



# Jesuit Prayer Lenten Reflections



JESUITS  
USA East



AMDG

Dear Friends,

By way of introduction, I am Father Philip Florio, SJ. I have recently completed seven years as the Vocation Director for the USA East Jesuits and have just been missioned to serve as the Director of Engagement and Pastoral Care in our Province Advancement Office. I am honored to serve the province and our friends in this ministry.

Our Holy Founder, Saint Ignatius Loyola, vigorously taught, “Pray as if God will take care of all; work as if all is up to you.” Here St. Ignatius emphasizes the importance of a personal relationship with God through deep prayer that is aligned with personal responsibility. Indeed, prayer and service go hand-in-hand.

As we approach the sacred season of Lent, we are reminded, once again, of the need for personal reflection, prayer, and spiritual growth. In gratitude for your generous support, we are pleased to provide you with this Ignatian prayer resource designed to help guide you through daily prayers and reflections.

For more than a decade, Jesuit Prayer online has provided hundreds of thousands of people with daily Ignatian reflections and prayer. Whether by email, the app, or the website, readers receive a short reflection on one of the daily Scripture readings written by a Jesuit or lay colleague. You can read more about Jesuit Prayer on page 30.

The reflections within this booklet are timeless, offering insights and inspiration that remain relevant today. We hope that these passages will invite you to a deeper prayer life and a closer relationship with the Lord as we, the Church, journey together through Lent.

Notably, the weekday Mass readings are the same each year, inviting us to pray with Gospel stories that are familiar to us. Because the Sunday readings rotate on a three-year cycle, we have included the Scripture citations for each year in the hope that this booklet will be one you can come back to year after year. The Sunday readings for 2025 are from Cycle C.

May this sacred season of Lent bring you peace, spiritual growth, and abundant blessings.

In Christ,

Rev. Philip Florio, SJ  
Director of Engagement and Pastoral Care.

To view this booklet online visit [JesuitsEast.org/JesuitPrayerLent](https://JesuitsEast.org/JesuitPrayerLent)

# ASH WEDNES- DAY

*Even now, says the Lord,  
return to me with your whole heart,  
with fasting, and weeping, and  
mourning; Rend your hearts, not  
your garments, and return to the  
Lord, your God.*

JOEL 2:12-13A

MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-18

## **Inner Transformation**

It's tempting to let our Lenten fast play double-duty: we give up sweets, hoping to drop a few pounds; we fast from our snooze button, hoping the boss might notice our early arrival.

In today's Gospel, Jesus addresses these ulterior motives. The point of Lent is not outward action but interior transformation that makes a difference in our spiritual lives, but which might not be seen by those around us. Eventually, though, these subtle changes of the heart will become evident in our relationships, decisions, and actions.

I don't think Jesus is saying that we shouldn't let anyone know about our Lenten commitments. I certainly think St. Ignatius would tell us not to ignore the importance of community in our spiritual lives. So beyond determining what interior change might be needed, let's ask ourselves who we trust to help keep us on track and encourage us all the way to Easter.

—Rachel Forton (2018)



## THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

*LUKE 9: 22-25*

### **How Do I Respond to Suffering?**

Suffering is a great mystery. Sometimes it makes God feel farther away, while other times it feels like God could be no closer. In some cases, suffering appears to be the result of sin—whether mine or another’s—and in many cases, it seems inexplicable if not unjust.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus does not tell us to look for meaning in suffering. He does not promise that everything happens for a reason or suggest that suffering is a test of our faithfulness. He does tell us that if we want to follow him, we must be willing to struggle. That does not mean that we seek out opportunities to endure pain, but it does mean that my relationship with God is worth the struggle it sometimes brings.

Jesus tells us that he suffers, too; he shows God’s solidarity with the entirety of the human condition. When I suffer, I am not alone.

Compassion means “to suffer with.” If I experience suffering, how can I feel compassion for myself and open myself to God’s compassion for me? If I am free from suffering, how can I bring compassion to those I love as well as those who are hard for me to love?

—Dr. Marcus Mescher (2019)

## FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

*MATTHEW 9: 14-15*

### **Awaiting God’s Finished Work**

Have you ever lost your appetite because you were sad, shocked, disappointed or afraid? What are the things in your life and our world that make you sad?

Fasting is an ancient religious practice that helps to develop the virtue of self-control. It is also a way of identifying with those around us who suffer in various ways. Based on today’s Gospel reading, fasting is also a way of mourning the unfinished world in which we live. God’s kingdom is not yet fully present. Christ the bridegroom has been taken from us. While we are awaiting God’s finished work and the full manifestation of God’s reign, there are times when we should push away the food and drink that can give a false sense of satisfaction and that may tempt us to forget our hurting neighbors. Will today be such a day for me?

—Mark McNeil (2019)



Colombiere Chapel (Baltimore, Maryland)



Loyola on the Potomac Retreat House (Faulkner, Maryland)

## **SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY**

*LUKE 5: 27-32*

### **Leave It All Behind**

When Levi meets Jesus, his whole life changes. He leaves everything behind and instantly follows when Jesus calls. We read similar accounts about the other disciples, so much so that it might seem easy or commonplace to us: someone meets Jesus, turns their life upside down, and follows him. How often do we really reflect on the enormity of those decisions? As a tax collector, Levi might have been scorned by the Pharisees, but he occupied a place of wealth and privilege in his society. Giving up a predictable, comfortable life to follow Jesus into the unknown must have taken incredible courage. Levi was humble and honest enough to admit his need for a Savior.

As I begin my Lenten journey, what is Jesus asking me to do? Am I prepared to follow Jesus with my whole heart like Levi? How is Jesus calling me to healing, repentance, and discipleship?

