Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

March 2026

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 that this passage ties 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, Second Reading and the Gospel 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.
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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 Scripture 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 SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT—March 1, 2026

Introduction: Have you ever stopped to wonder, "What makes the holy, holy?" What is it that makes a person holy? Is it some inner goodness or merit they achieved? Most godly people would be appalled by this suggestion; rather, they are unusually conscious of their own unworthiness. And this sense of unworthiness is often offset by an unusual consciousness of being a recipient of God's mercy and grace.

A story is told of a young girl, who when visiting a great cathedral, saw the figures depicted in the beautiful stained-glass windows. It was explained to her that these were the "saints" of the Church. Later, when asked by someone, "What is a saint?" she answered, "A saint is someone who lets the light shine through."

Isn't that really what makes us holy, the extent to which we allow Jesus, "the Light," to shine through us? We are set apart and made spiritually beautiful, or holy, not because we reflect our own merit but because we reflect his merit. Pope John XXIII, in the biography *The Journey of a Soul,* uses two wonderful expressions to capture this same thought. The first is from St. Augustine: "When you crown our merit, you are crowning your own gifts." The second is his own thought on this concept: "My merit, your mercy." Both men understood that the goodness and essence of their spirituality was simply, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:27)

This week's Gospel reading relates the story of Jesus and his three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. For a few short minutes these disciples visually saw that of which John the Baptist testified, the holiness of Jesus the Lamb of God. John the Baptist said, "among you stands one whom you do not know, even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." This holy light which transfigured Jesus' face and caused it to shine like the sun, was just a glimpse of his glory and holiness. This glory and holiness of Jesus Christ is the source of mercy of which Pope John XXIII spoke.

As we proceed through these days of Lent, and reflect on our spiritual condition and perhaps the disarray of our relationship with Christ, it is easy to see ourselves as unholy. Often when we perceive our spiritual shortcomings we try to compensate and offset our shortcomings by renewed spiritual vigor and devout promises in an attempt to feel better about ourselves. When we respond this way, we are getting the cart before the horse. The place of change and spiritual transformation begins with the recognition that we *are* holy, in spite of our sins, because the holiness of Jesus has been applied to our lives. God sees us as righteous through the righteousness of his Son. Pope John Paul II says in *Mission of the Redeemer,* "… we must first clearly affirm our faith in Christ, the one Savior of humanity, a faith we have received as a gift from on high, *not as a result of any merit of our own*. We say with St. Paul, 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith' (Rom 1:16).'" When we are able by faith to grasp that concept, we respond back to God in love, as St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore, all have died. And he died for all, *that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him* who for their sake died and was raised."

This is how transformation takes place. With this understanding of Christ's love for us, our resolve to live for him with renewed spiritual vigor comes not from a desire to offset our previous sins, but out of gratitude that our sins have been forgiven. That which makes the holy, holy, is simply the presence of Jesus, the "Light of the World," dwelling within us. His merit, his gifts shining through us, transforms our attitudes and behavior.

For the texts corresponding to this Sunday's Readings please either consult with your New American Bible, or the USCCB (United States Council of Catholic Bishops) website.

First Reading — Genesis 12:1-4

1. How would you respond if you were called from your family, friends, and country to follow God?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 33:4-5, 18-20, 22

Second Reading — 2 Timothy 1:8-10

2. In this explanation of our calling, which actions are God's, and which actions are ours?

3. What do you think sometimes causes timidity and embarrassment within us when we have an opportunity to speak to someone about Christ?

Gospel Reading — Matthew 17:1-9

4. How do you think you would have responded in this situation if you were there with the disciples?

5. What are the messages of this transfiguration experience, and what are their meanings?

6. To what extent do you believe that Jesus is calling you to come apart from your busy activities to behold him?

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Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT—March 8, 2026

Introduction: "Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink," was the lament of the Ancient Mariner as he sat idle in the doldrums of the sea. We, like him, live in a world with over a million, million gallons of water per cubic mile. But alas, only 3% is drinkable, fresh water, and 3/4 of that is frozen solid, according to *The World Book Encyclopedia.*

We must have water to live. We can perhaps go a month without food, but probably no more than a week without any water. When our body is really dehydrated, craving water, a little water on our lips and in our throat will cause the craving to go away, briefly. But if our deep inner organs are not refreshed, the craving thirst will quickly return. Like the Ancient Mariner many of us are dehydrated, dying of thirst_not a thirst for H_20, but a spiritual thirst for Living Water.

