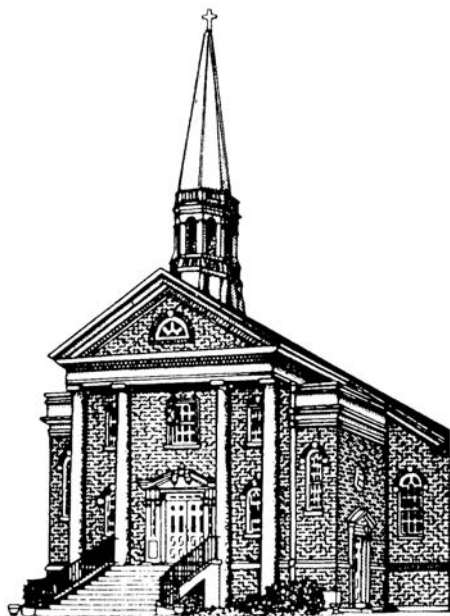


Lent

The Journey of Faith



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Lent

The Journey of Faith

Each year the Church invites us to journey into the wilderness with Jesus. Through prayer and reflection on the daily readings of the Mass, our journey will lead us into the wilderness of our souls. In the shadows and solitude of our hearts, we will confront our demons and, like Jesus, put the devil to flight. With the help of Jesus and of our brothers and sisters, we will be able to focus more on God's love and mercy than on our sins and guilt. Like Peter, who returned to his Lord weeping bitterly, we are called to turn away from sin and be faithful to the words of Jesus. We are called to live in the hope that God's plan will redeem sinners by his all-inclusive love of friend and enemy alike. Courage to begin our journey comes not from feeling heroic, but from believing in the way of God.

Ash Wednesday: *Joel 2: 12-18; Matthew 6: 1-6*

We are dust, and unto dust we shall all return. These words will be repeated today in churches throughout the world. They remind us that without God we are nothing and that without God nothing is possible. The words free us from illusions and false expectations as we prepare to journey in faith with Jesus. The readings today call us to rend our hearts and not our garments; to go to our inner room, close the door, and pray to our Father in secret. Let today's psalm response be our prayer: "Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me." *O Lord, how hard it is to let go and let you lead me into the wilderness. How hard it is to believe that change is possible in my life. Show me your way, and I will follow you.*

Thursday after Ash Wednesday: *Deuteronomy 30: 15-20; Luke 9: 22-25*

In the first reading Moses tells the people that they have two options: life or death. He then explains the choices they must make for each of these options. Although life is our precious gift from God, how we live is our choice. Jesus chooses to endure suffering and death as an expression of love that leads to resurrection. What are my options as I begin the journey of Lent? What choices do I need to make to help me along the way? *Lord, help me to prepare well by considering all my options and making wise choices. You call me to use this Lent to save my life and not forfeit myself in the process.*

Friday after Ash Wednesday: *Isaiah 58: 1-9A; Matthew 9:14-15*

In today's first reading Isaiah helps us with our choices. We are reminded that looking good is easier than being good. Like the people in today's reading, we also ask why God doesn't seem to notice the things we are doing to gain his attention. Perhaps he doesn't respond to us because we are too caught up in our own pursuits, noble as they may seem. If we want the Lord to answer us, we must release those unjustly bound or oppressed, share our bread with the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, and not turn our backs on our own. Jesus will repeat these words of Isaiah in the Gospel reading and make them the basis of his teaching. *Lord, help me to see more clearly what you expect from me as I journey with you into the wilderness. Help me to rejoice with you as guests at a wedding rejoice in the presence of the bridegroom.*

Saturday after Ash Wednesday: *Isaiah 58: 9B-14*

We are ready to begin our journey. Isaiah repeats his words about the choices we must make if we want light to shine for us in the darkness. Now that we are ready, Jesus is calling us as he calls Levi in today's gospel; we must find the courage to accept the invitation. We are in good company, for Jesus calls only the sinners to repentance, not the righteous. *Lord, help me to leave everything behind, that I may follow you.*

First Week of Lent

Sunday: *Genesis 22 1-2, 9A, 10-13, 15-18; Romans 8:31B-34; Mark 9:2-10*

In the wilderness with Jesus, we find ourselves a long way from home, in a wasteland filled with unfamiliar sounds and dark shadows. Jesus shows us how to gain courage by confronting our fears and facing the devil's temptations. He shows us that with God's help we can resist evil and grow stronger and less fearful of the wilderness. *O Lord, in the wasteland I experience your presence. I am surrounded by God, and I am safe.*