—Maggie Melchior (2016)

# First Sunday of Lent



## Grace Throughout the Lenten Season

*MATTHEW 4:1-11 (CYCLE A)*

*MARK 1:12-15 (CYCLE B)*

*LUKE 4:1-13 (CYCLE C)*

*You who dwell in the shelter  
of the Most High,  
who abide in the shadow  
of the Almighty,  
say to the LORD,  
“My refuge and fortress,  
my God in whom I trust.”*

*PSALM 91:1-2*

Each year, on the First Sunday of Lent, we read about Jesus being led by the Spirit into the desert where he fasts and prays. This time is undoubtedly a very powerful, Spirit-filled experience where he is deeply connected to the Father, and grows in understanding of what he is called to do during his time on earth with us. As we commit to our own Lenten practices of prayer and fasting, we model Jesus’ actions just before he begins his public ministry. This time spent in prayer strengthens our relationship with God, giving us the strong foundation of faith that helps us through the inevitable trials of life.

After 40 days in the desert, Jesus is tempted by the devil who offers him anything he might want in life. Likewise, we are not strangers to the many temptations of our world today. The lure of money, prestige, power, or even a comfortable and carefree life can be very strong. The temptation to give these things power over us is what St. Ignatius of Loyola refers to in the First Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises. Spiritual freedom means letting go of a preference for one thing over another and recognizing God’s gifts in the many people, places, or experiences in our lives.

Perhaps as we begin this Lenten season, we can let go of a plan or expectation of how the next 40 days will look and be open to God’s grace working in and through us in unexpected ways.

# FIRST WEEK OF LENT

## MONDAY

MATTHEW 25: 31-46

### Care for the Least

Today's readings present familiar themes. Leviticus reminds us of the obvious: "Do not steal. Do not swear falsely. Do not defraud your neighbor. Do not cause others to stumble. Do not bear hatred" (Lv 19: 1-2, 11-18). The charge we hear in Matthew's Gospel is also well-known to us: "Whatever you do to the least of your brothers and sisters, you do to me."

Externally, these teachings are not that complicated; the letter behind them is clear. But internally, the challenge gets tougher, as we aim to embody the spirit that animates them. Today, let us pray for the grace to see—and respond to—Jesus in every person we meet, especially those most in need. In doing so, we will strive to follow the Lord's charge to the Israelites: "Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy."

—Fr. David Mastrangelo, SJ (2014)

## TUESDAY

MATTHEW 6: 7-15

### Speaking Each Word of Prayer to God

We may not feel like we know how to pray eloquently. When we tell God what is on our hearts, it may feel like we are simply babbling. In the end, however, such makeshift prayers are often acts of the very trust which Jesus is trying to deepen in the hearts of his disciples. Rather than proud babbling focused on just words, Christ calls us to pray humbly with our eyes fixed on the Father who loves us. Jesus calls us to trust.

Saint Ignatius had a way to grow in this trust using the Lord's Prayer. He would sometimes pray the Our Father very slowly, saying just one word each time he took a breath, savoring every bit of the prayer, really speaking each word to God.

Today, let us take a moment just to imagine looking God in the eyes and seeing his fatherly love for us as we pray.

—Thomas Croteau, SJ (2022)

## WEDNESDAY

LUKE 11: 29-32

### Step Out in Faith Without Fear

When it's too hard to be patient, it's easy to demand signs from God. While anxiously waiting, our ears are often plugged with self-doubt and our backs turned away from God's open arms. It's no wonder we look for an outward sign. Oftentimes we expect sensational events to confirm what we have already planned for our lives. No matter our plans, God will be sure to meet us wherever we are through messages and messengers we'd never consider as signs. We mustn't forget to look for God in all things. We must remember that wherever God guides, God provides. Our Creator lovingly waits to usher us into new opportunities beyond what we could ever imagine for ourselves. Step out in faith without fear of the future. Be comforted in knowing that fear does not come from God and that love casts out all fear.

—Lori Stanley (2021)

## THURSDAY

MATTHEW 7: 7-12

### Trust That God Wants to Hear Us

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

What a wonderful reminder that God is here to listen to our innermost desires. Despite this, I often find myself reluctant to share with him. I think, who am I to ask God for what I need given all that is going on in the world? Or, how can I share what I yearn for when there are many on the margins who need his love?

This reading reminds us to create an open dialogue with God. He wants to know about the exterior things that we are passionate about in our world that need our prayers, but also the interior things we are trying to grapple with as we work our way towards his kingdom.

This week I challenge us to genuinely ask God for what we need and trust that he wants to hear it.

—Sheila Walsh (2021)



## FRIDAY

*MATTHEW 5: 20-26*

### Reconciliation

During the season of Lent, we often reflect upon fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. However, today's Gospel invites us to also seek out reconciliation. We live in a world that is often overstimulating with stressors on our time, finances, emotions, and physical well-being. However, in the midst of the chaos our focus must shift to what is most important – our relationship with the Lord and our relationships with others.

We are invited to seek out right relationships with others. We are invited to find forgiveness and healing even when it is challenging and difficult. We are invited to find peace within, and to be peacemakers. We are invited to cleanse away our sins, make room in our hearts for reconciliation, and move forward preparing our minds, bodies, and souls to celebrate Easter and the Risen Lord. How can I seek out reconciliation and extend offerings of peace this Lenten season?

—Leigh M. Hartley (2016)

## SATURDAY

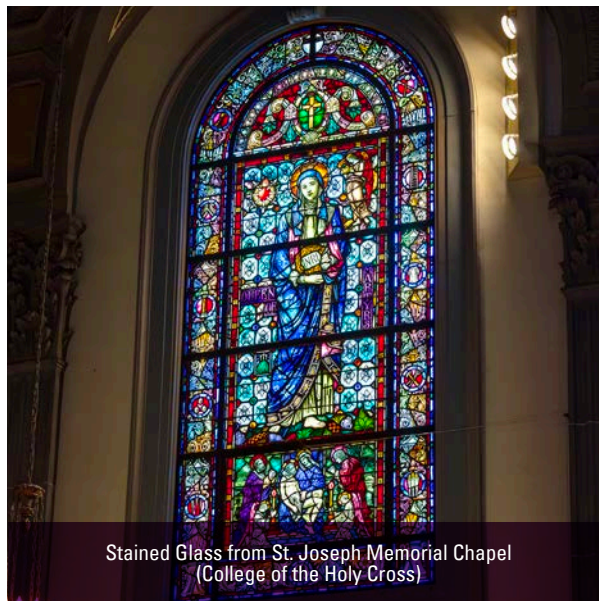
*MATTHEW 5: 43-48*

### Be Generative

When Jesus asks us to pray for ones who hurt us, love those who may not love us, and greet those who may not be like us, he asks us to be generative as God is generative. Actions that are generative allow for something new, something to change, some hope. Actions of the opposite sort – injury, hate, separation – leave us without hope, without change, and without possibilities. It becomes clear such actions are not of God since they are not life-giving.

