

Feast of Faith

Postures of the Mass

In the Mass, we pray not only with our lips, but with our bodies as well. We stand when the ministers enter. In Western culture, standing is a sign of attention, a mark of respect: all stand when the judge enters the courtroom, for example. Standing is also an ancient posture of prayer, mentioned frequently in the Old Testament. When the readings begin, we sit down: a listening posture. Mary sat at Jesus' feet to listen to his teaching; the crowds sat on the hillside or the seashore to hear his words. Kneeling is another posture that is full of meaning. It expresses adoration and worship, but it can also express humility and contrition. We bow: a sign of honor and reverence, acknowledging the presence of God, especially when we receive the Eucharist. And there are other ritual gestures as well—striking the breast, genuflecting, and of course making the sign of the cross. The liturgy invites us to pray with our whole person—with heart and mind, voice and body.

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



Total Allegiance

In previous weeks we have seen how the theme of covenant—as a preparation for the baptismal covenant celebrated at Easter—occupies an important place in our cycle of Lenten readings. The notion of covenant as a relationship between two parties carries with it an expectation of mutual accountability and fidelity to the terms of the covenant. When God forged the covenant with the Jewish people on Mt. Sinai, it was a pledge of God's protection, and it would forever permit them familiar access as the Chosen People. For their part, the Jewish people were to observe the dictates of the law, summarized most succinctly here in the form of the Ten Commandments. To be in a covenantal relationship with the Lord God requires an exclusive relationship, just as discipleship with Jesus—ritualized in baptism—demands a total allegiance to him and none other.

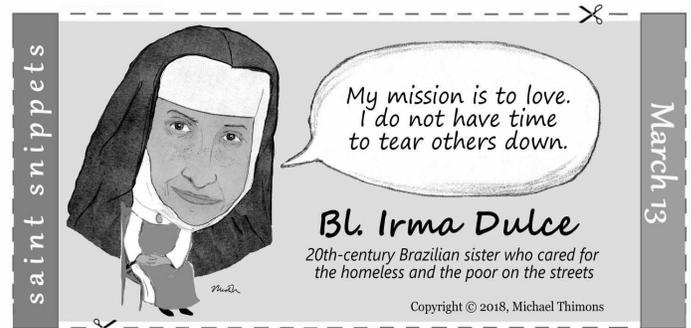
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Readings for the Week

Monday:	2 Kgs 5:1-15b; Ps 42:2, 3; 43:3, 4; Lk 4:24-30
Tuesday:	Dn 3:25, 34-43; Ps 25:4-5ab, 6-7bc, 8-9; Mt. 18:21-35
Wednesday:	Dt 4:1, 5-9; Ps 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-20; Mt 5:17-19
Thursday:	Jer 7:23-28; Ps 95:1-2, 6-9; Lk 11:14-23
Friday:	Hos 14:2-10; Ps 81:6c-11ab, 14, 17; Mk 12:28-34
Saturday:	Hos 6:1-6; Ps 51:3-4, 18-21ab; Lk 18:9-14
Sunday:	2 Chr 36:14-16, 19-23; Ps 137:1-6; Eph 2:4-10; Jn 3:14-21 Alternate readings (Year A): 1 Sm 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a; Ps 23:1-6; Eph 5:8-14; Jn 9:1-41[1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38]

Saints and Special Observances

Sunday:	Third Sunday of Lent; First Scrutiny
Monday:	St. John of God
Tuesday:	St. Frances of Rome
Friday:	Abstinence



Today's Readings

First Reading — The law was given through Moses (Exodus 20:1-17 [1-3, 7-8, 12-17]) or Exodus 17:3-7.

Psalm — Lord, you have the words of everlasting life (Psalm 19) or Psalm 95.

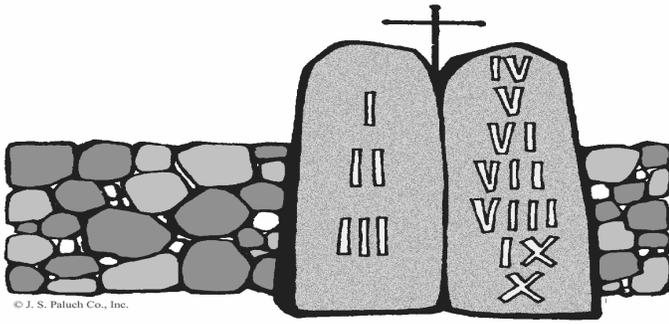
Second Reading — We proclaim Christ crucified; the foolishness of God is greater than human wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:22-25) or Romans 5:1-2, 5-8.

Gospel — Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up (John 2:13-25) or John 4:5-42 [5-15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42].

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**Third Sunday of Lent
March 7, 2021**

**I, the Lord, am your God...
You shall not have other gods besides me.
—Exodus 20:2a, 3**



Treasures From Our Tradition

On this Sunday, our attention is drawn to an enriched diet of scripture readings in the liturgy's three-year cycle. Forty years ago, there was merely one set of readings for Sunday: two readings only, an Epistle, and a Gospel. Each Sunday of the year had two readings, and they never varied from year to year. In the late 1960s, we received an enriched book of readings (a lectionary) keyed to a course of readings over three years, named A, B, and C. The architects of this new plan realized that in Jesus' time, it took three years to read through the Law and the Prophets completely in synagogue worship. With the renewed liturgy, our worship has embraced this same rhythm that Jesus experienced in public prayer. This year we are using the readings from Year B. The readings for Year A, however, are closely attuned to the Church's work of preparing to celebrate baptism at Easter. When the worship assembly includes people in the final stages of preparation, the Year B readings will often be set aside in favor of the readings from Year A, which this week include the story of the woman at the well. She is a fitting companion for those thirsting for living water.

