

# Reflecting

## On Sunday's Readings

March—2025

The following series is **free, downloadable small-group materials** based on each week's Mass readings and the seasons of the liturgical year. Each study provides an introductory reflection on some aspect of the readings or on personal spirituality. Each of the readings is provided along with a few questions designed to engage the heart and stimulate the group's discussion. These small-group materials will be provided on a continuing basis in monthly segments.

We would suggest the following 60-to-90 minutes format for the small group:

1. Open with a moment of quiet reflection and prayer.
2. Discuss the introductory reflection with a question or comment like, "What do you feel is important for us to grasp in this introduction?" or "What stood out to you from these opening paragraphs?" As the facilitator of the discussion be ready to share one or two things which were important to you from the introduction.
3. Have someone read the First Reading and ask several people to share their answers to the reflection questions. **Effective group-dynamic techniques should be used to further stimulate the discussion and affirm the participation.** (The booklet *A Facilitator's Guide* is available from Emmaus Journey to provide additional practical training for leading lively and informative small-group discussions.)
4. The Responsorial Psalm provides a reflective transition from the First Reading to the Gospel Reading, so have the Psalm read aloud. You may do this without additional comment, or you may want to draw their attention to something you feel is pertinent.
5. You can either read this week's Second Reading next and ask several people to share their answers to the reflection questions, or cover the Second Reading after you cover the Gospel Reading. The Second Reading does not always have a clear connection to the other Sunday Mass readings, **so do not feel like you need to force a connection.** However, you can provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to draw a connection by asking, "How do you see this passage tying into the theme of the readings?"
6. Move on to the Gospel Reading, repeating the process by asking several people to share their answers to the reflection questions.
7. Approximately equal time for discussion should be given to each of the sections: Introduction, First Reading, Gospel Reading, and the Second Reading. Obviously, if one section is especially stimulating, you should give some additional time to discussing it.
8. Close the discussion with group prayer, using various prayer formats.

We trust that God will use these materials to make His Word more meaningful to you, both within the small group environment and during Mass as you hear the Scripture is read and taught. **We would appreciate knowing if you are using the *Reflecting on Sunday's Readings*, and would welcome your feedback, either through the Emmaus Journey web page form, or by direct e-mail.**

Sincerely,

Richard A. Cleveland  
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# Reflecting

On Sunday's

## Readings

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—March 2, 2025

Introduction: Jim Downing, a friend of mine, who has since died, tells of an Oriental fable of three horsemen who were traveling through the desert at night. *"Unexpectedly they were confronted by a mysterious person. The stranger told them that they would soon cross the dry bed of a stream. 'When you arrive there,' he declared, 'get off your horses and fill your pockets and saddle bags from the river bed. At sunrise examine the stones you have picked up. You will be both glad and sorry.'*

*"As the man predicted, the travelers came to a dry stream bed. In a spirit of adventure they put a few of the many stones they found scattered about, into their pockets. At sunrise the next day they examined the pebbles they had picked up. To their great astonishment they found the stones had been transformed into diamonds, rubies, emeralds and other precious stones. Recalling the statement of the stranger in the desert, they understood what he meant—they were glad for the pebbles they had picked up but sorry they hadn't taken more."*

We too, like the horsemen, are traveling through life, picking up stones and storing them in the pockets of our heart and mind. At the end of life's journey, we too will be sorry or glad when we discover whether the stones we picked up are mere earth or eternally precious. This week's Gospel reading indicates that we can get a glimpse into the future contents of these pockets by looking at the things our heart is producing now. Often it is our reactions that show what is stored there.

Much of life is thoughtful, contemplated action, wherein we determine what our response to life will be. However, occasionally, and for some frequently, we encounter the unexpected and have no time to think and act, but only to spontaneously react. Like a cup, brimming full of liquid, when it is jarred unexpectedly, whatever was put into the cup, will slosh out. So it is with these unplanned reactions. **When life unexpectedly jars us, the language, attitudes, and behaviors that spill out, show us with what we are filled.**

This passage also says that *"everyone when he is fully taught will be like his teacher."* Jesus is the "master teacher," and His life and words are pure gold, showing us who God is, how we are related to Him, and how we should relate to one another. Each of us who follows Him, desires to be like Him, and when life unexpectedly jars us, usually it is a good news, bad news situation. The good news is that five or ten years ago we would have reacted much worse. The bad news is that we still are not responding fully like Jesus would. But we have hope! For the promise of this passage is that when we are "fully" taught, we will be like our teacher. Let's determine once again to purposely dismount from the busyness of our daily travels, to pause at the Master's feet and pick up some precious spiritual stones.

