

I will place my law within them  
and write it upon their hearts;  
I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.

JEREMIAH 31:33

FIFTH  
SUNDAY OF  
LENT

MARCH 21, 2021

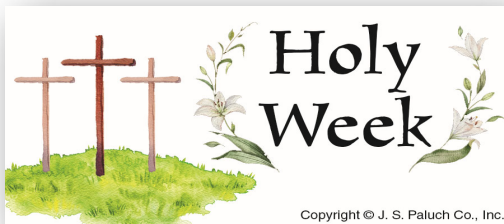
## Feast of Faith

### The First Reading

Each Sunday, we listen to three scripture readings. The first reading usually comes from the Old Testament. “The New Testament lies hidden in the Old; the Old Testament comes fully to light in the New,” we read in the Introduction to the Lectionary. “Christ himself is the center and fullness of the whole of Scripture” (5). On Sundays, these readings usually have a close connection to the Gospel. In this season of Lent, for example, the Exodus account of the thirst of the Israelites in the desert is paired with the Samaritan woman’s encounter with Jesus at the well. Ezekiel’s vision of the Lord raising people from their graves is paired with the narrative of Christ raising Lazarus from the dead.

The readings are taken from many sources—historical books like Judges, Kings, and the Acts of the Apostles, prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel, wisdom literature like Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. But no matter its genre, the first reading always ends with the same acclamation: “The word of the Lord.” The scriptures are written by human authors who wrote in widely different cultural and historical contexts, but these human authors are also divine instruments through whom God speaks to us. And so we say, “Thanks be to God.”

—Corinna Laughlin, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.



## The New Covenant

Today’s first reading is an enormously important passage, not only in the history of the Jewish people, but also for us as disciples of Jesus, who see in it a foreshadowing of the Christian dispensation. The prophet announces that God has chosen to forgive the people, and that as a sign of divine forgiveness a new covenant will be established. Contrasting the new covenant with the one made with Moses on Mount Sinai, Jeremiah says that the new covenant will be written on the people’s hearts rather than on tablets of stone. No longer will the community’s tradition be the sole bearer of the covenant; henceforth, God will speak directly and personally to each individual, forgiving sin and calling for a return to God in faithfulness. No longer will mere outward compliance with the dictates of the Law suffice; henceforth, God asks for an obedience that springs from the depths of one’s heart. Precisely that kind of obedience is highlighted in today’s second reading, where the author of the Letter to the Hebrews describes Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant whose obedience has made him the source of salvation for all who, in turn, obey him.

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## Readings for the Week

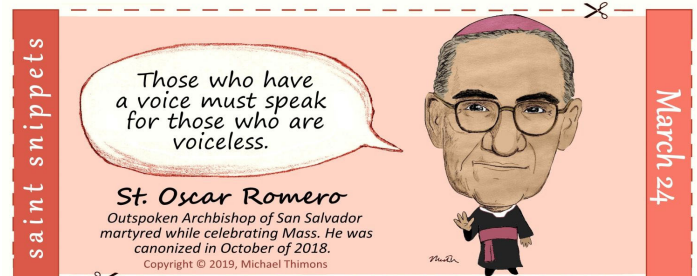
<b>Monday:</b>	Dn 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 [41c-62]; Ps 23:1-6; Jn 8:1-11
<b>Tuesday:</b>	Nm 21:4-9; Ps 102:2-3, 16-21; Jn 8:21-30
<b>Wednesday:</b>	Dn 3:14-20, 91-92, 95; Dn 3:52-56; Jn 8:31-42
<b>Thursday:</b>	Is 7:10-14; 8:10; Ps 40:7-11; Heb 10:4-10; Lk 1:26-38
<b>Friday:</b>	Jer 20:10-13; Ps 18:2-7; Jn 10:31-42
<b>Saturday:</b>	Ez 37:21-28; Jer 31:10, 11-13; Jn 11:45-56
<b>Sunday:</b>	Mk 11:1-10 or Jn 12:12-16 (procession); Is 50:4-7; Ps 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24; Phil 2:6-11; Mk 14:1 — 15:47 [15:1-39]

## Risks

I risk being wrong if I trust too much. But I risk living in torment if I don’t trust enough. —Anonymous