Monday: *Leviticus 19: 1-2, 11-18; Matthew 25: 31-46*

Now that we have left the security of home and begun the journey up God's holy mountain, we struggle to maintain our footing. Leviticus presents an entire list of what is now expected if we are to stay on the path leading from the valley onto the base of the mountain. Matthew's words sound in our ears like a rushing wind: "What you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me." We are again alone and struggling to catch our breath. *Lord, let me find refreshment in today's Gospel verse: "Behold, now is a very acceptable time; now is the day of salvation."*

Tuesday: *Isaiah 55: 10-11; Matthew 6: 7-15*

After yesterday's initial climb, we now rest and receive nourishment. We are reassured that God's word will not return until it has achieved the end for which it was sent. We are nourished by the words of Jesus as he teaches us how to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread." The journey will take place one step at a time and one day at a time. *Lord, I have so much to consider, so much to worry about, so much to fear. But strengthened by God's word and the promise of daily bread, I can rest comfortably for now. Tomorrow will come soon enough.*

Wednesday: *Jonah 3: 1-10; Luke 11: 29-32*

When Jonah accepted God's plan for his life, he became a great source of blessings for the people of Nineveh. When I accept God's will in my life, I also become a blessing for others. Luke reminds us here that our journey must not be in vain. True, people will question us and ask for a sign that what we are doing is important, but we know in our hearts, and we believe. We climb God's holy mountain because Jesus has called us to go higher and because he tells us that there is something greater than Solomon here. *Lord, give me the desire to seek you in the dark places of my life, for your light is greater than any darkness.*

Thursday: *Esther C: 12, 14-16, 23-25; Matthew 7:7-12*

Queen Esther, seized with mortal fear, calls on the Lord for help. At the point of wanting to take her own life, she has no one except the God of Abraham to rescue

her. And the Gospel reminds us that all we have to do is ask God for his help. Jesus tells us to ask, to seek, to knock, and we will find and the door will be opened for us. We cannot climb the holy mountain without the help that God will give for the asking. *Lord, I am afraid to ask for your help. Help me to trust that with you all things are possible, and without you nothing is possible. “Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.”*

Friday: *Ezekiel 18: 21-28, Matthew 5:20-26*

Ezekiel assures us that God wants us to succeed on our journey. All we need is to turn away from the path of evil and do what is right and just; then we will live. Choosing the right path is important, and it includes getting our relationships with those around us in order. We must go first and be reconciled with our brother, Jesus tells us in the Gospel, and then return and bring our gifts to the altar. The journey is hard, but we must continue to climb. *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life.*

Saturday: *Deuteronomy 26: 16-19; Matthew 5: 43-48*

The first week of Lent ends with the command to observe the Lord’s statutes and ordinances. We are told to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. This week has helped us answer a few questions: Who am I? Where am I going? Why do I need to go anywhere? How am I going to get there? There are no surprises; it’s all up front and clear what God expects. My father used to tell us, when we complained about a difficult task, that if it were easy they would have given it to someone else. We have been called to journey with Jesus this Lent, and it will not be easy—but then we knew that before we started. *My soul waits for the Lord, more than sentinels wait for the dawn.*

Second Week of Lent

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

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain to pray. The Gospel tells us that Jesus took them apart to see him transfigured. His face and his clothes become so dazzling white that the disciples hide their faces in fear. They also see Moses and Elijah, and they hear a voice from the clouds telling them to listen to Jesus, because he is the Father’s beloved Son. The scene changes quickly, and they find themselves alone with Jesus, going back down the mountain. Jesus wants to give us a glimpse of who he really is, so that, when we are discouraged by life’s journey, we too can be transfigured. We also are beloved of our Father. Knowing this will help us on our way up the mountain during the next few weeks of Lent. *Lord, it is good for us to be here.*

Monday: *Deuteronomy 9: 4b-10; Luke 6: 36-38*

Judging, condemning, or forgiving are choices that we make every day. These choices are boomerangs: once we choose to act on them, they return to us in a like manner. As the saying has it, what goes around, comes around. Our words and actions often come back to haunt us: “the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.” Having been to the top of the mountain with Jesus in yesterday’s Gospel, we know we can change and be transfigured; we can make better choices. *O Lord, make me an instrument of peace and justice, of forgiveness and compassion, that I might be transfigured with you.*

Tuesday: *Isaiah 1: 10, 16-20; Matthew 23: 1-12*

Isaiah tells us that we can be transformed: “Though your sins be scarlet, they may become white as snow.” This is in stark contrast to the Scribes and Pharisees in the Gospel: “They preach but they do not practice.” Like the Pharisees, we can be guilty of placing heavy burdens on the shoulders of others and not lifting a finger to help them. We sometimes seem afraid to affirm and praise those around us. We are sometimes smug when they fall under the weight of their crosses—some of which we have given them to carry. In contrast, Jesus is always willing to empower us and lift us up and give us abundant life. *Lord, give me the courage to keep rising with you in faith, and help me never to confine anyone to the tomb of hopelessness.*

