedient to the Father, humbly trusting that His is the better way, and it is precisely in doing this that He begins to bring about the salvation of the world.

How can I foster a greater devotion to Sacred Scripture in my life thereby growing in my appreciation for who God is and what He has done for me?

DAY 5

Monday of the First Week of Lent

Reading I: Leviticus 19:1–2, 11–18

Psalm: 19:8, 9, 10, 15

Gospel: Matthew 25:31–46



Today's readings remind us of the centrality of charity in the Christian life. Martin Luther was quite wrong to assert that our salvation lies in "faith alone," as if mere intellectual assent to the truths of Christianity were enough. On the contrary, as the text from Matthew 25 reminds us, on judgement day we will be sternly called to account for the extent to which we failed to actively live out our faith through good works in this life.

As the epistle of St. James tells us, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (Jas 1:27). Faith requires action: first and foremost in love of God but also—and essentially—in love of neighbor.

Already in the text from Leviticus we see this precept inscribed in the Mosaic Law: You shall love your neighbor as yourself (see Lev 19:17–18).

Perhaps at times, those of us who seek an orthodox expression of the Catholic faith risk losing sight of these words. Are there moments when we risk reducing the beauty of the faith to dry formulas? Do we take care to ensure our study of theology doesn't become an ivory tower that shields us from the truly difficult work of loving our neighbor and serving the poor?

Interestingly, the image Jesus uses in the Gospel is that of a king. As Christians we are called to serve Christ the King, and to the extent that we neglect the wants and needs of the King's subjects, we are offending the King Himself. We would do well, therefore, to remember that the kingdom of heaven is a kingdom defined by love. Let us strive to build up Christ's kingdom here on earth.

By the end of this Lent, how will I have concretely grown in love of neighbor? What steps am I taking now to build more habits of authentic Christian charity in my life?

DAY 6

Tuesday of the
First Week of Lent

Reading I: Isaiah 55:10–11

Psalm: 34:4–5, 6–7, 16–17, 18–19

Gospel: Matthew 6:7–15



Prayer is a relationship. In fact, it is the profoundest, most intimate, and most important of all relationships. Aristotle was wrong when he declared friendship between God and humans to be impossible, for the God–Man Himself tells us otherwise: “No longer do I call you servants, . . . but I have called you friends” (John 15:15).

Prayer, or relationship with the divine, is essential to our nature. Without prayer our lives lack that vertical dimension which gives us direction and meaning. St. Ephrem the Syrian is recorded as saying, “Birds fly, fish swim and human beings pray.”

Precisely because prayer is such an integral part of who we are and precisely because of the relational importance, we must at all costs avoid letting it

become a kind of mindless babbling which Our Lord warns against in the Gospel.

Rather, let our prayer be one which reflects the Word of God described in the first reading. Let our prayer be living and active, a sincere sharing of hearts with the One who gives seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats. Let our prayer be a heartfelt expression of trust in Our Father, He who already knows our needs better than we do.

How can I rekindle a spirit of love in my prayer even on the days when it feels tedious and routine?

DAY 7

Wednesday of the First Week of Lent

Reading I: Jonah 3:1–10

Psalm: 51:3–4, 12–13, 18–19

Gospel: Luke 11:29–32



Today's readings are a tale of two generations. On the one hand, we have the generation of Nineveh, which, caught up in its evil ways, finally repents at the promptings of the prophet Jonah. On the other hand, we have the generation of Jesus's own day, which He describes as an *evil generation* for its lack of faith and repentance (see Luke 11:29).

On judgement day, Our Lord tells us, the holy men of Nineveh and the queen of the south will rise and condemn that generation for its wicked ways. But what of our own day and age? Are we any different?

Looking at the world around us, it appears that the tragic answer, if anything, is that ours is an even worse generation. Evangelical pastor Rick Warren, in a September 2015 address to the World Meeting of Families, expressed it well when he said, "In today's

society, materialism is idolized, immorality is glamorized, truth is minimized, sin is normalized, divorce is rationalized, and abortion is legalized.

“In TV and movies, crime is legitimized, drug use is minimized, comedy is vulgarized, and sex is trivialized. In movies, the Bible is fictionalized, churches are satirized, God is marginalized, and Christians are demonized. The elderly are dehumanized, the sick are euthanized, the poor are victimized, the mentally ill are ostracized, immigrants are stigmatized, and children are tranquilized.

“In families around the world, our manners are uncivilized, speech is vulgarized, faith is secularized, and everything is commercialized.”¹

This is the world in which we live, and the words of the first pope, St. Peter, remain as relevant today as they were in the first century: “Save yourselves from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40).

As Christians we were born to stand out! Like Jonah, by virtue of our baptism, we have been given a prophetic mission, and ours is the task of proclaiming the truth and light of the Gospel to this broken world of ours.

What does it mean to be in the world, but not of the world? Am I living this out successfully?

DAY 8

Thursday of the First Week of Lent

Reading I: Esther C:12, 14–16, 23–25

Psalm: 138:1–2ab, 2cde–3, 7c–8

Gospel: Matthew 7:7–12



Petitionary prayer is mysterious. It isn't always easy to understand how it fits in with the bigger picture of God's providence and human freedom. There presumably isn't a human alive who hasn't at some point or other experienced the perplexity of a prayer seemingly not being answered.

And yet . . . and yet . . . Our Lord *insists* on the power and purpose of this most simple of human actions: ask, implore, plead with the Father for bread. Or at least, that's how it can seem to us; we beseech God as intensely as we can, and we just hope that He listens.

In today's Gospel, however, Jesus invites us to a more noble vision of what prayer really is. The truth of the matter is that Jesus knows exactly what we want, exactly what we need, and He has never—we

repeat, *never*—left us in a situation where we were uncared for, unloved, or unable to grow closer to Him. He loves us so much more than we love ourselves. There has never been a sigh He has not heard, or a tear He has not caught.

With all of His Heart, Jesus wants us to ask for good things and then, whatever the answer may be, to trust that He is working all things for the good. When we knock, the door to His heart is opened. From all eternity He has been waiting for us, waiting for that moment of encounter when we open ourselves up to Him: Here I am! “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20).

Jesus approaches us; we need only meet Him in trust. And when we do, we will realize that our prayer does truly possess real power. Like Queen Esther, we will find peace and contentment in Him who seeks to “turn our mourning into gladness and our sorrows into wholeness.” (Esther C12:23–25, NABRE).

Have there been occasions when I’ve begun to question whether prayer, especially petitionary prayer, is even worth it? What exactly does it mean to knock

at God's door, and how is He inviting us to do that today?

DAY 9

Friday of the First Week of Lent

Reading I: Ezekiel 18:21–28

Psalm: 130:1–2, 3–4, 5–7a, 7bc–8

Gospel: Matthew 5:20–26



This Friday the Church shows no signs of letting up on her choice of radical Lenten readings! Perhaps the common thread between the first reading and the Gospel can be expressed like this: God desperately wants us to realize how utterly self-destructive our sin is. It is from this perspective that we can understand not only God's justice but also His mercy.

Sacred Scripture tells us that “mercy triumphs over judgment” (Jas 2:13), but this does not mean that mercy negates justice. Rather, God's justice is itself an expression of His mercy. One thinks here of the epigraph above the threshold of Dante's inferno, where the netherworld is described as being the product of “the highest wisdom and the primal love.”² Even hell is a result of God's mercy.

Nonetheless, the first reading is careful to note that God does not derive any pleasure from the death of the wicked. He earnestly seeks our repentance, and He is constantly calling us to come out of ourselves. Sin is so inherently egocentric that it inevitably distorts our value system and can even lead us to become frustrated with God and His precepts.

Thus the challenge God poses to us in the book of Ezekiel is a pertinent one: “Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?” (Ezek 18:25). So often we make excuses for our bad behavior, but in the Gospel for today Jesus makes clear that the divine patience will not last forever.

We are called to something higher than ourselves. So, let us call on the Divine Mercy and make that our firm resolve this day.

How can I grow in my devotion to the message of Divine Mercy proclaimed by St. Faustina Kowalska, St. John Paul II, and others?

DAY 10

Saturday of the First Week of Lent

Reading I: Deuteronomy 26:16–19

Psalm: 119:1–2, 4–5, 7–8

Gospel: Matthew 5:43–48



No religion or worldview places more esteem on man than does Christianity. It was this realization that allowed the Renaissance era thinkers to preach a Christian humanism which recognized the heights of man's calling.

We see this same logic played out in today's Gospel: Jesus calls us to nothing less than perfection! The Greek word for *perfect* in this context is *teleios*, which is related to the English word *teleological*: relating to a purpose or goal. In other words, in calling us to be perfect, Jesus is inviting and challenging us to become fully who we are meant to be.

What amazing faith He places in our potential, a faith which the Catholic Church continues to emulate today. As human persons we were created for much more than worldly pleasures. We were created for glory, and as the psalm for today reminds us, it is

by adhering to the precepts of the Lord that we will attain that eternal beatitude to which we are called.

Of course, this is not to advocate for Pelagianism—the kind of thinking where we suppose we can be saved through our own efforts. On the contrary, we are called to be perfect, but we cannot get there on our own. In fact, apart from God's grace we can do nothing at all (see John 15:5).

How do we balance all these things? In an address given in France a decade before his death, St. John Paul II described the Christian life beautifully: “Just when night engulfs us, we must think about the dawn coming; we must believe that every morning, the Church is revived through her saints. Not because they conquered the world, but because they allowed Christ to conquer them.”³

Let us take those words to heart today and every day.

Am I at times guilty of complacency in the way that I approach the spiritual life? Do I ever buy into the untruth which says, “You’re perfect just the way you are”? How can I embrace the Father’s love for me while still acknowledging my continued need for spiritual growth?

Second Sunday of Lent

Reading I: Genesis 15:5–12, 17–18

Psalm: 27:1, 7–8, 8–9, 13–14.

Reading II: Philippians 3:17–4:1

Gospel: Luke 9:28b–36



What does today's first reading have to do with the other readings for the day? To answer this question, we should first take a step back and realize the context in which today's first reading from Genesis takes place. The text from Genesis 15 is a harkening back to an important passage in Genesis 12 when God delivers to Abram (later, Abraham) the promise of the covenant: "And by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" (Gen 12:3).

Today's reading describes the solemn enactment of this covenant between Abram and God, where Abram symbolizes the inviolability of the covenant by splitting the various animals in two and walking between their carcasses. The desiccated animal remains serve as a potent reminder of what the spiritual consequences would be should Abram be unfaithful to his oath.