## Saints and Special Observances

<b>Sunday:</b>	Fifth Sunday of Lent; Third Scrutiny
<b>Tuesday:</b>	St. Turibius of Mogrovejo
<b>Thursday:</b>	The Annunciation of the Lord
<b>Friday:</b>	Abstinence



## Today’s Readings

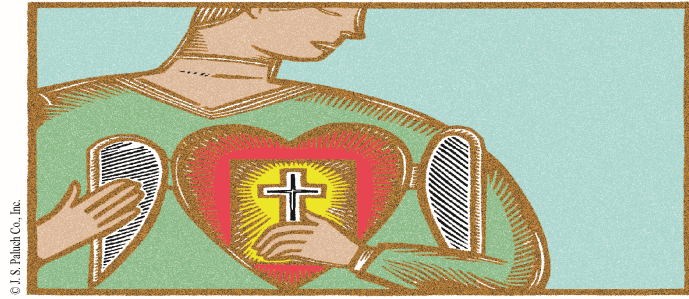
**First Reading** — I will make a new covenant; I will write my law upon their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34) or Ezekiel 37:12-14.

**Psalm** — Create a clean heart in me, O God (Psalm 51) or Psalm 130.

**Second Reading** — Christ learned obedience and became the source of eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:7-9) or Romans 8:8-11.

**Gospel** — If a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it produces much fruit (John 12:20-33) or John 11:1-45 [3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45].

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## Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 21, 2021

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And they shall be my people.

—Jeremiah 31:33

### *Treasures From Our Tradition*

Ask senior parishioners about this fifth Sunday, and they will share memories of this Sunday years ago, when it was known as “Passion Sunday.” In those days, the statues and crucifixes were draped in purple cloth, and a deeply somber atmosphere infused worship. The structure is different today for good reason. The stunning changes in the appearance of the church building drew attention away from the twofold work of Lent: reconciliation and preparing for initiation. Today, this Sunday is given to reflection on the necessity to commit, like Jesus, to the Father’s will. Wherever elect are present today, the “A” reading reveals Jesus’ compassion in the face of human suffering, and his desire to call us from the tombs of sin, isolation, and even death itself.

As Lent draws to a close over the next ten days, and before the beginning of the Easter Triduum on Holy Thursday, we enter an ideal time for celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation. Today’s old title of “Passion Sunday” has migrated to next Sunday, also called “Palm Sunday.” In many places, people prepare their own bundles of branches for next week’s liturgy: pussy willow, forsythia, dogwood. If your parish schedules a procession, you may want to prepare these branches at home and bring them along.

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

### *Father, Forgive Them*

The promise made by the LORD in the first reading is very bold. He says that all people shall know him, without having to be taught by others. He doesn't restrict the promise to only the holiest people: He says that the way people will know Him is through forgiveness of their sins. Remember, he is speaking to the Israelites, who had so many laws and commandments, they needed scribes and Pharisees to keep track of them. When they broke a commandment or law, they were isolated from the community. So the promise that God would place his law in their hearts meant they would be free to do God's will because they want to, not because they were feared punishment or rejection.

Jesus says something similar in today's gospel. He tells the disciples that his crucifixion would draw everyone to him. Now, Jesus' death showed that he took on the punishment for sins in place of us, who deserve it. In Luke's gospel he even prays for those who crucified him, asking God's forgiveness. (Lk 23:34) By dying on the cross, Jesus shows how much God loves us. By rising from the dead, he shows that we can rise from sin to a new life of faith and love. Getting back to the first reading, we experience that promise when we bring our sins to God. When we forgive people who have hurt us, we also help them to experience that love. After all, if I can forgive someone, surely God will forgive them. We also help others to know God when we share or experience of being forgiven. Still not sure if God has forgiven you? The sacrament of Reconciliation gives us the assurance of God's forgiveness, as well as the experience. Along with the other sacraments, it helps us keep God's love in our hearts.

