



National Eucharistic Revival Preaching Series Guide

Lent 2024

Welcome to the *Lent 2024 Preaching Series Guide* for the National Eucharistic Revival. The goal of this Guide is to offer a resource for clergy to help them prepare kerygmatic homilies that assist the faithful in not only encountering Jesus in the celebration of the Eucharist, but also fostering a sustained personal relationship with him through his Church.

As the U.S. Bishops have written, “In the Eucharist, with the eyes of faith we see before us Jesus Christ, who, in the Incarnation became flesh (Jn 1:14) and who in the Paschal Mystery gave himself for us (Titus 2:14), accepting even death on a cross (Phil 2:8)” (*The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church*, 19). Breaking open God’s Word in the celebration of the Eucharist through the lens of the kerygma can nourish the faithful, strengthening their ability to recognize Jesus “in the breaking of the bread” (Lk 24) and preparing their hearts for a fruitful encounter with him.

It is in this fruitful Eucharistic encounter that the human heart is changed and the faithful are conformed more fully to the person of Jesus, the one who is Love. Since love, by its nature, is missional (it always goes out of itself to seek the beloved), preparing God’s people to encounter Jesus efficaciously in the Eucharist (through preaching, prayer, and accompaniment) will energize and enliven the Church’s missionary activity.

The intention of this Guide is not to replace the personal discernment and prayer that are part and parcel of homily preparation with “talking points,” nor should anything within be taken as a homily substitute. Rather, let this resource serve as a tool to help focus your homiletic reflection and identify missionary and kerygmatic themes and connections between the readings.



Using This Preaching Series Guide

Each section of this booklet covers one of the Sundays in Lent and contains the following info:

A LIST OF READINGS FOR THAT SUNDAY

GOALS

The key truths in the homily that the faithful should wrestle with and, through God's grace, interiorize as a result of hearing this kerygmatic preaching.

SUMMARY

A brief overview of the kerygmatic themes running through the readings for that Sunday, as well as a callout of overarching missionary and kerygmatic themes connecting the Sunday Lenten readings as a whole. These summaries can help provide an evangelistic context from which to preach.

FOCUS VERSES

A short list of possible verses that make helpful connection points between the readings and the overall themes for that Sunday.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Each week you'll see a number of questions posed for further reflection on the themes, images, and language used in the readings for that week. You can pick one (or more) of those questions and pose it within the homily to the faithful. Or, you could make these reflection questions available to the community through FlockNote, emails, push notifications to mobile phones, on a website, or in the bulletin—depending on what channels of communication to your community you have available.

If you found the National Eucharist Revival Small Group Series helpful in your parish, these questions could easily be used as a way to call these small groups back into action to gather, reflect, and share their answers.

Lenten Readings Year B Thematic Journey

One of the keys to unlocking the Lenten Scriptures in Lectionary Cycle B is the reality of covenants in salvation history.

From the moment of our first parents' disobedience in Genesis, God's plan of salvation moved into action. Humanity had turned away from God, losing the participation in the divine life God had bestowed on them. God's children were now separated from him. Yet in his great love for us, the Father would make a way for us to have a new, greater relationship with him through his Son, Jesus.

The second Person of the Trinity, "though he was in the form of God... emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil 2:6, 7): he "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14). Through his life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, "Jesus atoned for our faults and made satisfaction for our sins" (CCC 615), paying the price for our disobedience and making the divine life—the life of the kingdom—once more available to us through adoption in him. Jesus invites each of us to receive a share in his very own life, lived in communion with the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus makes this divine life freely available to us as a gift. We begin by being baptized, rejecting sin, and turning to God. In this way, we are made new, and we become part of Christ's Mystical Body, the Church. Cooperating with the love, mercy, and grace we receive through the sacraments, we grow more like Christ as his disciples and represent him to the world, manifesting the love and power of the kingdom in the ordinary circumstances of life. Thus, in the Church is the seed and beginning of the kingdom, already present in creation and bearing fruit, yet awaiting the time when Christ will come again and the Kingdom of God will be present in its fullness.



THE COVENANTAL KEY

Jesus, therefore, is the fullness and crux of the Father's plan of salvation. Before the appointed time of the Incarnation, the world was not yet ready for his coming. Throughout salvation history, therefore, we see the Father preparing the world for the coming of the Son. He did this primarily through entering into covenants with them.

