

God so loved the world
that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him
might not perish
but might have eternal life.

JOHN 3:16

FOURTH
SUNDAY OF
LENT

MARCH 14, 2021

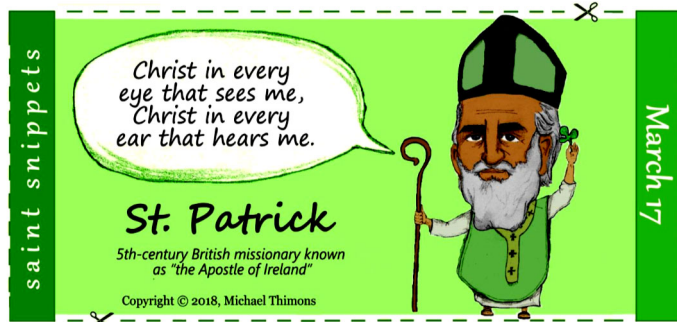
Feast of Faith

Lent, a Season of the Word

Each year on the First Sunday of Lent we hear one of the Gospel accounts of the temptation of Jesus. In Luke's account, the devil cites the scriptures repeatedly, urging Jesus to interpret them in a false, self-serving way—if God sends angels to protect those whom God loves (as it says in Psalm 91), then prove it! But Jesus resists this insidious temptation by turning to scripture passages that tell of right relationship with God—living by God's word, trusting in God, and worshiping God alone.

Jesus himself listened to the inspired word of God and let it shape and form him. Through the liturgy, we do the same. The readings we hear at Mass can teach us, but that is not their primary function. Rather, the scriptures are meant to reveal the Lord to us, to let us experience his presence, and to form us in our Christian identity. Christ's presence is realized by his spoken word, "since it is he himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 7). In the readings proclaimed at Mass, we hear the voice of Christ himself.

—Corinna Laughlin, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.



God's Mercy

Today's reading from the second book of Chronicles contains a sort of "mini-history" of Israel. It highlights God's mercies in choosing Cyrus the Persian to be an instrument of deliverance when the people were in captivity in Babylon. Despite their sinfulness and the deserved punishment they were undergoing, God's mercy was lavished on the people in the form of a miraculous act of liberation.

The Letter to the Ephesians, in much more theological terms, gives a similar account of a God "who brought us to life with Christ—by grace you have been saved." The author stresses that it was when we were "dead in our transgressions" that God saved us, an act of pure grace. He emphasizes that it is not our own efforts that freed us from sin ("this is not from you"); rather, "it is the gift of God." This, of course, is the heart of the entire Pauline corpus, that salvation comes to us by faith in God's mercy, revealed in the death of Jesus.

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Readings for the Week

Monday:	Is 65:17-21; Ps 30:2, 4-6, 11-13b; Jn 4:43-54
Tuesday:	Ez 47:1-9, 12; Ps 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9; Jn 5:1-16
Wednesday:	Is 49:8-15; Ps 145:8-9, 13cd-14, 17-18; Jn 5:17-30
Thursday:	Ex 32:7-14; Ps 106:19-23; Jn 5:31-47
Friday:	2 Sm 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16; Ps 89:2-5, 27, 29; Rm 4:13:16-18, 22; Mt 1:16, 18-21, 24a or Lk 2:41-51a
Saturday:	Jer 11:18-20; Ps 7:2-3, 9bc-12; Jn 7:40-53
Sunday:	Jer 31:31-34; Ps 51:3-4, 12-15; Heb 5:7-9; Jn 12:20-33 Alternate readings (Year A): Ez 37:12-14; Ps 130:1-8; Rom 8:8-11; Jn 11:1-45 [3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45]

Saints and Special Observances

Sunday:	Fourth Sunday of Lent; Second Scrutiny; Daylight Saving Time begins
Wednesday:	St. Patrick
Thursday:	St. Cyril of Jerusalem
Friday:	St. Joseph; Abstinence
Saturday:	Spring begins



Today's Readings

First Reading — The wrath and the mercy of the Lord are revealed in the exile and liberation of the chosen people (2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23) or 1 Samuel 16: 1b, 6-7, 10-13a.

Psalm — Let my tongue be silenced, if I ever forget you! (Psalm 137) or Psalm 23.

Second Reading — By grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:4-10) or Ephesians 5:8-14.

Gospel — The Son was sent by God so that the world might be saved through him (John 3:14-21) or John 9:1-41 [1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38].

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Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 14, 2021

God did not send his Son into the world
to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved
through him.