What do I want to do today to bring about something new, to encourage positive change, and to foster hope?

—Fr. Chris Manahan, SJ (2023)



Stained Glass from St. Joseph Memorial Chapel  
(College of the Holy Cross)

# Second Sunday of Lent



*And behold, two men were conversing with [Jesus], Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.*

*LUKE 9:30-31*

## **Mountaintop Experience**

*MATTHEW 17:1-9 (CYCLE A)*

*MARK 9:2-10 (CYCLE B)*

*LUKE 9:28B-36 (CYCLE C)*

In ministry, people sometimes refer to their time on retreat as a “mountaintop experience.” This references the powerful encounter that Peter, James, and John have with God on the mountain during the Transfiguration. Such times of deep connection with the Lord are truly impactful for one’s faith life. But, like the disciples, we don’t live on the mountaintop. Mountaintop experiences can provide clarity and focus, but we must take these things down from the mountain into our everyday lives.

On the mountain, the disciples encounter Jesus in an intensely profound way, but that isn’t the end of their relationship with him. They return from the mountain and continue to follow him, learning from him, deepening their relationship with him, and living into their vocations in life. We read the description of the Transfiguration each year on the Second Sunday of Lent. Perhaps this is a reminder that this Lent can be an opportunity to open ourselves to a mountaintop experience, to a deeper connection to God.

God’s voice in a cloud reminds the disciples of Jesus’ identity as the Son of God. His presence with Moses—representing the Jewish law—and Elijah—representing the prophets—confirms Jesus’ role in salvation history. How do we, like Peter, James, and John, take this and incorporate it into our lives? What can we do this Lent (and beyond) to live our mountaintop experiences of God?

# SECOND WEEK OF LENT

## MONDAY

LUKE 6: 36-38

### Living up to God's Expectations

After sharing good advice on how we should be interacting with others, Christ expresses that “the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” He tells us that the expectations we hold for those we encounter are the expectations that God has for us. Recently I realized that I often set very high expectations for the people in my life but never verbalize them. And yet, I am disappointed when they don't live up to my unspoken expectations and therefore feel that our relationship has been damaged. If God is measuring me the same way I am measuring the people I love, I'm failing miserably at meeting his expectations. Sometimes it takes a reality check to see with eyes of compassion and mercy, to recognize that forgiveness always supersedes teaching someone a lesson, and to open our hearts to loving even when it is most difficult to do so.

—Sara Spittler (2019)

## TUESDAY

MATTHEW 23: 1-12

### Our True Teacher

We have one teacher, one Father, one instructor, who teaches us that our actions speak louder than our words.

As if becoming human wasn't humbling enough, Jesus then showed us what it means to lead: inviting the poor and marginalized to be his companions, valuing the witness and wisdom of women and outsiders, and humbly serving and washing the feet of his students and followers.

Those of us who find ourselves in positions of leadership and power—as teachers, parents, directors, managers—do well to remember who the real leader is and to imitate him.

Christ shows us the way of humility and enriches our efforts towards the greater glory of God and the benefit of humankind.

How can we follow Christ's example today in the tasks and encounters before us?

—Fr. Thomas Bambrick, SJ (2020)

## WEDNESDAY

MATTHEW 20: 17-28

### Power Through Service

Can you think of any leaders, people in your personal or professional life, who might have the qualities of a tyrant? What is it like to be in relationship with them? Are they people you enjoy spending time with? Do they inspire you to follow? Do you desire to emulate their behavior? If you're like me, you might respond to this last question, “Of course not!”

Unfortunately, the reality is that humans are often caught up in the dynamics of power. Roughly three-quarters of today's Gospel passage is about people demonstrating their power, using violence to hold onto power, using manipulation to seek power, or the chaos that ensues when people try to grab power. Jesus is familiar with, and names, the dynamics of the power play. But he calls his disciples to a different way: “It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant.”

I can only imagine that this was startling to the disciples. Not only did Jesus call out the disciples' poor behavior, but he called them towards service. This description of power is so different from that of a tyrant. Jesus seems to invite the disciples to see power as acknowledging the worthiness of another... that they are deserving of care... AND to invite the disciples to acknowledge that they have talents that can be freely given away. To be powerful is to be a blessing to others. Can you demonstrate this kind of power today?

—Laura Gilmartin Hancock (2022)

## THURSDAY

LUKE 16: 19-31

### Toward an Ever Greater “We”

This year, our school’s theme is “towards an ever greater ‘we,’” based on Pope Francis’ theme for the 2021 World Day of Migrants and Refugees. In an age of “us versus them,” we journey together to cultivate a culture of “we,” where there is a deep sense of belonging to one another, with mutual care, concern, and compassion. In today’s Gospel, the rich man is not condemned for being mean or cruel to Lazarus. He is condemned for overlooking Lazarus, for ignoring Lazarus, with all his sores and suffering, because Lazarus was not part of the rich man’s “we.”

We wouldn’t dream of allowing “one of our own” to go hungry, or be covered in sores, or find comfort for their suffering in animals. Jesus invites us to expand our understanding of who is part of our “we,” and in doing so, expand our attentiveness to the hungry, the sick, the lonely, the poor, the marginalized, the invisible, the lost, and the forgotten, and minister to their needs with compassion and mercy.

Today, consider the ways in which you can expand your “we” to include the vulnerable and marginalized.

—Jackie Schulte (2023)

## FRIDAY

MATTHEW 21: 33-43, 45-46

### Get Out of Our Own Way

As I read this Gospel, I am struck by two things: first, the importance of responding to those who God sends and second, the importance of producing rich fruit. In fact, the two go hand in hand. As we pray the Examen each day, we are called to ask how well we are doing these two things. Are we responding to God? Are we seeing God in the people we are encountering each day? Are we recognizing the opportunities we have each day to serve God? And when we do respond to God, does our response produce rich fruit? Do we allow ourselves to be instruments of God’s love and peace and joy?

