The Redemptorists

With Him is plentiful redemption. (Psalm 130:7)
Prayer to Our Mother of Perpetual Help

O Mother of Perpetual Help!
Grant that I may ever invoke thy most powerful name, which is the safeguard of the living and the salvation of the dying.

O purest Mary, O sweetest Mary, let thy name henceforth be ever on my lips.
Delay not, O Blessed Lady, to help me whenever I call on thee, for, in all my temptations, in all my needs, I shall never cease to call on thee, ever repeating thy sacred name, Mary, Mary.

O what consolation, what sweetness, what confidence, what emotion fill my soul when I utter thy sacred name or even only think of thee.

I thank God for having given thee, for my good, so sweet, so powerful, so lovely a name.

But I will not be content with merely uttering thy name: let my love for thee prompt me ever to hail thee, Mother of Perpetual Help.
Who are the Redemptorists?

St. Alphonsus Liguori was born in Naples, Italy, in 1696. He left a promising legal career against the wishes of his family and became a priest. Alphonsus dedicated himself completely to serving the poor and most abandoned, and in 1732 he founded the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer: The Redemptorists.

Alphonsus and his companions preached the Word of God in rural and isolated communities around Naples. By the early 19th century, Redemptorists were serving in central Italy, Poland, Germany, Belgium, and Holland.

In 1832 six Redemptorists traveled to the United States and began missionary work outside of Europe. They served first among Native Americans and then with Irish, German, and Slavic immigrants. In 1850 the Redemptorists’ American Province was established in Baltimore.

Today we Redemptorists continue our ministry to the poor and most abandoned, in inner cities, hospitals, and prisons. We preach parish missions, staff parishes, promote devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help, and participate in many evangelization activities through traditional and new media.

Following in the footsteps of St. Alphonsus Liguori and 18 other confreres who have been canonized or beatified, approximately 5,500 Redemptorists serve in 82 countries throughout the world.

As Redemptorists, we have a special devotion to the crib of Bethlehem; the cross of Calvary; Mary, the Mother of God; and the Eucharist.

Will you help us serve God’s people with a gift today?

Please visit redemptorists.net/lent to give via our secure online page, or mail your gift to the following address. May God bless you!

The Redemptorists
Perpetual Help Center
107 Duke of Gloucester Street
Annapolis, MD 21401
February 14, Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:12-18; Psalm 51; 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

We grumble when our stuff or our skin starts to crumble. We cry when we sit at the funeral of loved ones or stand at the grave looking at the box holding their remains. Seeing that casket forces us to be more aware of the Ash Wednesday formula: “Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).

This day, Ash Wednesday, we can choose to come forward publicly to have ashes rubbed onto our forehead and into our consciousness. It’s a way of telling ourselves: “We only have so much shelf life.” Then we crumble back into the ground from which we came—with the resurrection, with Christ, as the hope that remains.

Tough stuff. On Ash Wednesday, we enter into Lent and are reminded that we live on borrowed time.


Then, with a sense of humor, the Ash Wednesday Gospel has Jesus telling us to go stealth: “Wash your face. Go into your inner room and start your praying there. Then, living on borrowed time, go out and give to the poor.” Give up. Fast. Rise.

Father Andy Costello, C.Ss.R.
Annapolis, Md.

February 15, Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 1; Luke 9:22-25

Yesterday we began our Lenten observance with a day of fasting and the sign of ashes on our forehead. Today we continue with whatever penance or practice we have chosen to mark this time of Lent. Today’s Scripture readings challenge us always to keep in mind
the purpose of the season: to find our true selves and live as God’s beloved people.

In the first reading Moses tells us that to live as God’s beloved people, we must listen to the Lord our God and heed his decrees. In the Gospel Jesus tells us that to find our true selves, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow him.

I cannot turn away from my own selfish interests unless I turn to Jesus in prayer and penance and open my heart to others in charity. Carrying my cross is not just accepting life’s difficulties—it’s seeking to do God’s will in whatever situation I find myself.

O Lord, help me to seek you with all my heart, all my mind, and all my strength, not just in particular practices but in everything I do.

Father Karl Esker, C.Ss.R.
Newark, N.J.

February 16, Friday after Ash Wednesday
Isaiah 58:1-9; Psalm 51; Matthew 9:14-15

In today’s first reading the Prophet Isaiah tells us the kind of fasting the Lord desires:

Releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own (Isaiah 58:6-7).