A covenant is more than simply a legal agreement or an alliance. It is a deep exchange between God and a human being or between human beings that places all involved into a deep and intimate relationship with one another. That is why we acknowledge marriage as a covenant, for example. The covenants of the Old Testament prefigure and lay a foundation for the one eternal covenant in Jesus Christ.

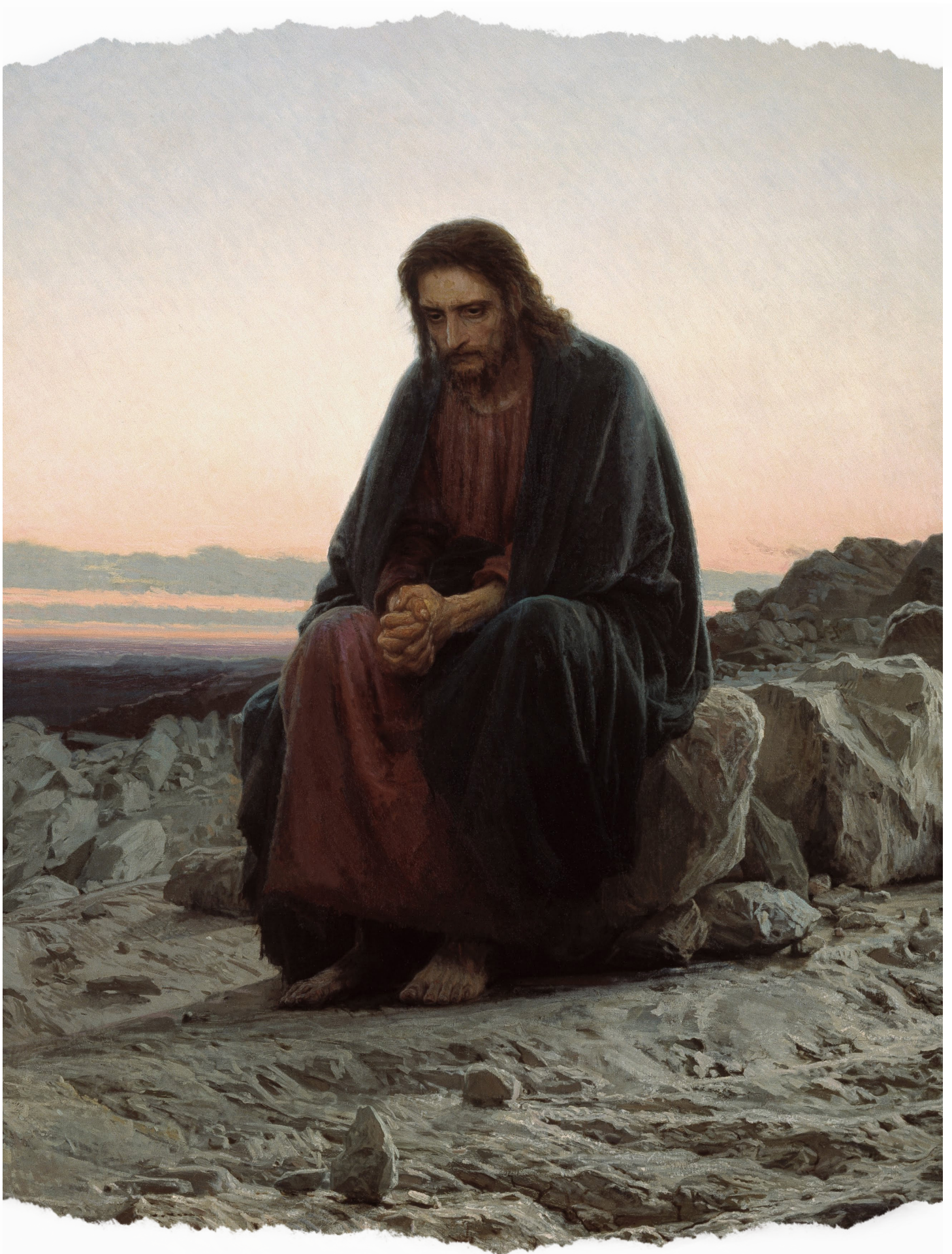
As we examine the Lenten readings for this Liturgical Cycle, we find a powerful juxtaposition of the Old Covenant in the First Readings with the revelation about the identity and Person of Jesus in the Gospels. We are meant to see Jesus in light of the Old Covenant, to recognize that he is the One who will fulfill this covenant and bring it to perfection in the new and eternal Covenant sealed by his living out of the Paschal Mystery.