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

As we are now well into Lent, we can take a look at what it means to turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel. A good place to start would be the Ten Commandments. The reading from Exodus presents us with one of the first listings of the Commandments. In this passage, God explains some of the laws to show how serious they are. For the first one, God includes making images to be used for worship. Now you might jump to the conclusion that all the statues and crucifixes in our churches must be destroyed. Not so. In the days of Moses, people of other cultures made images of their gods and declared that the image was the god, and so should be worshipped. The LORD wanted his people to remember that God cannot be limited to an image or idea. That is still true today. Our images and statues are meant to help us pray to God, not to that work of art. In that sense, they are no worse than using a beautiful sunset or mountain scene to help you pray. On the other hand, some people give a superstitious meaning to religious articles. Burying a statue to help sell your house could be one example. If you want to ask for a favor from God, just ask Him. God is much more likely to listen to a sincere prayer than a superstitious action. The reason God gives for the first commandment is that he is a passionate God, who has chosen the Israelites to be his people. When he punishes sin, he allows the effect of our bad choices to hurt us and those around us. But when we repent and change our ways, his love is everlasting. God also emphasizes some commands by duplicating them. He tells us not to steal from others, and also not to plan to steal from our neighbor. The same with adultery: Planning it is just as bad as doing it. Taking his name in vain originally meant perjuring yourself after taking an oath to tell the truth. That is similar to the eighth commandment about false witness. Jesus simplified all these commands when he reminds us to love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. Let's remember that as we turn away from sin to serving God better during Lent.

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Jesus said,
“Destroy this temple
and in three days
I will raise it up.”

JOHN 2:19



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THE LAW

Today’s reading from Exodus tells of God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses; this passage is well known to Christians, but it is only the introduction to the entire Mosaic Law, or Torah. The Psalm is a small section of the longest in the Psalter—172 verses—which are generally couplets (two lines) praising the Law as perfect, true, just, right, and so on. The Law is both the source of Jewish identity and the centerpiece of the Jewish intellectual tradition. Paul briefly compares this tradition with those of the Greeks, the two groups in the church at Corinth that were often quarreling. The passage from John’s Gospel shows Jesus’ righteous anger as he chases the moneychangers from the temple. His actions are a sign of Jesus’ own reverence for “my Father’s house,” which in turn reflects his deep appreciation for the Law.

“THE LAW OF THE LORD IS PERFECT . . .”

For pious Jews in first-century Palestine, the Mosaic Law prescribed the way every action in life is dedicated to God. Today’s reading from Exodus tells how the Ten Commandments, the introduction to this larger legal code, is given to Israel as a gift from God.

In the Gospels Jesus is portrayed as a rabbi, or someone learned in the Law. A rabbi’s learning ideally included both the precepts of the Law and its reverent contemplation as a divine gift, within which one could hear God’s own voice. This was the way rabbis through the centuries used the Law to adapt to changing circumstances. This seems to be what Jesus was doing with the moneychangers in the temple.

JESUS, THE LAW, THE JEWS—AND US

When Jesus accused the moneychangers of sacrilege and cleared them out of the temple, the onlookers asked for a sign of his authority to do such a thing. After all, wasn’t it a sacrilege to purchase animals for sacrifice with pagan coins? Wasn’t this how the Jews adapted to Roman rule? Jesus says nothing about that; he only knows that this commercial activity inside the temple was a sacrilege. Elsewhere in the Gospels Jesus is criticized for not being strict enough with the Law, as when he ate with prostitutes and tax collectors, but here he is prescribing something stricter, something “more.”

Jesus is doing something extraordinary, contrary to ordinary practice, prompting the onlookers to request a sign, evidence that God is acting here through Jesus. His insistence that the moneychangers depart, his clear vision regarding “my Father’s house,” and his cryptic reference to himself as a temple, are signs of his contemplative intimacy with his Father that is the source of his authority about the Law.

Catholics, like first-century Jews, have our regular means for living in God’s presence. We have the liturgy, sacraments, devotions, and personal prayer. During Lent, we are asked to be a little stricter with ourselves, listening for God’s own voice. If we do, we might discover that we, too, are being called to something “more.”

TODAY’S READINGS

Exodus 20:1–17 [1–3, 7–8, 12–17]
Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11
1 Corinthians 1:22–25
John 2:13–25

THIRD
LENT
SUNDAY OF
MARCH 7, 2021

Prayer of the Faithful

**Let us pray on behalf of all those in need,
mindful that God's wisdom is wiser than human
wisdom and God knows our needs well,
even before we utter them.**

**For God's holy Church to serve the world
with zeal and dedication,
let us pray to the Lord.**

**For leaders and throughout the world to heed
God's commands and act with justice and compassion,
let us pray to the Lord.**

**For those victimized by the moneychangers of the world;
for all those abused and mistreated for the sake of the profit of others,
let us pray to the Lord.**

**For those preparing for the Easter sacraments, especially
those in our midst, may they come to believe in Jesus'
name more deeply every day,
let us pray to the Lord.**

**For our community as we use this Lenten season to
purify and cleanse the temple of our hearts,
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.**

**O God, your law is perfect, refreshing our souls.
Hear these our prayers which we bring to you
at your invitation, and graciously grant them
according to your will,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

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