*"It can easily be shown from examples both in the Old Testament and the New that the Spirit changes those in whom he comes to dwell; he so transforms them that they begin to live a completely new kind of life....Saint Paul writes: 'As we behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces, that glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit, transforms us all into his own likeness, from one degree of glory to another.' Does that not show that the Spirit changes those in whom he comes to dwell and alters the whole pattern of their lives? With the Spirit within them it is quite natural for the people who had been absorbed by the things of this world to become entirely other-worldly in outlook, and for cowards to become men of great courage."*—Cyril of Alexandria

### First Reading — Sirach 27:4-7

<sup>4</sup>When a sieve is shaken, the refuse remains; so a man's filth remains in his thoughts. <sup>5</sup>The kiln tests the potter's vessels; so the test of a man is in his reasoning. <sup>6</sup>The fruit discloses the cultivation of a tree; so the expression of a thought discloses the cultivation of a man's mind. <sup>7</sup>Do not praise a man before you hear him reason, for this is the test of men.

1. How do you feel when you read this passage?

2. What is the most helpful thing you have discovered to shape your mind and heart into Jesus' image?

**Responsorial Reading — Psalm 92:2-3, 13-16**

<sup>1</sup> It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to thy name, O Most High; <sup>2</sup> to declare thy steadfast love in the morning, and thy faithfulness by night...

<sup>12</sup> The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. <sup>13</sup> They are planted in the house of the LORD, they flourish in the courts of our God.

<sup>14</sup> They still bring forth fruit in old age, they are ever full of sap and green, <sup>15</sup> to show that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

**Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 15:54-58**

<sup>54</sup> When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." <sup>55</sup> "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" <sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

3. How would you describe the "victory" in light of this week's reflection?

**Gospel Reading — Luke 6:39-45**

<sup>39</sup> He also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?" <sup>40</sup> A disciple is not above his teacher, but every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher. <sup>41</sup> Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? <sup>42</sup> Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

<sup>43</sup> "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; <sup>44</sup> for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. <sup>45</sup> The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil; for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

4. What is the difference between having good judgement and being judgmental?
5. How do we store treasures in our heart?
6. How do we empty our hearts of evil things that have been stored there, either purposefully or inadvertently?
7. Practically, what does "fruit" refer to in this passage?

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# Reflecting

## On Sunday's

### Readings

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT—March 9, 2025

**Introduction:** What image comes to your mind when you think of Lent? — Penance? Fasting? Sacrifice? A time to do something difficult and severe, or perhaps a time to give up or abstain from something dear to us? Though all of these may have their place during the Lenten season, Lent is primarily a time of preparation and growth through anticipation and celebration of Christ's saving sacrifice. Marilyn Gustin points this out so aptly in her book *Living the Liturgy*, "It is a time for our own conscious, deliberate effort to cooperate in our own transformation. If our life in God is to become vital in our experience, we must be involved in ongoing and repeated transformation. It does not have to be forced, but it does have to be real. God's grace will do most of it, but our cooperation is required. During Lent we make our cooperation as conscious and disciplined as we can."

This cooperation can take many forms, from extended time reading the Scriptures and praying, to various forms of fasting to make us conscious of our Christ on whom we should focus. During this time of cooperation, though we may not have a face to face encounter with Satan as Jesus did in this week's Gospel Reading, we will undoubtedly be tempted to abandon our spiritual resolve and make light of our Lenten commitments. During Jesus' forty-day fast he too was tempted. We need to take courage and find strength in Jesus' steadfastness, and learn from his resistance. Jesus did not allow the illusionary promise of immediate gratification dissuade him from his deep-rooted commitment to entrust himself to the Father's will. Jesus confronted each temptation with confidence rooted in sacred Scripture and in knowledge of God. This intimate acquaintance with God's Word strengthened his resolve and provided the answers to combat each alluring temptation.