The readings throughout these weeks of Lent journey ever deeper into the heart of the covenantal relationship between God and his people. In the Gospel readings of this season, we journey with Jesus as he approaches the culmination of his Father's plan, until we see him enter triumphantly into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Jesus' journey in the Scriptures invites us to consider the love and intimacy God offers us through the final covenant sealed in Jesus' Passion and Death. He goes to his Death in Jerusalem not for nameless, faceless people, but for you and me. He is raised from the dead and opens the gates of heaven not for a disconnected and anonymous group of people, but for his dearest ones—for you and for me.

This new and definitive covenant in Jesus fulfills the Father's promises and offers us the possibility of new life. Even after his Resurrection and Ascension, he does not abandon us, but, along with the Holy Spirit, he remains with us in his Mystical Body, the Church—most especially in the Eucharist—accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As the National Eucharistic Revival continues and we prepare for the upcoming Congress, let us recall the covenantal love of God, first recounted in the Old Testament and fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament. Let us open our hearts to Jesus in the Eucharist and say "yes" to the Father's love, so that we may live in the heart of that covenant and grow in intimacy with Jesus and our desire to share him with others.





First Sunday of Lent Year B

MASS READINGS

Genesis 9:8–15

Psalms 25:4–5, 6–7, 8–9.

1 Peter 3:18–22

Mark 1:12–15

GOALS

- To help the faithful see Jesus as the fulfillment of the Father's plan of salvation.
- To introduce the nature and purpose of covenants in salvation history.
- To see God's covenant with Noah as the first major step in reuniting humanity with him and part of the preparation for the world to receive Jesus.
- To understand that God's covenant with Noah wasn't simply about him promising not to destroy the earth but also about revealing a way of life to Noah and his descendants, teaching them a path of righteousness.
- To make the connection that this way of life is the life of grace, which is fully revealed in Jesus Christ.
- To help the faithful understand that Jesus makes his life, the life of grace, available to us particularly through the Eucharist.

SUMMARY

The first chapter of Mark moves us into the action of Jesus' public life and ministry quite quickly. In today's Gospel, we hear that Jesus enters the desert, driven there by the Holy Spirit, where he is tempted by the devil. Luke's Gospel (4:13) gives more details of this encounter. The first thing that Satan says to Jesus is **"If you are** the Son of God, command this stone to become bread" (Lk 4:3).

It might seem strange to start breaking open these readings with a quote from the devil, but if we listen carefully, we can hear in them an echo of Satan's strategy used by the serpent with Eve from the third chapter of

Genesis. Satan's words to Jesus in today's Gospel are meant to strike at the heart of Jesus' identity and relationship with the Father. In the same way, the devil's question to Eve, "Did God really say, 'You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden?'" (Gen 3:1) was meant to attack her trust and relationship with her heavenly Father. That question ultimately led to the Fall of Man and humanity's separation from God.

Not willing to abandon us to death—the consequence of abusing our free will—the Father set a plan of salvation in motion that reached its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who would make satisfaction for our sins through his life and Death, and in his Resurrection and Ascension would make it possible for us to receive his divine life and experience intimacy and union with God in the reality of His Kingdom.

In order to prepare the world for the coming of his Son, Jesus, the Father drew near his people through the use of covenants, which are far more than simply legal agreements but rather are an intimate exchange of persons—similar in depth and scope to marriage, for example. This week's First Reading details the inaugural covenant that God made after the Fall. This one, made with Noah and his descendants, places God and his people into a particular relationship with obligations for all involved in the covenant.

God agrees to not destroy creation with water again and renews his blessing of fruitfulness (Gen 9:3–7). This covenant made with Noah and his descendants isn't primarily about obedience to a set of rules but rather fidelity to a relationship and a path to righteousness.