Importantly, however, we also see the Lord repeat in this passage an earlier promise given to Abram: the promise of the land. “To your descendants I give this land” (Gen 12:7). The promised land of Canaan would become the ancestral heritage of the Jewish people.

Contrast this with today’s second reading, and the connection is striking. “But our commonwealth is in heaven” (Phil 3:20), St. Paul reminds us. In other words, whereas God gave the promise of the physical land to Abraham and his descendants, we know as Christians that our true homeland lies in heaven, and in the new world to come (see Rev. 21:1)

The Gospel account of the Transfiguration reminds us, however, that this new world will very much incorporate our physical bodies, such that we, too, will one day share bodily in Christ’s glorified state.

Do I always treat my body as a true, integral aspect of myself? How can I give greater glory to God by treating my body more like a temple of the Holy Spirit?

DAY 11

Monday of the Second Week of Lent

Reading I: Daniel 9:4b–10

Psalm: 79:8, 9, 11 and 13

Gospel: Luke 6:36–38



Perhaps you are feeling a little tired of all the somber Lenten readings at this point. Just take the responsory for today: *Lord, do not deal with us according to our sins*. Gloomy stuff, right? Well, sort of.

You see, the truth of the matter is that sin, death, mortification, repentance—this is what the forty days of Lent are all about! Yet this shouldn't be a cause of sadness but rather one of hope. Why?

Because these forty days of Lent are none other than a preparation for the fifty days of Easter.

So often in the Christian life we can fall into one extreme or another. Perhaps we possess a more melancholic temperament, and so we tend to overemphasize the dark and difficult aspects of Christianity. In severe cases, this can lead to very damaging forms of scrupulosity.

On the other hand, there might be times when we're guilty of an overly lax Christianity, acting as if we've already achieved heaven on earth, and easily forgetting the hard-hitting aspects of Jesus's preaching.

The truth of the matter is that real Christianity consists in a balancing of all these things, and *that* is what makes it so beautiful. St. John Henry Newman made this point in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* when he warned that, "[O]ne aspect of Revelation must not be allowed to exclude or to obscure another; and Christianity is dogmatical, devotional, practical all at once; it is esoteric and exoteric; it is indulgent and strict; it is light and dark; it is love, and it is fear."⁴

So yes, Jesus loves us, cares for us, forgives us, and welcomes us back. But also yes, He warns us, rebukes us, challenges us, and even judges us. We must not over emphasize one aspect of Jesus's message at the expense of the others. Rather, we must simply strive to remain faithful to Him, trusting that He will give us the grace to do so: "For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get" (Matt 7:2).

Do I truly accept Jesus for who He is even when it makes me uncomfortable? Or am I guilty at times of “putting Him in a box” and reading my own biases and preconceptions into what He wants to say to me?

DAY 12

Tuesday of the
Second Week of Lent

Reading I: Isaiah 1:10, 16–20

Psalm: 50:8–9, 16bc–17, 21 and 23

Gospel: Matthew 23:1–12



Today's Gospel reading teaches us that humility is the most foundationally Christian hermeneutic. A hermeneutic is a tool for interpreting something, and the message Jesus gives us is that without humility we are incapable of seeing and understanding the mysteries of the Kingdom.

The scribes and Pharisees personify a prideful attitude, and their egocentricity has blinded them to the truth of things. After all, what is humility if not a *seeing things with proper perspective*? Because the scribes and Pharisees lack humility, they no longer possess a proper understanding of their own place, or of their neighbor, or even of God. They are the centers of their moral universe, and all their works flow from this. In response, Jesus Christ offers us something radically different: "Whoever exalts

himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt 23:12).

In his work *The Glories of Divine Grace*, Matthias Scheeben, the great nineteenth century German theologian, described humility, together with the virtue of chastity, as "the rarest and most beautiful blossoms of the tree of Christian grace [which] outside the Christian world are least known and understood." More than all the other virtues, he said, "humility and chastity are closely connected with all the mysteries of grace and supernatural love."⁵

In approaching the Christian life, therefore, let us continually challenge ourselves to grow in this archetypal virtue of humility. Like the figure described in the first reading from Isaiah, let us examine our self-centeredness, question our ulterior motives, and call out our own false humility. And in doing so, let us pray intently for the grace to have our souls become white as snow.

Do I take seriously the principle that all the other virtues flow from humility? Am I honest enough to acknowledge that I am more prideful than I would like to think I am, and that without Christ's grace I am incapable of seeing myself accurately?

DAY 13

Wednesday of the
Second Week of Lent

Reading I: Jeremiah 18:18–20

Psalm: 31:5–6, 14, 15–16

Gospel: Matthew 20:17–28



There is an amusing side to today's Gospel reading. The ambitious sons of Zebedee approach Jesus with their mother in the hopes of being granted a place of honor in His Kingdom. Jesus asks them, "Are you able to drink the chalice that I am to drink?" They reply, "We are able" (Matt 20:22). So far so good. But then comes the funny part. Jesus congratulates them on being willing to embrace the chalice of His passion, but only now informs them that the place of honor is not His to give!

One can imagine James and John feeling a little nonplussed, having agreed to suffer on Jesus's behalf only to realize they weren't being promised anything in return. In this passage one clearly sees Christianity's inversion of pagan values. Jesus calls

out the Gentiles' approach to lordship, and in its place He establishes that central paradigm of humility, which we saw in yesterday's readings.

To be clear, Christianity doesn't just take pagan ethics and add some icing on top. On the contrary, Jesus inverts pagan values, transforms pagan virtues, and offers us a radically new perspective on what it means to be fully human.

In the moral and social decline that threatens to engulf our contemporary culture, it is not difficult to see that when we begin to neglect this Gospel vision, chaos ensues. "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind," St. Paul tells the Romans (12:2). Such is Jesus's message to His disciples, the same message He delivers to us today.

Do I at times compromise or downplay my Christian faith out of a desire to be liked or a fear of being shunned? If so, how can I become more courageous and counter-worldly in the way I live out the Gospel?

DAY 14

Thursday of the
Second Week of Lent

Reading I: Jeremiah 17:5–10

Psalm: 1:1–2, 3, 4 and 6

Gospel: Luke 16:19–31



Today's readings point to what biblical scholars sometimes refer to as the “two ways” doctrine of Scripture: the way of selfishness that leads to perdition and the way of holiness that leads to life. It is the way of the rich man versus the way of Lazarus.

In the first reading from Jeremiah, we see a mirror image of Psalm 1. Dr. John Bergsma in his book *Psalm Basics for Catholics*⁶ points out that this first psalm sets the tone for the entire Psalter with its emphasis on what it means to be a righteous man.

Notice first the different gradations of sin that are described: *following* the wicked, *walking with* sinners, *sitting in the company of* the insolent. Each kind of association is worse than the one before, yet the blessed man avoids all of these. How does he do this? By delighting in God's law and meditating on it day and night.

And yet, it is intriguing that we receive this recommendation not in one of the books of the law, such as Leviticus or Numbers, but rather at the very beginning of the Book of Psalms. It is almost as if King David, the traditional author of the Psalms, is telling us that true meditation on God's law is found through prayer and worship, which is what the essence of the psalms is all about.

It is when we fail in these daily practices of prayer and worship that we risk turning in on ourselves. Like the rich man in the Gospel, our consciences become dulled, and our moral senses are dimmed. Blessed is the man planted beside the running waters, whose roots reach to the stream!

Do I conduct a daily examination of conscience every night before going to sleep? If not, how soon can I begin this practice? If yes, is there anything I can do to make it deeper and more meaningful?

DAY 15

Friday of the Second Week of Lent

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

Psalm: 105:16–17, 18–19, 20–21

Gospel: Matthew 21:33–43, 45–46



The readings for today point forward to tomorrow's Solemnity of St. Joseph. The story of Joseph in the Old Testament reminds us in many respects of St. Joseph, the father of Jesus, in the New Testament.

Think about it: both Josephs had a father named Jacob (*see* Matt 1:15); both were royalty; both left their homes and went to Egypt; both had a special ability to interpret dreams; both were known for their purity and chastity; and both experienced great poverty and suffering without complaint. But the similarities don't end there.

Even more poignantly, we should remember that in a profound sense, both Josephs were responsible for feeding the whole world, and both became, in the words of the psalm, the lord of the king's house

and the ruler of all his possessions. Just as the first Joseph was made the pharaoh's right-hand man and provided grain for all peoples when famine hit, so the second Joseph was made the father of the Son of God, and to him was entrusted the care of the One who would become the Bread of Life for all men.

Let us pray today for the grace to be more like St. Joseph who, unlike the tenants in the Gospel, did exactly what was asked of him and through his obedience produced more spiritual fruits than he or we could ever imagine.

What apostolic task have I been putting off which I will commit to undertaking this coming week?

DAY 16

Solemnity of St. Joseph

Reading I: 2 Samuel 7:4–5a, 12–14a, 16

Psalm: 89:2–3, 4–5, 27 and 29

Reading II: Romans 4:13, 16–18, 22

Gospel: Matthew 1:16, 18–21, 24a



Over the centuries, various theories have been proposed regarding how St. Joseph reacted to the news that Mary was pregnant. The first is known as the Suspicion Theory: Joseph suspects Mary of adultery, and because he is righteous but also gentle, he opts to divorce her quietly without exposing her to shame.

A second perspective is sometimes called the Perplexity Theory. Joseph cannot believe Mary would have committed adultery, but he also has no idea how she became pregnant, so he simply remains confused.

A third theory, however, avoids the negative connotations of the Suspicion Theory while at the same time providing more of an explanation than the Perplexity Theory. This third approach is known

as the Reverence Theory, and it enjoys the support of such theological giants as St. Bernard of Clairvaux and St. Thomas Aquinas. On this view, Joseph realizes the miraculous nature of Mary's pregnancy from the start, yet he is so overcome by a sense of his own unworthiness that he decides he ought to separate from her quietly.

Knowing exactly which of these theories is correct is not an easy task, and the Church has never defined it one way or the other. A word that should be offered in defense of the Reverence Theory, however, would be this: St. Joseph was one of the holiest men who ever lived, and so we can infer that he would have been a decent judge of character!

Given this, it seems unlikely that he would have easily succumbed to the belief that his beloved betrothed could have betrayed him so violently. Joseph knew Our Lady better than anyone, and he had already gotten a sense of her unfathomable purity and spiritual beauty. Is it not conceivable, then, that upon learning that she was with child, his mind might have turned to the ancient prophecy from Isaiah? "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa 7:14). Joseph would have known the Scriptures well, and one can't help but wonder how many times

he thought of this verse in those trying days that followed the Annunciation.