We have the sacred Scripture readily available to us in numerous translations. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to indwell us so that we could discern the truth and grow in Christ-likeness. He will readily and eagerly respond to our efforts to cooperate with his work of transformation. So whatever else we do during this Lenten season, we need to make sure that our hearts and minds are available to his transforming presence through the Sacraments, prayer, and reading and reflecting on sacred Scripture. As Catholics we can readily take pride in the fact that we have preserved, defended, and venerated sacred Scripture for centuries. On the other hand, we must acknowledge that many of us as Catholics are undeniably ignorant of both the Scripture and the teachings of the Church. Sadly, for some Catholics' commitment to know and study God's written word is often less than that of many non-Catholic Christians. We would do well to reflect on St Chrysostom's perspective: "Here is why the exhortation of the Scripture is given: that the man of God may be rendered complete by it. Without this he cannot grow to maturity. You have the Scriptures, he says, in place of me. If you would learn anything, you may learn it from them."

One other aspect of Lent to consider is that transformation is not intended to be temporary, something that is present for only six weeks. Our disciplines and Lenten practices can be temporary but the changes they endeavor to bring about should be eternal. So perhaps it would be more beneficial to introduce into our lives during Lent, disciplines and practices that we would like to have become a permanent part of our relationship with Christ. This year during Lent, by the power of the Holy Spirit we can be introduced into a new depth of spiritual transformation. Practically, perhaps the place to begin this transformation is by asking the Holy Spirit to transform our commitment to daily read and reflect on sacred Scripture.

#### First Reading — Deut. 26:4-10

<sup>4</sup>Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand, and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God.

<sup>5</sup>"And you shall make response before the LORD your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. <sup>6</sup>And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. <sup>7</sup>Then we cried to the LORD the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; <sup>8</sup>and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; <sup>9</sup>and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. <sup>10</sup>And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which thou, O LORD, hast given me.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God, and worship before the LORD your God; ...

1. What will be in “the basket from your hand,” or the “first of the fruit” as an expression of gratitude and worship this Lenten Season?

**Responsorial Reading — Psalm 91:1-2, 10-15**

<sup>1</sup> He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, <sup>2</sup> will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.”... <sup>10</sup> no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

<sup>11</sup> For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. <sup>12</sup> On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. <sup>13</sup> You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

<sup>14</sup> Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name.

<sup>15</sup> When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will rescue him and honor him.

**Second Reading — Romans 10:8-13**

<sup>8</sup> But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); <sup>9</sup> because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved. <sup>11</sup> The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. <sup>13</sup> For, “every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”

2. What do these Scriptures say about salvation?

**Gospel Reading — Luke 4:1-13**

<sup>1</sup> And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit <sup>2</sup> for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing in those days; and when they were ended, he was hungry.

<sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”

<sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’”

<sup>5</sup> And the devil took him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, <sup>6</sup> and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. <sup>7</sup> If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours.”

<sup>8</sup> And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’”

<sup>9</sup> And he took him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; <sup>10</sup> for it is written, ‘He will give his angels charge of you, to guard you,’ <sup>11</sup> and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

<sup>12</sup> And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’” <sup>13</sup> And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

3. Remembering the first temptation by Satan in the Garden of Eden, what is always at the root of temptation?

4. What part did sacred Scripture play both in the temptation of Jesus and in his overcoming the temptation?

5. When was the next occasion when Satan tempted Jesus? (See Luke 23:33-43) How does it compare to this occasion?

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# Reflecting

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## Readings

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT—March 16, 2025

**Introduction:** The transfiguration, in and of itself, was a momentous event. Especially for these three Jewish disciples, the appearance of their great deliverer Moses and their fiery prophet Elijah was unbelievably significant. Moses and Elijah encapsulate the history of Israel, spanning the time of both the Law and the Prophets. Yet this momentous occasion pales in significance to the occasion that brought them all together; to speak of Jesus' coming departure (death). During Lent we are reliving this impending event, along with the dark days that lead up to Jesus' crucifixion. Hopefully, unlike Peter, James and John, we will not simply be dazzled by the glory of the transfiguration, but will discover the true meaning of the message delivered by it.

What do you imagine Moses and Elijah were thinking and experiencing? Here standing before them was the man, Son of God and Son of Man, who would make possible the genuine deliverance of Israel, the mission upon which Moses staked his life, and the fulfillment of Elijah's prophesy regarding the holiness of God. I wonder if they were recalling God's words, "I have observed the misery of my people. . . . I have heard their cry. . . . I know their sufferings, and I have come to deliver them." At long last Israel would be set free, free from enslavement to sin, and along with Israel all mankind too could be saved. This inclusion of the Gentiles in salvation was always God's plan; that through Israel all nations of the earth should be blessed. How they must have glowed with the joy of knowing that now the promise was coming to completion, now it was about to be fulfilled.