This way of life and path to righteousness is brought to fulfillment in Jesus, who reveals it as his Father's Kingdom which "is at hand." However, Jesus doesn't simply announce the Kingdom; he is the kingdom "personified." What does it look like to live divine life fruitfully? It looks like Jesus! Which is why Satan tries to trip up Jesus in the Gospel—this way of righteousness is a person, Jesus, who is



The Way!

Jesus makes his life available to us as Catholics in many ways (through Scripture, prayer, fellowship, etc.), but most especially through the Church and her sacraments, and in particular through the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Father looks upon each of us and calls us by our names through his Son Jesus, who waits for us in the Eucharist, where he has made himself so small—coming to us under the appearance of bread and wine—that we can take him, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, into our very being and live fruitfully as sons and daughters.

POSSIBLE VERSES FOR FOCUS

Genesis 9:12 *“God said: This is the sign of the covenant that I am making between me and you and every living creature with you for all ages to come.”* God has placed a visible sign in creation as a pledge of his fidelity to the covenant. He calls on his children to live in accord with the covenant he set forth with Noah.

Psalm 25:10 *“All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth toward those who honor his covenant and decrees.”* Fidelity to living out the covenant brings forgiveness and transformation. This is brought to fulfillment in the eternal covenant Jesus makes with us through his life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension. If we surrender our lives to Jesus, we will truly be conformed to him and live in harmony as sons and daughters of God.

1 Peter 3:20–21 *“While God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water. This prefigured baptism, which saves you now.”* Just as Noah and his family were saved by the Lord as the ark was carried on the waters of the flood, the waters of baptism carry us into new life in Jesus and the Kingdom he announces.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Satan tries to disrupt Jesus’ relationship with the Father through his temptations, yet Jesus’ fidelity confirms both his identity and his messianic mission. Jesus truly is the Son of God. We share Jesus’ life through baptism, and this life of grace is preserved, increased, and renewed through fruitful reception of the Eucharist, fortifying us as sons and daughters of God. What does it mean to you to be a son or daughter of God?
2. Jesus announces the breaking in of his Father’s Kingdom in this week’s Gospel. What are some of the characteristics of God’s Kingdom? Where are you seeing those Kingdom characteristics appearing and growing in your own life? What might be some obstacles that you have to seeing growth in those areas of Kingdom life?



Second Sunday of Lent Year B

MASS READINGS

Genesis 22:1–2, 9a, 10–13, 15–18

Psalms 116:10, 15, 16–17, 18–19

Romans 8:31–34

Mark 9:2–10

GOALS

- To see Isaac as a type of Jesus and the sacrifice of Isaac as a prefigurement for the new and definitive covenant in Christ.
- To see that the Lord renews and strengthens the original promises he made to Abraham (Gen 12:1–3) after he was willing to sacrifice his son, because the patriarch held nothing back from the Lord, making their relationship the bedrock of his life.
- To set the context of Jesus' Transfiguration in light of his Passion.
- To know that we should listen to Jesus not simply because he teaches good doctrine or theology but because he offers us a way of living in him that leads to righteousness.

SUMMARY

The story of the sacrifice of Isaac is one of the most popular and important stories from the Old Testament. The Lord asks Abraham to offer up his son's life as a burnt offering and Abraham withholds nothing from the Lord, even the life of his cherished son. At the last moment, God spares Isaac and says that he will provide the sacrifice. Abraham is able to slaughter a ram trapped in the underbrush for the sacrifice.

It doesn't take much effort for us to make the connection that Isaac, bound to the wood on the altar, is a type, or representational figure, for Jesus, who would himself be bound to the wood of the cross as an offering for the forgiveness of sin. We are to see in Abraham's

willingness to sacrifice Isaac the loving heart of the Father, who offers even the life of his own son for the sake of his people.

Paul emphasizes the compassion of the Father's heart when he writes in the Second Reading from Romans: "He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?" (8:32). Paul exhorts Christians to trust in the Lord's goodness and protection. If the Father loved us enough to send his Son Jesus to the Cross, how much more does he want to fill us with the fullness of mercy, truth, and freedom found in his Kingdom? Just as the Lord provided the sacrifice so that Isaac's life would be spared, the Father offers his own Son, Jesus, to suffer and die so that we might truly live.