Maybe—just maybe—he slowly began to realize that he was implicated in something far bigger, far more profound, and far more mysterious than he had ever thought possible.

*How shall I draw closer to St. Joseph this coming year?
What might he be inviting me to do to grow in my
devotion to him and his beloved spouse?*

Third Sunday of Lent

Reading I: Exodus 3:1–8a, 13–15

Psalm: 103: 1–2, 3–4, 6–7, 8, 11

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 10:1–6, 10–12

Gospel: Luke 13:1–9



This Third Sunday of Lent the Scriptures offer us a warning and a promise.

In the first reading from Exodus 3—one of the most pivotal chapters in the whole Bible—the Lord appears to Moses and reveals His identity: “I am who am.” It would not be an exaggeration to say that the entirety of Judeo-Christian philosophy and theology is built on this one foundational statement—statement which would be definitively manifested over one thousand years later in the person of Jesus Christ.

Together with this divine self-revelation, however, comes the Lord’s promise of Divine Mercy and His commitment to save His people from their slavery in Egypt.

Fast forward to the New Testament readings, and we see the continuation of this promise. Yet, as St. Paul tells the Corinthians, the promise comes with

a warning: “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12).

Likewise, in the Gospel, Jesus offers us the image of the fig tree. In doing so, He makes us realize that God is indeed merciful by agreeing to permit the tree to stand for one more year. But at the same time we cannot risk testing His patience forever! Rather, we must show zeal in our pursuit of the Christian life, doing everything we can to cultivate good fruit in our souls. True, the eighteen people killed by the falling tower did not die as a punishment for their sins. But if we remain in our sin, then we can be sure that we will suffer something far greater than physical death.

So let us turn to the Lord today in prayerful hope, trusting in the promises of Him who is slow to anger and abounding in kindness.

What is something I must do today which I would rather avoid? How can I commit to offering up my discomfort to the Lord and undertaking this task with joy and zeal?

DAY 17

Monday of the Third Week of Lent

Reading I: 2 Kings 5:1–15ab

Psalm: 42:2, 3; 43:3, 4

Gospel: Luke 4:24–30



The story of Naaman in the second Book of Kings teaches us so much about the value of the Sacramental economy. A man of great power and status, Naaman sets out with a vast allotment of wealth, hoping that by doing so he might somehow be able to buy his way toward healing from his leprosy.

In doing so, he exhibits a rudimentary kind of faith in God's healing power, but it is obvious that his faith hasn't yet gone beyond the level of his own self-interest. He still views his interactions with the divine in terms of "transactional relationship"—what Fr. Thomas Acklin and Fr. Boniface Hicks describe in their book *Personal Prayer: A Guide for Receiving the Father's Love*. It is the kind of thinking which asserts, "I am giving you a certain amount of

thing X, therefore you owe me a certain amount of thing Y in return.” It is the language of contract not covenant, and it is no surprise then that Naaman becomes indignant when Elisha the prophet asks him to do something humble and seemingly trivial.

We can fall into this same pragmatic, worldly kind of thinking in the way we approach the sacraments. Do I really need to confess my sins to an old, eccentric priest? Am I really supposed to believe that a wafer becomes the very substance of the risen Christ?

Like the Jews in today’s Gospel, we risk finding ourselves victims of the age-old adage that familiarity breeds contempt. Let us pray then for the grace to receive that sense of humble wonder which Naaman eventually discovered. In doing so, we shall make the words of the psalmist our own: “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for you, O God” (Ps 42:1).

Do I exhibit a transactional relationship with God? Do I pray and fast and give alms with the expectation that I am thereby earning and deserving of more blessings? How can I begin to grow beyond the transactional and instead foster a relationship with God based on disinterested love?

DAY 18

Tuesday of the
Third Week of Lent

Reading I: Daniel 3:25, 34–43

Psalm: 25:4–5ab, 6 and 7bc, 8–9

Gospel: Matthew 18:21–35



The faith-filled figure of Azariah in today's first reading is an example of what it means to continue to trust God even when everything has gone awry. One can almost hear the mournful anguish in his voice: "For we are reduced, O Lord, beyond any other nation, brought low everywhere in the world this day. . . . We have in our day no prince, prophet, or leader, no burnt offering, sacrifice, oblation, or incense, no place to offer first fruits" (Dan 3:38, NABRE).

For context, Azariah is speaking all this from the depths of the furnace, having been sentenced there by the evil King Nebuchadnezzar. This is the same king who a few years earlier had led his armies in the conquering of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon's Temple. Hence Azariah is living at a time

when his homeland has been devastated, his people have been exiled, and the very meeting place of God and man (that is, the temple) has been destroyed. And yet, notice how his prayer begins and ends with trust.

Both the first reading and the Gospel remind us today that it is all too easy to trust God when things are going well in our lives. True faith, however, is that which persists even when trials arise. We must be vigilant in making sure we do not become so comfortable in our Christianity and our modern way of life that we start to forget all the ways in which we have been recipients of God's mercy. Like Azariah, we should continually cling to the Lord, recognizing that without Him we are nothing.

Do I continue to rely on God and turn to Him even when things are going well? What steps can I take to show more gratitude in my relationship with God and with the people around me?

DAY 19

Wednesday of the
Third Week of Lent

Reading I: Deuteronomy 4:1, 5–9

Psalm: 147:12–13, 15–16, 19–20

Gospel: Matthew 5:17–19



Sacred Scripture teaches us that law and love are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, Jesus informs us at one point, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

In today’s readings, the Church reminds us of the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Just as Moses offered a preliminary law to the Israelites and then was forced to expand its precepts due to their apostasy (see Exod 32; Num 25), so, too, Jesus offers a law that will form the basis for the New Covenant. Of course, many of the specific ceremonial and dietary instructions of the Mosaic Law are no longer necessary in the New Testament era.

Nevertheless, the core principle of the old and new laws are exactly the same: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have

come not to abolish but to fulfill.” What is that core principle? It is the principle of love. All the rules and regulations imposed on the Israelite people were provided for their own good: to discipline them in holiness, to protect them, and to keep them from falling away.

And although Jesus does away with some of these practices, the striking thing about His teaching is that He introduces a law that is *more* stringent, not less. Whereas the law of Moses decrees an eye for an eye, Jesus commands us to turn the other cheek. Whereas the law of Moses cautioned against adultery, Jesus warns us that when we look at a person with lust we are already committing adultery in our hearts!

When we realize all this, we see that Jesus is telling the truth when He says He is not abolishing the law. In fact, quite the opposite: He is perfecting it, elevating it, and giving us the grace to fulfill it.

Do I at times regard the Church’s moral precepts and requirements as tedious and burdensome? How can I challenge myself to dive deeper into a real acknowledgment that these “laws” are actually stepping-stones helping me to grow in love?

DAY 20

Thursday of the
Third Week of Lent

Reading I: Jeremiah 7:23–28

Psalm: 95:1–2, 6–7, 8–9

Gospel: Luke 11:14–23



The Kingdom of God is at hand. This is the message of Jesus in today's Gospel as He makes known to His critics that there can be no neutral ground in their response to Him. It is either by the power of God or by the power of Beelzebul that the demons are being forced out—there is no third way.

Jesus uses vivid imagery in making His point, describing as He does the heavily guarded palace that is Satan's stronghold in this world. Yet the evil one's defenses are not enough, for Jesus Christ is the *one stronger than he* who overcomes him and liberates the many captive sinners held within.

Notice that this is more than mere metaphor or parable: the spiritual battle is real, and each of us must decide which side we are on. It is this same reality which allows Jesus to be so uncompromising

in His assessment: “He who is not with me is against me” (Luke 11:23).

We might be inclined to balk at the severity of this statement, but we can make sense of it when we think of it in terms of a wartime scenario. On a field of battle, every participant is very clearly either a contributor to his own side or a traitor working for the enemy.

Let us pray today for the grace to avoid that hardness of heart which would set us at odds with Christ. May we pray as well for the courage to stand with Him whatever may come our way.

What is holding me back from trusting Jesus? What are the idols in my life which I need to overcome if I am to serve Him with my whole being?

DAY 21

Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Reading I: Isaiah 7:10–14; 8:10

Psalm: 40:7–8a, 8b–9, 10, 11

Reading II: Hebrews 10:4–10

Gospel: Luke 1:26–38



We can think of today's solemnity as the Church's Feast of the Incarnation, and what an amazing feast it is!

As we draw closer to Calvary, it is a joyful reminder that our Catholic faith is rooted in real historical events. Jesus Christ was truly conceived in a real town called Nazareth in a real region called Galilee to a real woman named Mary, who was betrothed to a real man named Joseph, who came from the line of David.

Unlike the ancient Greco-Roman myths which never seemed to occur in an actual time or place, the Christian Myth unfolded in a literal manner within time and space. "It is the myth made fact,"⁷ as C. S. Lewis put it. And if we find this mind-blowing

and overwhelming, just imagine how Mary felt! Yet she is our perfect role model precisely because in the face of so much fear and uncertainty, she never stopped trusting.

It is interesting to compare her response to the angel Gabriel with the response by Zechariah a few verses earlier. Upon being told that his wife will bear a son, Zechariah responds, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years” (Luke 1:18). The response given by Our Lady, on the other hand, is subtly but profoundly different: “How can this be, since I have no husband?” (Luke 1:34).

Two similar answers, yet where Mary receives encouragement, Zechariah is reprimanded and even made speechless. The distinction is that Zechariah *needed to know* what the Lord was doing and how, whereas Mary was content simply to trust. Whereas Zechariah felt like he had to cover his bases and perhaps even put God in a box, Mary merely sought divine instruction on what to do next.

So often in our lives we seek clarity about the future, and many times for good reason. Nonetheless, we must challenge ourselves to inquire whether clarity itself, which can seem so good and prudent, has in reality become an idol that keeps us more distant from the Father.

Of course, we must make plans and be prudent. But at the same time, we must not let these become substitutes for real and courageous expressions of trust in God's unfailing providence.

Taking the sinless maiden of Nazareth as our model this day, let us pray for the grace to set out into the deep and pray with ever greater sincerity, "Jesus, I trust in you!"

Do I trust God as much as I'd like to think I do? What is one area of my life that God is asking me to entrust to Him in a new way today?

DAY 22

Saturday of the Third Week of Lent

Reading I: Hosea 6:1–6

Psalm: 51:3–4, 18–19, 20–21ab

Gospel: Luke 18:9–14



Today's first reading is one of the most beautiful texts in the Old Testament. Not only does it contain a poignant prophecy of the Resurrection, but it also offers us so much hope and encouragement as we round out this third week of our Lenten journey.