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## THROUGH SUFFERING

The prophet Jeremiah, in today's first reading, is looking beyond the often-messy history of Israel and Judah to a time when the people will no longer be disobedient to God, because God's law will be "written on their hearts"—that is, their natural inclinations and desires will be oriented toward God's will. The psalmist gives voice to the sorrow that Israel and Judah experienced in their separation from God "Have mercy on me, O God . . . A clean heart create for me." According to Saint Paul, the earthly Jesus, "son though he was," like his ethnic ancestors, he "learned obedience from what he suffered." The Gospel reading is part of Jesus' discourses not long before the Last Supper. Instead of a social encounter with Philip's friends who had come to see him, Jesus is grappling with his approaching death and its ultimate meaning for the world.

### JEREMIAH: LOOKING BEYOND EXILE AND SUFFERING

The readings today remind us how close we are to Easter—only two weeks from now. They also remind us that the path to resurrection and Easter always includes suffering and death. The prophet Jeremiah spent his whole life proclaiming the word of God to kings who would not listen. As an old man, he saw Jerusalem defeated and the inhabitants taken into exile. Jeremiah himself suffered in being left behind, but in today's reading, he is looking beyond those sufferings to a time when the previously disobedient people would be transformed and live in harmony with God's law.

### LOOKING FOR JESUS, FINDING THE CROSS

In the Gospel reading, friends of Philip come to him and ask about meeting Jesus. When Philip and Andrew take the request to Jesus, he begins a cryptic discourse on discipleship, transformation, and divine judgment. We never hear whether Philip's friends got to personally meet Jesus. Perhaps they simply blended in with the crowd.

Jesus says, "[W]hen I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." The narrator says that Jesus' words indicate how he will die; the readers already know Jesus will be crucified. Jesus also speaks of divine judgment driving out the world's rulers and of the need to be transformed, like a seed growing into a productive plant. He warns about loving our life and losing it. Unlike Jeremiah's detailed vision, Jesus only hints at what kind of transformed life his death will bring.

What if we, like Philip's friends, want to get close to Jesus? Does that mean that the discourse on death and judgment is addressed to us? If Jesus will draw everyone to himself as he is "lifted up," does being closer to him mean joining him on his cross? (Do we want to be that close to Jesus?) Do we want to be transformed? If we say "yes," the liturgy these next two weeks can show us the only way the Church knows to get closer to Jesus: to be willing to be "lifted up" with him in his suffering—and in our own.

### TODAY'S READINGS

Jeremiah 31:31–34  
Psalm 51:3–4, 12–13, 14–15  
Hebrews 5:7–9  
John 12:20–33

FIFTH  
SUNDAY OF  
MARCH 21, 2021

# Prayer of the Faithful

**Let us offer our prayers and supplications to  
God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**For our Church be so united to Christ's dying  
and rising that our witness will, like the grain  
of wheat, bear fruit for the reign of God,  
let us pray to the Lord.**

**For leaders in our world to hear God's voice  
and glorify God's name in actions of peacemaking,  
reconciliation, and international collaboration,  
let us pray to the Lord.**

**For those who suffer anguish in mind or body,  
that their loud cries and supplications may  
be heard by the One who is able to save them from death,  
let us pray to the Lord.**

**For those preparing for the Easter sacraments,  
especially those in our midst, as they seek to serve  
and follow Jesus,  
let us pray to the Lord.**

**For our church community as we work to  
make Jesus' presence tangible in the world  
around us,  
let us pray to the Lord.**

**For all those who are sick, for all who suffer  
from COVID-19, and for all who have died,  
let us pray to the Lord.**

**For all the prayers that we hold in the silence  
of our hearts; for all our intentions spoken and unspoken,  
let us pray to the Lord.**

**Loving God, you have written your law upon our hearts.  
May that law be so evident to others  
that we draw them to you by all our words and deeds.  
We ask for this and for all these our prayers  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**



But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "I will put my law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Jer 31:33

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# CATHOLIC CORNER

## A CLEAN HEART

We are getting very close to the end of Lent. There are two choices for Gospels today. Whichever Gospel you hear—Jesus saying he would be lifted up on the cross (John 12:20-33) or the story of his friend Lazarus (John 11:1-45)—both psalms remind us that we need forgiveness and we can ask God's help to change our hearts. Today's two psalm responses psalms are:

*Create a clean heart in me, O God. (Psalm 51:12a)*

*With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption. (Psalm 130:7)*

If your parish has catechumens—people who will be baptized at Easter—part of their preparation is the celebration of *scrutiny rites* on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent. A scrutiny is an examination or careful study. The catechumens have the opportunity in these rites to examine their lives and ask the questions, "What am I doing that is good?" and "What things in my life do I need to change?" You might ask yourself the same questions. Use the letters of the word "forgiveness" to think of some actions or thoughts in your life that are good and others that need changing. Some examples are done for you. Mark good actions with a G and those you need to change with a C.