Wednesday: *Jeremiah 18: 18-20; Matthew 20: 17-28*

Both Jeremiah and Jesus suffer for proclaiming the word of God. Like them, we are not responsible for whether people accept the word or not. Like them, we must prepare ourselves to face rejection and even death. We must be clear about why we want to climb the holy mountain of God. To many, what we say and do will make no sense at all; it will be foolishness and absurdity. Even if we are not able to give a rational explanation for our faith, we must continue to believe. St. Paul tells us that those who believe in Jesus and his cross are the very power of God. *Lord, strengthen me so that I am not afraid to go along in your company no matter what others may think of me. What are you calling me to say and do today?*

Thursday: *Jeremiah 17: 5-10; Luke 16: 19-31*

Before we take one more step on our journey, we need to make an important decision: Will we trust God totally or will we rely on our own abilities and the powers and riches of the world? Jeremiah and Lazarus, through their pain and suffering, put their trust in God, and he does not abandon them. As he did with them, the Lord probes our minds and tests our hearts, and he rewards us according to the merits of our deeds. The rich man and Lazarus both receive what they deserve, based on the life they have led. *Lord, do not deal with me as my sins deserve, but grant me your forgiveness. Bring me, like Lazarus, to the fullness of your kingdom when my life on earth has ended.*

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

Today’s first reading presents a powerful story of betrayal, violence, and forgiveness. Joseph, like Jesus, is sold out by his brothers; like Jesus he is rescued from death, and like Jesus he lives to bring forgiveness, mercy, and love to his brothers in need. *Lord, rescue me from my enemies and from the evil one. You have a plan for my life, and you will keep me safe.*

Saturday: *Micah 7: 14-15, 18-20; Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32*

Micah tells us that God will cast our sins into the depths of the sea, and the story of the Prodigal Son in today’s Gospel is a beautiful follow-up to the first reading. The parable is also the story of the angry older son and the forgiving father. All of us can identify with the characters in this familiar story. We never pray that God will give us what we truly deserve; rather we pray for mercy and forgiveness. We want justice for others, but we are afraid to ask God to deal justly with us. It has been a long and difficult week, and we have not gone very far up the mountain. We rest secure, however, because we know that God will be our guide and deliverer if we stumble as the path grows steeper. A verse from today’s responsorial psalm sums up this second

week of Lent: “Not according to our sins does he deal with us, nor does he requite us according to our crimes.” *Lord, what do you want to do for me today?*

Third Week of Lent

Sunday: *Exodus 17: 3-7; Romans 5: 1-2, 5-8; John 4: 5-42*

In today’s Gospel passage, Jesus goes up to the Temple. For the Israelites, the Temple was the center of their existence, the place where they encountered the holy presence of God. For Jesus, it is the dwelling of his Father, and thus a house of prayer. By making the Temple a place of trade and commerce, the moneychangers had violated the first commandment: “I am the Lord your God; you shall not have strange gods before me.” Jesus is consumed with love and zeal for his Father’s house, and angrily tips over the tables and drives out the moneychangers. This defining moment in his life will set in motion his final trip to Jerusalem, where he will be handed over and crucified. Jesus has won the day, but the authorities will have the last word. Jesus uses this moment to refer to his body as the temple that will be destroyed and rebuilt in three days. He is the temple in which God, his Father, dwells. By his actions here, Jesus has attacked the religious establishment, which is no longer faithful to God. And he clearly shows his single-heartedness, integrity, and desire to serve God above all else. *Lord, let me recall the response of Jesus to the Devil’s temptation to bow down and worship him: “The Lord your God shall you worship; him only shall you serve.*

Monday: *2 Kings 5: 1-15ab; Luke 4: 24-30*

When the people in the synagogue hear Jesus say that Naaman the Syrian was the only one cured of leprosy at the time of Elias the prophet, they are filled with fury. His words cut so deeply into their self-righteousness that they rise up and try to throw Jesus down a hill. Do we feel that because we are Catholics we are better than others or deserve more from God? Does it infuriate us to hear that God loves everyone, without exception? *Lord, help me to remember that I am not alone as I climb the holy mountain of God, and I am not called to push others out of my way.*

Tuesday: *Daniel 3: 25, 34-43; Matthew 18: 21-35*

In a zero-tolerant world, the words of Jesus provide us with hope. Peter thinks he is being generous when he asks Jesus if forgiving his brother seven times is enough. But Jesus responds with “seventy times seven,” meaning as many times as your brother asks for forgiveness. Forgiveness and reconciliation are not a single event, but an ongoing process, a journey from death to life that takes place in God’s time, not ours. The next time you are tempted to slam the door in someone’s face, remember what Jesus said to Peter. God has a plan that this world will be saved by love—love of friends and enemies alike. *Lord, I rely on the constant rhythm of the responsorial psalms of Lent: “Remember your mercies, O Lord.”*