Even though we might be feeling a bit fed up with our different penances and spiritual practices at this point, Hosea reminds us that the arrival of the Lord is as sure as the dawn, and when He comes, His presence will be like the spring rain that waters the earth after the cold, dark days of winter. Easter is coming!

As we continue to prepare to reach our goal, we should call to mind the words of the prophet, which we find repeated in the psalm: "For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Hos 6:6). What does this mean exactly?

On one level, it is a reminder of much more than the burnt sacrificial offerings that characterized the Old Covenant. What God desires of us is the offering of a merciful heart. In other words, rituals and offerings are important, but they must flow from love. At a deeper level, however, it seems that what the Lord is also saying is not just that He wants us to show mercy to other people, but also that first and foremost we need to come into an encounter with His Divine Mercy.

For it is only when we realize how much we are the recipients of mercy and love that we can begin to extend this grace to those around us. This is what makes the tax collector in the Gospel a model for us; here is one who knew of his need for forgiveness and went in humble search of the Lord's loving mercy. Let us become more like him.

Where have I been slacking in my Lenten commitments, and what can I do to revitalize my efforts for these final three weeks?

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Reading I: Joshua 5:9a, 10–12

Psalm: 34:2–3, 4–5, 6–7

Reading II: 2 Corinthians 5:17–21

Gospel: Luke 15:1–3, 11–32



This Sunday the Church continues to utilize the “big guns” of its Scriptural inventory. Perhaps it is worth reminding ourselves that, especially on Sundays during Lent, the Church’s primary purpose with the Old Testament readings is not so much to draw a direct connection with the Gospel readings as it is to remind us of the drama of salvation history.

Over the course of our Lenten journey, we have received a kind of panoramic view of all the good things the Lord has done for His people over the course of centuries. We have been continually reminded that just as God delivered the people of Israel from their physical slavery in Egypt, so now with the advent of Christ, He has opted to deliver us from our spiritual slavery to sin. St. Paul tells us in the second reading, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17).

In the famous parable of the prodigal son, we see what this looks like in practice as the younger

son repents of his evil ways and is reinstated by the merciful Father. It is moving to note how the passage describes the manner in which the young man's father was actively keeping vigil, desperately longing for his wayward son's return, such that "while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). The father came running to him, and Christ does the same for us.

But perhaps we can't quite relate; perhaps we were raised from the cradle as Catholics, and we've always seen ourselves more like the older son; perhaps we can even sympathize with the older son over his indignation. This would be a misreading of the text.

What Jesus invites us to appreciate is that there is an element of *both* sons—older and younger—in each of us. For even if we see ourselves as the older son, perhaps as someone who has spent the better part of their whole life on the "straight and narrow," the reality is that we are *all* sinners, and in this respect we are all called to be like the younger son: grateful recipients of God's unfailing mercy.

How can I make the Sacrament of Confession a more integral part of my life this Lent?

DAY 23

Monday of the
Fourth Week of Lent

Reading I: Isaiah 65:17–21

Psalm: 30:2, 4, 5–6, 11–12a, 13b

Gospel: John 4:43–54



Deep down, we all know that things are not the way they are supposed to be. If the skeptics and atheists were right, one would expect death to feel like the most natural thing in the world to us. After all, if we really are just highly sophisticated bundles of cells and neurons, then it is difficult to see how our final end should be any more tragic than that of a car breaking down. Regrettable, perhaps, but hardly a serious evil.

As always, however, the problem with atheism is that it contradicts our experience, for the truth is that the monumental abnormality of death is something we all know deeply. Every time one attends a funeral, even the funeral of a devout Catholic, one can't help but get the sense that it's not *the way things are supposed to be*.

Turning our attention to today's readings, we notice that the Old Testament passage from Isaiah speaks of a time and place when death will be overcome. This finds beautiful expression in today's Gospel reading, when the royal official approaches Jesus and pleads, "Sir, come down before my child dies" (John 4:49). The Greek word for "Sir" is *Kyrie*, also translated "Lord," and Jesus can't help but be amazed at the deferential faith that this man exhibits.

Like the royal official, we can and should pray for the physical healing of ourselves, our family members, and friends. Nevertheless, we know that physical suffering and death will continue to be features of this world for a little while yet.

Much more importantly, therefore, we need to have faith that the same Jesus who gave physical life to the young boy in the Gospel can also work spiritual healing in our own hearts. Even in our most trying moments, Jesus is there with us, supporting and encouraging us: "At dusk weeping comes for the night; but at dawn there is rejoicing" (Ps 30:6).

Who is a sick person in my life whom I could reach out to this week with material and spiritual support?

DAY 24

Tuesday of the
Fourth Week of Lent

Reading I: Ezekiel 47:1–9, 12

Psalm: 46:2–3, 5–6, 8–9

Gospel: John 5:1–16



Do you want to be well? The question that Jesus poses to the crippled man is a poignant one. Immediately defenses are raised, and excuses start to fly: “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool” (John 5:7).

Perhaps we also feel defensive when the Lord asks us a similar question. Perhaps there is some addiction or some deep-seated vice which has plagued us for many years. “Do you want to be well?” He asks us. Doubtless we have our excuses: It’s too difficult; I have no one to help me; I’ve tried, and tried, and tried, but I just can’t seem to be rid of the thing.

The point of Jesus’s question is not to dismiss our reasonings. In fact, just like the crippled man, many of our excuses might be legitimate. No, *the point of Jesus’s question is to challenge us on whether we are as*

serious about overcoming our sin as He is. He does this because the process of overcoming sin in our lives, and especially deep-seated sin, is twofold.

First, it is painful. It requires mortifying our flesh, foregoing our pride, and re-ordering our desires. We must be willing, as St. Paul tells us, to die to ourselves, and we know that death is never pleasant.

Secondly, it requires a total acceptance that we cannot do this on our own, and that it is only the grace that Jesus gives to us that will enable us to let go of that which needlessly cripples us and to endure the pain of moving forward.

Like Ezekiel in the first reading, we need to come to a point where we realize that in crossing the river of divine grace, wading isn't an option! It is a river which can only be crossed by swimming, and so our only resource is to dive right in, trusting in the healing currents of Him who desperately wants to heal our fragmented hearts just as He healed the limbs of the cripple.

What is one sin that I have struggled with for a long time without much success? Do I want to be well?

DAY 25

Wednesday of the
Fourth Week of Lent

Reading I: Isaiah 49:8–15

Psalm: 145:8–9, 13cd–14, 17–18

Gospel: John 5:17–30



Today we continue our Gospel readings from John, which will carry us through to Easter, and it is clear that things are beginning to heat up. Whereas in yesterday's Gospel the Jews were starting to persecute Jesus, now they are intent on killing Him.

In response to criticism, Jesus sets out to defend His identity as Son of God, and in doing so, He offers profound insights into the very depths of the Trinitarian divine life. In the discourse, He emphasizes that the relationship between Father and Son is one, not of competition but rather, of intimate union. In fact, so intense is the self-giving love between Father and Son that, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (John 5:23).

In just a few sentences, moreover, St. John depicts whole swathes of the salvation drama. On the one hand, the hour is coming when Christ will destroy death at Calvary, and those people currently living in spiritual death “will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (John 5:25).

On the other hand, a different hour is coming (albeit at a later date) in which “all who are in the tombs will hear his voice” (John 5:28), and they will come out, and they will be judged on the basis of their deeds. Thus in this passage Jesus is looking forward both to Calvary and to the end of the world.

In each case, Jesus plays the pivotal role as guarantor of the fullness of spiritual life. This is the entire purpose for His becoming man (see John 3:16), and it was His entire purpose for creating you. Eternal life, the heavenly promised land: this is our heritage, our birthright as sons and daughters of God. We must settle for nothing less than this.

How do I relate to the different Persons of the Blessed Trinity? How can I grow in my worship of each?

DAY 26

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Reading I: Exodus 32:7–14

Psalm: 106:19–20, 21–22, 23

Gospel: John 5:31–47



The group of Jews in today's Gospel are guilty of using Moses as an excuse to reject Jesus. They hide behind the precepts of the Old Law because they are unable or unwilling to accept Jesus as the new and greater Moses. In response, Jesus acknowledges the limitations of self-testimony, choosing instead to invoke three distinct witnesses that attest to the veracity of His claims.

First, he invokes John the Baptist. In doing so, He soundly criticizes the Jews who were happy enough to listen to John and to "rejoice in his light" for a while, and yet they failed to take seriously his message about the coming of Christ.

Secondly, he invokes the Father and His works, including the various miracles that Jesus has already performed. Here Jesus offers a chilling warning: "His

voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen; . . . for you do not believe him whom he has sent" (John 5:37–38). Imagine somebody standing up today and telling all the bishops of the Church that they have never heard or seen God!

Yet Jesus can offer this critique without exaggeration because he knows that the Jews to whom he is speaking are no longer worshippers of the true God, but instead they worship merely their own faulty image of God. They have put God in such a small box that they are unable to recognize Him even when He is standing in front of them.

Finally, Jesus invokes the Scriptures. Just as Moses in the first reading mediated on behalf of God's chosen people, so now Jesus will lay down His life on behalf of all men. Interestingly, the root Greek word for "witness" and "testimony" is *martus*, from which we derive the English word "martyr."

This serves as a reminder that in addition to the three lines of witness that Jesus invokes in today's Gospel, we, too, are called to testify to the truth of His claims by the way we live our lives.

*Am I a good witness to the saving truth of Christ?
What is one area of my life where I witness poorly, and
how can it be improved?*

DAY 27

Friday of the
Fourth Week of Lent

Reading I: Wisdom 2:1a, 12–22

Psalm: 34:17–18, 19–20, 21, 23

Gospel: John 7:1–2, 10, 25–30



Today's prophetic first reading is an eerie portent of the Good Friday which awaits us two weeks from now. Already in the writings of pagan antiquity, there was discussion of what might happen if ever a truly just man was to appear.

Even after the coming of Christ, the stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius could declare in the second century AD that “the infallible man does not exist.”⁸ Some six hundred years earlier, Plato had made the argument that even if such a man could exist, he would never be allowed to endure. As the character Glaucon describes in Book II of the *Republic*, the perfect man “shall be scourged, tortured, bound, his eyes burnt out, and at last, after suffering every evil, shall be impaled or crucified.”⁹ As Christians, we realize that Plato was more correct

than he could ever have imagined.

Similarly, in the first reading from Wisdom we hear of a man who “professes to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a child of the Lord” (Wis 2:13). But, we despise Him. Why? Because, “He became to us a reproof of our thoughts” (Wis 2:14). And for this reason we, “condemn him to a shameful death” (Wis 2:20). In the presence of Goodness, evil feels confused, called out, and threatened.