It is precisely the sonship of Jesus that we hear highlighted in this week's Gospel account of the Transfiguration, as the Lord declares, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." (Mk 9:7). Occurring as it does later in Jesus' ministry, on the threshold of Christ's Passion, the Father's affirmation of Jesus was confirmation of not only his identity but also his mission. Jesus is the Anointed One, sent into the world to suffer and die so that the life of the Kingdom may be made available to all.

The Father's admonition to "listen to him" reveals that Jesus is not simply teaching good life principles. Remember, both Moses (representing the Law) and Elijah (representing the Prophets) are present on the mountain with Jesus, signifying that he is the fulfillment of God's revelation to his people. Jesus, in his very life and teaching, invites people into a new identity and relationship with the Father that leads to transformation and new life.

What does it mean to listen to Jesus? This week's Scriptures offer us a clear model in Abraham's willingness to hold nothing back from the Lord. His fidelity didn't stop at following the "letter" of God's commands. Abraham made his relationship with God the bedrock of his life,



placing its importance before everything else. Because of this, the Lord renewed and strengthened the promises he had made to Abraham in the initial covenant (Gen 12:1–3). Now these promises are given as a reward for Abraham’s faithfulness (Gen 22:17–18).

When we surrender ourselves to Jesus, making our relationship with him the centerpiece of our lives, we are experiencing the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham. Baptism makes us members of “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,” the Church (1 Pet 2:9): she has been given the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, which will one day be gathered in the Father when death and evil are no more. When we live intentionally as disciples of Jesus, we become a sign of God’s presence in the world.

The greatest expression of this is our participation in the Eucharist, which simultaneously draws us closer to Christ and each other and sends us out to fulfill God’s will in our daily lives.

POSSIBLE VERSES FOR FOCUS

Genesis 22:2 *“Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you.”* Just as Isaac is Abraham’s only beloved child, Jesus is the Father’s beloved Son, whom he sends as a sacrifice for the redemption of all.

Genesis 22:12 *“I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son.”* Abraham’s willingness to follow God’s command to sacrifice his son flows from his deep, intimate relationship with the Lord, characterized by trust and fidelity even in times of darkness and crisis.

Psalms 116:16–17 *“You have loosed my bonds. To you will I offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and I will call upon the name of the LORD.”* In some way, all of us were like Isaac, bound to the altar of sin and death, until the Lord freed us through the offering of his own Son as a sacrifice. It

is Jesus, then, who unbinds us and calls us out of sin and death—and into new life.

Mark 9:9 *“As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”* The Father’s confirmation of Jesus’ identity also confirms his mission, to lay down his life for the redemption of the world.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. There are things in life that we struggle with—temptations, grief, anxiety, broken relationships, sin—that keep us bound up, like Isaac. The Father has made a way for us to live freely in his Son Jesus. What are those things that bind you up? Can you name them and give them over to Jesus so that you might live unbound?
2. Abraham’s devotion to God allowed him to surrender everything to the Lord. How would you describe your own relationship with God? What are those obstacles you have in your life to trusting the Lord? How might you work on overcoming those obstacles?
3. In what ways do you think the Eucharist empowers us to be a sign of God’s presence in the world (our family, our community, our nation, the world, etc.)?



Third Sunday of Lent Year B

MASS READINGS

Exodus 20:1–17

Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11

1 Corinthians 1:22–25

John 2:13–25

GOALS

- To understand that the Ten Commandments were more than simply a set of rules to follow; rather, they emerged out of the Jewish people's covenantal relationship with the Lord.
- To see that following the commandments was a sign of the Israelites' fidelity to God.
- To know that when Jesus turned over the moneychangers' tables in the temple, he was reprioritizing relationship with God over external obedience to rules that had become merely transactional.
- To realize that when Jesus talked about the destruction of the Temple and referred to his Body, he was fulfilling the reality of the Mosaic covenant. Fullness of authentic worship would take place not in the Jewish temple but within (and grounded by) a relationship with Jesus in the midst of his Church.

SUMMARY

In this week's First Reading from Exodus, we hear how the Lord gave the Israelites Ten Commandments. It would be tempting to just hear this reading, which we are quite familiar with, and allow that familiarity to lead us to see the Ten Commandments simply as a checklist of rules.

