

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

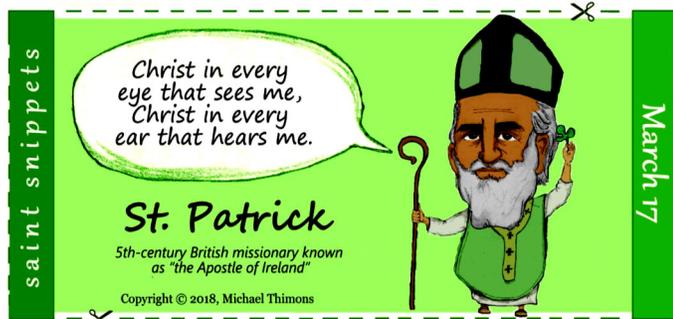
Feast of Faith

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

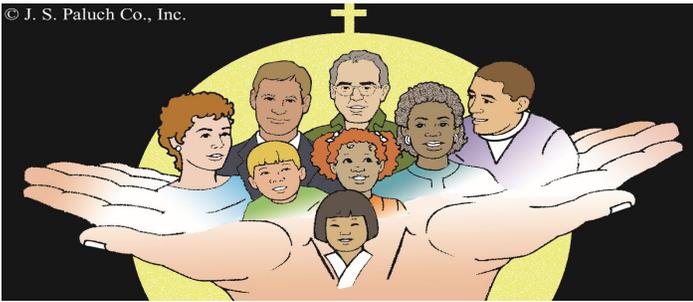
First Reading — The wrath and the mercy of the Lord are revealed in the exile and liberation of the chosen people (2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23) or 1 Samuel 16: 1b, 6-7, 10-13a.

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.

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

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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