There are three key practices to truly being a disciple of Jesus: fasting, prayer, and good works. Most people try fasting—giving up something for Lent, often candy, alcohol, desserts, and so forth. This is a good discipline to follow and one that is not easy.

Many of us pray more during the Lenten season. We might go to daily Mass, say an extra rosary, or read a spiritual book. Again, this is a wonderful way to deepen our relationship with God.

Still, I think the third pillar of Lent, good works, may be the most
difficult. Good works could include helping at a soup kitchen, donating to the poor, assisting a needy neighbor, forgiving someone who has hurt us, and resisting the temptation to gossip about someone. As we begin our journey of Lent, may all three invitations from the prophet move us to deepen our love for Jesus and one another.

Father Patrick Woods, C.Ss.R.
Bethpage, N.Y.

February 17, Saturday after Ash Wednesday
Isaiah 58:9–14; Psalm 86; Luke 5:27–32

Through the Prophet Isaiah, the Church specifies what is to be accomplished through our Lenten observance: a new way of being and living in the world, a way of being and living that carries with it a permanent blessing. So we are encouraged to be fully engaged in the project the Lord sets before us these 40 days.

But there is always the danger of formalism: “giving up” something or undertaking some pious exercise primarily as an exterior action that makes us feel better about ourselves. But if this is our motivation, we sabotage what should be the goal: conversion of heart. Unless Lent touches the depths of the “I,” challenging me to examine closely where I derive my energy for living, all the personal sacrifices and prayers I offer will be to no avail.

The call of Matthew in today’s Gospel is a perfect vignette for understanding Lent: changing our focus from the activities and concerns of this world to be with the Lord and hear his voice. Wherever we may be at the moment, spiritually and emotionally, he desires more than we to enter into communion with us and permanently change our gaze—our way of looking at all things. This is the conversion of heart that saves and is the “reason for the season.”

Father Joseph Dionne, C.Ss.R.
Newton Grove, N.C.
February 18, first Sunday

*Genesis 9:8–15; Psalm 25; 1 Peter 3:18–22; Mark 1:12–15*

Lent is an old English word for springtime. Just as we expect spring to bring warm weather and gentle rains to produce vegetables and flowers, the Church wants us to open up to the warmth and rain of God’s grace.

We don’t do Lent alone. God is the sower. Our heart is the field, the garden, in which he wants to sow seeds. In the Gospel today the devil tells Jesus he should show his divinity by making a big splash, by turning stones into bread or jumping off the pinnacle of the Temple. Jesus didn’t think his divinity was something to be clung to, so he resisted the temptation.

The Lord doesn’t want a big splash from us this Lent. Sacrifice and oblation he desires not: what he wants is a heart open to his grace.

So if we have the weeds of sin, such as selfishness and resentment, in our heart, he wants to give us his grace to pull them out. But he doesn’t force grace on us. We must ask in order to receive. We must develop the habit of prayer each day.

Can we not give God a few minutes each day to rain on us, to warm and soften the garden of our heart, so we can produce good fruit?

*Father Paul Bryan, C.Ss.R.
Ephrata, Pa.*

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February 19, Monday of the first week

*Leviticus 19:1–2, 11–18; Psalm 19; Matthew 25:31–46*

The Church gives us the magnificent scene from today’s Gospel early in Lent to guide us through these 40 days.

This parable is unique to Matthew, the only one Jesus ever gave on judgment. But read it closely. The word *judgment* never appears. Jesus as the Son of Man simply reminds his listeners what they did or didn’t do in their lifetime and separates them accordingly.
Another thing to notice is the great turnaround. We will find God in the least of the brothers and sisters, the hungry and the thirsty, the stranger and the imprisoned.

Jesus is repeating what he told us in the Beatitudes, another time when he turned everything upside down: “Blessed are you who are poor” (Matthew 5:3), etc. In the Old Testament, poverty was seen as a curse from God.

The Beatitudes and today’s scene of the End Times form bookends to the public ministry of Jesus. He begins his great sermon with the Beatitudes and ends his public ministry with the parable of the assembly of the nations.

Read Matthew 25 throughout Lent as a reminder of what’s truly important.

_Father John Murray, C.Ss.R._
_Brooklyn, N.Y._

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**February 20, Tuesday of the first week**

_Isaiah 55:10-11; Psalm 34; Matthew 6:7-15_

I have a difficult time forgiving anyone who wrongs me. I mull over the offense for a long time, contemplating just how I can even the score. Not very Christian, I know.