Yet these commandments emerge out of Israel's fundamental covenantal relationship with God. For the Israelites, a covenant was far more than an alliance or legal agreement. Entering a covenant means formalizing

a deep and intimate relationship which becomes an exchange of persons.

In his covenants with the Jewish people, the Lord binds himself to Israel, and the Israelites bind themselves to the Lord. This is the essential meaning of the word religion, which we get from the Latin word *ligere*, which means "to bind." In this covenant, the Israelites are literally "bound again" to the Lord in relationship. Thus, the first commandment is rooted in relationship with the Lord: "I, the LORD am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me" (Ex 20:2–3).

Following the Ten Commandments, then, is a loving response to the God who led the Israelites out of an experience of slavery into life and freedom. Why is this important for us, who encounter this reading thousands of years after it was written? The Gospel reading helps us answer that question.

All of the covenants which we see in the Old Testament prepare the world for the definitive and eternal covenant in Jesus Christ. The Gospel reading depicts Jesus cleansing the temple. As he turns over the moneychanger's tables, Jesus is reprioritizing relationship with God over exclusively external obedience to rules that has become merely transactional.

The sacrifices required by Mosaic law in the Old Testament were also ways in which Israel signaled their fidelity to their covenantal relationship with God. In Jesus' time, the moneychangers and vendors in the temple were making it more difficult for the Jews to express this fidelity by profiteering and taking advantage of those who did not have access to their own animals.

In addition, we must recognize that, for the Jewish people, the Temple sat at the center of culture, religion, and society. In many ways, it was one of the foundations of their identity as a people. Jesus' cleansing of the Temple



disrupts that essential worship happening within the temple, and he makes a startling declaration. “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews said, ‘This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?’ But he was speaking about the temple of his body” (Jn 2:19–21).

Jesus is signaling that he is going to fulfill the Mosaic Covenant. In his actions in today’s Gospel, Jesus is demonstrating that, in the new and eternal covenant, authentic worship of the Father will not occur in the context of a place but from within his Person, from within an intimate and personal relationship with Jesus in the midst of his Mystical Body, the Church.

And it is in the Holy Eucharist, where we receive Jesus, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, that our union with Jesus grows deeper and more profound.

POSSIBLE VERSES FOR FOCUS

Exodus 20:2–5 *“You shall not have other gods besides me. You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God.”* The Ten Commandments are rooted in relationship; they are an invitation to live a righteous life rooted in the goodness and presence of God.

Psalm Response *“Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.”* This response captures the ultimate meaning of this reading from Psalm 19. The revelation of God, his self-disclosure, the revealing of his identity as well as our identity, and the invitation to take up his life in covenantal relationship lead to everlasting life and union with him.

John 2:19–21 *“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews said, ‘This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?’ But he was speaking about the temple of his body.”* Here Jesus identifies himself as the center of

authentic worship and relationship with God. Fidelity to the Mosaic law and animal sacrifices are no longer the criteria for understanding ourselves in a valid, intimate relationship with God. Jesus is the way to the Father!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. The very first and foundational commandment is one of relationship, removing all of the idols in our lives so that God is central. What are some of the idols that you see in your life that get in the way of making your relationship with God the primary relationship in your life?
2. What do you think Scripture means when it says that Jesus did not need anyone to testify about human nature because he knew it well? Does Jesus’ knowledge of human nature change the way you relate to him?



Fourth Sunday of Lent Year B

MASS READINGS

2 Chronicles 36:14–16, 19–23

Psalm 137:1–2, 3, 4–5, 6

Ephesians 2:4–10

John 3:14–21

GOALS

- To recognize that a covenantal relationship is two-way and that the Jewish people struggled to keep up their end of the covenant.
- To realize that chaos, exile, and ultimately death are the “fruits” of sin.
- To understand that, despite our infidelity, the Father is faithful to his promise of salvation and offers restoration, healing, and hope in Jesus.
- To interiorize the reality that the Eucharist is both the sign of the Father’s faithfulness in Jesus and the source of our new life in him.