Wednesday: *Deuteronomy 4: 1, 5-9; Matthew 5: 17-19*

Observance of God’s law was the hallmark of God’s people. Fidelity to the law meant prosperity and blessing, and carefully observing the law gave to the nations evidence of their wisdom and intelligence. In today’s first reading we are told, “Take care not to forget the things your eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your memory as long as you live, but teach them to your children and to your children’s children. In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus tells us how important it is to teach others about God’s

law in every detail. We must be careful not to fall into the accommodating mode of the twenty-first century and go along to get along. We must not neglect to teach the faith as Jesus taught us. *Lord, help me to abide by your command, "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts."*

Thursday: *Jeremiah 7: 23-28; Luke 11: 14-23*

Trust forms the basis of all our relationships; without it the good ordering of society descends into chaos. Jeremiah proclaims that “faithfulness has disappeared; the word itself is banished from their speech.” “They walked in the hardness of their evil hearts and turned their backs, not their faces to me.” In the Gospel Jesus tells us that if we are not united with him, Satan will be able to divide and conquer. When we stay faithful to one another, we form a bond that cannot be broken; and Satan can have no power over us. When the Church of Jesus breaks faith with its Lord and with other members of the Church, however, the whole body is weakened. “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.” *Lord, help me to trust and to be trustworthy as I continue my journey.*

Friday: *Hosea 14: 2-10; Mark 12: 28-34*

God uses Hosea to speak these words to the people of Israel: “I will heal their defection; I will love them freely, for my wrath is turned away from them.” In tender terms God expresses the hurt he felt as a result of Israel’s infidelity. Like Hosea, who forgave his unfaithful wife, God remains faithful to the people of Israel. In today’s Gospel, love of God and of neighbor form the basis for Jesus’ teaching. The scribe says that these two commandments are worth more than burnt offerings and sacrifices. *Merciful Father, fill my heart with your love and keep me faithful to the Gospel.*

Saturday: *Exodus 17: 1-7; John 4: 5-42*

In Years B and C of the three-year cycle of scripture readings, the Church uses these readings for today’s Mass. The Gospel is the story of the Samaritan woman’s encounter with Jesus, which reveals God’s universal call to salvation. Through Jesus the love of God reaches beyond and climbs over the social and religious boundaries set up by the religious establishment to exclude those outside their circle of acceptability. Even the followers of Jesus are shocked and dismayed when they see him speaking to and taking water from a woman not in his family—and a Samaritan and divorced besides! She is at the well alone; even her own people shun her because she has been married and divorced five times. Jesus reveals the depth of his compassion for all who suffer rejection by offering the living water of his own love to this woman who has been left by five husbands. In her, we all find acceptance and know that we are loved. Jesus asks us also for a cup of water, the cup of our faith that he will not reject us. *Lord, give me the living water, that I may never thirst again.*

Fourth Week of Lent

Sunday: *2 Chronicles 36: 14-16, 19-23; Ephesians 2: 4-10; John 3: 14-21*

Many people think that Lent is all about reflecting on our sins and what we can do to make up for our transgressions. Contrary to this way of thinking, the readings of Lent present an endless display of how much God loves us and what he wants to do for us. Today’s Gospel is no exception: “For God so loved the world that he gave us his only son.” God sent his son not to condemn us, but so that through him we might

be saved. In a real sense it is a rescue operation for the human race. Our salvation will be accomplished by the Son's being lifted up, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert. Both actions bring salvation to the people. Why, then, won't we let God do anything for us? Why do we think that God is out to condemn and punish us, when he wants only our total good and happiness? *O Lord, help me to surrender my will and my life into your loving embrace.*

Monday: *Isaiah 65:17-21; John 4: 43-54*

It has been many days since we left the valley, and we now find ourselves higher on the mountain than we have ever been before. We have been caught up in the love of God and have not noticed the difficulties of our journey. Today we pause to look back down the mountain and to look up to where the path will lead us. The two readings today encourage us to continue our journey. Isaiah talks of a time of security and prosperity. He reminds us that God is about to create new heavens and a new earth and turn our weeping into rejoicing. This will come about, however, only when we, like the royal official in today's Gospel, are not afraid to ask Jesus to heal us. At first Jesus seems annoyed by the man's request and says, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe." Nevertheless, he tells the official that his son will live. Sometimes we need to remind God that he has promised us many signs and wonders. We cannot be afraid to call upon God to be God; this in itself is an act of faith. *Lord, I will tell you what I need today, and I believe that you will help me as I climb ever higher.*