We can feel that way, too, in our own lives, especially when we have put ourselves in a place of sin. Perhaps prayer or even repentance seems futile to us in such moments; we are so fed up with our frailty and weakness, and we are convinced that there is nothing for us to say to God in the midst of our sin.

Today’s readings are a reminder, however, that God truly became one of us, and He continued to long for us even when we were nailing Him to the Cross: “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit” (Ps 34:18).

Do I make a habit of praying for at least fifteen minutes every day, even on those days when I feel downcast, distracted, or unworthy? How do I plan to keep my prayer life strong these last two weeks of Lent?

DAY 28

Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Reading I: Jeremiah 11:18–20

Psalm: 7:2–3, 9bc–10, 11–12

Gospel: John 7:40–53



Like so much of John's Gospel, today's passage points us to the centrality of Christ. Amidst so many differing reactions to His identity and mission, even the Jewish guards can't help but blurt out, "Never before has anyone spoken like this man."

We can detect a huge spiritual irony in the Pharisees' response. "Have you also been deceived?" they demand. Those who are the most deceived accuse everyone but themselves of seeing things incorrectly.

John's Gospel repeatedly underscores for us the fact that Jesus Christ truly is the answer to the deepest longings of our heart, and that is why skeptics and tyrants in every age have found Him impossible to ignore. Pope Benedict XVI often said that Jesus shatters all our categories. As he explains further in

Deus Caritas Est, “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”¹⁰

That person is Jesus; He is that same person who divided public opinion in first-century Palestine and who continues to divide opinion in our world today. We should pray for the grace today to accept Jesus for who He is and to have the humility and self-knowledge to avoid the kind of spiritual blindness exhibited by the Pharisees. Lord Jesus, help us to see you more clearly!

Why do the great spiritual masters describe self-knowledge as the beginning of the spiritual life? How can I grow in humble recognition of both my faults and my gifts?

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Reading I: Isaiah 43:16–21

Psalm: 126:1–2, 2–3, 4–5, 6

Reading II: Philippians 3:8–14

Gospel: John 8:1–11



The finish line is in sight! As we enter the final week before Holy Week, the Church offers us readings of encouragement and hope.

In the first reading from Isaiah we are invited to remember how the Lord delivered His people from Egypt. But then we are told, “Remember not the former things . . . Behold, I am doing a new thing” (Isa 43:18, 19).

Similarly, in the second reading, St. Paul speaks of “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead” (Phil 3:13). We can think of these as the Church telling us not to dwell on the times we messed up or slacked in our commitments this Lent. Christianity is a religion of confident hope, not stagnant remorse!

We find this same theme in our beautiful Gospel reading from John 8. The scribes and Pharisees come to Jesus attempting to trap Him. Here, they claim,

is a woman who was caught in adultery. Will Jesus therefore condemn her to death by stoning as the law of Moses prescribed? If He does, the Roman soldiers will surely arrest Him for subverting their rule of law. Alternatively, Jesus could opt not to have the woman stoned, but then the Jews could accuse Him of directly contradicting Moses.

Yet Jesus doesn't take the bait; He sidesteps their trap. Although we don't know what He wrote on the ground, we do know what He says in response: "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). Notice how the tables are turned! The Pharisees and scribes certainly are convinced that they are without sin. But now they face a dilemma. If they cast the stones, then *they* are the ones whom the Romans will arrest and punish. But if they don't, then they are admitting that they have sinned!

Thus they are forced to leave one by one, beginning with the eldest and wisest, who were the first to realize how Jesus had outwitted them. The final words Jesus says to the woman are the same words He offers to us today as we enter the final phase of our Lenten journey: He wishes to help us, not condemn us. Let us turn away from our sins this day and continue to draw closer to Him who is ever ancient and ever new.

How will I mark the Lord's day today? What is one thing I could do to also help the other people in my life make this a day of rest and not of work?

DAY 29

Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Reading I: Daniel 13:1–9, 15–17, 19–30, 33–62

Psalm: 23:1–3a, 3b–4, 5, 6

Gospel: John 8:12–20



Today's first reading is a long and poignant one, and we can think of it as providing us with an imaginative backdrop for Jesus's important discussion of testimony in the Gospel.

In the reading from Daniel, the maligned Susanna has true testimony, but her protestations are dismissed. Instead, the false testimony of the two elders are believed, and it is only when Daniel intervenes that the truth comes to light. In this respect, Daniel looks forward to Christ, who always stands ready to vindicate us from the great accuser—the devil.

You may recall the scene in C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, when the evil Witch declares that the boy Edmund's blood must be spilled on account of his being a traitor. We are all traitors for having sinned, but Jesus, like Daniel and

Aslan, takes our sins upon Himself. We need only repent and turn back to Him.

It is interesting to note as well the cause of the elders' evil ways: "Lust has perverted your heart," Daniel tells them (13:56). This is a sobering reminder that every time we sin, we slide into spiritual darkness, and we make ourselves less capable of seeing the truth of things.

In response to our human predicament, Jesus declares Himself the light of the world. He does so, moreover, in the area of the temple where the Jews would erect huge lampstands at night during the feast of tabernacles, making the imagery especially potent for His immediate listeners. As John tells us elsewhere, the Good News of the Christian Gospel is that, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). Let us strive to allow Jesus to shine out more brightly in our lives.

Does Christ's grace appear effective in me? Who are examples of Catholics in my life who seem to radically reflect the light of Christ, and how can I become more like them?

DAY 30

Tuesday of the
Fifth Week of Lent

Reading I: Numbers 21:4–9

Psalm: 102:2–3, 16–18, 19–21

Gospel: John 8:21–30



Our theologically dense Gospel readings from John continue today with Jesus making a prophecy about His Crucifixion.

This scene is prefigured in the first reading from Numbers, when God instructs Moses to install a bronze serpent on a pole in order that anyone who looked at it could be saved from their snakebites. The episode is a fascinating one because the serpent is typically regarded as a symbol of evil in Sacred Scripture, yet this is the symbol which God opts to use as His healing instrument.

We can detect in this a deliberate foreshadowing of Calvary, when Jesus will take on the sins of His people in order to save them. Just as God used the bronze serpent to obviate the effects of saraph serpents, so Jesus, the perfect man, puts Himself in

the place of a humble, wretched sinner in order that all true sinners may be saved. In this respect, Jesus's choice of words is no accident: "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He" (John 8:28).

In other words, it is precisely on the Cross that the magnificent self-revelation of the Trinitarian love will become fully manifest. *Ecce lignum crucis, in qua salus mundi pependit!* the Church will proclaim on Good Friday. *Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the Savior of the World!* What an amazing truth this is! Come, let us adore Him!

How can I make Eucharistic adoration more of a feature in my weekly life?

DAY 31

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Reading I: Daniel 3:14–20, 91–92, 95

Psalm: Daniel 3:52, 53, 54, 55, 56

Gospel: John 8:31–42



The English word “redemption” comes from the Latin verb *redimēre*, which literally means “to buy back.” The saving work of Christ is one which buys us back from the bondage of the devil, liberating us from the slavery of sin and restoring us to divine sonship.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus drives this point home when He professes “Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave of sin” (John 8:34). When we sin, we not only offend God, but we actually become less of ourselves, and we experience the gradual erosion of our freedom.

Hence the Christian vision of freedom is at once radical but also deeply relatable. Deep down we sense that freedom is much more than being able to do whatever we like; rather, authentic freedom is

the condition of being the master of our own concupiscent wants and desires, and having the ability to direct these toward other persons in self-gift.

In his classic work *Love and Responsibility*, St. John Paul II underscored this point by noting how freedom is first and foremost for love. When freedom lacks love, he said, it becomes something empty and meaningless which ultimately leaves us unfulfilled.

For the Christian, then, we could assert that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the first reading are actually far more radically free than the idolatrous King Nebuchadnezzar who imprisons them. This is because they possess truth, they see reality clearly, and they are able to act rightly in accordance with that knowledge. So powerful is their witness that Nebuchadnezzar eventually comes to acknowledge the God whom they worship.

As we continue to journey through this season of Lent, let us pray for the grace to live lives that are rooted in a radical and courageous experience of Christian freedom.

What are the areas of my life where I remain enslaved by sin? How can I offer these over to Christ's redemptive power this day?

DAY 32

Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Reading I: Genesis 17:3–9

Psalm: 105:4–5, 6–7, 8–9

Gospel: John 8:51–59



Sacred Scripture places great emphasis on the power of a name. Jesus's own name is none other than the Greek form of the Hebrew Joshua, meaning *God saves*. The title of Emmanuel, also ascribed to Jesus, simply means *God with us*. Both of these names, Jesus and Emmanuel, serve as a kind of one-word synopsis of the entirety of Sacred Scripture. After all, what is salvation history if not the story of how Jesus saves us, how God is with us?

In today's Gospel, however, Jesus makes a point of repeating a different divine appellation, one which we've heard several times in the past few days: "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). With this declaration Jesus is explicitly identifying Himself with the name of God. Notice as well that He doesn't say, "Before Abraham was, I *was*."

As St. Thomas Aquinas points out in his commentary, Jesus's use of the present form "am" is a decisive refutation of the Arian heresy which plagued the early Church. In other words, Jesus is saying He always *has been*, always *is*, and *always will be*.

But why does He say, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56)? As our father in faith, Abraham—himself the recipient of a new name in confirmation of his new identity—is told in our first reading that his descendants will maintain an everlasting covenant with God.

But whereas God promised the earthly land of Canaan to Abraham, deep down the patriarch must have known that this was not enough. It couldn't be enough that all his descendants forever and ever would live and suffer and die purely for the sake of a plot of land. In his heart of hearts, Abraham knew that something greater lay ahead, that death had yet to be conquered, that Someone greater than he was yet to come.

And so he rejoiced in anticipation of that day when the promise of the physical land of Canaan would be replaced with the promise of our heavenly inheritance. Jesus Christ stands before us today as God the Father's fulfillment of that promise.

Do I exhibit a radical Christian joy in my interactions with those around me? How can I cultivate a habit of gratitude as a means toward growing in joy?

DAY 33

Friday of the
Fifth Week of Lent

Reading I: Jeremiah 20:10–13

Psalm: 18:2–3a, 3bc–4, 5–6, 7

Gospel: John 10:31–42



One week before Good Friday, the Church offers us a passage from John's Gospel which underscores the motivation for and consequence of Christ's redemptive work.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it well by quoting a number of the Church fathers in a paragraph teeming with profundities: "The Word became flesh to make us 'partakers of the divine nature': 'For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God.' 'For the Son of God became man so that we might become God.' 'The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man,

might make men gods.”