SUMMARY

This week’s First Reading from the Second Book of Chronicles details how the people of God sinned against God and what the consequences were for their sin. Scripture says, “the priests, and the people added infidelity to infidelity, practicing all the abominations of the nations and polluting the LORD’s temple which he had consecrated in Jerusalem” (2 Chr 36:14).

Remember that the Jewish people lived under a covenantal relationship with God. These covenants held expectations and obligations for all involved. Since these covenants were fundamentally about relationship with God, fidelity to the way of life spelled out by the covenants was an expression of the people’s fidelity to their relationship with God.

The southern kingdom of Judah—its king, priests, and people—cast aside their fidelity and chose to live outside

the law, taking on the practices of other nations and forsaking the distinctive practices characteristic of their special relationship with the Lord. God, in his goodness, sent messengers—the prophets—to call the people of Judah back to himself.

But the people persisted in their infidelity, so the Lord allowed their enemies to vanquish them. The Babylonians invaded, destroyed the Temple, and scattered the people, forcing many to live in exile in Babylon. We see here the fruit that comes from living a sinful life—chaos, exile, and ultimately death and destruction.

Even after his people persisted in their infidelity, the Lord God made a way for the Southern Kingdom to be restored. After 70 years, when the Persians defeated the Babylonians, the Lord used Cyrus, king of Persia, to restore God’s people to their home and rebuild the Temple. God’s goodness, love, and mercy are ever directed toward his people, even when they turn away from him.

Paul describes this well in his letter to the Ephesians when he writes, “God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ” (Eph 2:4–5). This is echoed and anchored by that most famous passage from John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.”

The Father has called us to a supernatural vocation: eternal life, which was lost when we turned away from God. In giving us his commandments, God revealed to us our sin and prepared the world for the coming of his Son. Yet our wounded human nature made it impossible for us to live out these commandments on our own. Jesus, as true God, institutes a new covenant in his Blood, offering himself on our behalf, meriting for us justification and grace.

Jesus comes into the world to fulfill the Father’s promises that his people would live free and full lives,



united to him. The Eucharist, therefore, is a sign of the Father's faithfulness in Jesus Christ and also the source of our new life in him. The Father's mercy isn't simply for his people thousands of years ago. It is also for you and me, here and now.

Jesus—his life, mercy, goodness, and peace—await us in the Eucharist. How will we respond to the invitation of God to encounter the merciful Jesus in the Eucharist today?

POSSIBLE VERSES FOR FOCUS

2 Chronicles 36:14 *"In those days, all the princes of Judah, the priests, and the people added infidelity to infidelity, practicing all the abominations of the nations and polluting the LORD's temple which he had consecrated in Jerusalem."* The Ten Commandments are rooted in relationship; they are an invitation to live a righteous life rooted in the goodness and presence of God.

Psalms 137:1 *"By the streams of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion."* This Psalm verse expresses the sorrow of the exiles in Babylon, yet as the Psalm progresses, there is a kind of hopefulness in the recollection of Babylon, in the "never forgetting." This captures perfectly the penitential aspect of Lent, which is rooted in our hope that comes from Jesus, whose Paschal Mystery draws us into his Father's Kingdom.

John 3:19–21 *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."* The Father has already looked upon the world through the eyes of mercy. Jesus comes not to condemn but to save. He fulfills the Father's plan of salvation, satisfying the demands of both the Father's justice and his mercy.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think that the infidelities of the people of Judah were particularly offensive to the Lord in the First Reading from 2 Chronicles 36? How did the Lord try to remedy this?
2. In your own life, what ways does God use to try and reconcile you to himself and restore your relationship with him?
3. Paul writes in Ephesians that we are saved through faith, which is a gift from God. What do you think that means? In what way would you say your faith in Jesus comes from God?
4. John writes that "whoever believes in him will not be condemned" (Jn 3:18). What does it mean to believe in Jesus? Do you think you hold that kind of belief in Jesus? Why or why not?
5. How does our reception of Jesus in the Eucharist connect to our belief in him?