Once one of my relatives came to stay with us. And I noticed that during the family rosary every evening he would omit saying the words “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

One day I got up the courage to ask him about it. He said someone had really hurt him, and he wasn’t about to forgive that person. So he figured he’d better not say those words because he’d be calling the Lord’s condemnation upon himself.

Let it be known, however, that before he died, he did finally forgive the person who had wronged him, and I’m sure Our Lord accordingly forgave him as well.
My lesson for today: Let’s ask Our Lord to give us the insight to forgive even when we have no motive or incentive to do so. Only then can we hope to receive the forgiveness to enter heaven.

Father John Harrison, C.Ss.R.
Timonium, Md.

February 21, Wednesday of the first week

Jonah 3:1-10; Psalm 51; Luke 11:29-32

Lent is a time to accept Christ’s invitation to mend our ways, to change our ways, to live more generously than before.

When Hurricane Harvey hit Houston, lots of people changed their ways. They became more generous, going to Texas to help those who had lost everything.

In today’s first reading Jonah is told by God to preach to the people of Nineveh so they would change their ways and become loving and generous people. In the Gospel for today the people wanted a sign from Jesus. He gave them the sign of Jonah, who spent three days in the belly of the whale and then was saved.

Last August the people of Texas suffered death, loss, pain, and grief. Then, just like Jesus on Easter Sunday, they were rescued, helped, and raised up from their pain and loss. The people of South Texas experienced new life, new hope.

The word of God invites you and me to change, to become more generous, more loving, more giving. We give thanks for all whom Hurricane Harvey made more generous and loving.

We thank God for those who will change and become more loving today and tomorrow.

Father Thomas “Martín” Deely, C.Ss.R.
Esopus, N.Y.
February 22, Chair of St. Peter

1 Peter 5:1-4; Psalm 23; Matthew 16:13-19

Most of us have had a favorite chair through the years. Looking back on my growing-up years in Brooklyn, I remember that “Mom liked to sit here” and “Dad liked to sit there.” That was their chair.

Today the church celebrates the Chair of St. Peter, a sign of unity, love, and service. This chair does not signify royalty, prestige, preference, or power. Quite the contrary! It signifies service.

The words of St. Peter in today’s first reading call us to be caring and loving, attentive to the needs of all. He could write that because he had learned it from his Savior.

And in today’s Gospel Jesus taught his disciples that if they took the lowest chair at table, they would hear, “My friend, come higher.” Jesus called Peter to a higher chair, the chair of service in the kingdom of God and to all the apostles.

Jesus makes the same call to you and me—the call to service. It’s our great hope and prayer that the Lord Jesus is preparing a chair for you and me in his heavenly kingdom. By our random acts of kindness and charity, of gentleness and thoughtfulness here on earth, may we find that chair a perfect fit in the kingdom of Heaven.

Father Denis Sweeney, C.Ss.R.
Bethpage, N.Y.

February 23, Friday of the first week

Ezekiel 18:21-28; Psalm 130; Matthew 5:20-26

What was the “righteousness of the Pharisees” our Lord was complaining about in today’s Gospel? Simply put, the Pharisees liked looking good rather than being good. They were interested in fine clothes, places of honor, and grandiose titles.

Sound familiar? The Pharisees are not dead. They live on—sometimes in people like you and me.
Why is Facebook so popular? Perhaps because it helps people preen and show off with photos, clever quotes, and inflated narratives. Who will know?

But Lent is a time for seeing ourselves as Jesus sees us. His standards go to the heart—our hearts. He sees not just actions but motives. He wants us to honor our neighbor in word and deed, to be concerned about the needs and struggles of others, no matter who’s looking. He wants us to live for God and his kingdom alone.

That’s why the sacrament of confession is so important during the Lenten season. It helps us face Jesus in humility and truth.

“Make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit” (Ezekiel 18:31).

Father E. Patrick Lynch, C.Ss.R.
Christiansted, St. Croix, Virgin Islands

February 24, Saturday of the first week
Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Psalm 119; Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus tells us in the Gospel today, “Love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44). That’s really hard to do—especially when sentiments of revenge, hurt, and resentment fill our minds and hearts.

When we’ve been wounded, we tend to “play the tape” of our injuries over and over. Jesus describes the kingdom of God as a place of peace, joy, justice, and fulfillment. But when we habitually play the tape of our injuries, we get stuck instead in a place of anxiety, fear, and turmoil.

