

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

LECTIONARY #33

READING I Joshua 5.9a, 10-12

A reading from the book of Joshua.

The Lord said to Joshua,
"Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt."

While the children of Israel were camped in Gilgal they kept the Passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho.

On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, **unleavened cakes and parched grain.**

The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the children of Israel no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 34.1-2, 3-4, 5-6 (R.8a)

R. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

I will bless the Lord at all times;
 his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
 My soul makes its boast in the Lord;
 let the humble hear and be glad.

Look to him, and be radiant;
 so your faces shall never be ashamed.
 The poor one called, and the Lord heard,
 and saved that person from every trouble.

O magnify the Lord with me,
 and let us exalt his name together.
 I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
 and delivered me from all my fears.

Joshua = JOSH-oo-uh

Pause briefly after "Today." Removal of "disgrace" is an announcement of joy.

Gilgal = GIL-gahl

Speak of the Passover with reverence.

Jericho = JAYR-ih-koh

Eating food they've grown is occasion for joy. The cessation of manna signifies the end of an era, but it is not sad news.

With God's help, Israel will now fend for herself; speak with a mix of pride and gratitude.

Canaan = KAY-n*n

For meditation and context:

READING I The people are encamped at Gilgal, their first stop in the Promised Land, and their Passover celebration enlivens their hope for the future. It is the beginning of a new stage in Israel's history. Egypt and the wilderness hardships are things of the past. They crossed the Jordan and performed the rite of circumcision, which signifies the people's intimate commitment to the Lord. The provision of manna has ceased; from now on, they will feed on the fruits of the Promised Land, which the Lord has given. There is no need to fear the enemy; the Lord's words indi-

cate a rupture with the past: "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." The reading highlights three things that are required: obedience to the law, the liturgy, and cultivation of the land for food.

READING II In today's passage from the Second Letter to the Corinthians we learn the extent of God's gift. God has reconciled us through Christ, who gave his own life to save us from sin, but it is up to us to accept that reconciliation and return to the house of the loving Father in our real, everyday lives. We have

received the ministry of reconciliation. Paul's mandate is precise: "entrusting the message of reconciliation to us . . . on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." He urges us to a response that imitates and prolongs God's gift of reconciliation in our own lives. Reconciliation is envisioned, above all, as a re-creation of the believer, a "new creation," resurrected in Christ. Paul's "brothers and sisters," having been reconciled to Christ and to whom the ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted, are sent to the whole world as "ambassadors for Christ."

Corinthians = kohr-IN-thee-uhnz

Use the greeting to win everyone's attention; then announce the joyous good news that follows.

You will need to believe this about yourself to proclaim with conviction.

Take time with this significant declaration of God's benign initiative.

That ministry is now ours!

Only if we believe that our "trespasses" are not held against us can we become true "ambassadors."

Don't ignore the strong word "entreat."

Pause before starting this final sentence. You are sharing a profound truth that, for us, is joyful good news. Stress the words "be" and "no."

Jesus tells the story in the midst of the righteous and the outcast. He addresses the parable to the complainers: is he trying to chasten or to change hearts?

The pacing of the dialogue should be brisk.

GOSPEL For a time, one son is carried away by his foolish inclinations and departs from the paternal home. The loving father exercises patience toward this youth. When the father's patience is rewarded with the foolish son's return, the other, elder son separates himself from the family on a principle of mistaken righteousness. Of the three, the eldest son is unable to enjoy the fruits of the family home; instead, he ponders his

READING II 2 Corinthians 5.17-21

A reading from the second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

Brothers and sisters:

If anyone is in **Christ**, there is a **new creation**: everything **old** has **passed away**; **see, everything** has become **new!**

All this is from **God**, who **reconciled** us to **himself** through **Christ**, and has given us the **ministry** of **reconciliation**; that is, in **Christ**, God was **reconciling** the **world** to **himself**, **not counting** their **trespasses** against them, and entrusting the **message** of **reconciliation** to us.

So **we** are **ambassadors** for **Christ**, since **God** is making his appeal **through** us; **we entreat** you on **behalf** of **Christ**, **be reconciled** to **God**.

For **our sake** God made **Christ** to be **sin** who knew **no sin**, so that in **Christ** we might become the **righteousness** of **God**.