In today’s world, so much emphasis is placed on doing things our way, in living out our dreams. We put so much emphasis on doing what we want that we never ask ourselves what God wants. As a result, we become like the servants who beat and killed the messengers sent to the vineyard. Why? Because we all too often see those who God sends into our lives as a threat to our plans, our dreams, or our goals. They may get in the way of what we want. However, if we can “get out of our own way” we can see that what God desires is greater than anything we can dream or imagine. What God desires for us will bring greater joy and will produce much fruit.

Amen.

—Ed DeVenney (2023)

## SATURDAY

LUKE 15: 1-3, 11-32

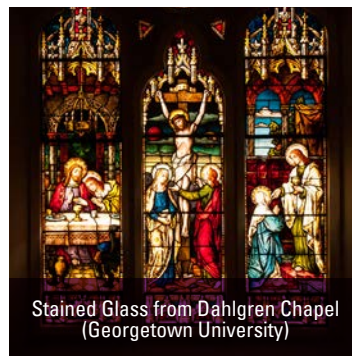
### Open Hands

I reread Henri Nouwen’s *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, a reflection on Rembrandt’s painting of the same name, which shows the younger son’s return home. Nouwen was famously struck by this image’s depiction of the two sons and their father. It is the spiritual destiny of each of us to become like the father in the parable, Nouwen writes. We need only look to the father’s open hands.

An open hand holds onto nothing: no secrets, no weapons, no money, no pride. Unlike the younger son who grasps at wealth and the older son who holds fast to his own ego, the father lets go, releases his own desires in patient trust that God is at work. And in so doing, his hands are open, then, in welcome, healing and compassion when his children find their way home.

Are our hands grasping at something, or open to God?

—Eric Clayton (2020)



Stained Glass from Dahlgren Chapel  
(Georgetown University)

# Third Sunday of Lent



*Merciful and gracious is the Lord,  
slow to anger and abounding in  
kindness.*

PSALM 103:8

## **A Time for Reflection**

*JOHN 4:5-42 (CYCLE A)*

*JOHN 2:13-25 (CYCLE B)*

*LUKE 13:1-9 (CYCLE C)*

As we move into the Third Week of Lent, our Sunday Gospel readings vary year to year. In Luke's Gospel, we will hear an ominous reminder of the need to repent and turn away from our sins. Early in John's Gospel, Jesus drives the moneychangers out of the temple in a display of righteous anger. And later in the same Gospel we read about the Samaritan woman at the well who recognizes her sins, repents, and brings others toward Jesus.

Each of these invites us to deeper reflection on our own lives, and particularly the ways we may be falling short. Perhaps we are quick to recognize the failings of others while ignoring the myriad ways that we ourselves are lacking. Maybe we have put obstacles in place of authentic relationship with God for ourselves or others, focusing on the wrong things. Or it could be that we recognize our sins and have allowed them to cut us off from God or our community.

Lent offers us a time and space to slow down and reflect on whether our thoughts and behaviors align with what it means to be disciples. Are our interactions with others leading us closer to or further away from God? And, conversely, do our actions draw people in by demonstrating what it means to be a disciple? How can we, like the Samaritan woman, lead others to deeper faith?

# THIRD WEEK OF LENT

## MONDAY

LUKE 4: 24-30

### Prophetic Voices

Have you ever been so angered by the truth that you wanted to kill the messenger?

Like the people of Nazareth in today's Gospel, I think we sometimes want to be affirmed in our limited image of God. I want to believe in a God who rewards those who work hard, say our prayers, go to church on Sunday, and follow the rules.

It is never this simple with Jesus.

Prophets draw our attention to the truth we would rather ignore. In speaking about the widow in Zarephath and the leper from Syria, Jesus makes a radical statement about God's faithfulness to the poor, the foreigner, and the outcast. The people were so outraged, they wished him dead!

I wonder what egregious examples Jesus would give today. Would Jesus point to the racial tensions in our country? Would he remind us of the inherent dignity of death row inmates, people with disabilities, and the life in a mother's womb? Would he challenge me to befriend people of different political persuasions or someone who does not share my same religious convictions?

As followers of Jesus, we are called to be prophetic voices for justice in our world. Am I righteously angry and moved to action or prayer? Or am I appalled that God would ask such a thing of me?

—Beth Knobbe (2015)

## TUESDAY

MATTHEW 18: 21-35

### Judge Not, Love Radically

Our Christian tradition encourages us to spend a good amount of time meditating on our sins. While most of us would likely rather spend our prayer reflecting on happier things, such as Jesus' healings and miracles, we need to be aware of our own sin. When we know and feel in our heart that we've done wrong in our lives, it should be a lot harder to judge others. God is willing to forgive us if we ask for it but we also need to be willing to forgive others just as God has forgiven us. So let's judge not, lest we be judged, and love radically, just as God loves us radically.

—Alex Hale, SJ (2023)



## WEDNESDAY

MATTHEW 5: 17-19

### Fulfillment of the Law

"[N]ot the smallest letter . . . will pass from the law" until "heaven and earth pass away". Jesus' insistence here on adherence to the law seems to be out of step with his challenges to the burdens of the law laid on the people by the scribes and Pharisees. Didn't Jesus come into the world to shake things up, to turn over some tables, and to release people from the bonds of rigid, religious fundamentalism?

This passage is part of Matthew's lead-in to the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus articulates a new way of living, a way, or even "The Way," that is the fulfillment of the law. This passage makes it plain that while the new way of living that Jesus announces is a development beyond the religious tradition of the time, there is continuity with the tradition, as Jesus came "not to abolish but to fulfill."

Pray today for unity in the Church as we seek and find the fulfillment of our tradition in the love of Jesus for each and all as we walk together to Jerusalem and the cross.