As in this week's first reading, sometimes our thirst is expressed negatively like the people of Israel when they were in the dessert. We grumble and complain about our situation in life rather than being thankful for all God is doing to sustain us. At other times we often try to satiate our thirst by merely wetting our lips with things spiritual rather than drinking deeply at the Wellspring of Life. Or in the worst-case scenario, like the woman at the well, we try to quench our spiritual thirst by artificial means, drinking of that which never can satisfy our inner thirst. And all the time the Living Water from which we could drink deeply, and satisfyingly is right at our fingertips. As Romano Guardini assures us in *The Lord,* "He is the stream of living water from the eternal source of the Father's love to the thirsting world."

In Isaiah 55:1-3 the Lord extends to us a question, and an invitation: "All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk! Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what fails to satisfy? Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare. Come to me heedfully; listen, that you may have life."

How do we drink of the Living Water? This week's Responsorial Psalm gives us some insight. The Psalmist tell us to "sing to the Lord," to "come into his presence with thanksgiving," to "worship and bow down," and to "hearken to his voice." Each of these actions describe interactive communication wherein we take the time to express our love and appreciation, and take time to stop and listen as he speaks to us in sacred Scripture and in

prayer. At first, we may feel somewhat ill at ease as we participate in something new, but as we develop our ability to think and to listen and to express our love, we will find our soul refreshed with Jesus, the Living Water. Pope John Paul II has reminded us that "Christ is always in our midst and wants to speak to our hearts, we can listen to him by meditating with faith on Sacred Scripture, recollecting ourselves in private and communal prayer, pausing in silence before the tabernacle, from which he speaks to us of his love."

This week we are reaching the midpoint of Lent. Let's respond to our Savior and make a lifetime commitment to drink deeply of him through private and public worship. Let's put a halt to trying to quench our thirst through artificial means and turn to Christ, who is the thirst-quenching Living Water we really need and desire. He is free for the asking.

For the texts corresponding to this Sunday's Readings please either consult with your New American Bible, or the USCCB (United States Council of Catholic Bishops) website.

First Reading — Exodus 17:3-7

1. The Israelites expressed their discontent by complaining. What are the real roots of discontent?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9

Second Reading — Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

2. Contrast the reasons for the positive atmosphere of this passage with the reasons for the negative atmosphere of the First Reading.

3. Which of these reasons are most important to you? Why?

Gospel Reading — John 4:5-42

4. How would you define "spiritual thirst"?

5. What does the Samaritan woman's response tell about her search for truth?

6. Which characteristic of Jesus most appeals to you from this encounter?

7. What can we learn from Jesus' example about sharing the thirst-quenching Living Water with others?

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Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT—March 15, 2026

Introduction: Many of us know people who have become either completely or partially blind due to accident or disease. Few of us know blind people who have received the ability to see for the first time. In both cases, the contrast between darkness and light is startling. Light opens to us a world of possibilities, freedom of movement, and an ability to comprehend our world. Darkness, on the other hand, limits our options, restricts our freedom to move around freely, and obscures our world.

All of us realize that we live in a real, concrete, physical world, but are we equally aware that we concurrently live in a real spiritual world? One reality we can see, hear, and feel; the other is more elusive to our comprehension, however, its effects can be readily recognized. Some of us see well in the earthly realm, even with 20/20 vision, but in the realm of the Spirit we are practically blind. Which is the worst tragedy, to be physically blind, or to be spiritually blind?

Like Samuel in this week's first reading it is easy for us to mistakenly make spiritual judgments based on physical appearances. This is unfortunate, for one's physical appearance, good looks, charismatic personality, and fashionable bearing can often mask a person's less attractive spiritual condition. To primarily view people on outward appearances is a form of spiritual blindness which we should abandon.

The Lord, on the other hand, looks through people's outward shell to view the spiritual quality of their inner life. This kind of spiritual vision and insight must come from the Lord, and from having our mind transformed to think in light of the truths of sacred Scripture and the values found in the Word of God.