In today’s episode, the Jews once again seek to kill Jesus because He has called Himself the Son of God. In response, however, Jesus draws on an old Torah tradition established in Psalm 82 which referred to God’s holy ones as *gods*. If Scripture can describe these people as gods, Jesus argues, then how much more so can “the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world” be described as the Son of God (see John 10:36)!

The layers of meaning are profound. However, Jesus is aware that under the Old Covenant even the holiest of people could not become partakers of the divine nature, and in this sense they could still only be described as *children of God*. And yet it is precisely because Jesus Himself, the Son of God, took on human flesh that we, His younger brothers and sisters, now find our humanity elevated to the point where we can literally share in the divine nature through divine adoption (see John 1:12).

If this doesn’t startle or pierce you, you probably aren’t contemplating it seriously enough! In no other religion do we find the majesty and the beauty of the truth claims which are found in Catholic Christianity. This saving truth is rooted in Jesus Christ; He beckons us to follow Him and to become more like Him.

What have I learned about sacred theology and Sacred Scripture this Lent? How can I continue to develop a knowledge of and, more importantly, a love for the doctrines of the Catholic faith?

DAY 34

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Reading I: Ezekiel 37:21–28

Psalm: Jeremiah 31:10, 11–12abcd, 13

Gospel: John 11:45–56



Jesus has just raised Lazarus from the dead, hundreds are beginning to believe in Him, and for His enemies, it is the final straw.

As the Sanhedrin Council of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and chief priests is convened to address these events, Caiaphas the high priest unwittingly delivers a prophecy: “[I]t is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish” (John 11:50).

From a historical perspective, there is an inherent irony in the text, given the happenings of the First Jewish–Roman War, which took place a mere thirty years after the events of today’s Gospel. During this war, the Jewish rebellion was utterly extinguished. In the summer of AD 70, the city of Jerusalem was obliterated, the Temple destroyed, and the Jewish

people dispersed. Thus the very fate which the Sanhedrin sought to avoid ended up being realized a few short decades later.

For John the Evangelist, however, there is something deeper going on here. From the eyes of faith, he is aware of the unintended truth of Caiaphas's words, namely that because of Jesus's sacrificial offering on the Cross, the spiritual salvation of the Jewish nation will be brought about. Even more than that, however, John tells us that Christ's death would serve "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (John 11:52).

In this way, the Old Testament reading from Ezekiel finds its fulfillment. Whereas Ezekiel speaks of the one kingdom of Israel being united in right worship, John looks forward to the universal kingdom of the children of God which will be instituted by Christ at Calvary. That kingdom is the Church, and we are its inheritors.

Am I conscious of the reality of the communion of saints in my day-to-day life? How might I grow in my devotion to the saints in heaven, and how can I get better at turning to them in times of difficulty?

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Opening Gospel: Luke 19:28–40

Reading I: Isaiah 50:4–7

Psalm: 22:8–9, 17–18, 19–20, 23–24

Reading II: Philippians 2:6–11

Gospel: Luke 22:14–23:56



We concluded yesterday's reflection with a reference to the kingdom of God. This is what the readings for Palm Sunday are all about. Upon Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the people proclaim joyfully, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord" (Luke 19:38). Yet this is no ordinary King.

Here is a King who sits upon an ass and who rides to His death. In the long Gospel reading for today, Jesus makes clear at the Passover supper that everything in His life has been leading up to fulfillment "in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16).

In His final instructions to His disciples, He declares to them, "I confer a kingdom on you" (Luke 22:29, NABRE). On the Cross, He interacts with

the good thief, who begs Him, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” All four Gospels, moreover, make a point of noting the inscription that Pilate placed above the Sacred Head on the Cross: “This is Jesus the King of the Jews” (Matt 27:37).

As Christians living under the New Covenant, we realize that this sign was significant for understanding Jesus’s true identity. We know, furthermore, that He is the King not just of the Jews but *of the whole world*. This is why He came, why He lived, why He died, and why He rose: to overthrow the evil dominion of the prince of this world and to reclaim creation for the Father.

The crown He bore, the purple robe He donned, the sign placed above His head—these are no mere coincidences. It is at Calvary that the kingdom of God achieves its decisive victory, bringing infinite good out of unfathomable evil. In its final act of desperation, hell put God to death. We put Him to death. Yet we know that “unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit” (John 12:24, NABRE).

In suffering, therefore, we have hope; from defeat, victory; through death, life. It is at Calvary that the

King of kings is lifted up—and before Him every knee must bend.

Is Jesus Christ Lord of my entire life?

DAY 35

Monday of Holy Week

Reading I: Isaiah 42:1–7

Psalm: 27:1, 2, 3, 13–14

Gospel: John 12:1–11



Many of the Church fathers describe the Book of Isaiah as the “fifth” Gospel, so rich are its prophecies about the person of Christ. Today’s passage is no exception, as we read with hope of the mission of the Redeemer: “To open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (Isa 42:7).

Fast forward to John’s Gospel and one finds a beautiful illustration of this mission in the small house at Bethany. Mary takes a jar of expensive perfume and begins to anoint the feet of Jesus. In the tradition, the theological masters are almost unanimous in identifying Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene as one and the same person. Hence, as Fr. Sean Davidson explains in his book *St. Mary Magdalene: Prophetess of Eucharistic Love*, it would seem that this beautiful episode of anointing shortly before Jesus’s death is actually a repetition of what

Mary had done earlier in Jesus's ministry (see Luke 7:36–50).

Having grown up in a devout Jewish home, Mary of Bethany at some point fell away from the faith of her ancestors and became embroiled in sin and vice. It was in this stage of her life that she earned the title “Magdalene,” and in Luke's Gospel we read of the first occasion on which she came to anoint Jesus's feet—an occasion wherein the oils she administered were mixed with many tears. Having lived a life of sin, Mary's profound encounter with the person of Jesus suddenly brought about conversion in her heart.

Returning now to the episode in John's Gospel, we see that same Mary two or three years later, now one of Jesus's closest friends, repeating that same act of deferential love which marked the beginning of her journey with Him. Jesus says in response to Judas's criticisms, “Let her keep this for the day of my burial,” a reference to how Mary Magdalene (that is, Mary of Bethany) would be the one to go to the tomb to anoint His body.

Understood in these ways, the figure of Mary Magdalene given to us in the Gospels shines out as a beautiful example of spiritual healing and ongoing, conversion. Let us pray for the grace to become more

like her this Holy Week.

*What lessons can we learn from St. Mary of Bethany
this Holy Week?*

DAY 36

Tuesday of Holy Week

Reading I: Isaiah 49:1–6

Psalm: 71:1–2, 3–4a, 5ab–6ab, 15, 17

Gospel: John 13:21–33, 36–38



Today's Gospel offers us a fascinating and moving scene. The beloved disciple, traditionally identified with St. John the Evangelist, is described as reclining on the Sacred Heart of Our Lord.

The Greek word used to describe the “side” (*kolpō*) of Jesus is only invoked one other time in John's Gospel, to describe the abiding of the Son in the bosom (*kolpon*) of the Father. This gives us a glimpse into how radically intimate the friendship was between John and Jesus.

It is in this context that Peter asks John to try to figure out from Jesus who it is that will betray Him. What is remarkable about this interaction—and something we often miss—is that Jesus gives John a straight answer! “It is he to whom I will give this morsel when I have dipped it” (John 13:26). And what is the very next thing that happens? Jesus dips the morsel and hands it to Judas.

Presumably all the disciples would have noticed this action, but only John knew what Jesus had told him, and clearly he chose not to share this information with anyone else. In a heart-rending way, then, a close reading of John's last supper scene reveals that John himself received forewarning from Jesus as to what was about to take place and who the betrayer would be.

Why did Jesus share this information with John? And why did John not share the information? Why did he not jump to his feet and confront Judas in front of the other Apostles? Why did he not intervene to try to prevent the calamitous tragedy which would be the death of the Son of God?

The answer: John trusted Jesus absolutely. John must have firmly believed that Jesus knew what He was doing and that this was the way things had to be. Although in that moment John must have wanted with his whole being to do something, instead he followed Jesus's lead and simply watched and prayed in silence, uniting his anguish with the anguish of Christ—even to the foot of the Cross.

What are the sufferings or hardships in my life that God is inviting me to embrace with trust?

DAY 37

Wednesday of Holy Week

Reading I: Isaiah 50:4–9a

Psalms: 69:8–10, 21–22, 31, 33–34

Gospel: Matthew 26:14–25



Have you ever stopped and wondered why Judas did what he did? Perhaps he was so filled with greed that he opted to betray Jesus purely for the sake of the thirty pieces of silver. We do know from elsewhere in the Gospels that Judas had an unhealthy relationship with money. But even though thirty pieces of silver was a substantial amount, it wasn't a life-changing sum. Perhaps a third of a year's wages at most.

Nor can one reduce his motives solely to the influence of the demonic since the Scriptures suggest that it was only after he had already betrayed Jesus in his heart that the devil entered him. One wonders, then, if there is some deeper explanation for why Judas ultimately chose to carry out the greatest crime a human being could ever commit.

One explanation is that the real reason for Judas's betrayal is that he had lost patience with Jesus and

he believed the time had come to act. Having witnessed the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Judas truly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but he was frustrated by inaction. He couldn't understand why Jesus seemed so unwilling to finally make his move and overthrow the Romans.

According to this theory, although Judas's heart had already been corrupted by vice, the thirty silver coins were not his primary motive for the betrayal. Rather, his primary motive was his belief that if no one else was going to take action, then he would have to be the one to do it. If he simply turned Jesus over to the authorities, then at last Jesus would be forced to reveal His true power and to vanquish His enemies!

This was true, of course, but not in the way Judas imagined. Ultimately we do not know exactly what led Judas to make his decision, but whatever the case may be, we should view his tragic story as a reminder that true discipleship requires realizing that God's ways are not always our ways. Let us pray for the grace to conform ourselves entirely to the will of God, no matter how challenging that may be.

Do I trust totally in God's plan for my life, or am I still prone at times to prioritizing my own values, plans, and desires ahead of God's?

DAY 38

Holy Thursday Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper

Reading I: Exodus 12:1–8, 11–14

Psalm: 116:12–13, 15–16bc, 17–18

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26

Gospel: John 13:1–15



Traditionally called Maundy Thursday (Latin, *mandatum*), today we are reminded of the new commandment that Jesus offers us in the Gospel acclamation: “Love one another as I have loved you.”