GOSPEL Luke 15.1-3, 11-32

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

All the **tax collectors** and **sinners** were **coming near** to **listen** to **Jesus**.

And the **Pharisees** and the **scribes** were **grumbling** and saying, "**This fellow** welcomes **sinners** and eats with them."

So he told **them** a **parable**:

"There was a **man** who had **two sons**.

The **younger** of them said to his father,

'**Father**, give me the share of the **property**

own virtue, meditating on the kid goat he never requested of his father, to celebrate with his friends. Rather than rejoice that his father's dearest hope has been fulfilled, he clings to his resentment and refuses to enter his brother's welcome home celebration. In that house, we find not only a prodigal brother, but also and above all, a father prodigal in his love, who lavishes mercy and forgiveness on the strayed sheep. This the elder son cannot tolerate. How can he

live in a house where the heart is more important than order and discipline, where mercy surpasses justice, where the sinner receives forgiveness without reproach?

The parable is above all the story of the boundless love of a Father, who offers his repentant child the gift of reunion and unconditional reconciliation. The prodigal son, in his anxiety over conversion, in his longing to return to the family home and to be forgiven, represents those who long for

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Isaiah = Ī-ZAY-uh

Remember, these are not questions but poetic lines that describe how God saved Israel and destroyed Pharaoh's army. Stress the verbs "makes" and "brings."

Your tone should signal that now we hear the voice of the Lord instead of the Prophet. Use a slower, more solemn tone.

These words are meant to rouse hearts and engender hope.

All of nature will respond to God's saving initiative.

The natural response of a person of faith to God's mercy is overflowing praise.

LECTIONARY #36

READING I Isaiah 43.16-21

A reading from the book of the Prophet Isaiah.

Thus says the Lord,
 who makes a way in the sea,
 a path in the mighty waters,
 who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior;
 they lie down, they cannot rise,
 they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
 "Do not remember the former things,
 or consider the things of old.
 I am about to do a new thing;
 now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
 I will make a way in the wilderness
 and rivers in the desert.
 The wild animals will honour me,
 the jackals and the ostriches;
 for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert,
 to give drink to my chosen people,
 the people whom I formed for myself
 so that they might declare my praise."

READING I The first reading encourages the chosen people to look forward to the day of their liberation from exile in Babylon. It evokes the liberation of Egypt, mentioning the tempestuous waters of the sea and the Egyptian cadavers washed ashore. But the story of salvation does not stop with the exodus from Egypt, a glorious event of the past. God's voice sets the present generation on the

road to Jerusalem and the future. The new exodus will be even more marvelous than the previous one; God will again pave a highway, and the wilderness will be transformed into a paradise, where wild animals will honor their creator and the chosen people will drink from abundant streams and praise God. Isaiah shines the light on "something new" on the horizon, as he recalls the past, and projects a present ori-

ented towards the bright future. He encourages the exiled people to trust that God will restore them to their homeland in a more wondrous exodus than before.

READING II The event on the Damascus road (recounted in Acts 9) transformed Paul. Elsewhere he stresses the power of God's grace; here he gives his personal assessment: "I consider every-

For meditation and context:

TO KEEP IN MIND

Poetry is gourmet food, eaten slowly and savoured. Go slowly. Pay attention to the sounds, rhythms, and repetitions.

Philippians = fih-LIP-ee-uhrz

The Letter to the Philippians is often called the "Letter of Joy." Let that colour your tone.

"Everything" refers to his earlier efforts to achieve righteousness through the Law, which has lost power and meaning for him.

Christ is the only prize worth seeking.

Paul can't speak of "resurrection" without also speaking of the necessary path there: "sufferings" and "death."

Paul speaks honestly of the progress he still must make. "Obtained this" refers to the resurrected life that comes only after death.

thing as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." He is referring to the intimacy of biblical knowledge by which one enters into communion with Christ, by knowing "him and the power of his Resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death." Paul desires to be fully identified with Christ, conscious that he will not achieve this by his own efforts but by God's

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 126.1-2a, 2b-3, 4-5, 6 (R.3)

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy.

Then it was said among the nations,
"The Lord has done great things for them."
The Lord has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like the watercourses in the desert of
the Negev.

May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.