Fanny Crosby, the prolific Christian hymn writer, lost her physical sight as a young child. However, it is obvious through her hymns that she was a person who could wonderfully see with the spiritual eyes of her heart. We get a glimpse of her spiritual insight in the following poem:

"Oh, what a happy soul am I! Although I cannot see,

I am resolved that in this world, contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy that other people don't,
To weep and sigh because I'm blind, I cannot and I won't."

Like the blind man in this week's Gospel reading, there is no shame in recognizing our blindness, rather there is wisdom in doing so. For only when we recognize our blindness can we appeal to Jesus for healing and new sight. Jesus stands ready to make the "sightless see." The only question is, are we ready to admit our need, believe that he does and will give us spiritual insight, and ask him for healing?

For the texts corresponding to this Sunday's Readings please either consult with your New American Bible, or the USCCB (United States Council of Catholic Bishops) website.

First Reading — 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13

1. Explain what it means to be blind spiritually and to see spiritually.

2. How can we, like Samuel, avoid the mistake of judging people on their outward appearance?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 23:1-6

Second Reading — Ephesians 5:8-14

3. Contrast the options for living expressed in this passage, that are available for every Christian.

4. Why should someone choose living life in the light over living life in the darkness?

Gospel Reading — John 9:1-41

5. With whom do you most identify in this story?

6. How do you think one feels who is spiritually blind?

7. What are the various ways people can respond when confronted with a work of Christ in another's life?

8. What truths did Jesus reveal about spiritual blindness?

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Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT—March 22, 2026

Introduction: "Don't miss that call!" seems to be the prevailing sentiment of U.S. society these days. Who of us hasn't had a telephone conversation, even a long-distance call, interrupted by someone needing to answer a "call waiting" signal? The assumption being that the incoming call may be more important than the current call. We use all kind of devises for people to get through to us and often walk around with a cell phone in our hand, or a gadget in our ear, so that we don't miss that all important call.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a spiritual cell phone so that God could reach us at any time day or night by simply calling our spiritual cell phone number? I wonder how many of us would walk around with the cell phone turned off, or even worse allow God's call to be interrupted by a seemingly more important "call waiting" signal from our world.

In this week's Gospel reading, we see Martha and Mary being linked by faith to Jesus and his message of resurrection and life. "When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him." Mary heard Jesus' call through Martha, "The Master is here and calls for you." And as soon as she heard that Jesus called for her, "she rose quickly and went to him." In this fifth week of Lent, do we hear Jesus' call or are we disconnected? Are we rising in faith to respond to his call or are we distracted by the many cares of our world? Imagine what would have happened, or should we say what would not have happened, if Martha and Mary had not responded in faith to Jesus. What a glorious experience and message they would have missed.

Jesus chose to punctuate the message of resurrection and life by raising Lazarus bodily from death. This is the third time Jesus raised someone from the dead, demonstrating each time that he holds the keys to life. But it was in this instance, a precursor of his own death and resurrection, that he chose to clearly articulate the promise

of resurrection and life for those who believe. “Thus, the human being linked in faith to Christ possesses a life that will outlive death and that already here on earth reaches into eternity. It is as Christ himself once expressed it: ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, he who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has life everlasting, and does not come to judgement, but has passed from death to life’ (John 5:24) … After Golgotha death was never the same. To believe in Jesus Christ means to share in his deathlessness, as he himself said we should: He who believes shall have life everlasting, even in death.”[1]

We read the story of Lazarus and marvel, one who was dead for four days had risen alive. But there is a more marvelous truth hidden in this week's readings. Ezekiel foretells the promise that God will put his Spirit within us and we will live, really live, not just physically but eternally. The indwelling of us by God does not happen after we die but begins here and now. “For every believer regenerated in Christ, no matter what part of the whole world he may be, breaks with that ancient way of life that derives from original sin, and by rebirth is transformed into a new man [or woman]. Henceforth he is reckoned to be of the stock, not of his earthly father, but of Christ, who became Son of Man precisely that men could become sons of God; for unless in humility he had come down to us, none of us by our merits could ever go up to him.

“Therefore the greatness of the gift which he has bestowed on us demands an appreciation proportioned to its excellence; for blessed St. Paul the Apostle truly teaches: ‘we have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God’ ”[2]

How different must have been the lives of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary after this experience. Not simply because Lazarus lived again after being dead for four days, but because they came to experience a life “that already here on earth reaches into eternity.” Martha’s words to Mary echo in our ears, “The Master is here and calls for you.” Jesus still calls to us, offering this resurrection life to us as well. How will you respond?