What do you think might happen if we turned our thoughts and actions away from anger and hatred and embraced an attitude of love and forgiveness? In short order, we could get out of our own darkness and pain and move toward the light (Christ).

With God’s grace, we don’t have to be angry and resentful. By the practice of love and forgiveness, our lives and hearts can soon move from being heavy and burdened to being light, happy, and free.
Lent is all about making a change: turning away from sin and darkness to follow Christ our Redeemer, as we allow his light to dispel our darkness. This Lent, may we truly grow in Christian virtue so we can follow Jesus’ command to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

Father Richard Bennett, C.Ss.R.
Philadelphia

February 25, second Sunday

Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18; Psalm 116; Romans 8:31-34; Mark 9:2-10

Abraham and Sarah longed for a son, prayed for a son, and waited for a son. When he finally arrived, his ancient parents called him Isaac, which means “laughter.” So it was that Abraham’s faith in God was rewarded.

Then the ultimate test comes. God tells Abraham to make a burnt offering of his beloved son. Abraham agrees, with no argument, no protest, no anguished madness. He takes the road to the top of Mount Moriah, where the wood is arranged for the fire, the altar is built for the victim, and the knife is at hand.

But when Abraham seizes the knife to kill his son, he is given a new command not to kill him. Instead, he sacrifices a ram that is caught in a bush nearby.

What happened on Mount Moriah finds an echo in what happens atop Mount Tabor and Mount Calvary in the New Testament. These peaks are significant places of vision, and on them we see a God who never abandons us, who is with us through thick and thin.

These mountains teach us that it’s only when we are willing to let go of what we love most in this life and offer it back to God that we can hope to receive it back in ways we never dreamed of. Only then will we experience resurrection, healing, consoling light, and new life.

Father Philip Dabney, C.Ss.R.
Boston
The sacrifice of Isaac
February 26, Monday of the second week

_Daniel 9:4-10; Psalm 79; Luke 6:36-38_

In our first reading today Daniel speaks openly to God of God’s loving and merciful attributes and of our own persistent failure to live in harmonious and right relationship with him. Daniel shows a spiritual maturity and honesty that we would do well to emulate. This sort of honest dialogue with God lies at the heart of the Lenten journey. We speak truthfully to God, admitting our faults without excuse, all the while humbly acknowledging his incomprehensible love for all humanity.

Lent brings us to consider yet another truth, the sublime truth of who we are as human persons—for we are God’s beloved children, made in God’s beautiful image and likeness. The Lenten season becomes the time to humbly accept the grandeur of this higher truth, and, in Christ, to be transformed by it.

If we are indeed made in God’s image, we must take Jesus’ words to heart. We must “be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). We must stop judging and condemning; we must be forgiving. We must seek to be like Christ, who journeys with us and will not allow us to lose our way.

_Father Anthony Michalik, C.Ss.R._

_Philadelphia_

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February 27, Tuesday of the second week

_Isaiah 1:10, 16–20; Psalm 50; Matthew 23:1–12_

Did you ever have the experience of hearing someone explode in anger or frustration and blurt out your faults and failings? Or did you ever do that to another person? God—through Isaiah—seems to be doing just that: “Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil; learn to do good!” (Isaiah 1:16-17)

Our Lenten journey is serious business in God’s eyes. God desires
that we look at our lives with the same truthfulness as he does. Isaiah does not name our misdeeds. Only you and I can do that. If God were to get in your face with your sins and weaknesses, what would they be?

Ask God for the courage and sincerity to name the things that need to be repented of. Then hear the encouraging and tender words God pronounces when we repent: “Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

And as we hear in today’s psalm, “To the one that goes the right way, I will show the salvation of God” (Psalm 50:23).

May this day of Lent fill you with trust in God’s desire to pardon you and make you whole.

Father James Gilmour, C.Ss.R.
Brooklyn, N.Y.

February 28, Wednesday of the second week
Jeremiah 18:18-20, Psalm 31, Matthew 20:17-28

Today for the third time Jesus predicts his suffering, death, and resurrection. Then Matthew presents the mother of James and John asking Jesus to give her boys a special place at table when he enters his kingdom. Interestingly, Mark’s Gospel, always more honest about the apostles, has James and John making this request.

All three predictions reveal how difficult it is for the apostles to accept Jesus’ future ordeal. Each prediction leads Jesus to address what it means to be his disciple.

Recently I read the statement that in America we are educated for success but not for suffering. Perhaps people haven’t changed much since Jesus’ day.