READING II Philippians 3.8-14

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians.

Brothers and sisters:

I regard **everything** as loss

because of the **surpassing value** of knowing **Christ Jesus my Lord.**

For **his** sake I have suffered the loss of **all things**,

and I regard them as **rubbish**,

in order that I may gain **Christ** and be found in **him**,

not having a righteousness of my **own** that comes from the **law**,

but one that comes through **faith in Christ**,

the **righteousness from God** based on **faith**.

I want to **know Christ**

and the **power of his resurrection**

and the **sharing of his sufferings** by becoming **like him**

in his **death**,

if **somehow** I may attain the **resurrection from the dead.**

Not that I have **already** obtained this

or have **already reached** the **goal**;

but I **press on** to make it my **own**,

because **Christ Jesus** has made me **his own**.

grace and "righteousness" or "justice." This justice is illustrated in today's Gospel, which tells of grace extended to the adulterous woman, who is a figure of God's people. The new justice to which Paul refers is exercised through the restored relationship that springs from merciful love. Adhering to Christ means giving up self-sufficiency "that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my

own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ." Our knowledge of and sharing with Christ is always imperfect; Christian existence is characterized not by having reached a goal but by "straining forward to what lies ahead" in pursuit of knowing Christ. Paul reminds us that we depend on God to restore us; he knows that righteousness cannot be claimed on

He has not yet reached the "goal," but nothing in his past (nor anything in ours!) will prevent further progress.

The "goal" and "prize" is eternal life with Christ.

As proclaimer, you are a faith-filled storyteller. Tell the story simply and naturally, aware that Jesus has love for *all* the players in this tense drama.

Jesus has probably been praying before this encounter.

Don't rush the details of how the crowds flocked to him.

Emphasize the treatment of the woman, exposed and humiliated before the crowd.

The leaders play their cards close so as all the better to snare Jesus.

This aside reveals your attitude as narrator—protective of Jesus or contemptuous of the leaders.

Slow your delivery as you share this enigmatic behaviour.

Let Jesus speak without anger.

The witnesses to the sin were to be the first to throw a stone.

one's personal merit; it is an ongoing gift from God.

GOSPEL On Mount Sinai God engraved the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets. In today's Gospel, the evangelist tells how the Son of God writes on the Palestinian soil. Both inscriptions are interventions of grace.

Brothers and sisters, I do **not** consider that I have made it my own;
but **this one thing I do:**
forgetting what lies **behind** and **straining forward**
to what lies **ahead**,
I **press on** toward the **goal**
for the **prize** of the heavenly **call** of **God** in **Christ Jesus**.

GOSPEL John 8:1-11

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

Early in the **morning** he came again to the **temple**.

All the people came to him

and he sat down and began to **teach** them.

The **scribes** and the **Pharisees** brought a **woman**

who had been caught in **adultery**;

and making her **stand** before the **people**,

they said to **Jesus**,

"**Teacher**, **this woman** was caught

in the **very act** of committing **adultery**.

In the **law**, **Moses** commanded us to **stone** such women.

Now what do **you** say?"

They said this to **test** Jesus,

so that they might have some **charge** to bring against him.

Jesus **bent down**

and **wrote** with his **finger** on the **ground**.

When the scribes and Pharisees kept on **questioning** him,

Jesus **straightened up** and said to them,

"Let **anyone among you** who is **without sin**

be the **first** to throw a **stone** at her."

And once again Jesus **bent down** and **wrote** on the **ground**. >>

Hoping to trap Jesus, some Pharisees and scribes present a woman caught in adultery to Jesus, insisting, "Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" They were right. The law condemns the woman and her partner to death. Jesus does not argue with them, but raises the argument to another level. On the limestone ground of

Judea, he reinterprets what God wrote on the tablets of the law: "Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger." Jesus traces in the thin topsoil the new law of grace. What did Jesus write? A list of sins? A cast of adulterers present? Or, the new law: "Love your neighbor as yourself" or "Do not judge and you will not be judged" (see Luke 6:37).

"Peace in heaven" is Luke's version of "hosannah."

They are fearful.

Jesus is saying: this is out of my hands.
With energy.

Isaiah = I-ZAY-uh

Despite much suffering, the servant speaks with gratitude.

