

Weekend Readings & Reflections

April 2-3, 2022 – Fifth Sunday of Lent

Reflection: *The Liturgy this Lent has shown us the God of the Exodus. He is a mighty and gracious God, Who out of faithfulness to His covenant has done “great things” for His people, as today’s Psalm puts it. But the “things of long ago,” Isaiah tells us in today’s First Reading, are nothing compared to the “something new” that He will do in the future. Today’s First Reading and Psalm look back to the marvelous deeds of the Exodus. Both see in the Exodus a pattern and prophecy of the future, when God will restore the fortunes of His people fallen in sin. The readings today look forward to a still greater Exodus, when God will gather in the exiled tribes of Israel that had been scattered to the four winds, the ends of the earth. The new Exodus that Israel waited and hoped for has come in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Like the adulterous woman in today’s Gospel, all have been spared by the Lord’s compassion. All have heard His words of forgiveness, His urging to repentance, to be sinners no more. Like Paul in today’s Epistle, Christ has taken possession of every one, claimed each as a child of our heavenly Father. In the Church, God has formed a people for Himself to announce His praise, just as Isaiah said He would. And as Isaiah promised, He has given His “chosen people” living waters to drink in the desert wastelands of the world (see John 7:37–39). But our God is ever a God of the future, not of the past. We are to live with hopeful hearts, “forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead,” as Paul tells us. His salvation, Paul says, is power in the present, “the power of His resurrection.” We are to live awaiting a still greater and final Exodus, pursuing “the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling,” striving in faith to attain the last new thing God promises—“the resurrection of the dead.”*

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome our discussion on the Fifth Sunday of Lent. Let’s open our time together by praying the Anima Christi or Soul of Christ, fully entrusting ourselves to the mercy, love, and protection of the crucified Christ:

All: Soul of Christ, sanctify me. Body of Christ, save me. Blood of Christ, inebriate me. Water from the side of Christ, wash me. Passion of Christ, strengthen me. O Good Jesus, hear me. Within your wounds hide me. Never permit me to be parted from you. From the evil enemy defend me. At the hour of my death call me and bid me come to you, that with your Saints I may praise you, for age upon age. Amen.

Leader: *In this weekend’s Gospel reading, Jesus is encountering two very different types of people and teaches us about sin, justice, and mercy—and how Jesus deals with each. On the one hand, he is confronting the self-righteous Pharisees who seek to condemn the woman and trap him. On the other hand, he encounters the woman who is caught in sin. How are the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus? How does Jesus’ response to the Pharisees avoid the trap and show his great wisdom? Reflect on these questions as we watch the video.*

(Play the video on [FORMED.org](https://www.formed.org) - [Opening the Word – Fifth Sunday in Lent \(Year C\)](https://www.formed.org/Opening-the-Word-Fifth-Sunday-in-Lent-Year-C))

FIRST READING ~ Ezekiel 37:12-14 ~

Thus says the Lord GOD: O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and have you rise from them, O my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may live, and I will settle you upon your land; thus you shall know that I am the LORD. I have promised, and I will do it, says the LORD.

Digging Deeper Mercy Conquers All

Above all, love is greater than sin, than weakness, than the ‘futility of creation,’ it is stronger than death; it is a love always ready to raise up and forgive, always ready to go to meet the prodigal son, always looking for ‘the revealing of the sons of God, who are called to the glory that is to be revealed.’ This revelation of love is also described as mercy; and in man’s history this revelation of love and mercy has taken a form and a name: that of Jesus Christ.”

—Pope St. John Paul II

Chapters 40-55 are a special part of the Book of Isaiah. While still away from their homeland struggling with life in exile in Babylon, Isaiah invites people to understand God is doing something new.

- Have you ever wanted things to return to the way they were? If you had to see new rivers, current experiences that are forming you, what would you identify? Do you allow yourself to see difficult times as experiences that can grow you eventually into praise?

SECOND READING ~ Romans 8:8-11 ~

Brothers and sisters: Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you.

In his previous life as a Pharisee, Paul would have treasured living all 613 Jewish laws taught by Moses. He would have had honor and status in the community. This is now colorfully referred to as 'rubbish'. (Literally the word means scraps thrown to dogs). Paul's life is now aimed toward being taken possession of by Jesus.

- Have you ever desired to be 'fully' taken over by God? How could you pursue this as a goal? Paul reflects this reality of possession is not taken, but received as a gift. What part of your life would you like to ask the Spirit into this Lent?