To this end, the readings for tonight point us to the interconnectedness of the sacraments and the Cross. The Passover of the Old Covenant is fulfilled in the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ at Calvary. St. Paul tells us, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the chalice, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26).

The Mass is none other than our participation in the once-for-all sacrifice that Jesus offered for us on the Cross. It is at Mass that we come face-to-face

with the perfect expression of self-giving love, a love which Christ calls us to share.

The Sacramental economy is further highlighted in the passage from John's Gospel when we consider Jesus's enigmatic explanation to Peter: "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over" (John 13:10). Traditionally the "bathing" in this passage has been taken as a reference to baptism, hence Jesus's insistence that Peter cannot receive this sacrament a second time. Nonetheless, Jesus is careful to stress that the disciples' feet still need washing, thereby symbolizing our need for ongoing conversion and confession even after we've received baptism.

More generally, we can reflect on what Peter's reluctance and the Lord's response teach us about the spiritual life. Peter's struggle is one we are at times tempted to share in: he won't allow himself to be loved as he ought.

Perhaps there are moments when, like Peter, we know we have a problem, something unclean in our hearts, but out of fear or self-dependence, we refuse to allow the Lord to cleanse our heart as He wishes. Tonight we are reminded that we need to let go of ourselves and let Jesus in.

What are those parts of myself which I feel are unlovable? How can I surrender these to the tender love of Jesus?

DAY 39

Good Friday of the Lord's Passion

Reading I: Isaiah 52:13–53:12

Psalm: 31:2, 6, 12–13, 15–16, 17, 25

Reading II: Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9

Gospel: John 18:1–19:42



Jesus taught us how to live; now He is teaching us how to die. In his book *The Priest Is Not His Own*, Venerable Fulton Sheen once reflected on the wholly unique priestly role of Christ, a priesthood in which priest and victim are one:

Our Lord called him Satan, for it was Satan who at the beginning of the public ministry tempted Him to reject the way of suffering by offering Him three shortcuts to His Kingdom without the Cross (Matt 4:1–11). The denial of His victimhood appears to Christ as something satanic. When “Satan sits enthroned” (Rev 2:13) at the end of time, Our Lord said, he would appear so much like Him “that if it were

possible, even the elect would be deceived” (Matt 24:24). But if Satan works miracles, if he lays his hands gently on children, if he appears benign and a lover of the poor, how will we know him from Christ? Satan will have no scars on his hands or feet or side. He will appear as a priest, but not as a victim.¹¹

Christ the victim underwent the most painful death imaginable so that we wouldn't have to. Unimaginably painful because in His physical being, unimpaired by the effects of sin, Jesus was more in touch with His physical senses than any other human being who has ever lived, and for Him even the first lash of the Roman scourge would have caused a physical pain more deeply felt than any we have ever experienced.

Unimaginably painful because in His psychological state, He felt not only the dread of all the anguish that was still to come but also, and even more intensely, the feeling of utter loneliness and betrayal at having been abandoned by all but one of His chosen disciples. Unimaginably painful, as well, because at the spiritual level, Jesus did not merely destroy our sins; no, He *took them upon Himself*, and they became far more real to Him than they have

ever been to us. Indeed that which seems too trivial, so slight, so easily forgivable in our eyes, He saw for what it truly is. St. John Henry Newman writes:

Alas! He had to bear what is well known to us, what is familiar to us, but what to Him was woe unutterable. He had to bear that which is so easy a thing to us, so natural, so welcome, that we cannot conceive of it as of a great endurance, but which to Him had the scent and the poison of death—He had, my dear brethren, to bear the weight of sin; He had to bear your sins; He had to bear the sins of the whole world. Sin is an easy thing to us; we think little of it; we do not understand how the Creator can think much of it; we cannot bring our imagination to believe that it deserves retribution, and, when even in this world punishments follow upon it, we explain them away or turn our minds from them. But consider what sin is in itself; it is rebellion against God; it is a traitor's act who aims at the overthrow and death of His sovereign; it is that, if I may use a strong expression, which, could the Divine Governor of the world cease to be, would be sufficient to bring it about. Sin is

the mortal enemy of the All-holy, so that He and it cannot be together; and as the All-holy drives it from His presence into the outer darkness, so, if God could be less than God, it is sin that would have power to make Him less.¹²

We so routinely fail to acknowledge sin for what it is: a spiritual suicide, a cosmic treason. At Calvary, our Beloved Master was under no such illusions. He was completely aware of the task He was about to undertake, and He did it willingly. For multiple hours He allowed His mind to be filled with all the darkness that has ever plagued humankind, so earnest was His desire to redeem us. It was not the only way, yet it was the perfect way.

Although upon the Cross, the physical suffering that He endured was more excruciating than we could ever imagine, even this was nothing compared to the uttermost mental and spiritual pain which filled His soul, reverberating throughout His entire being. And throughout it all, He sensed that, with a mere blink of an eye, He could end everything, make the pain stop, or even just mitigate it by some small degree. But He would not sanction it.

Thus, He hung upon that sacred Cross as countless hosts of His adoring angels watched on in

trembling and awe, as He undid the sin of Adam. In so doing, the King of the Ages, as St. Paul calls Him, transformed that scene of untold evil into the source of endless glory. He shined forth, even amidst the darkness of Calvary, as the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Prince of Peace, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Ruler of this world and the King of your heart and mine. This is the King we serve, the King who died for us.

How will I thank Jesus today for everything He has done for me?

DAY 40

Holy Saturday



An ancient homily for Holy Saturday reads in part:

What is happening? Today there is a great silence over the earth, a great silence, and stillness, a great silence because the King sleeps; the earth was in terror and was still, because God slept in the flesh and raised up those who were sleeping from the ages. God has died in the flesh, and the underworld has trembled.¹³

Death and concupiscence: such are the legacies of sin. Apart from Christ, we sense our interior division as we struggle to become ourselves, to become the kinds of persons we are called to be.

Afflicted by concupiscence, we feel hopeless and abandoned, unable to properly give of ourselves and fearful of our own weakness. But this is not the end of the story. In light of the Gospel, a deeper and greater truth rings out: Christ has come; the divine has taken flesh; death has been conquered; freedom is again possible. For the Good News of the Gospel

is that the Redeemer has not only come, but He has given Himself up for man precisely so that man may come to share in His definitive example of self-sacrificial gift.

Thus, death does not have the final word: man experiences an internal war, but he finds victory in the Cross. Together with St. John Paul II, then, one can rightly say that “the redeemer of man, Jesus Christ, is the center of the universe and of history,”¹⁴ precisely because it is Jesus who stands at the threshold of man’s ultimate vocation, his ultimate calling. It is through Christ and Christ alone that man’s calling is made clear, and it is in the Blood of Christ that he finds the strength to answer the call.

It is Jesus, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, who extends to each of us the power to become a child of God (see John 1:12). At Calvary, the Eternal Trinity definitively sundered “the dominion of darkness” (Col 1:13) which had existed since Adam’s first sin. Through the sacrifice of the New Adam, death was defeated, and the triumph of grace was brought about. This is the life-changing, world-transforming, civilization-defining truth of the Gospel. The tomb is empty. The Master is risen. Tears are wiped away, and death is no more. Let us rejoice in that truth this Easter!

How has my life been changed this Lent? How will I allow the graces of Easter to continue to work an interior transformation in my heart?

BONUS MATERIAL

Promise & Fulfillment

SERIES



Included in this devotional are companion summaries and reflections for another exceptional Lenten resource: The Promise & Fulfillment series presented by Scott Hahn.

Promise & Fulfillment includes Hahn's most popular talks on the Eucharist, Confession, and other Catholic themes that are sure to enrich your faith. Find the series at StPaulCenter.com/Promise-And-Fulfillment.

Lord, Have Mercy: The Healing Power of Confession



In *Lord, Have Mercy*, Scott Hahn explores the sacrament of reconciliation and shows why it is the key to growth in the spiritual life. Drawing from the story of Adam and Eve in the garden and his personal encounters with God's mercy in the confessional, Scott shows why this sacrament is vital to the new evangelization.

EPISODE 1

In this first episode, Scott begins by taking us to the beginning in the garden where our first parents failed to obey, depriving humanity of the life of grace for which we were created. Recounting his personal encounter with the law as a teenager, Scott illustrates how God used this life event to show him His mercy.

Reflection:

- ☛ “If we don't humble ourselves and repent, in pride what we do is resent. If we don't accuse ourselves

we end up excusing ourselves and accusing our loved ones, especially our Lord, even God.” Scott says this in the context of Adam’s defiant response to God. What do you make of this statement?

- ☛ Why do you think most people experience a deeper repentance from a quiet reaction of disappointment from someone we’ve hurt than from their justified outburst of anger?

EPISODE 2

We ended the last episode with Scott’s conversion and intense study of Scripture. In this episode Scott recounts what it was like for him to live out his faith as a believer and then as a pastor. It is then that he realizes that there is a cost to being a disciple of Christ.

Reflection:

- ☛ What was your main takeaway from Scott’s restitution story?
- ☛ What has been the “cost” of being a disciple for you?

EPISODE 3

Before entering the Church, Scott had some objections to the Sacrament of Confession. After

receiving sacramental catechesis from Msgr. Bruskewitz, Scott's questions were answered. Now a Catholic, Scott shares what a difference the sacrament of mercy made not only for himself but for his entire family.

Reflection:

- ☛ Is there anything in Msgr. Bruskewitz's catechesis that you had never heard before?
- ☛ Have you ever done a general confession (confess sins from age of reason to the present)?
- ☛ What would a day of jubilee be like in your home?

First Comes Love: What Is the Catholic Gospel?



In *First Comes Love*, Dr. Scott Hahn delves into the Gospels to show that family terminology—words like brother, sister, mother, father, and home—dominates Jesus’s speech and the writings of His first followers. These are the very words that illuminate Christianity’s central ideas. Through real-life examples and relevant Scripture passages, Dr. Hahn makes it clear that, no matter what sort of family we come from, we can all find our family in the Church.

EPISODE 1

What is the Catholic gospel? Scott Hahn opens with this question to explore the deepest mystery of our faith: the Trinity. The gospel is none other than the plan of the Father for the Son to give us the Spirit of sonship. But first we need to understand who God is from all eternity in terms of family life to appreciate what God does for us. Scott will share just how revolutionary this mystery is.

Reflection:

- ☛ Why is it important to know who God is as family in his Fatherhood, Sonship and Love to better understand what He does as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier?
- ☛ Why do you think the concept of God as Father is so difficult for many to accept?