Sometimes we smugly laugh at Peter's feeble attempt to process all that he saw. Prior to the cross, he did not comprehend all that was taking place, but he did recognize that it was a holy occasion. Do we, looking back with all of the wisdom of hindsight, also recognize and appropriately respond to this holy event and the occasion it foresaw? Probably not. Yet we can take courage that even in the midst of their ignorance the cloud of God's presence engulfed Peter, James and John and spoke to them, so he might also overshadow us. We should not expect to be thrilled and excited by some "new" message, but simply expect to evermore hear the Father say, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him." And so we should, especially during Lent.

Saint Jerome reminds us, **"This is my Son; hear him, my son, not Moses or Elijah. They are servants; this is the Son. This is my Son, of my nature, of my substance, abiding in me, and he is all that I am. This is my beloved Son. They, too, indeed are dear to me, but he is my beloved; hear him, therefore. They proclaim and teach him, but you, hear him. He is the Lord and master, they are companions in service. Moses and Elijah speak of Christ; they are your fellow servants. He is the Lord; hear him."**

Peter desired to make three booths, or tents, for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Perhaps the "booth" we should build in honor of this redemptive departure of Jesus should not be a booth of tents but a spiritual space in our head and heart wherein we strain to grasp his every word.

As you enter this second week of Lent how will you create this space of receptivity in your life, a place to contemplate him, and listen to his voice. Wouldn't it have been a tragedy if Jesus had invited a fourth disciple to accompany him to the Mount of Transfiguration and the disciple had been too busy to participate with him? Similarly, wouldn't it be tragic if Jesus is inviting you to participate in another transformational experience and you are too busy?

### First Reading — Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18

<sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." <sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.

<sup>7</sup> And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." <sup>8</sup> But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" <sup>9</sup> He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."

<sup>10</sup> And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. <sup>11</sup> And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

<sup>12</sup> As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him. . . . <sup>17</sup> When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between



these pieces. <sup>18</sup> On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.

1. How would you feel if you were in Abram’s shoes (sandals)?
2. What makes a covenant, a covenant?

### **Responsorial Reading — Psalm 27:1, 7-9, 13-14**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? ... The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

<sup>7</sup> Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! <sup>8</sup> Thou hast said, “Seek ye my face.” My heart says to thee, “Thy face, LORD, do I seek.”

<sup>9</sup> Hide not thy face from me. Turn not thy servant away in anger, thou who hast been my help. Cast me not off, forsake me not, O God of my salvation! ...

<sup>13</sup> I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! <sup>14</sup> Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the LORD!

### **Second Reading — Philippians 3:17—4:1**

<sup>17</sup> Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. <sup>18</sup> For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.

<sup>4:1</sup> Therefore, my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

3. Describe what it means to live as an enemy of the cross of Christ. What would the opposite be?
4. Who do you know that is a Christian example worth imitating? Why?

### **Gospel Reading — Luke 9:28-36**

<sup>28</sup> Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup> And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup> who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, and when they wakened they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup> And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup> As he said this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” <sup>36</sup> And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silence and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

5. What possible meanings does Jesus’ dazzling white raiment convey?
6. What similar messages encouraging us to “listen to Him,” are you aware of in Scripture? How can we enhance our ability to listen to Jesus?
7. What insight could this incident provide regarding the communion of the Saints?

# Reflecting

## On Sunday's Readings

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT—March 23, 2025

**Introduction:** In this week's Gospel Reading through the parable which Jesus tells he puts a premium on fruitfulness. He does this first by stressing the vineyard owner's severe judgment of the fig tree that has continued to bear no figs. The vineyard owner is ready to remove the fig tree because it is totally unproductive. Secondly, he focuses on the importance of being fruitful by underscoring the vinedresser's unusual concern and attention to try and insure the fig tree's future productivity. Both in the vineyard owner's judgment and the vinedresser's care, one message comes through loud and clear; fruitfulness is essential.