He’s trying to educate his apostles for suffering—not only the suffering of death that his followers will face but also the suffering of self-emptying for others in daily life. Service, not success, is the
hallmark of being a follower of Jesus.

Lent provides an opportunity to continue our education in whatever suffering our service of others calls for. Lenten practices invite us to fast as a sign of creating a spiritual openness toward both God and neighbor. Prayer directs us toward greater self-giving to God; almsgiving makes us more attentive to our neighbors.

Have you enrolled to continue your education?

Father James A. Wallace, C.Ss.R.
Long Branch, N.J.

March 1, Thursday of the second week
Jeremiah 17:5-10; Psalm 1; Luke 16:19-31

On September 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria assaulted a number of Caribbean islands. For 36 hours violent winds destroyed much of their lush green vegetation. The loss of property, energy, potable water, and roads was incalculable. So many people’s lives had been radically changed.

Afterward I saw three photos from Puerto Rico, all taken from the same vantage point. One was shot the day after the storm, showing crops that had been destroyed and trees knocked down, with all their leaves blown off. It looked like a war zone.

The second photo was taken two weeks later, and you could see the shadow of green buds growing. The third photo, taken after a month, showed that much of the area’s lushness had returned.

Nature had been bruised but not destroyed—a vivid symbol of what we will commemorate during Holy Week, the victory of life over death.

The roots of those Caribbean trees had grown deep. The trees had suffered but had not died. Their roots were pumping the life forces of soil, sun, and water to the trees. Life is stronger than death.

Today’s first reading speaks about roots: “Blessed is the one who
trusts in the Lord . . . He is like a tree that stretches out its roots . . . Its leaves stay green . . . it shows no distress but still bears fruit” (Jeremiah 17:7-8).

May our trust in the Lord continue to root us in our source of life.

Father John McKenna, C.Ss.R.
Brooklyn, N.Y.

March 2, Friday of the second week

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28; Psalm 105; Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

“For this reason, I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will yield a rich harvest” (Matthew 21:43).

A Native American proverb states: “Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents; it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.”

Today’s Gospel underscores this view: Our world and all it contains is God’s vineyard, which he has entrusted to us for the benefit of all his people. God leases the earth to us not for our own profit but rather for the good of all our brothers and sisters.

Yet at times our sins of greed, jealousy, envy, and self-interest lead us to destructive patterns of beating, stoning, killing, and destroying—not only the vineyard itself but also those servants who call us to accountability for our care of God’s vineyard and the just distribution of its riches.

As we continue our Lenten journey, may we put aside our own greed and sense of entitlement, recognize our responsibility for the care of the vineyard entrusted to us by God, and share its riches and abundant resources with our less fortunate brothers and sisters.

Father John McLoughlin, C.Ss.R.
Ephrata, Pa.
Today we celebrate the feast of St. Katharine Drexel, the second American-born saint of our Church. She was born into a very wealthy family, but unlike the younger son in today’s Gospel, who threw away all his earnings, or the older son, who grew more bitter each day, Katharine used her inheritance to make the world better and more loving. She cared most especially for Native Americans and blacks.

I’m sure that early in her life she was confronted with the choice of accepting prestige and prosperity. She could have lived a very selfish life. But, in the words of her Savior, Katharine chose the narrow road and gave her life in the service of others. What a shining example she is to the Church and the world in her care for the poor and most abandoned!

It’s never easy for us to slip into the sandals of the father in today’s parable, as Katharine did. We struggle as sons and daughters with our own wants and desires, with anger and resentment, with hurts and disappointments. Yet Jesus tells us true peace and fulfillment, true joy and happiness, and true forgiveness will ultimately be found when we walk in the sandals of the father.

St. Katharine Drexel, pray for us.

Father Denis Sweeney, C.Ss.R.
Bethpage, N.Y.

March 4, third Sunday

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25; John 2:13-25

The Ten Commandments take a central position in today’s readings. The greatest obligation is to worship God alone, the greatest injury to a person is murder, the greatest injury to family bonds is adultery, the greatest injury to commerce and law is bearing false witness, the greatest inter-generational obligation is to honor one’s
parents, and the greatest injury to moveable property is theft.

St. Paul acknowledged the Decalogue in the 13th chapter of his letter to the Romans, and Jesus summarized the commandments in one great commandment to love God and our neighbor.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* considers the Ten Commandments essential for spiritual good health and growth, and they are also the basis for social justice. Jesus instructed his disciples to go further than the scribes and Pharisees in keeping the law.