EPISODE 2

This episode focuses on what God does for humanity. He is Creator, and in His wisdom He makes us in His image and likeness as male and female to show us who He is. As Redeemer, He saves mankind not only *from* sin but *for* sharing in His divine sonship. As Sanctifier, He fills us with His own life through the Church. Scott will explain what it means to be saved, in the here and now, and the necessity of being a member of the Family of God.

Reflection:

- ☛ Is there anything that struck you about the way Scott explained the “good news?”
- ☛ Why is it important for Catholics to understand the meaning of, “there is no salvation outside the Church”?

EPISODE 3

Scott shares his experience as a first-time father and reflects on how this new relationship profoundly changed him. It was a night in the nursery with his newborn when he had a deep insight into the love of the Father for humanity.

Reflection:

- ☛ Scott shared how he struggled with not feeling that he was a child of God. Did anything in this story resonate with you?
- ☛ How would you summarize the Catholic gospel to a friend?

The Family Prayer: Understanding Our Father



The prayer at hand has been called many things: the *Pater Noster*, the Our Father, the Model Prayer, the Lord's Prayer. As its name indicates, the Our Father has a particular meaning for all who call themselves children of God. In *The Family Prayer: Understanding "Our Father,"* Dr. Scott Hahn presents a unique meditation that highlights the wealth of meaning in this most common Christian prayer. Relying on the Fathers and doctors of the Church as well as Sacred Scripture, Dr. Hahn takes each of the seven petitions of the Our Father individually and draws out the implications of the prayer given to the family of God by Christ Himself. After *The Family Prayer*, you'll never pray the Our Father in quite the same way again.

EPISODE 1

The Lord's Prayer is one of the most recited prayers, but do we ponder it enough? In this presentation, Scott reflects on the structure of this "perfect prayer" where Jesus begins by teaching us that God

is “Our Father.” Then moving to the first three God-centered petitions, Scott reminds us how “Hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom, thy will be done,” are most meaningful in the context of the liturgy.

Reflection:

- ☛ Have you ever thought of yourself as royalty?
- ☛ Reflect on your personal prayer life. In what ways does it follow the structure of the Our Father?

EPISODE 2

Before reflecting on the last four “us” petitions, Scott ponders a bit longer on “thy will be done,” reminding us that the goal of prayer is our conformity to God’s will. Does prayer change things then? Scott offers his insights on the power of prayer, when we as God’s children share our hearts with our loving Father and ask Him for the grace to forgive others.

Reflection:

- ☛ What has God shown you after saying a “prayer of complaint?”
- ☛ Can you think of someone you need to forgive?

EPISODE 3

In this last episode, Scott shares a personal anecdote to highlight the aspect of “forgive us our trespasses.” To end his reflections on the Lord’s Prayer, Scott goes into a deeper explanation of the meaning of “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” which has often been misunderstood. It is in understanding the inner logic of who God is and what He has done in salvation history that we can better understand this powerful prayer.

Reflection:

- ☛ What was your takeaway from Scott’s conversation with Fr. John?
- ☛ Now that you’ve heard the explanation of each of the petitions of this Family Prayer, how will praying it make a difference in your life?

The Lamb's Supper



In *The Lamb's Supper*, Scott Hahn connects the Catholic Mass with the early Christians' understanding of the New Testament's Book of Revelation, explaining that the mystical visions of heaven found in Revelation can shed light on the sacrifice and celebration of the Eucharist. With the help of the Church Fathers, Scott discovers that the typological reading of Scripture has the most explanatory power.

EPISODE 1

In this first episode, Scott begins with the story of the Road to Emmaus, a key text to interpreting the Scriptures. Scott recounts his deep study of Scripture before becoming Catholic, specifically Revelation, and what led him to discover the rich teaching of the early Church Fathers. Little did he know where he would end up after unearthing this treasure.

Reflection:

- ☛ Like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, have you ever had a “burning heart” experience?

- ☛ Have you ever tried to read the Book of the Revelation of St. John? What is your impression of this book?

EPISODE 2

Now an Evangelical pastor, Scott realized that mining the gold in the teachings of the early Church had certain implications. As he wrestled with the truth found in the sermons of the Church Fathers, Scott went in search of the Church described in their writings. What he encountered in the back pew of a basement chapel changed his life forever.

Reflection:

- ☛ Which of the typological parallels struck you the most? Why?
- ☛ Next time you go to Mass, pay attention to the readings and find their typological connection.

EPISODE 3

After attending his first Mass, Scott was never the same again. Seeing the connection between the Catholic Mass and the Book of Revelation compelled him to come into full communion with the Church. However, this was not easy for Scott as his decision brought marital strife. What he came to

realize is that Kimberly's conversion would come, not from his skillful argumentation for the faith, but by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection:

- ☛ Have you ever tried to convert someone? How fruitful were your efforts?
- ☛ Can you think of anyone with whom you want to share this talk?

Consuming the Word



In *Consuming the Word* Dr. Scott Hahn undertakes an examination of some of Christianity's most basic terms to discover what they meant to the sacred authors, the apostolic preachers, and their first hearers. Moreover, at a time when the Church is embarking on a new evangelization, he draws lessons for Christians today to help solidify their understanding of the why it is that Catholics do what Catholics do.

EPISODE 1

The need to re-evangelize Christians has prompted the Church to call for a new evangelization, centered on her source and summit: the Eucharist. In this first episode Scott finds himself catechizing his former Catholic classmate. Now a Bible-believing Catholic, Scott is asked the question he had once asked his friend, "Where in the New Testament do you find the Sacrifice of the Mass?" The answer to this question takes these two classmates into a deeper discussion about the Old Testament Passover.

Reflection:

- ☛ Two keys to evangelization are friendship and sharing the joy of the gospel. Are there opportunities in your life to exemplify these?
- ☛ Why is it important for Catholics to understand the Mass as primarily a sacrifice and secondarily a meal?

EPISODE 2

“The New Testament was a sacrament before it was a document according to the document.” This is what Scott asserted to his friend Carl as they continued their discussion of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. By reviewing the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke and of St. Paul, Scott shows his friend that the expression “New Testament” isn’t about literature; it’s about the liturgy.

Reflection:

- ☛ Carl lamented never having heard any of Scott’s explanations in his Catholic upbringing. How was your catechetical formation growing up?
- ☛ Had you ever heard the phrase “New Testament” explained this way before?

EPISODE 3

In this final episode, Scott concludes by making this final point: the Bible is a liturgical book that belongs in its supernatural habitat: the liturgy. The language used by Jesus and St. Paul point to the liturgical nature of Scripture. Reading the inspired Word in union with the incarnate Word in the Eucharist is what will draw us deeper into unity. By consuming the Word, we receive the Remedy to strengthen us in all our weaknesses and trials.

Reflection:

- ☛ Meditate on Scott's reflection of 1 Corinthians 10: the Eucharist as the "way of escape."
- ☛ Which lines struck you from Rick Warren's description of the state of the world and the Church?

The Fourth Cup



In *The Fourth Cup*, Dr. Scott Hahn explains Christ's Paschal sacrifice on the Cross as the fulfillment of the traditional fourth cup used in the celebration of Passover, drawing symbolic parallels to the Last Supper and Christ's death on Calvary. Through his scholarly insights and important biblical connections, Mass will come alive for you as never before!

EPISODE 1

"It is finished!" These are the last words of Our Lord on the Cross. But "What is finished?" is what Scott, the evangelical seminarian, wanted to find out. It was by looking at the events of the Last Supper and Calvary in the context of the Passover that Scott found his answer.

Reflection:

- ☛ Which one of the four clues in Scott's research of the meaning of "it is finished," struck you the most? Why?
- ☛ Meditate on St. John's irony: What looks like defeat for Jesus—hanging on the Cross—is

actually His victory, the supreme expression of love, where evil is cast out.

EPISODE 2

Having made the connection between the Old Testament Passover and the sacrifice begun in the Upper Room and culminating with the consummation of the fourth cup on Calvary, Scott was not finished penetrating the depths of the gospel of John. It was the Church Fathers' reading of the Bread of Life discourse that set Scott in search for the church that taught all that he was discovering in his study of the early Church.

Reflection:

- ☛ Do you own a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church or a Baltimore Catechism? Do you consult it regularly?
- ☛ Why is it important for Catholics to study the early Church?

EPISODE 3

Recognizing that his church was not the church he was searching for, Scott resigns and continues his study of the Scriptures with a focus on Hebrews. It is in this epistle that he discovers that the Sacrifice

of Christ that is begun in the Upper Room and consummated in Calvary is then completed and presented once and for all by Jesus as High Priest.

Reflection:

- ☛ What struck you most about the account of Polycarp's martyrdom?
- ☛ Had you ever pondered what was happening between the Father and the Son as Jesus hung on the Cross? Why does it matter how we view this? What implications does it have on our spiritual life?

Endnotes



1. Rick Warren, “The Joy of the Gospel of Life” (presentation, 2015 World Meeting of Families, Philadelphia, PA, September 22–27, 2015).

2. Dante, *Inferno*, trans. Anthony Esolen (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 23.

3. Tomasz Królak, *1001 Things You Should Know About the Blessed John Paul II* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: FT Press, 2011), 142.

4. St. John Henry Newman, “An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine.” 6th ed., University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN, available online at <https://restorationchristianculture.org/wp-content/uploads/Essay-on-the-Development-of-Christian-Doctrine-An-John-Henry-Newman.pdf>.

5. Matthias J. Scheeben, *The Glories of Divine Grace: A Fervent Exhortation to All to Preserve and to Grow in Sanctifying Grace* (Rockford, IL: Tan, 2000), 372–373.

6. John Bergsma, *Psalm Basics for Catholics: Seeing Salvation History in a New Way* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2018).

7. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970).

8. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Martin Hammond (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), V.10.1.

9. Plato *Republic* Book II.360-61, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan in *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (Yale University Press, 1999), 44–45

10. Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Love *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005), §1.

11. Fulton J. Sheen, *The Priest Is Not His Own* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 27.

12. St. John Henry Newman, “Discourse 16: Mental Sufferings of Our Lord in His Passion,”

Newman Reader Works of John Henry Newman, The National Institute for Newman Studies. <https://www.newmanreader.org/works/discourses/discourse16.html>.

13. “The Lord's Descent into Hell,” From an ancient homily for Holy Saturday, Pontifical University Saint Thomas Aquinas, https://www.vatican.va/spirit/documents/spirit_20010414_omelia-sabato-santo_en.html.

14. Pope St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the Redeemer of Man *Redemptor Hominis* (March 4, 1979), §1.