I am <b>F</b> riendly to others (G)
<b>O</b>
<b>R</b>
<b>G</b>
<b>I</b>
<b>V</b>
<b>E</b>
<b>N</b>
<b>E</b>
I will stop <b>S</b> aying mean things (C)
<b>S</b>

*If you sing the psalm at Mass today, listen carefully to the melody of the response. Try to remember it and sing it during the week.*

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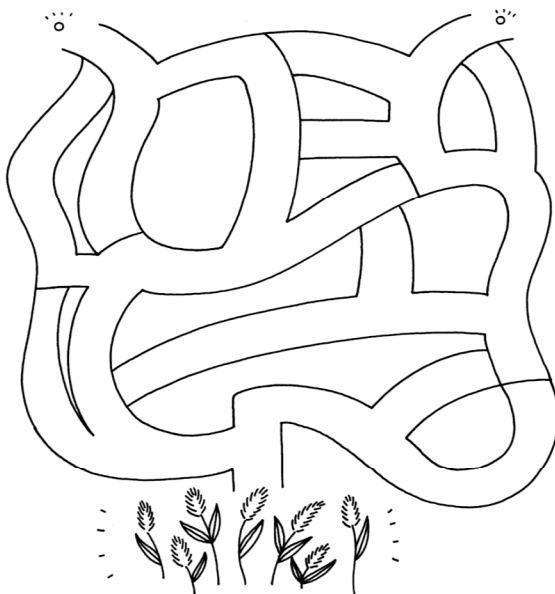
# God's Word for Children

Jesus said that when a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it produces fruit.

In the same way, we need to surrender our lives to Jesus.

Then he can help us do wonderful things for God.

Find out which seed will be planted in the soil and grow to become wheat.



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## Fifth Sunday of Lent

Let's find out what happens when we serve Jesus.  
 Use a different color to trace each of the three sets of arrows that point in the same direction.  
 Read each set in order.  
 Which set tells us something Jesus said about serving him?  
 (You can read John 12:26 in your Bible for help.)  
 Put a star on each of these arrows.

①  
Whoever serves me

③  
and where I am,

①  
Whoever serves me

④  
there also will my servant be.

②  
must follow me,

②  
must follow me,

②  
should sometimes follow me,

③  
and where I am,

①  
whoever serves me

③  
and where I am,

④  
you will not be,

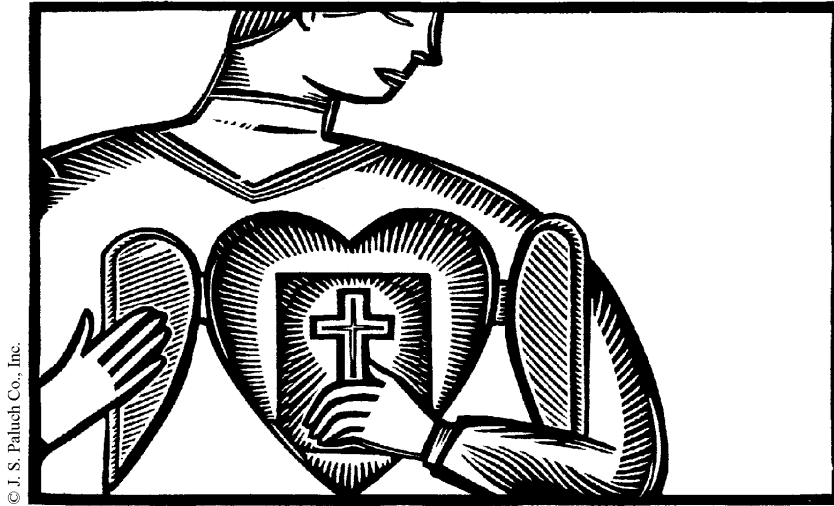
④  
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# Fifth Sunday of Lent

## March 21, 2021

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