—Bill Lipscomb (2024)

## THURSDAY

LUKE 11: 14-23

### Listening to the Prophets

One can hear the frustration in Jesus' voice as he responds to his detractors; he has just healed someone and yet some people attribute this miracle to the devil. Jesus finds himself in a similar position to the prophets before him as we hear in the first reading: "I have sent you untiringly all my servants the prophets. Yet [you] have not obeyed me nor paid heed" (Jeremiah 7:25-26).

I am reminded of a modern-day prophet, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." The letter is a response to a statement by religious leaders. Dr. King expresses his frustration with the church in general, and the "moderate" believer in particular, in the struggle for civil rights and the end of desegregation.

How do we respond to the prophets of our time, the people who speak on the environment, poverty, human rights and conflict? Are we able to discern in them the voice of God?

—Fr. Paul Kalenzi, SJ (2024)



## FRIDAY

MARK 12: 28-34

### Asking God a Question

I wonder if the most dangerous thing you can do with God is to ask a question. A question opens one's heart and mind and soul to God and lowers one's resistance to God grace and love. In answer to the scribe's simple question, Jesus gives the only possible response:

The Lord our God is Lord alone!

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

Then he adds: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. In this simple way, Jesus interweaves love and action. Not only are we commanded to love God with all our being, but this love is fulfilled in how we love everyone with the same love. This is a love of mercy and compassion, generosity and forgiveness.

Like this scribe, I bring questions to God for which I've already decided on an answer – and ask God's blessings to fulfill my desires. God's expansive love and wisdom will take our simple question and desire and expand and direct it in the ways that God desires. If we genuinely want not just an answer to our question, but God's answer, we may have embarked on an adventure: better buckle up!

—Fr. Glen Chun, SJ (2024)

## SATURDAY

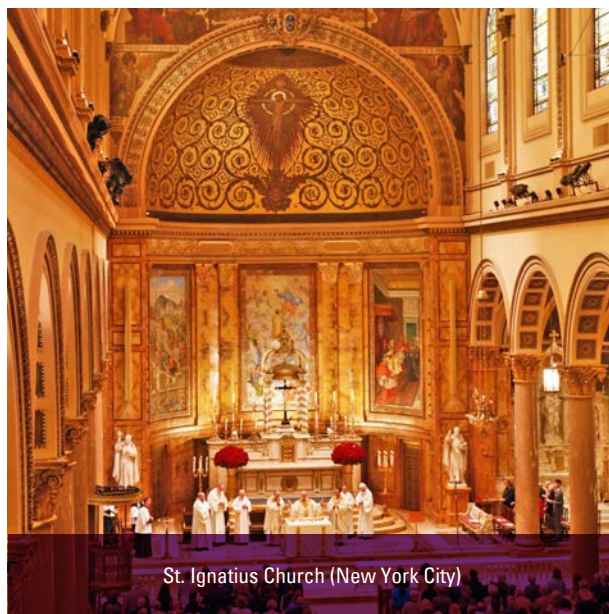
LUKE 18: 9-14

### Looking Deep Within Ourselves

Comparisons can be deadly. Do I look as good as the other guy? Here, in this Gospel, Jesus is actually doing the comparing and if we are smart, we will learn from the exchange. An encounter in the temple: a Pharisee and a tax collector, both are praying... but who does it better? Do I follow the example of the one who lists his worthy deeds in hopes of impressing God and gaining points? Or do I stand at a figurative distance, while not able to even raise my eyes to heaven...and say...nothing?

There is a provocative invitation here. Saint Ignatius encourages me to look deeply, to go into the less-traveled terrain of my heart to explore, weigh, and discern. Lighting my lamp, I give myself the honest once-over as I stand face to face with what is hidden, lost, and lamentable; trusting God with what is revealed.

—Monique Jacobs (2022)



St. Ignatius Church (New York City)

# Fourth Sunday of Lent



Stained Glass from the Blue Chapel (Fordham University)

*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.*

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

JOHN 3:16-17

## Healing and Restoration

JOHN 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38 (CYCLE A)

JOHN 3:14-21 (CYCLE B)

LUKE 15:1-3, 11-32 (CYCLE C)

Just past the halfway point of Lent, the Gospel readings this week remind us that we are all in need of God's healing. We read the familiar story of the Prodigal Son and witness the healing and restoration of the relationship between a father and both of his sons. John 9 contains the story of the healing of a blind man, who has his physical sight restored, and is able to see Jesus as the Son of Man. In a more poetic passage from John 3, Jesus reminds us that he is the light of the world, and we may have eternal life by walking in this light.

Each of these passages offers the chance for us to reflect on where we most need God's healing hand. Perhaps we await a physical remedy for ourselves or someone we care about. We may desire reconciliation in our relationships with an individual or our community. And, like John's Gospel, the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises invites us to acknowledge that, despite our best efforts, we are sinners in need of God's mercy. The good news, though, is that God loves us anyway! As we continue our Lenten journey, where might we ask for God's healing presence to enter into our lives?

# FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

## MONDAY

JOHN 4: 43-54

### **Boldly Asking For Healing**

The distance between Cana and Capernaum is around 20 miles. I wonder what the royal official was thinking about on that journey to talk to Jesus in person. I wonder what kind of faith and humility it took to keep walking, when he probably wanted to stay by his sick child. I wonder what kind of relief and gratitude he felt after encountering Jesus and turning to go home.

The royal official shows great courage in asking Jesus to answer his deepest prayer, and in return, Jesus' response of healing is immediate and generous.

We too are allowed to be persistent and straightforward in our prayers. We can trust that Jesus is waiting to answer us, no matter who we are or what our life circumstances may be. He is there at the end of whatever road we may be walking.

How would our lives be changed if we boldly asked Jesus to heal us?

—Kristy Parrish (2024)

## TUESDAY

JOHN 5: 1-16

### **Our Merciful God**

We are presented in today's Gospel with an awfully pathetic figure. Most commentators shake their heads over someone who after 38 years needed to be asked if he wanted to be well. They resent the way he sold out Jesus to the authorities as quickly as he could walk on his newly-healed legs, and they bristle that he did so even after he was admonished not to sin again. All it takes is a quick look at his life and a cursory look at my own to see the striking similarities.