For us modern-day disciples, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, sums up the impact of the Ten Commandments: “Every part of this law must remain in force upon all mankind in all ages, as not depending either on time or place nor on any other circumstances liable to change; but on the nature of God and the nature of man and their unchangeable relation to each other.”

*Father Kevin MacDonald, C.Ss.R.*

*New Smyrna Beach, Fla.*

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**March 5, Monday of the third week**


“Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place” (Luke 4:24).

Today’s Gospel finds Jesus confronting his hometown crowd in the synagogue for their lack of openness to him and their rejection of his claim to be the fulfillment of their longed-for Messiah.

Jesus is among the synagogue-going people doing their customary duty on the Sabbath. Yet his audience seems so set in their ways, so committed to their version of things (including their version of God!) that they miss and even disavow the presence of God—in Jesus—within their hearing and in their midst.

Today many church-going people struggle to follow the call of God to new life in the power of the Spirit and to trust in the grace of God’s healing and empowering love.
Is there any aspect of your practice of religion or your embrace of the faith so set and uptight that it keeps you from an intimate relationship and personal encounter with Jesus? Does your going to church move you to bring forth God’s love and mercy into the world?

Father John Collins, C.Ss.R.
Long Branch, N.J.

March 6, Tuesday of the third week
Daniel 3:25, 34-43; Psalm 25; Matthew 18:21-35

Years ago I read the story of Eva Kor, founder of the CANDLES Holocaust Museum in Terre Haute, Indiana. Eva’s parents had perished in a Nazi concentration camp, and Eva and her twin sister, Miriam, had been imprisoned at Auschwitz and subjected to cruel and dangerous medical experiments. Both survived, but Miriam ultimately died of complications.

Overwhelmed with rage and hatred, Eva decided to search for her former captors, and eventually she located one of the doctors who had been at Auschwitz. Much to her surprise, he agreed to meet with her.

Why? He wanted to ask her forgiveness, and Eva gave it to him. Eva later said it was as though a pile of stones had been lifted from her back. She spoke of the experience with other Auschwitz survivors and persuaded a group of fellow prisoners to travel with her to Auschwitz. Standing at the prison gates, before the press, they publicly proclaimed their forgiveness for their former captors.

In today’s Gospel Jesus urges us to forgive not seven times but 77 times. For most of us, that number should probably be more like 7,000 times seven! In my own life, how often is it a struggle to forgive biting remarks, silly disputes, and petty slights? But then I think of Eva’s story. Can we not forgive these lesser “offenses” of those whom we love?

Father Gerry Chylko, C.Ss.R.
Philadelphia
March 7, Wednesday of the third week  
_Deuteronomy 4:1, 5–9; Psalm 147; Matthew 5:17–19_

Jesus proclaims that he is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. The Old Testament gives us many profound words that teach us important truths, but Jesus is the main Word, the living Word.

In him we see God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—clearly. In him we see the truth and the way to real and eternal life: “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

Today we celebrate the memorial of the martyrs St. Perpetua, a woman from a noble family; St. Felicity, a slave; and their companions. These martyrs from diverse backgrounds believed firmly in Jesus Christ and followed him faithfully day after day, even giving their lives for him.

Each of us is different, but we are all called to follow Jesus. During Lent we’re called to look at our lives. How is our relationship with Jesus? Do we know him? How firm is our commitment? Are we following him every day?

Today we ask Jesus to help us deepen our friendship with him throughout this Lent.

_Father Sean McGillicuddy, C.Ss.R._  
_New York City_

March 8, Thursday of the third week  
_Jeremiah 7:23–28; Psalm 95; Luke 11:14–23_

Now, in the middle of Lent, is a good time to drench ourselves in the mystery of this line in today’s Gospel: “But if it is by the finger of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20).

Jeremiah’s denunciations in the first reading take on particular force in a nation that glorifies wealth, power, and narcissistic personality and ignores the many who have been made mute by a system that’s
stacked against them.

But we who profess to follow the Christ whose death on a cross has brought about the reconciliation of everyone and everything, cannot fail to see the refugee, the undocumented, the homeless child, the rejected transgender or gay person, the bullied adolescent, the countless women victims of sexual abuse, the women and men who bear the burden of racism, the “first nation” tribal members impoverished for generations, the dejected and forgotten people addicted to opioids, as our society’s “throwaways,” in the words of Pope Francis.

