A vibrant stained glass artwork. On the right, a large figure of Jesus with a beard and long hair, wearing a red robe and a blue sash, points upwards with his right hand. To the left, a vertical column of smaller, circular medallions contains the faces of various saints, each with a halo. The background is a mix of yellow, blue, and red, with dark lines representing the leaded glass panes.

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

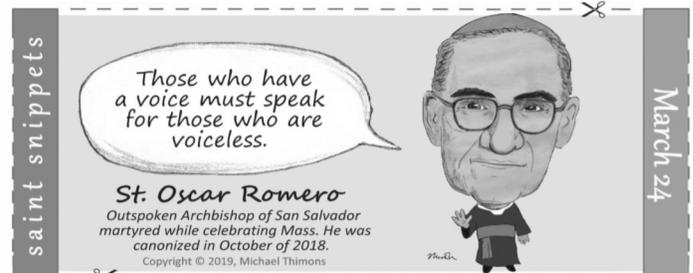
Monday:	Dn 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 [41c-62]; Ps 23:1-6; Jn 8:1-11
Tuesday:	Nm 21:4-9; Ps 102:2-3, 16-21; Jn 8:21-30
Wednesday:	Dn 3:14-20, 91-92, 95; Dn 3:52-56; Jn 8:31-42
Thursday:	Is 7:10-14; 8:10; Ps 40:7-11; Heb 10:4-10; Lk 1:26-38
Friday:	Jer 20:10-13; Ps 18:2-7; Jn 10:31-42
Saturday:	Ez 37:21-28; Jer 31:10, 11-13; Jn 11:45-56
Sunday:	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

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



Today’s Readings

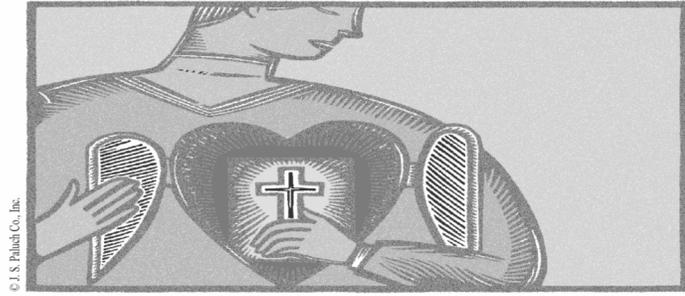
First Reading — I will make a new covenant; I will write my law upon their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34) or Ezekiel 37:12-14.

Psalms — 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

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

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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