Tuesday: *Ezekiel 47: 1-9, 12; John 5: 1-16*

It is not enough for us to want God to heal and help us; we have to be actively involved in the process. When Jesus asks the man in today's Gospel if he wants to be cured, the man doesn't simply say yes; he explains that for thirty-eight years he has had no one to help him into the water when it was stirred up. Perhaps that is the truth, or perhaps it is an excuse, because he has become comfortable in his role as the poor sick man. All we can say for sure is that Jesus wastes no time in curing him. There is no recognition on the man's part of who Jesus is. This is also the only scriptural account of a miracle of Jesus in which there is no mention of the man's faith or even of his asking to be cured. When Jesus approaches him again and tells him to sin no more, the man immediately sells him out to the leaders, who are upset that the healing took place on the Sabbath and who now begin to persecute Jesus. Why does Jesus work a cure without even being asked, and why does the man not seem to appreciate the act of healing? One possible answer is that Jesus has no patience with the attitude of those who would rather remain unhealed and blame someone else for their condition. How are we like the man at the pool at Bethesda? How would we respond to Jesus if he asked, "Do you want to get well?" *O Lord, heal me. Fill me with your grace and your strength.*

Wednesday: *Isaiah 49: 8-15; John 5:17-30*

We sometimes like to pull rank and throw around the names of the important people we know. The only person Jesus mentions is his Father, and he insists that he can do nothing without his Father's help. "I cannot do anything on my own....I seek to do the will of him who sent me." How hard it is for us to conform our wills to the will of God! Through Baptism, we also are sent to bring the Father's will to the world. We know Jesus and we know the Father, but we can't just be name-droppers. Jesus

tells us that not everyone who cries “Lord, Lord” will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. He goes on to say, “I tell you, I do not know who you are.” Life is not about whom we know, but about what we do with this knowledge. *Lord, grant that I may have a deep relationship with Jesus—and not merely drop his name to others from time to time.*

Thursday: *Exodus 32: 7-14; John 5: 31-47*

Mothers often say that they can't leave their children alone for a minute without their getting into trouble. That is what God is saying to Moses in the first reading: “Get down at once, for the people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have become depraved.” God is angry because the people have made a calf of molten gold to worship. How quickly they forget who loves them and who rescues them. Moses utters a prayer of intercession. He reminds God that rescuing his people from Egypt was his own idea, and that he will look foolish in the sight of the other nations if he doesn't continue to care for them. Because of Moses, God relents and shows mercy. In fact, Moses reminds God that his greatness and his power lie in his mercy and forgiveness, not in his anger and desire to destroy. Jesus does the same thing as Moses when he prays to the Father on our behalf. Every time we celebrate Mass, it is Jesus who reminds our Father that he loves us more than he hates our sins. We need not be surprised at how quickly we return to our old sinful ways when we are left alone. Thankfully, someone is praying for us. *Lord, give me patience when I see how far I am from the top of the mountain, and I wonder if I will ever make it. I know that you are not finished with me.*

Friday: *Wisdom 2: 1a, 12-22; John 7: 1-2, 10, 25-30*

An increasing tension hangs in the air. Jesus cannot go about openly because the authorities are trying to arrest him. Like the Suffering Servant in today's first reading, Jesus is beset with suffering, “because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings.” Why is the truth so hard for us to accept? Who are the people in our lives who call us to walk in truth and holiness? *Lord, forgive me for the way I treat others and for my need to be in control, no matter what the price or who may be hurt.*

Saturday: *Jeremiah 11: 18-20; John 7: 40-53*

We end this fourth week of Lent in turmoil and division. What has happened to the excitement of climbing the holy mountain of God? We want to turn back, but we have come too far. How could we have thought that leaving the valley was a good idea? Look at all the trouble Jesus is causing; we are afraid to be identified with him. Like Jeremiah, Jesus faces an uncertain future filled with suffering and even death at the hands of those whom he loves. What anguish we feel as those around us begin to fall away! A fog bank clouds the path in front of us so that we cannot see where we are going. *O Lord, my God, in you I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers and rescue me. Never let me be put to shame.*

Fifth Week of Lent

Sunday: *Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Hebrews 5: 7-9; John 12: 20-33*