This focus on bearing fruit takes on added importance when we recall Jesus' last conversation with his disciples in John's Gospel. In John 15:16 Jesus said, "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last." Earlier in verse 8, he stated that this is the way his Father is glorified, "that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." Clearly, as Jesus was preparing to leave his disciples and begin the ordeal of his crucifixion, he did not merely discuss trivial things with them, but shared his very heart and soul. And at the heart of what he said was his expectations for their fruitfulness.

When the subject of fruitfulness comes up it is not unusual to see opinions vary regarding what is meant by fruit. Some would suggest that fruitfulness is simply Christian character, others that it is Christian deeds, and still others that it is Christian converts. I would suggest that to some degree it is inclusive of all of these because the three types of fruit mentioned are interdependent and interconnected.

However, it is interesting that when we study the nature of fruit, we discover that fruit always contains the seed of new life. So it is with both Christian character and Christian deeds, they are never intended to dwell alone, but are the seeds of new life; converts; "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Our Christian lives and deeds should result in non-believers' desiring to also become believers. If we as a community of believers are not seeing conversions take place through us, we need to be concerned.

How does all of this fit into Lent? Lent should be both a time of pruning and of cultivation. It is the time of year when we pay special attention to Christ and our relationship with him. As we focus on Christ, and add to our lives disciplines that enhance our spiritual consciousness and receptivity to him, it allows the Holy Spirit to begin tilling up the hardness of our hearts. Lenten missions, more frequent attendance at Mass and other celebrations, Lenten discussion group studies, and personal prayer and reflection are all means which the Holy Spirit can use to rework the dry, hard ground of our hearts. As these stony portions are broken up, and turned over, our hearts become more receptive to the nourishing nutrients that bring about growth and fruitfulness; sacred Scripture, Christ's Presence, and prayer to seek God's will.

We are faced with the same decision as the disciples, will we, or will we not go and bear fruit so that the Father is glorified? Pope Paul VI in *On Evangelization in the Modern World* clearly calls us to this realization. "The Church is born of the evangelizing activity of Jesus and the Twelve. She is the normal, desired, most immediate and most visible fruit of this activity..." And he earlier states, "Those who have received the Good News and who have been gathered by it into the community of salvation can and must communicate and spread it." May this Lent be a time of preparation for just such fruitfulness, and may Easter be a time when we invite those who don't know Christ to "Come see!"

### First Reading — Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15

<sup>1</sup> Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. <sup>3</sup> And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." <sup>4</sup> When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." <sup>5</sup> Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." <sup>6</sup> And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD said, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry

because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, <sup>8</sup> and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ... <sup>13</sup> Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

<sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"<sup>15</sup> God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

1. In what ways can Lent become a process of turning aside to see and hear from God?

### **Responsorial Reading — Psalm 103:1-4, 6-8, 11**

<sup>1</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! <sup>2</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, ...

<sup>6</sup> The LORD works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. <sup>7</sup> He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. <sup>8</sup> The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ... <sup>11</sup> For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.

### **Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12**

<sup>1</sup> I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup> and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup> and all ate the same supernatural food <sup>4</sup> and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

<sup>6</sup> Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. <sup>10</sup> ... nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. <sup>11</sup> Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup> Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

2. For what behavior did God express displeasure with Israel? How would you restate in positive terms the lesson this passage teaches?

### **Gospel Reading — Luke 13:1-9**

<sup>1</sup> There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

<sup>6</sup> And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup> And he said to the vinedresser, 'Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?' <sup>8</sup> And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. <sup>9</sup> And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

3. Why do people feel that another's, misfortune is the result of personal sinfulness?
4. What are the conditions that bring a person to repentance?
5. What needs to take place in your life, or the life of your community to enhance fruitfulness?

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# Reflecting

On Sunday's

## Readings

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT—March 30, 2025

**Introduction:** Here it is, the great accusation, the compelling indictment against Jesus— *“This man receives sinners and eats with them.”* This indictment of Jesus by his ungrateful and self-righteous critics, is also the unknowing restatement of the Good News— *“This man receives sinners and eats with them.”* Perhaps this is a sign we should hang around the necks of our Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to remind us that this is what takes place at every Eucharist meal— *“This man [Jesus] receives sinners and eats with them.”*

Luke is often called the Gospel of meals, for in Luke's Gospel he records ten meals in which Jesus participated and two major parables which Jesus positioned around meals. In our own lives, meals play a major role. Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, weddings, graduations, promotions, all are examples of when we gather with our loved ones around a meal or a banquet to remember, to honor, and to rejoice over the high points of our lives. And though it is less so in today's hectic society the daily meal is a place of belonging and nurture where the family can unite. Ultimately, as in each of the Gospels, Jesus becomes the life-saving meal of our redemption.