GOSPEL ~ Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 ~

Now a man was ill, Lazarus from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with perfumed oil and dried his feet with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was ill. So the sisters sent word to him saying, "Master, the one you love is ill." When Jesus heard this he said, "This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was. Then after this he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you, and you want to go back there?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If one walks during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks at night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." He said this, and then told them, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him." So the disciples said to him, "Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved." But Jesus was talking about his death, while they thought that he meant ordinary sleep. So then Jesus said to them clearly, "Lazarus has died. And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe. Let us go to him." So Thomas, called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go to die with him." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles away. And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you

ask of God, God will give you.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise.” Martha said to him, “I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.” When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying, “The teacher is here and is asking for you.” As soon as she heard this, she rose quickly and went to him. For Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still where Martha had met him. So when the Jews who were with her in the house comforting her saw Mary get up quickly and go out, they followed her, presuming that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Sir, come and see.” And Jesus wept. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him.” But some of them said, “Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?” So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the dead man’s sister, said to him, “Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me.” And when he had said this, He cried out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, “Untie him and let him go.” Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him.

In the season of Lent special readings are chosen to hopefully puncture our lives so that we let in God’s mercy. The Prodigal Son is now followed this week with the Woman caught in Adultery. Both readings reveal an unexpected forgiveness.

Early in the morning people started coming to Jesus in the temple area and listened to his teaching.

- *In this last week of Lent how could you bring yourself into the presence of Jesus to listen and ask for guidance?*

Scribes and Pharisees believed following Laws strictly would bring a person into holiness. They were upset Jesus spent time with those doing the opposite (sinners). They test him publicly if he keeps the Laws Moses commanded. They wish to maintain a way of relating to God that puts people into holy/right and sinners/wrong buckets. Love and mercy is abandoned in favor of judgment and punishment. Jesus beautifully takes away all holy pretending as he knows we all sin. Faced with this deep truth we meet God’s response. Consider praying vulnerably in the context of your own life: neither do I condemn you.

- *What is your response to someone when you realize they do not judge you but love you?*
- *Can you remember a time when your relationship with God changed away from a focus on sin toward a deeper knowing of forgiveness? What has been the deepest experience you have had of the Mercy of God? Do you allow the Sacrament of Reconciliation to help you move beyond guilt into wisdom and forgiveness?*

MEDITATION

Are you ready to be changed and transformed in Christ-like holiness? God never withholds his grace from us. His steadfast love and mercy is new every day (Lamentations 3:22-23). Through the gift and grace of the Holy Spirit we can be changed and made new in Christ. He can set us free from our unruly desires and passions.

The Gospel accounts frequently describe how Jesus had to face unjust accusations made by the Pharisees, the ruling elders of Israel. They were upset with Jesus' teaching and they wanted to discredit him in any way they could. They wanted to not only silence him, but to get rid of him because of his claim to speak with God's authority. When a moral dilemma or difficult legal question arose, it was typical for the Jews to take the matter to a rabbi for a decision. The scribes and the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. John writes that they wanted to "test" Jesus on the issue of retribution so "they might have some charge to bring against him" (John 8:6).

Jewish law treated adultery as a serious crime since it violated God's ordinance and wreaked havoc on the stability of marriage and family life. It was one of the three gravest sins punishable by death. If Jesus said the woman must be pardoned, he would be accused of breaking the law of Moses. If he said the woman must be stoned, he would lose his reputation for being the merciful friend of sinners.

Jesus then does something quite unexpected - he begins to write in the sand. The word for "writing" which is used here in the Gospel text has a literal meaning "to write down a record against someone" (for another example see Job 13:26). Perhaps Jesus was writing down a list of the sins of the accusers standing before him. Jesus now turns the challenge towards his accusers. In effect he says: *Go ahead and stone her! But let the man who is without sin be the first to cast a stone.* The Lord leaves the matter to their own consciences.

When the adulterous woman is left alone with Jesus, he both expresses mercy and he strongly exhorts her to not sin again. The scribes wished to condemn, Jesus wished to forgive and to restore the sinner to health. His challenge involved a choice - either to go back to her former way of sin and death or to reach out to God's offer of forgiveness, restoration, and new life in his kingdom of peace and righteousness. Jesus gave her pardon and a new start on life. God's grace enables us to confront our sin for what it is - unfaithfulness to God, and to turn back to God with a repentant heart and a thankful spirit for God's mercy and forgiveness.

- *Do you know the joy of repentance and a clean conscience? Have you ever been forgiven of something that you thought could never be forgiven? How did that feel?*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing, let us pray together:

ALL: God our Father, we find it difficult to come to you, because our knowledge of you is imperfect. In our ignorance we have imagined you to be our enemy; we have wrongly thought that you take pleasure in punishing our sins; and we have foolishly conceived you to be a tyrant over human life. But since Jesus came among us, he has shown that you are loving, that you are on our side against all that stunts life, and that our resentment against you was groundless. So we come to you, asking you to forgive our past ignorance, and wanting to know more and more of you and your forgiving love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen (Prayer of Saint Augustine)

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

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