I can't help but imagine the stages of failure and limitation in this man's 38 years. How many decades before his drive and determination slipped away like broken Lenten promises? I can see the questioning, the resentment, the depression. After 38 long years, he forgot even how to desire to be healed; he couldn't remember how to be grateful even to the one who reached out to heal him.

Jesus "saw" and "knew" and then healed him anyway. What a merciful God we have.

—Fr. Cyril Pinchak, SJ (2015)

## WEDNESDAY

JOHN 5: 17-30

### **Bringing Life into the World**

The Gospel passage today tells us that Jesus came to do his Father's work. Jesus, then, not only works on behalf of his Father, but also reveals the Father to us in that work. What Jesus tells us about his Father is that our God is the God of life. God's work is always focused on bringing life to the world. Even the dead will be raised to life. Jesus came so that all might have fullness of life. This is the work that Jesus, as the Son, came to accomplish on behalf of the Father.

As disciples, we are also called to carry on this work for the sake of life. We might ask ourselves these questions about this mission of discipleship. How can I better bring fullness of life to the world today? Where in my life can I do a better job of choosing and nurturing life? What good deeds have I done to bring about the resurrection of life?

—Tom Weiler (2018)

## THURSDAY

JOHN 5: 31-47

### **Who Are You, Jesus?**

From the wonderful book *Jesus: A Pilgrimage* by Fr. James Martin, SJ, I learned that in John's Gospel "one is privileged to see the divine side of Jesus." That's certainly the case in today's Gospel as Jesus presents evidence of his divine identity to the religious leaders.

But I can't help imagining how Jesus felt as he faced this persecutory bunch. Was he sad they didn't believe John the Baptist's testimony? Was he disappointed they couldn't understand he was sent by his Father? Did he want to shout in frustration, "What will it take, people?"

Lent is a time to draw closer to Jesus, fully human and fully divine. To choose the life that he offers. To abide in his word. To approach him when we are rejected or dismissed. Two-thirds of the way through Lent, might he be asking me, "What will it take to be still and know who I am?"

—Diane Amento Owens (2019)

## FRIDAY

*JOHN 7: 1-2, 10, 25-30*

### **Returning to Our Roots**

In John's Gospel we witness Jesus traveling through Judea, knowing full well that the Jews were trying to kill him. He goes anyway, perhaps wanting to be with his brothers and not alone, to the annual Feast of Tabernacles. I found myself drawn into the images of this Feast of Ingathering (Sukkot) where they set up booths reminding them of their frailties and dependence on the Lord, just as their Jewish ancestors recalled their roots and God's protective care everywhere.

Jesus also reminds me of the importance of making time and space for the Lord, especially on our Lenten journeys. Do I carve out some quiet time to return to my own roots, to reflect on my own ancestral strengths and wisdom while in the presence of God?

How might I respond to being with my sisters and brothers by taking some risks, being open and vulnerable by my words, all the while calling upon God for recognition of my inner resources and strength?

—Vicki Simon (2018)

## SATURDAY

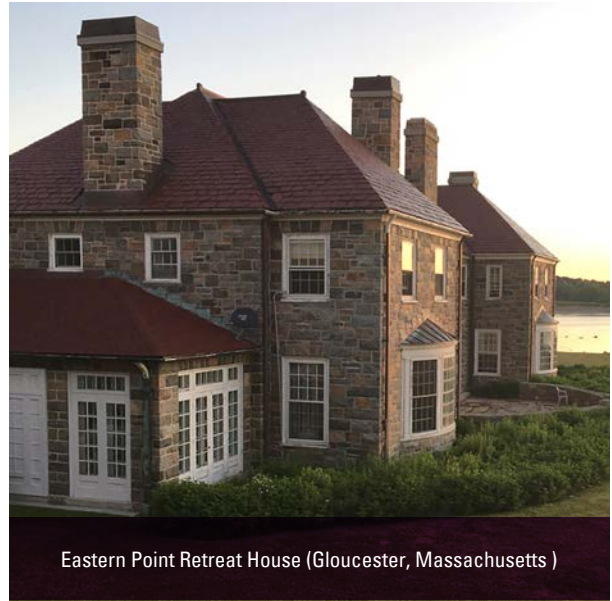
*JOHN 7: 40-53*

### **Listening With Our Hearts**

Though Nicodemus may be only a furtive, potential disciple of Jesus, he seems to have gotten one of the main points of the message, which is to resist the impulse to accuse, or even to define. The anxious discussion of this entire passage centers around figuring out exactly who Jesus is. Does he come from Galilee? From Bethlehem? Is he a prophet? Could he be the Messiah? No one is quite certain of the answers to these questions, but the leaders demand certainty nonetheless. In their minds, to be taken with Jesus is the same as being taken in by Jesus.

When Nicodemus asks his fellows simply to hear Jesus out, he is in effect asking them to remain comfortable with uncertainty. Maybe, he suggests, before we name what Jesus is, we should go and see who Jesus is. Nicodemus anticipates the culture of encounter and dialogue for which Pope Francis has called. And this culture begins in listening.

—Paul Lynch (2021)



Eastern Point Retreat House (Gloucester, Massachusetts )

# Fifth Sunday of Lent



Alumni Chapel (Loyola University Maryland)

*Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more."*

*JOHN 8:11*

## **Walking With Jesus Through His Passion**

*JOHN 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33B-45 (CYCLE A)*

*JOHN 12:20-33 (CYCLE B)*

*JOHN 8:1-11 (CYCLE C)*

Our Lenten journey continues, and our reflection begins to turn toward Jesus' impending death. Most of us would rather not focus on death, preferring, perhaps, to move quickly to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. But we cannot have the resurrection without Good Friday. Saint Ignatius knows this, with the meditations of the Third Week of the Spiritual Exercises inviting us to enter into Jesus' Passion and death.

Likewise, the Gospel readings for this Fifth Sunday of Lent center on death. John 8 presents the account of the woman caught in adultery who, according to Jewish law, was to be stoned for her sins. By reminding the crowd that none of us is without sin, Jesus spares her life with the admonition to sin no more, demonstrating the infinite mercy of God. Three chapters later, in John 11, we read about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. In doing so, he shows "the glory of God," drawing people to him in the process. In the following chapter, Jesus tells his followers that those who lose their lives for his sake will preserve their lives eternally. Each of these Scripture passages reminds us that death is a reality for us all, but it is not the end. Through his death, Jesus won eternal life for us all.

