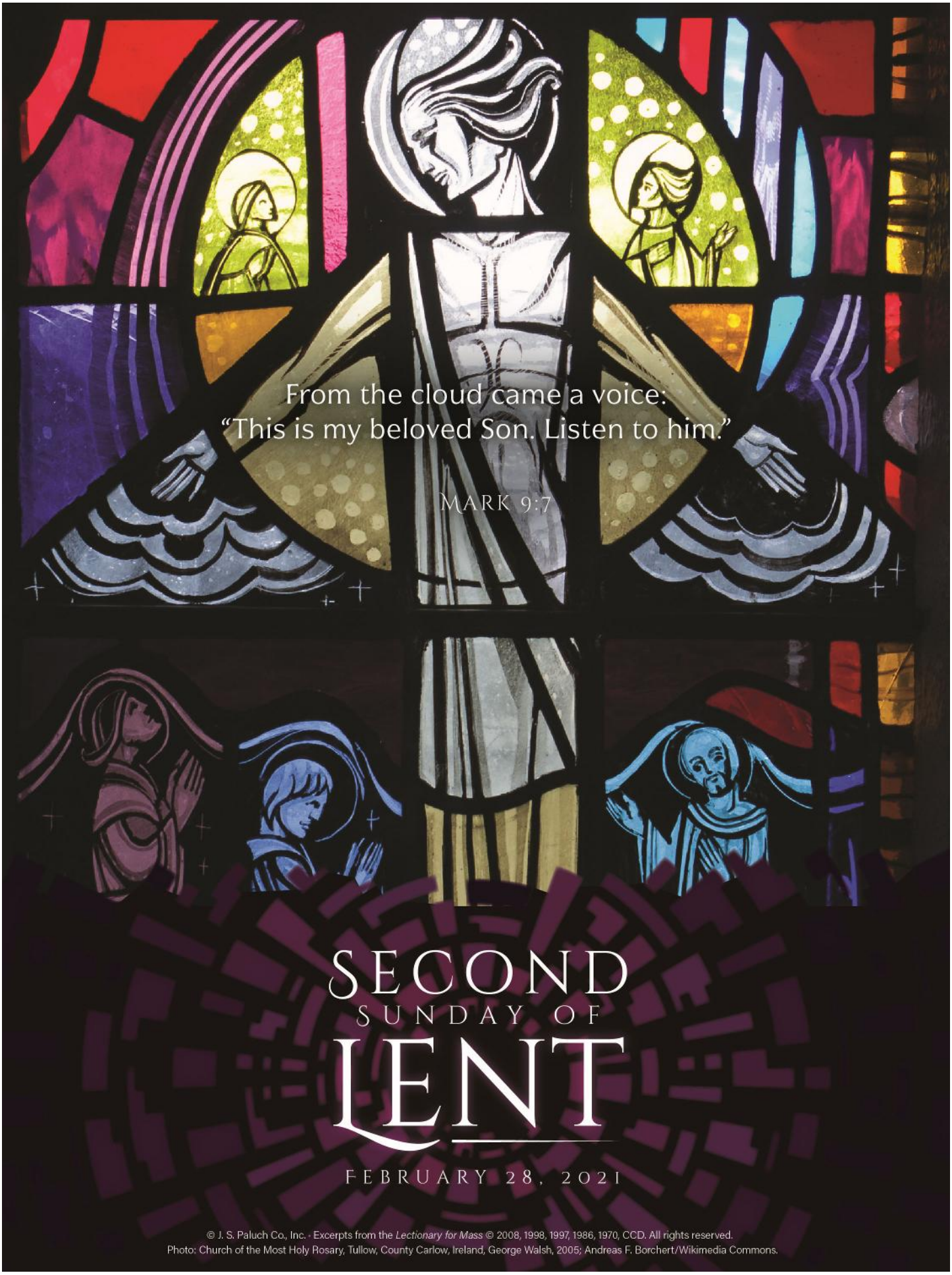

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Feast of Faith

The Opening Prayer

At the conclusion of the Introductory Rites of the Mass, the presider says or chants the words "Let us pray," followed by the Opening Prayer. This prayer is also called a "collect" because it gathers or "collects" the prayers of the entire assembly into one. The Roman collects that we pray in our liturgy—noted for the brevity, clarity, and conciseness of the Latin originals—date from a variety of periods. Some are quite new; others reach back more than a thousand years. They are truly treasures of our tradition.

The Opening Prayer can be divided into four main parts: 1) the invitation, or "Let us pray"; 2) the silence that follows, during which each member of the assembly lifts up before God his or her own prayers; 3) the collect itself, spoken or sung by the priest; 4) and finally the Amen, by which the assembly says, "yes," "may it be so," making the prayer their own.

The collect itself almost always follows the same pattern. It begins with an invocation to God. A petition follows, usually very general. We ask for health, strength, wisdom, grace, forgiveness, faith, awareness. Every collect concludes by offering the prayer to God through Jesus Christ. With the Amen of the assembly, the Introductory Rites of the Mass come to an end.

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

The art of listening

If you want God to listen to you when you pray, shouldn't you listen to God when God speaks to you?