We who renew the emblem of the cross this Lent as the definitive sign that the kingdom of God has come upon us will then continue to drive out the demons with the very finger of God.

And then we will continue as a nation and as a Church to heed the words of Jeremiah as our Lenten call: “Listen to my voice; then I will be your God and you shall be my people. Walk in all the ways that I command you so that you may prosper” (Jeremiah 7:23).

Father Francis Gargani, C.Ss.R.
Brooklyn, N.Y.

March 9, Friday of the third week
Hosea 14:2-10; Psalm 81; Mark 12:28-34

A story I heard recently reflects how our love for God can be.

Shortly before Christmas a little boy wrote to God, asking him to bring him a bicycle for Christmas and saying, “If you do, I’ll be a good boy for a year.” Then he thought about it, tore up the letter, and wrote a new one, saying, “I’ll be a good boy for six months.” He paused again and then wrote, “I’ll do the supper dishes for three months.”

On Sunday he went to Mass with his mother and father and saw a beautiful statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. After Mass he told his parents he’d like to stay for a while and pray. Since they lived near the church, they said OK. Once everyone was gone, he went into
the sanctuary, took the statue, wrapped it in his jacket, went home, and put it under his bed. Then he wrote another note to God: “Bring me the bike. I’ve got your mother!”

Shouldn’t our love for God be like a child’s—simple, trustworthy, and sincere? I don’t think we realize the great love God has for us. He knows each of us by name and knew us when we were in our mother’s womb.

Can’t we show this love to others—and bring them closer to God or back to God? Let us be more loving to our neighbor and pray that God will help us bring people back to him—and we’ll be a good boy or girl for six months!

_Father Eugene Grohe, C.Ss.R.  
Esopus, N.Y._

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**March 10, Saturday of the third week**

*Hosea 6:1–6; Psalm 51; Luke 18:9–14*

People in the ancient world believed the gods punished human beings because they weren’t perfect. In addition, people tried to explain events they could not control—for example, earthquakes and storms—as a result of the wrath of God.

In the first reading, Hosea explains that God desires love, not sacrifice “and knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (6:6). Thus the Jews are beginning to realize how important love is. This love is revealed by the way we treat other people.

Treating people with love is not always easy since we (and I include myself) do not always feel like loving other people. In the cartoon strip *Peanuts*, Linus once said, “I love mankind . . . it’s people I can’t stand!”

Sometimes we get tired of loving and become cynical because the human condition isn’t perfect. The one who never became cynical with the human condition was Jesus. When he rose from the dead, he returned to the people who had denied him: the apostles.
So let’s remember that Jesus doesn’t give up on humanity, and let’s continue to love others even when we don’t feel like it.

Father Jim McCabe, C.Ss.R.
Bethpage, N.Y.

March 11, fourth Sunday
2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; Psalm 137; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16).

The season of Lent calls us to “return to God with all our hearts.” And today’s Scriptures remind us why turning to God changes everything. Our God, who is rich in mercy, gave us Jesus, his only Son, to free us from the power of sin and death.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit are the gifts of God’s abundant love for all. God desires our fullness of life through our willingness to believe in and receive the love God has for us.

The cross becomes the tree of life for all who trust that it was out of love for us that Jesus died and out of love for us that God raised him from the dead. God, out of love, gives us the Holy Spirit to live a love that is kind, forgiving, compassionate, and merciful.

Is this loving and merciful God the One you know in your heart and proclaim by your life?

Father John Collins, C.Ss.R.
Long Branch, N.J.

March 12, Monday of the fourth week
Isaiah 65:17-21; Psalm 30; John 4:43-54

When we pray, the important thing is not what we’re asking for but to whom we’re speaking.

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In today’s Gospel an official who works for King Herod approaches Jesus simply because he has heard so many stories about his healings. He asks Jesus to come to his home to heal his feverish son, who is in mortal danger.

He is momentarily stunned at Jesus’ answer: “Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe” (John 4:48). Those sharp words quickly get the man to focus. He will not be put off from asking what he has come so far to ask.

He answers calmly, “Sir, this is not about me. It’s about the boy. Please heal the boy.”

Jesus tells him, “You can go home. The boy lives.” And now the man’s faith comes to life, for he puts his faith in the words of Jesus and heads for home.

Consider yourself blessed if you hear the Lord challenge you as he challenged the royal official. Ask the Lord to teach you that knowing the One to whom you are speaking is the real wonder, the real miracle.

Father Charles MacDonald, C.Ss.R.
Bronx, N.Y.