What does it mean for you to walk with Jesus as he foretells of his death on the cross?

# FIFTH WEEK OF LENT



Xavier High School (Micronesia)

## MONDAY

JOHN 8: 1-11

### Mercy Above All

“But mercy is above the sceptered sway... It is enthroned in the heart of kings. It is an attribute of God himself” (*Merchant of Venice* (IV.1.191-193))

The Gospel relates the story of an adulterous woman brought before the Pharisees who are ready to condemn her to death – for such is the law. It is here that Jesus intervenes with his response of empathy and mercy: “Let one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

Surely all of us can see ourselves in the role of the woman who has sinned. Much like the woman in the Gospel, we hope that “mercy seasons justice” when we examine our failings, immorality, mistakes, and sin. Yet, how often do we play the role of the Pharisees? Do we judge and condemn others who don’t live up to our expectations? Do we carry grudges that inform and support our mistaken sense of pride? Do we throw metaphorical stones at those who are different than us?

Jesus understands our actions and bids us to stop – it’s actually that simple.

—Dr. Jane Delaney (2017)

## TUESDAY

JOHN 8: 21-30

### Seek You in the Cross

Jesus, sometimes I stay late in our chapel, and I stare up at you on the cross. At first, I notice your pain, and I can take it only for so long. After a short time, I often look away. But soon enough, my eyes return, and I fix on you. On your open side. On your fingers reaching out. On your face in agony.

You say in the Gospel today that “when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he.” Jesus, can’t you be lifted up in some other way? This way is too much for me. Yet, I’m drawn to you here, and I long to reach out and grab your hand. To be with you not just in joy, but here in pain and struggle. To respond to your open arms with my own.

Can I seek you in your cross?

—Nathan Krawetzke, SJ (2018)

## WEDNESDAY

JOHN 8: 31-42

### Our Identity With God

We are inheritors of identity politics. We are just as divided as the Jews were in Jesus’ time. The Jews all identified as sons of Abraham, but sectioned off from each other because of ideological differences. The Essenes fled to the desert, the Pharisees prayed within their clan, the Sadducees kept busy in the Temple, and the Zealots plotted to blow the whole thing up. They could not identify with each other. Is this not the current landscape of our world?

Then there’s Jesus, who identified himself as a child of God, the Son of God. It’s no wonder scholars struggle identifying Jesus’ Jewish faction. Perhaps it’s because he only identified with God, as God. He knew that identity politics was nothing more than tribalism, colonization, and dominance. It wasn’t going to save anyone.

—Mark Chang (2019)



## THURSDAY

*JOHN 8: 51-59*

### **Maintaining Right Relationship**

Jesus must have been repeatedly frustrated by people who just didn't get it. Today's reading is a good example of this. Jesus, wanting to reassure people that if you keep his word you will not see death, and the subsequent conversation, was met with enough outrage that the Jews intended to stone him.

Jesus is pointing to something beyond himself, to his Father who glorifies him. It's about God and God's kingdom that Jesus is inviting me to, simply by keeping Jesus' word. But what does it mean to keep Jesus' word? I think it has something to do with being in right relationship with self, others, all of creation, and with God. It means working to ensure that everyone has a place at the table, caring for our fragile environment and taking all that has been given to me and using it for God's greater glory.

A tall order! What is one thing, a small thing, I might do today that addresses the need for right relationship in my life?

—Tom Drexler (2024)

## FRIDAY

*JOHN 10: 31-42*

### **Watching Jesus**

With less than a week until the Triduum, our readings today continue to invite us to notice Jesus in the challenging conversations. And Jesus seems to know where to go during difficult times. He went back to the place where he was nourished, with his Father's message of love and support. ("You are my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.")

When I hear the voices of those who want to challenge me and even correct me, am I willing to listen, or do I enter into a defensive posture, defending or retreating? Jesus seems to remind the challengers to watch who he is, and what he does, and allow that to inform them. And then, in walking back to the comforting memories, he is fed again.

I find myself asking a few questions as I watch Jesus here. What have I heard about Jesus? Is it true for me? What have I said about Jesus? Is it true? Would people believe because of what I have said? Why or why not? Many began to believe in him because of what they heard. Do I? May we grow in the truth that Jesus offers in his life.

—Fr. Kevin Schneider, SJ (2017)

## SATURDAY

*JOHN 11: 45-56*

### **In a Place Called "Fruitful"**

Turning towards Christ's Passion in the Spiritual Exercises, we pray for the difficult grace to experience suffering. But as Fr. George Aschenbrenner, SJ, emphasizes, "the focus is not on your suffering but on that of your beloved. ... [Being able] to get out of your own suffering and to enter his teaches a very important lesson: to enter the suffering of other people you must get free of the all-absorbing clutches of your own."

Today Jesus pauses with his disciples in a desert town whose name could be translated by the promise "I will be fruitful" (John 11:54). Imagine him listening to their heart-breaking concerns for his life and theirs. While being honest about his own fears, we also hear Jesus sharing his belief in them, his love for them. We hear him praying with them, in them, and through them for God's strength in the coming days.

Noticing my perennial resistance heading into Holy Week, I'm praying for the grace to be more attentive to the needs of those around me, holding the mystery of suffering in prayer, lending aid as I'm able. Pause with Jesus to share your desires for Holy Week. May they bear great fruit.

—Jenéne Francis (2024)

# Palm Sunday



St. Ignace Statue (Fairfield University)

*“Hosanna to the Son of David;  
blessed is he who comes in the name  
of the Lord; hosanna in the highest.”*

MATTHEW 21:9

### **Gospel Before the Procession:**

MATTHEW 21:1-11 (CYCLE A)

MARK 11: 1-10 (CYCLE B)

LUKE 19: 28-40 (CYCLE C)

### **Passion of Christ:**

MATTHEW 26:14-27:66 (CYCLE A)

MARK 14:1-15:47 (CYCLE B)

LUKE 22:14-23:56 (CYCLE C)

### **Being Present to Suffering**

How quickly the mood changes on Palm Sunday. Suddenly we go from the jubilation of Jesus being greeted with palms as he enters Jerusalem, to the brutality of the suffering servant passage of the first reading (Isaiah 50:4-7). This solemn theme continues with the reading of the Passion.