Fifth Sunday of Lent Year B

MASS READINGS

Jeremiah 31:31–34

Psalms 51:3–4, 12–13, 14–15

Hebrews 5:7–9

John 12:20–33

GOALS

- To understand that the new and perfect covenant in Jesus, which the Lord had envisioned from all eternity, brought to fulfillment all the covenants that came before.
- To know that this new covenant will have at its center intimate relationship; God and man would no longer be separated.
- To see that the most solemn covenants are sealed with a blood sacrifice. The New Covenant in Jesus is sealed with the Sacrifice of Jesus' suffering and Death.
- To know that Jesus' Death on the Cross is the way that leads to new life; Jesus dies to make satisfaction for the sins of mankind. His Resurrection is the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Covenant.

SUMMARY

As we hear in our First Reading from Jeremiah, the covenantal themes that have been running through our scriptural journey this liturgical cycle are coming together and nearing a climax as we prepare to journey with Jesus into Jerusalem and, ultimately, to the Cross and Resurrection during Holy Week. The Lord God reveals the promise of a new and perfect covenant, prepared for and prefigured by the old covenants.

The New Law given by Christ fulfills, refines, and surpasses the laws of the Old Covenant, bringing them to perfection. Rather than providing new external precepts, the New Law is directed at reforming the human heart.

We know from the covenantal tradition that emerged

out of the Old Testament that every covenant must be sealed, and the most solemn ones were sealed with a blood sacrifice. In fact, the Hebrew word for covenant, *beriyth*, means “to cut.” Covenants aren’t simply “entered into,” they are **cut**.

If Jesus is the fulfillment of the Father’s promises and the covenant by which he will perfect his previous covenants, then what is the sacrifice that seals such a covenant? Namely, the suffering and Death of Christ on the Cross. Jesus makes this abundantly clear in John’s Gospel reading this week, in which the anchoring image is the necessity of wheat falling to the earth to die so that it might multiply into many stalks of wheat.

The implications are clear—Jesus must go to the Cross, die, and be raised again so that we might receive the life of the Kingdom. He is the paschal sacrifice that seals the new and eternal covenant. Jesus’ divine nature and human nature exist together in union. Jesus is the bringer of the covenant, and he is also the icon of its fruit, to become “the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29). Another way to say this is **that what Jesus is by nature (the Son of the Father), he invites us to become through grace (adopted sons and daughters of God)!**

This is why Jesus makes this fundamental call through his Church: “repent and be baptized.” (Acts 2:38). If we surrender our lives to Jesus (repent) and enter into his covenant through Baptism, then the life of his Kingdom takes root in us and conforms us to him. Jesus makes that clear in his image of wheat. Close on the heels of that image is an admonition for his followers to embrace the mystery of dying to self: “Whoever serves me must follow me” (Jn 12:26).

We have an opportunity to enter into that dynamic of surrender, of dying and rising, every time we encounter Jesus in the Eucharist at Mass. Let us prepare for it, so that when we say “Amen” before receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, it becomes an intentional act of holy



submission—the surrender of our hearts, minds, and entire lives to the one who died so that we might live.

POSSIBLE VERSES FOR FOCUS

Jeremiah 31:32 *“It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for they broke my covenant, and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD.”* The Lord reveals that this new covenant will be a different type of covenant, one in which the laws of righteousness—the very life of the Kingdom—will not be merely kept externally, but, as the reading continues, God will place that law deep in the hearts of his people (Jer 31:33).

Psalms 51:12–13 *“A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Cast me not out from your presence, and your Holy Spirit take not from me.”* Christ’s sacrifice is unique, surpassing all other sacrifices. Christ pours out the graces of salvation on the Church, meriting for us forgiveness of our sins, and sends his Holy Spirit to bring about our spiritual transformation into the image of Christ.

John 2:25 *“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.”* Jesus reveals here one of the founding principles of the life of grace: it is in dying to self and embracing surrender that we receive the riches and abundance of divine life within us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think it means that, in the New Covenant, God will write his law in our hearts?
2. Why do you think it was important for Jesus to seal this New Covenant by offering himself as a sacrifice on the Cross? Can you think of any ways that you have sacrificed your life for the sake of others? How are your sacrifices and Jesus’ sacrifice connected?
3. Jesus became the “source of eternal salvation for all

who obey him” (Heb 5:9). How would you explain the word “salvation” to someone? Does salvation have anything to do with our life here on earth?

4. How does our reception of Jesus in the Eucharist connect us to his dying on the Cross? How does it connect us to his Resurrection from the dead?