—John 3:17

Treasures From Our Tradition

Over the years, our tradition has come to see this Sunday as a transition, a midpoint, an oasis in the middle of six long weeks of preparation for Easter. The key is the Latin word *Laetare*, or “Rejoice,” which was for centuries the first word sung in the Mass for this Sunday. In southern Europe, the first roses of springtime are appearing now, and there used to be a custom of honoring those to be baptized at Easter with roses on this Sunday. Long ago, this was also seen as a day for celebrating the ordination of priests. Many parishes retain the custom of using rose-colored vestments on this day. Normally flowers are banned from worship in the restrained season of Lent, but here, midway, these signposts of festivity pointing to the renewal of Easter springtime sometimes make a quiet appearance. A project for today would be to plant a few paperwhite or narcissus bulbs in a water bowl filled with river rocks. Like those elect who will soon be bathed in baptismal waters, they will come to full stature in the Easter season.

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Saying, Doing, or Being?

St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians that we are saved through grace: God's actions of sending his Son to die for us, and raising Jesus from the dead show the love God has for us. It comes entirely from God. We are saved by our faith in Jesus, but even that faith comes from God. So when Paul says that no one can boast about being saved, he means that we can't add up our good deeds like reward points for heaven. He also means that we can't brag about our faith because we can recite the creed or answer an altar call. So if being saved is not a matter of saying the right things, or doing good deeds, what is it?

The answer comes from the gospel. Jesus tells us that he will be lifted up, or crucified, so that we can believe in him and have eternal life. Notice he doesn't give a list of facts about God that we are required to believe. When we “believe in” someone, we put our love and trust in that person. We want to be with that person as much as we can. We know that we are loved and so respond by giving love. Our response of love is not just a happy feeling. It inspires us to stop being selfish and start noticing that others need our help. Jesus describes it as living in the light: we are not ashamed to help someone, forgive someone, or comfort someone. While we do not force our faith on others, we don't hide it either. Our life is in the light, open to anyone who wants to see what God has done for us.

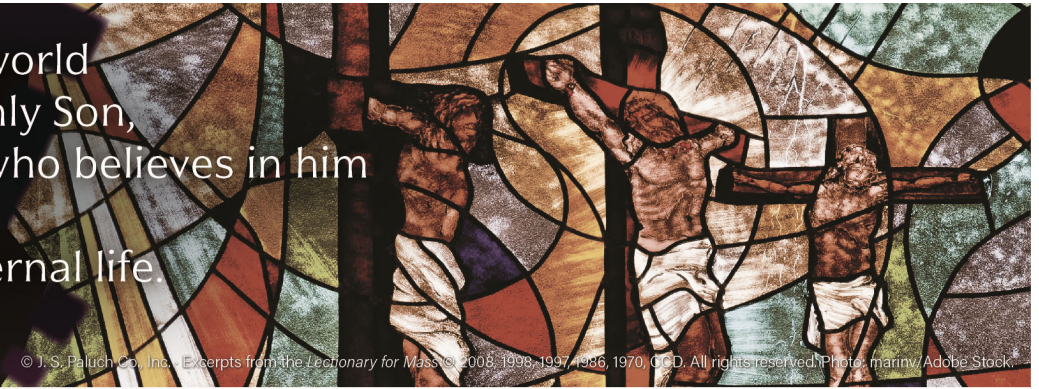
That brings us back to the question about salvation: it is not something we do or say. It is what God does for us. Our response of faith is also his gift. So when we recognize all that God has done for us and believe in his Son Jesus, the Spirit will guide us to live that faith and share it with others.

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REDEEMING HUMANITY

The end of Second Chronicles claims that “all the princes of Judah, the priests, and the people” were continuously unfaithful to their covenant with God. This infidelity ultimately led to seventy years of exile in Babylon, after which Cyrus, the Persian ruler who conquered Babylon, allows the people of Israel to return home and rebuild their temple; the Psalmist reflects on the bitterness of those seventy years. Paul is lyrical in praising God “who is rich in mercy” and who “brought us to life” with Christ, while the evangelist recounts preaching by Jesus on this same theme. This is the section of John that includes the oft-memorized John 3:16: “For God so loved the world . . .” All three readings emphasize God’s desire to rescue—or redeem—humanity from pain and suffering.

HUMAN HISTORY . . .