[1] From *The Lord,* by Romano Guardini.
[2] From a sermon by Saint Leo the Great, in *The Liturgy of the Hours-I,* page 471.

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First Reading — Ezekiel 37:12-14

1. Which of these promises are most meaningful to you? Why?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 130:1-8

Second Reading — Romans 8:8-11

2. What does it mean to be “in the flesh” and “in the Spirit”?

Gospel Reading — John 11:1-45

3. How have you experienced comfort in the loss of a loved one?

4. How would you answer Jesus’ question in verse 26?

5. What is the stone that needs to be rolled away so that you can experience new life?

7. How can we help roll away the stone for others?

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PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION—March 29, 2026

Introduction: Passion Sunday introduces us to a week of intense reflection on the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God. What difference will it make in our lives two weeks, or two months, from now?

Pope John Paul II begins the encyclical *Mission of the Redeemer,* by reiterating a truth he set forth in his very first encyclical: *"The Church's fundamental function in every age, and particularly in ours, is to direct man's gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity toward the mystery of Christ."* This statement presupposes that we, the Church, have sufficiently gazed upon and contemplated the mystery of Christ, ourselves, so that it has become a compelling force in our lives.

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ope John Paul II goes on to explain why we, and all of humanity, need to direct our gaze to him: "In him, and only in him, are we set free from all alienation and doubt, from slavery to the power of sin and death. Christ is truly 'our peace' (Eph 2:14); 'the love of Christ impels us' (2 Cor 5:14) giving meaning and joy to our life." He further explains, "Indeed, all people are searching for it, albeit at times in a confused way, and have a right to know the value of this gift and to approach it freely." In these two statements the Holy Father explains the benefits we personally will receive by coming to know the Savior more fully.

Hopefully during this Holy Week we will slow down our other activities and concentrate on grasping and understanding all that Jesus went through on our behalf. But what about the remaining fifty-one weeks, or for that matter, the remaining weeks of our lives? Should we not during this week, along with those being newly baptized, renew our baptismal vows to be lifelong disciples of Jesus?

Richard McBrien, in his classic work, *Catholicism,* explains, *"To become a disciple, therefore was to enter into a lifelong relationship with Jesus, . . . discipleship was not only a process of learning, but of shaping one's whole life around the Master without reservation."*

Many people gazed on Jesus' death on the cross, some mocked, some cried, some were duly impressed, and a few dedicated their lives to believe and follow his instructions. Those few who committed their lives to knowing and following Christ, subsequently turned their world upside down with the Good News we celebrate this week.

During this coming week we will be faced with several important choices. The first very simply is; Will we longingly gaze on Jesus' agony and death, and his resurrection for us, or will we only give him a cursory glance? The Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, Eucharistic Adoration, and a host of spiritual readings are all means we can use to longingly and continually reflect on his passion and resurrection. Will we?

Then, if we choose to gaze at length on our Savior's passion, we will have another choice. Will we only briefly respond emotionally to all he has done for us, or will we dedicate our lives to believing and following him? This moving and motivating experience need not only take place once a year during Lent and Easter, but it can be a constant and recurring way of life. Philippians 2:5 the verse preceding this week's second reading encourages us to let Christ's mind be in us, in our mind. The ability to live the year controlled by Christ is dependent on this ongoing reflection of Christ's humility and passion.

Perhaps there may be no better finale to this week than to dedicate ourselves to follow Jesus for a lifetime, and for the remainder of our life, by our actions and words, direct the gaze of others to him. If we do the latter it will make a difference in our lives not just for two days, two weeks, or even two months, but a difference that will last a lifetime.

For the texts corresponding to this Sunday's Readings please either consult with your New American Bible, or the USCCB (United States Council of Catholic Bishops) website.

First Reading — Isaiah 50:4-7

1. What attitudes do you see in this prophecy of Christ that we should embrace?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24

Second Reading — Philippians 2:6-11

2. How did Jesus express humility through his life and death?

3. What do the expressions, "every knee shall bow" and "every tongue confess" really mean?

Gospel Reading — Matthew 26:14-27:66

4. How were you moved through this account of Jesus' last days?

5. What are the three most profound truths of these passages?

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