Be aware of the multivalent meaning of "weary" as you speak the word.

God has been persistent and faithful.

Communicate pride and gratitude for the God-given strength to endure.

Don't gloss over these graphic details. Give them their due. "Pulled out the beard" is a grave insult in that culture. The past tense lessens the intensity of the pain described. Here is the voice of hope in the face of adversity.

Speak with rock-like confidence and strength.

the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully, and with a loud voice,
for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying,
"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!"
Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him,
"Teacher, order your disciples to stop."
Jesus answered, "I tell you,
if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

READING I Isaiah 50.4-7

A reading from the book of the Prophet Isaiah.

The servant of the Lord said:
"The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.
Morning by morning he wakens—
wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.
The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backward.
I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting.
The Lord God helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame."

is different now: it is our very heart, which we clothe with the testimony of our faith. The carpet of cloaks, capes, and branches consists of simplicity, our Baptismal promises, our joy, and our compassion for the afflicted. Throughout the circumstances of our lives, Jesus' entrance into the heart anticipates our entrance into the heavenly Jerusalem. What about us, his faithful followers, believers, and some others who join in the festal procession by chance or

curiosity? For whatever reason, Jesus wants to enter intimately into our lives and take possession of his rightful inheritance. With pleasure and holy fear, let us accompany him to Jerusalem.

On that original Palm Sunday, the liveliness of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was short-lived for many who were present. The supple green boughs soon dried and stiffened. The enthusiastic "Peace in heaven" was transposed to the chaotic cry

of the manipulated rabble: "Crucify him, crucify him!" How different are the fresh, green branches, and the cruel, dry, and rigid crossbeam, the soft flowers and the brittle thorns of his Passion! We spread before him a lush carpet, then strip him naked and cast lots for his tunic. In our interior lives, we are shocked by our own contradictory nature: capable of the best and the worst, one day fearless and the next a coward. We cultivate the virtue that

For meditation and context:

TO KEEP IN MIND

Pauses are never "dead" moments. Something is always happening during a pause. Practise will teach you how often and how long to pause. Too many pauses make a reading choppy; too few cause ideas to run into one another.

Philippians = fil-IP-ee-uhnz

Begin slowly, but with solid energy.

Speak the name of the Lord with reverence.

"But" signals a shift. As important as what he rejected, what Christ humbly embraced is even more important.

Speak with gratitude that Christ became one of us, also of the great pain he endured.

Another significant shift: tempo quickens. You can get louder, or softer but more intense.

Slowly—stress "heaven," "earth," and "under the earth." The hymn is citing Isaiah 45.23.

Your greatest energy goes to the acclamation of Christ, followed by a slightly lower-key delivery of the final line.

leads to life eternal, and we are stuck in the mire that separates us from God. Who does not want to have Jesus Christ as their true King? But not just yet. The triumphal entrance to Jerusalem challenges each one of us to consistency and perseverance, so the good intentions are not just lights that shine momentarily, like fireworks that burst into flame and rapidly burn out. The celebration of the Paschal Mystery that we begin today contains the two aspects: life

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 22.7–8, 16–17, 18–19, 22–23 (R.1)

R. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake
their heads;

"Commit your cause to the Lord; let
him deliver;
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"

For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shrivelled;
I can count all my bones.

They divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.
But you, O Lord, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!

I will tell of your name to my brothers
and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will
praise you:

You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring
of Israel!

READING II Philippians 2.6–11

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians.

**Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.**

**And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.**

**Therefore God highly exalted him
and gave him the name that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

and death, failure and success. The ritual spirals around two axes: the applause that receives the Christ in our city and the weeping that accompanies him to the tomb. To carry a palm frond in the hand is to say to Jesus: "Come, Lord, welcome to our city. Whatever you ask, I will put into practice in life, because I believe that you are the only God, who has come to take me with you, to live with you forever in eternal Jerusalem."

The first two readings also emphasize the tension in this liturgy. The third poem of the Lord's servant (first reading) is the mysterious, prophetic presentation of the Saviour, Christ the King. But he does not achieve salvation by military victory, but by suffering and surrender to adverse forces. The two poles of this poem are his purifying suffering and final liberation. The same antithesis serves as the basis for the second text, the Christological hymn in