Today’s reading from Second Chronicles is the conclusion of these two volumes, a brief summary of Judah’s infidelity under a sequence of kings and the subsequent seventy years of exile in Babylon. This abbreviated sequence recaps the events treated in earlier chapters, concluding with Jerusalem being conquered and its inhabitants deported by to Babylon.

After the Babylonians were conquered by Cyrus and the Persians, Cyrus built the great Persian Empire that covered almost the entire ancient Near East. Unlike the earlier Assyrians and Babylonians, Cyrus did not rule by deporting and enslaving peoples he defeated. Instead, he organized his empire into regional governments and funded their construction projects, ruling over all with the title King of Kings (among others). In this spirit, Cyrus urged the exiles to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple and their native culture. In Jewish terms, Cyrus was a “messiah” (Hebrew), or a *christos* (Greek), someone anointed by God to carry out this divine mission.

. . . AND DIVINE RESCUE

The return from exile in Babylon was second only to the Exodus from Egypt as a founding narrative shaping the Jewish identity into which Jesus was born and in which his church took root and began to grow. If we read between the lines of the two New Testament readings from today, we can see the outlines of this same pattern of God bringing humanity from sorrow into joy: The Hebrews’ slavery in Egypt and the Judeans’ exile in Babylonia reveal a universal truth, that we belong to the God who is “rich in mercy,” and we are assured that “when we were dead in our transgressions,” God “so loved the world” that he sent Jesus to be the way of our redemption, our salvation.

The Fourth Sunday of Lent is sometimes called “Laetare Sunday,” or “Rejoice! Sunday.” Even if we feel overwhelmed by the darkness of sin (our own and others’), wondering whether God really is working on our behalf, we can put our faith in today’s Word that it is so. For this, we can truly rejoice—we are more than halfway to Easter!

TODAY’S READINGS

2 Chronicles 36:14–16, 19–23
Psalm 137:1–2, 3, 4–5, 6
Ephesians 2:4–10
John 3:14–21

FOURTH LENT
SUNDAY OF
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Prayer of the Faithful

By grace we have been saved, and so in God's grace let us pray for the needs of the world.

For the Church to live in the light of Christ so that all our works may be clearly seen as done in God, let us pray to the Lord.

For those lands burdened by age-old animosities and present-day warfare, that light and peace will dawn on them, let us pray to the Lord.

For refugees, for those in exile, for those who have no place to call home because of war, violence, or political oppression, let us pray to the Lord.

For those preparing for the Easter sacraments, especially those in our midst, that they may rejoice in the great love that God has for them, let us pray to the Lord.

For those who serve and protect our nation at home and abroad, and for their families and loved ones, let us pray to the Lord.

For all those who are sick, for all who suffer from COVID-19, and for all who have died, let us pray to the Lord.

For all the prayers that we hold in the silence of our hearts; for all our intentions spoken and unspoken, let us pray to the Lord.

**O God of all grace,
we are your handiwork.
Strengthen us for the good works
that you have prepared for us
and grant all these our prayers
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

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God's Word for Children

This scripture verse tells us what a great gift God has given to us, and why it was given. Perhaps you have seen it on billboards or even homemade signs. Find it in your Bible and mark the lists below to tell where it is written.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."

Put a check by the book	Put an "X" by the chapter	Put a heart by the verse
Moses	Ten	4
John	Seven	7
Noah	Three	25
Esther	Two	16

Answer: John 3:16

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Fourth Sunday of Lent

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (2:10) tells us what we are. Color only the capital letters in the quilt to find out.

The Little Ones

Jim Burrows

NEED SOME LIGHT?

BURROWS

But whoever practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God. Jn 3:21

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CATHOLIC CORNER

IF I EVER FORGET YOU

If there are people in your parish who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil, today you might hear the Gospel story about the man born blind. Listen for the psalm that goes with this reading.

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. (Psalm 23:1)

Otherwise, you might hear the story about a man named Nicodemus, a Gospel that contains a sentence that you might have heard and seen: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). Listen for the psalm that goes with this reading.

Let my tongue be silenced, if I ever forget you! (Psalm 137:6ab)

Both psalms promise that God will never forget us and will always take care of us. We promise never to forget about God. Unscramble the words below to discover something important to remember. Write the message on the lines.

oGd lilw ysalwa velo su dna reac rof su.

oGd ilwl veig su revyehitng ew dene.



I nikhth fo odG rvege yda.

I veig oGd hsktan for revyehitng I vahe.



If you sing the psalm at Mass today, listen carefully to the melody of the response. Try to remember it and sing it during the week.

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