How am I being called to be present to my own suffering and the suffering of others this Holy Week? As we look upon Jesus hanging on the cross as St. Ignatius suggests in the Third Week of the Spiritual Exercises, can we begin to appreciate Jesus’ tremendous love for us? I believe he would have died for me even if I was the only one needing redemption.

—Fr. Paul Macke, SJ (2022)

# HOLY WEEK

## MONDAY

JOHN 12: 1-11

### Growing in Faith

While this is a passage I've heard and read many times, this time what stands out to me is the change in Martha and Mary from the last time we heard about a dinner they gave for Jesus. Martha is still serving, but she seems to be doing so with a quiet and content spirit. Mary, rather than simply sitting at Jesus' feet, is more active as she anoints his feet with oil. What has happened in the intervening time? For one thing, Jesus raised their brother Lazarus from the dead. That surely would give one a different perspective! I imagine that they have also learned more from Jesus and that their faith has grown and deepened. Both seem more balanced in their approach to Jesus and perhaps to life in general. From our vantage point, we know that they will need to draw on that steadfast faith in the days to come. As Lent draws to a close may we find that our faith has grown and deepened as well.

—Mandy Dillon (2023)

## TUESDAY

JOHN 13: 21-33, 36-38

### Generosity in Dark Moments

Why did Jesus invite Judas to the Last Supper? Our traditional answer to this is to complete his earthly mission—to be handed over so that he might begin his ultimate mission, to die for our sins. We always remember Judas in this lens, as the one who betrayed Jesus. But Jesus and Judas were friends. It is easy to imagine Jesus wanting to share the Eucharist with Judas. It is also easy for us to believe that Jesus, full of mercy and love, hoped that Judas would be so moved by the experience of the Last Supper that he might change his mind. Jesus' generosity towards Judas is a good reminder for us that even in our darkest moments, God's offer of mercy is staring us right in the face.

—Fr. Paul Shelton, SJ (2024)

## WEDNESDAY

MATTHEW 26: 14-25

### We Can Be Both Betrayer and Beloved

"Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me." "Surely not I, Lord?"

Who's the traitor? Not me! How easy it is to point the finger at someone else to "save face." Today and in the days before Easter, we see Jesus' closest friends handing him over, abandoning him in Gethsemane and denying him three times for the earthly rewards of payment or avoidance of persecution. How ironic. His disciples' self-preservation and deliberate avoidance of bearing a cross directly result in the Passion of Jesus, who bears the weight of our cross, who gives completely of himself by dying so that we can be born into eternal life.

We can be both betrayer and beloved. Flawed humans who are in God's likeness. I take comfort in knowing that both despite our humanity and because of our humanity we are, simply by "being", unconditionally loved by a God who offers a wellspring of forgiveness and who gifted us with the hope of eternal salvation.

—Marianne P. Baxendale, Ph.D. (2020)

## HOLY THURSDAY

JOHN 13: 1-15

### Invitation and Care

Such a powerful image: Jesus, as servant to his disciples, washes their feet. Jesus demonstrates so clearly that I am to serve others, not necessarily by washing their feet—though there are plenty of opportunities for practical care—but by listening well and responding openly to others. In my "washing another's feet," may I see the dignity of the person I face and also the tender reality of my own humbled dignity as servant. "As I have done for you, you should do also."

This "Last Supper" was not an unplanned event. Jesus made choices about how this would proceed, from the selection of the venue, to having his closest disciples gathered with him, to the statement of washing their feet. In this setting, with closest disciples, just before his arrest, he transformed the ritual supper into a new participation in redemption. Now we are drawn together as disciples of Jesus the Christ. Here he presents to us his body and blood, uniting us as his body and directing us outwards, remembering who he is and what he has done for us.

—Fr. Jim Stoecker, SJ (2016)

## GOOD FRIDAY

*JOHN 18:1-19:42*

### Standing at the Foot of the Cross

One of the lasting images for me from a visit to Rome in 2016 is a set of statues at Castel Sant'Angelo, a short walk from the Vatican. It is of Mary, Mary Magdalene, Joseph of Arimathea and a few others standing over the body of Jesus that has been taken down from the cross. The expressions on their faces are filled with sorrow and confusion.

We are nearing the end of our Lenten desert experience. We are thirsty and anxious to place our feet on solid ground, but today is not the day to rush ahead. Today is the day to enter into Scripture as St. Ignatius instructs us. He tells us to notice the explicit details: the sights, sounds, and smells. Today is the day to cry with Mary as she and the loved disciple crumble at the feet of Jesus. To hear the crowds mocking Jesus. To see Jesus gasping for his breath on the cross. To be reminded of Paul's message to the Hebrews: in Jesus we have a Savior who has experienced everything that we have, sorrow and pain, blessings and joy. Easter will arrive, yes; but today let us remember that for there to be a resurrection first there must be death.

—Jim Bozik (2021)



## HOLY SATURDAY

### Waiting in Hope

On this day of waiting that sits between the agony of Good Friday and the exultation of Easter Sunday, we enter into the uncertainty felt by the disciples. Gathered together in fear and despair, they did not yet understand what Jesus had done for them, and for each of us. Today we invite you to spend time in prayer and reflection, thanking our Savior for conquering death so that we may share in the promise of eternal life with him.



Newly ordained Jesuit priests (2024)

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In 2012, on the feast of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Midwest Jesuits launched Jesuit Prayer, a daily resource for Ignatian prayer and reflection. By email, via the website, or on the app, we share a reading, a short reflection on the Scripture, and a prayer 365 days a year.

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Fr. John Piderit, SJ, Advancement Associate & Stewardship Assistant  
(212) 774-5556 or [jpiderit@jesuits.org](mailto:jpiderit@jesuits.org)

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