Jesus is now confronted with his own mortality, and he must contend with his human desire for self-preservation. He says to Andrew and Philip, “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it produces much fruit.” He then says, “I am troubled now.” He must decide whether he wants

his Father to save him from this hour, and he concludes by realizing that he must fulfill the purpose for which he was sent. Responding to Jesus' prayer, "Father, glorify your spirit," the Father's voice is now heard: "I have glorified it and will continue to glorify it." The Gospel passage ends with Jesus saying, "Now is the time of judgment on this world. Now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." We now know how Jesus is going to die—and why. He will glorify God by doing the will of the Father who sent him into the world. There is no getting around what Jesus is saying. This fifth week of Lent will bring us to a new level on the mountain, and Jerusalem is now our destination. To climb higher will not be easy; it never is. The journey demands our total commitment; and we are perhaps not quite sure that we are ready to let go of the past or of the things that have made up our lives. *Lord, help me to see beyond the pain, beyond the cross that looms before me, beyond the nails, and beyond the tomb. Help me to see the resurrection at the top of the mountain. Amen.*

Monday: *Daniel 13: 1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62; John 8: 1-11*

Susanna and the woman caught in the act of adultery represent anyone who has ever been caught in a difficult situation. They experience rejection, shame, and fear. Accused of sexual misconduct, they were to be stoned to death according to the law. The women are helpless to defend themselves, but both, the innocent Susanna and the guilty woman in the Gospel, are rescued. A young boy named Daniel saves Susanna by speaking up on behalf of justice. The two old men who brought the false charges are angry because she refused to give in to their desires, and they assume that people will automatically believe them because of the prestige of old age. Young Daniel, however, is not afraid to confront them and save an innocent woman. The young woman in the Gospel is saved despite her guilt. Jesus rescues her by saying, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to cast a stone." He reminds us that the law of God does not desire a sinner to die, but to be converted and live. He offers this hope to the woman by saying, "Has no one condemned you? Then neither do I condemn you. Do not sin any more." These two stories have powerful implications in our own lives. We never ask God to treat us as our sins deserve, yet we don't hesitate to pass judgment on others whether we have all the facts or not. *Lord, help me to see others as you see them, with your all-inclusive merciful love. Lord, help me to realize that the way I treat others is the way I am asking you to treat me. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

Tuesday: *Numbers 21: 4-9; John 8: 21-30*

No matter how often God helps us, we still complain and want more. With their patience worn out, the people complain against God and Moses: "We are disgusted with this wretched food." Angered by their ingratitude, God sends serpents as a punishment. But when the people ask for forgiveness, God saves them once again. Though our sins bring death, Jesus brings life. We need only look upon Jesus as he is lifted up for us, and we will live. Thus we are called to die and rise again many times throughout our lives. *Lord, the mountain is a lonely and deserted place. Help me to keep my eyes fixed on Jesus as I struggle to reach the summit.*

Wednesday: *Daniel 3: 14-20, 91-92, 95; John 8: 31-42*

In former times, the fifth Sunday of Lent was called Passion Sunday, and the following week the First Week in Passiontide. "Passion" here refers to the sufferings

of Christ after the Last Supper, ending with his death on the cross. His suffering, however, started long before that. The passion of Jesus' life was to do the will of the Father, and the cross was always just beneath the surface. He spent his entire life making his way to Jerusalem, the place where the final plan of God was to be accomplished. Our life also can be a passion if we love as Jesus loved. Today we unite our pain, our suffering, our setbacks, our rejections, our dark nights alone on the mountain, our feelings of despair and abandonment, and our fragile humanity with the sufferings of Jesus. *Lord, you rescue me from raging enemies, you lift me above my attackers, and you deliver me from violent men.*

Thursday: *Genesis 17: 3-9; John 8: 51-59*

"They picked up stones to throw at Jesus, but he hid and went out of the Temple area." The followers of Jesus are beginning to question their relationship with him in light of the turmoil his presence is causing. All the miracles and the good times seem far away. They stay with Jesus and offer to die with him, but in the end they will all deny him and run away. Jesus knows their doubts and fears, and he realizes that he will be left alone to face his accusers. As he will tell his disciples in the garden, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Alone on the mountain at night, we too may feel that denying our Master would make life much easier. Yet we are inescapably bound to him; to deny him is to deny ourselves. Like Peter, we feel the shame of our betrayal and can only weep bitterly. *Lord, come to me, free me from my shame and guilt, and help me remain faithful to a holy way of life.*

Friday: *Jeremiah 20: 10-13; John 10: 31-42*

Like Jeremiah, we hear the whisperings of many, terror on every side. "Denounce! Let us denounce him!" Today's passage from Jeremiah is our prayer as we continue our climb. Despite those who throw stones at Jesus, there are many who begin to believe in him. Throughout history, the words of the Good Thief, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," and Jesus' response, "Today you will be with me in Paradise," have been our source of hope and strength. On this last Friday, before we make the final ascent, we need to prepare ourselves for the most difficult part of the journey. *In my distress I called upon the Lord, and he heard my voice. Your words, Lord, are spirit and life; you have the words of everlasting life.*