—Anonymous

History of Salvation

The first reading today continues the "history of salvation" narrative that we hear throughout Lent this year. Today's story was among the best-loved in the Jewish tradition (surely Joseph told the story to young Jesus as he formed him in the ways of their faith); the early fathers of the Church were very fond of it as a means of explaining the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The overall tone of the first reading, psalm, and second reading seems a little incongruous with the dazzling Gospel, until we remember that the Transfiguration was placed as the Gospel for this Sunday precisely to remind us of the glory that awaits those who live faithfully and obediently to the will of God. In the life of Jesus, it is a preview of the glory of his resurrection; for us it is a glimpse of the destiny of those who continue, as we heard in last week's Gospel, to repent and believe in the Good News.

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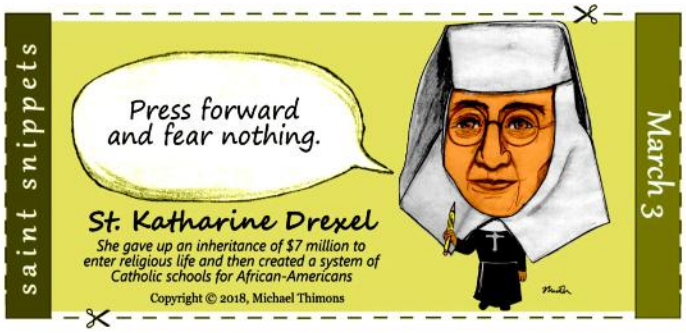
Readings for the Week

Monday:	Dn 9:4b-10; Ps 79:8, 9, 11, 13; Lk 6:36-38
Tuesday:	Is 1:10, 16-20; Ps 50:8-9, 16bc-17, 21, 23; Mt 23:1-12
Wednesday:	Jer 18:18-20; Ps 31:5-6, 14-16; Mt 20:17-28
Thursday:	Jer 17:5-10; Ps 1:1-4, 6; Lk 16:19-31
Friday:	Gn 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a; Ps 105:16-21; Mt 21:33-43, 45-46
Saturday:	Mi 7:14-15, 18-20; Ps 103:1-4, 9-12; Lk 15:1-3, 11-32
Sunday:	Ex 20:1-17 [1-3, 7-8, 12-17]; Ps 19:8-11; 1 Cor 1:22-25; Jn 2:13-25 Alternate readings (Year A): Ex 17:3-7; Ps 95:1-2, 6-9; Rom 5:1-2, 5-8; Jn 4:5-42 [5-15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42]

Saints and Special Observances

Sunday:	Second Sunday of Lent; Penitential Rite for Candidates for Full Communion
Wednesday:	St. Katharine Drexel
Thursday:	St. Casimir
Friday:	First Friday; World Day of Prayer; Abstinence
Saturday:	First Saturday



Today's Readings

First Reading — The sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith (Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18).

Psalm — I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living (Psalm 116).

Second Reading — If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31b-34).

Gospel — Jesus was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white (Mark 9:2-10).

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Second Sunday of Lent
February 28, 2021

If God is for us, who can be against us?
—Romans 8:31b

Treasures From Our Tradition

The basis of Abraham's test in the first reading is the fact that his neighbors followed a religious system that demanded human sacrifice. In offering Isaac's life on an altar of sacrifice, he is following long-accustomed religious practice. Ancient people accepted this because they thought that life was an ever-renewing circle: what had been lost would be restored in time. But here, God springs this trap and gives Abraham, Isaac, and you and me, a future. From now on, God will provide the sacrifice. From this point on, our lives have a direction, a purpose, a goal.

The faithful following of Lent and its consoling, challenging scriptures strengthens and prepares us to remember the Lord's passion and resurrection. Today, many parishes welcome home the elect, men and women chosen on the First Sunday of Lent for the Easter sacraments, from a celebration with the bishop. The scriptures today are chosen with them in mind, to steady their steps, to clear their vision, to strengthen their resolve: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

—James Field, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

Second Sunday of Lent
This is a Test

I used to wonder how God could lie to Abraham about sacrificing his son Isaac. But the story begins by telling us God put Abraham to the test. Abraham himself seems to know it's a test--in verses left out or our reading, he tells the servants that he and Isaac will return after the sacrifice; he also tells Isaac that God will provide the offering. Apparently, I'm the only one fooled by God.

I don't know if I would have passed the test. I would have at least argued with God about it, begging him to spare my son. Yet in our second reading, St. Paul reminds us that God did not spare his own son. (Rom 8:32) He passed his own test. Jesus was sacrificed so that God could show us how much he loved us: By dying, Jesus showed us the promise of resurrection, which shows us that we can also have new life by the forgiveness of our sins. If God loves us so much that he gives his Son to die for us, why would he not forgive us? Or as Paul says, if He is on our side, who can hurt us?

What does that tell us about life? You may have noticed that things don't always go your way. We sometimes suffer for no apparent reason. We may lose someone we love through death. We may be tempted to lose faith when we see wars, killer tornados, terrorist attacks--if "God is for us," why does he allow these things? Because he is still testing us. And not necessarily testing the victims of these troubles. If I get angry at God because I hear about someone's death, I haven't passed the test.

Does that mean those tragedies are our fault? No, God gives everyone free will and some people choose to do wrong. And some accidents are just accidental; no one is necessarily at fault. God intervenes sometimes and lives are saved. Other times, God intervenes by saving us after death with our resurrection. But as long as people doubt God's love, there will be tests. That's why it is so important to proclaim the Kingdom: so that someday all people will know God's love and not need to be tested.

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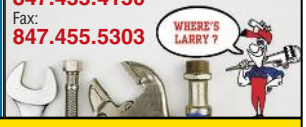

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