The parable of the Prodigal Son which we read in this week's Gospel Reading, reflects elements of both celebration and of belonging. The wayward son returns, having rejected both his family and his family's values. In desperation he finally comes to his senses and returns home. Occasions of such repentance are not the time for recriminations but for celebration! One who was *as dead* is alive again. The father of the Prodigal Son who is illustrative of our heavenly Father was watching for his wayward son's return and runs to welcome the Prodigal home. He immediately sets about to have a banquet in his son's honor. Like Jesus— *“This man receives sinners and eats with them.”*

Similar to the religious hypocrites, who challenged Jesus, so the elder son murmured against his father and challenged his merciful behavior. The Prodigal came home in guilty remorse saying, “I am not worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants,” and the elder son's attitude shouted, “That's right, he's not worthy!” implying that he, the elder son, *is* worthy. These are the flies in the ointment of their understanding that Jesus came to destroy. The lie of the Prodigal son's guilty conscience and the deceit of the elder son's self-righteousness both seek to convince us that though we are children of God we are unworthy of his love.

**Unfortunately, neither the Pharisees and scribes, nor the two sons understood that the Father does not receive us based on our worthiness. Rather, having been made worthy through the merits of Christ we can be assured of the Father's mercy and grace because—** *“This man receives sinners and eats with them.”*

During Lent we must stop listening to the voices of condemnation and hear the voice of invitation to “Come, eat and commune with me.” We must repent of viewing the Eucharist as a fast food meal and recognize that Jesus wants to daily feed us with himself through communion with him around his Word. As Jesus told Mary and Martha at another meal in Luke's Gospel, sitting at his feet and feasting on his words is choosing the “better part” and the necessary thing. And so we should, for— *“This man receives sinners and eats with them.”*

“I now realize that there are two things especially necessary to me ... You have therefore given me in my weakness Your sacred Body to be the refreshment of my soul and body, and have set Your Word as a lamp to my feet. Without these two, I cannot rightly live; for the Word of God is the light of my soul, and Your sacrament is the bread of my life.” (Thomas à Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ*) Lent is the ideal time to reject spiritual anorexia. With the Scripture and the Eucharist, the table is set. Now is the time to reject self-imposed spiritual starvation and to avail ourselves of the spiritual nourishment Jesus provides. Accept Jesus' invitation to dine with him, and on him, daily.

### First Reading — Joshua 5:9-12

<sup>9</sup> And the LORD said to Joshua, “This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day.

<sup>10</sup> While the people of Israel were encamped in Gilgal they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at evening in the plains of Jericho. <sup>11</sup> And on the morrow after the passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. <sup>12</sup> And the manna ceased on the morrow, when they ate of the produce of the land; and the people of Israel had manna no more, but ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan

that year.

1. What does this passage teach about celebrating reconciliation?

**Responsorial Reading — Psalm 34:2-7**

<sup>1</sup> I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. <sup>2</sup> My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and be glad. <sup>3</sup> O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together! <sup>4</sup> I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. <sup>5</sup> Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed. <sup>6</sup> This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

**Second Reading — 2 Corinthians 5:17-21**

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2. What are the key components to the message of reconciliation?

**Gospel Reading — Luke 15:1-3, 11-32**

<sup>1</sup> Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable: ...

<sup>11</sup> And he said, “There was a man who had two sons; <sup>12</sup> and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.’ And he divided his living between them.

<sup>13</sup> Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living.

<sup>14</sup> And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want.

<sup>15</sup> So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine.

<sup>16</sup> And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.’” <sup>20</sup> And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; <sup>23</sup> and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; <sup>24</sup> for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to make merry.

<sup>25</sup> “Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. <sup>27</sup> And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.’ <sup>28</sup> But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, <sup>29</sup> but he answered his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!’

<sup>31</sup> And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup> It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

3. Which son best illustrates your journey?
4. How do we, who are Catholic Christians, avoid embracing, and communicating, an attitude similar to that of the elder brother?
5. What does this passage teach us about our Heavenly Father? About reconciliation?

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