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

On the eve of Holy Week, we find Jesus and his disciples hiding out in the small town of Ephraim. The chief priest and the other religious leaders have decided that it is better for Jesus to be killed than for the people to believe in him. Belief in him, they reason, could incur the wrath of the Romans, who would come and take away their land and their nation. The irony is that the land was given to them by God, and their identity as a nation was created by their covenant with him. And now they would rather sell out to Rome than to accept God's plan to rescue them through his son, Jesus. During the Babylonian Exile, the people longed to return home; now they prefer to be in a state of spiritual exile. The people, not the Romans, are their real enemy. Jesus offers them the means to salvation, and they reject it. While they go piously through the ritual of celebration of Passover, their hearts are hardened to what God wants to do for them; they are blinded by their own power and need to control. The words of Jesus come to mind: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets, oh, that you would have known the day of your visitation! I would have gathered you as

a hen gathers her chicks, but alas for you, not a stone will be left standing upon a stone.” Scripture tells us that Jesus wept as he spoke these words. *Lord, do not stay away; come quickly to help me! I am a worm and no man. Men scorn me and people despise me.*”

Holy Week

Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday): *Mark 11: 1-10; Isaiah 50: 4-7; Philipians 2: 6-11; Mark 14:1-15:47*

Jesus has now come to Jerusalem, and he will not leave the city until his body is carried outside the walls for burial on the eve of the Sabbath. We would like to protect him from the crowds that will turn on him and demand his Crucifixion. Like Judas, we might try to work behind the scenes to save his life, perhaps thinking that handing him over would make it go easier for him. Of course, there is never a good reason to betray a friend, and yet that is what we do whenever we strike out in anger or force love to the ground and trample over others with acts of injustice. *Lord, forgive me for my refusal to love and for my refusal to suffer and die with you.*

Monday: *Isaiah 42: 1-7; John 12: 1-11*

The power of God is revealed now in his vulnerability. As Isaiah writes, “He will not cry out or make his voice heard in the street. He shall not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick.” Today’s Gospel tells us that the Anointed of the Lord allows a woman to anoint his feet and dry them with her hair. We know that in a few days he will humbly wash the feet of his own disciples. We also learn that the chief priests, with the help of Judas, plan to kill Jesus and also Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. *Lord, I am so afraid to let you and others into my life and the secret places of my soul. Like Judas, I betray you and your friendship.*

Tuesday: *Isaiah 49: 1-6; John 13: 21-33, 36-38*

Betrayal, denial, and darkness are the themes of today’s liturgy. Isaiah reminds us that these are the reasons that Jesus must suffer and die. Jesus has sat at table with his disciples many times, but now there is unrest. He tells them, “One of you will betray me” and the words hang in the air as the disciples question him. Finally he looks at Judas and tells him to do quickly what he must do. Judas goes out into the night. Betrayal is always such a dark moment. Peter professes his loyalty, but Jesus says, “Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” No one dares to ask any more questions; even Peter is quiet. *Lord, I am alone now, and there is no one to help me. Like Peter, I am silent in the face of what you have just said.*”

Wednesday: *Isaiah 50: 4-9a; Matthew 26: 14-25*

The final days of Jesus’ life on earth are depicted in tense, shadowy moments at table with his disciples. Both Matthew’s and John’s accounts of the final meal in the upper room contain elements of betrayal and darkness and dread. When Jesus says, “One of you will betray me,” Judas joins in with what the others are saying: “Surely it is not I, Lord.” Did Judas think that Jesus was a fool, as we sometimes think others are not capable of seeing through our lies? Judas could have taken the moment to fall down at the Lord’s feet and beg forgiveness; there was still time. But Judas had set his plan into motion, and would not turn back. Nor is his the only betrayal: Peter would deny him and the rest would run away, leaving him to face his death alone. Now we,

too, are alone on the mountain, trying to rest but kept awake by the noises in the dark woods around us, our own transgressions and betrayals. How can we make it to the top without rest? Why did we ever leave the valley where life was easy? *Lord, in your great love, answer me.*

Holy Thursday: *Exodus 12: 1-8, 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26; John 13:1-15*

When Jesus had his feet washed earlier this week, he was criticized by fellow guests who were made uncomfortable by this gesture of hospitality. Judas even protested the cost of the oil the woman used: “Could not this money have been given to the poor?”—although we know it was not the poor he was concerned about. Jesus allowed this kindness from a woman not a member of his family to show that God is open to all who express love and generosity. Like Veronica, who will step from the crowd to wipe the face of Jesus, this woman was not afraid to act out of compassion. Now it is Jesus’ turn to wash feet, and Peter who protests. In both cases Jesus meets resistance, and in both cases he insists, because of the importance and meaningfulness of the gesture. He tells Peter that he can have no part in him if he does not agree. Jesus then tells the disciples that they must wash one another’s feet as he has done. In John’s Gospel the foot washing becomes a sign of what Eucharist is, the intimate sharing between God and us that takes place in Holy Communion. *Lord, you come to me by night when I am tired by life’s journey, and you wash my feet and renew my strength. Help me to do the same for those who journey with me.*

Good Friday: *Isaiah 52: 13-53: 12; Hebrews 4: 14-16, 5: 7-9; John 18:1-19:42*

The Passion of Jesus began last night in the garden, when he was in such agony that he sweated drops of blood and prayed to be delivered from his impending suffering and death. But he knew that his entire life had been a preparation for this hour, and he has accepted God’s plan to save the world by his Son’s act of love. His betrayal sealed by a kiss, Jesus surrendered himself without a fight to those who would kill him. He now endures hours of unbelievable pain and degradation with humility and resignation. His body, nailed to a wooden cross, is lifted up for all to see. Above the noise of the jeering crowd, he is heard to say, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” The man who saved others does not lift a finger on his own behalf. Mute as a lamb before the slaughter, Jesus had been dragged before the religious and civil tribunals of his day. He was cut off from the land of the living. Who would have thought any more about him? It is Satan’s hour, the hour of the triumph of darkness. *Lord, I stand in horror at the foot of your cross. I watch in helpless desperation as you struggle to pull yourself up to catch a breath. I can do nothing to ease your pain. Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*

Holy Saturday: *Genesis 1: 1-2: 2; Exodus 14:15-15:1; Isaiah 55:1-11; Ezekiel 36: 16-17a, 18-28; Romans 6: 3-11; Year A, Matthew 28: 1-10; Year B, Mark 16: 1-7; Year C, Luke 24: 1-12*

The crowds have gone home and the streets of Jerusalem are empty this Sabbath morning. Those who cheered Jesus earlier this week and who cried out for his death yesterday have disappeared. But we can still hear them shouting “Away with him! Crucify him!” as we sit outside the tomb where his body was laid. We rest against the huge rock that blocks the entrance. How could our journey end like this? We have nowhere to go, and so we stay here mourning while the soldiers guarding the

tomb eye us suspiciously. We remember hearing Jesus cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” as he hung dying on the cross, and we find ourselves repeating the words now. His last words were “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Now his body is in the tomb, and we sit numbly and aimlessly outside. *Lord, everyone has gone away. There is no one to comfort me, as there was no one to comfort you in your last hours. Help me to say with you, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”*

Easter Sunday: *Acts of the Apostles 10: 34a, 37-43; 1 Corinthians 5: 6b-8; John 20:1-9*

The Gospels do not give us an account of the actual Resurrection. We are told only that the tomb is empty and that a woman named Mary sees Jesus in the garden. The women find the tomb empty early in the morning, and a man clothed in white tells them that Jesus has been raised. The women run to tell the disciples, who are in hiding. They, led by Peter, James, and John, run to the tomb to see for themselves. But we are told that they do not yet understand what it means to rise from the dead. Only Mary, from whom Jesus had driven out demons, actually encounters him. Thinking him to be the gardener, she asks where the body has been taken. When Jesus speaks her name and asks her why she is weeping, she recognizes him. He tells her not to cling to him, but to go and tell the others that he will be with them. Like Mary, we are weeping, so overwhelmed by our grief that we cannot immediately see that the stone has been rolled back, that the tomb is empty, and that the soldiers have gone. But our journey, like Mary’s, has led us through our tears and struggles beyond the tomb of Jesus to the dawn of a new day. The sun is rising on the top of the mountain of God, and we can see clearly for miles around. We are filled with exhilaration as we remember all that has happened in the past forty days. There have been days of challenge and days of miracles and transfigurations that have sustained us on the long journey. Now we feel compelled to run and tell everyone the news that Jesus lives. Together with the disciples on the road to Emmaus and the millions who have journeyed in faith since that first Easter morning, we hear Jesus repeat the words: “How slow you are to believe. Did not the Messiah first have to suffer in order to enter into his glory?” And like the disciples we say “Did not our hearts burn within us as he spoke to us?” and like them we recognize him in the breaking of the bread. *Lord, there are still many paths to travel and many more journeys to your holy mountain, but for now it is good for me to be here with you. “Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing choirs of angels! Exult, all creation, around God’s throne! Jesus Christ, our King, is risen! Sound the trumpet of salvation! Christ has conquered! Glory fills you, and darkness vanishes forever!*

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