March 13, Tuesday of the fourth week
Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; Psalm 46; John 5:1-16

Water is everywhere in our readings today—water that heals, cleanses, and generates life. This water flows powerfully and deeply from the Jerusalem Temple in our first reading. The water of Bethsaida in our Gospel also cleanses, heals, and generates life when stirred by an angel.

What beautiful reminders of the cleansing, healing, life-generating waters and graces poured out by the Holy Spirit in baptism!

In the Gospel Jesus cleanses, heals, and gives new life to the paralytic without any need of an external sign like water. He himself is the central focus of baptism, the means by which we, 20 centuries
later, are bonded spiritually to him and his saving death and resurrection through his mystical body, the Church.

Through adoption and not nature, the baptized become children of the Father, like Jesus, with the right to be in the presence of the Triune God forever after death as long as we stay free from mortal sin or sincerely repent of it in the sacrament of reconciliation afterward.

Yet being in heaven with God is a supernatural gift, and we can never claim it is our due. All the more reason to be massively grateful to our Redeemer, Jesus, for his incredible gift of baptism. And all the more reason to strive to ensure that everyone in our relationship circles is gently invited or gently challenged to know, follow, and love Jesus through baptism.

Father James Cascione, C.Ss.R.
New York City

March 14, Wednesday of the fourth week
Isaiah 49:8-15; Psalm 145; John 5:17-30

The Church invites us during Lent to offer sacrifice in times of crisis. St. Edith Stein—Sister Benedicta of the Cross, her name in religious life—was moved to do penance for the sins committed against her Jewish people.

Her own Jewish mother had disowned her when she converted to Catholicism from Judaism. She also felt the helplessness of a “motherless child” when the German Nazi government decided to rid Germany of the Jewish race.

She could do nothing to stop the Nazis’ “final solution.” She sought God in prayer. She also wrote letters to the Holy Father, but the response was silence.

When Edith made her vows as a Carmelite nun, she told her Mother Superior, “Human action cannot help us, only the sufferings of Christ. My aspiration is to share them.” Edith believed God had invited her to put on Christ, to offer her life as a sacrifice for
the sin and evil in the world.

In 1942 on the feast of St. Alphonsus, founder of the Redemptorists, then observed on August 2, the Gestapo came to take Edith and her sister, Rosa, also a Carmelite nun, to Auschwitz, where they died a week later.

A final insight of Edith’s: “Each time I feel my impotence and inability to directly influence people, I feel a keen awareness of the necessity of my own holocaust.”

When we face horrible evil or seek answers to prayers that are slow in coming, we might take an insight from St. Edith Stein and do penance this Lent, beginning with our own proper holocaust.

Father Norman Bennett, C.Ss.R.
Brooklyn, N.Y.

March 15, St. Clement Mary Hofbauer

Today we Redemptorists celebrate the feast of one of our saints: St. Clement Mary Hofbauer. We look on him as the second founder of our Congregation—the one responsible for bringing the Redemptorists out of Italy, across the Alps, and into America.

Clement had an interesting and varied career, beginning as a baker’s apprentice, then becoming a priest, a hermit, and eventually a Redemptorist. He labored in Eastern Europe in the 19th century, doing amazing work as a preacher, a confessor, and a worker of charity—converting and helping people of every social class.

Canonized in 1909, today he is the co-patron of Vienna and Warsaw.

We remember Clement especially for his energy and his tireless love for the ordinary person. We can emulate him by being tireless in our welcome and embrace of the underdog, the immigrant, the refugee—those searching for a home in our world, our country, and in our hearts.
Clement stood with the poor, just as Jesus did and as we are called to do. The harvest is greater than ever, but the laborers are still few. We pray to the Lord of the harvest to continue to make us saints and apostles like St. Clement Mary Hofbauer.

Father John McGowan, C.Ss.R.
Long Branch, N.J.

March 16, Friday of the fourth week
Wisdom 2:1, 12-22; Psalm 34; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

The first reading for today is taken from the book of Wisdom and includes these words: “The wicked said among themselves, thinking not aright: Let us beset the just one because he is obnoxious to us” (Wisdom 2:1, 12). Toward the end of the reading we hear, “their wickedness blinded them” (2:21).

The point is that wickedness blinds us and twists our thinking into ways that are evil. This text is a reminder for us not to slip into the trap of “thinking not aright.”

Today’s Gospel shows us Jesus sneaking into Jerusalem because some were trying to kill him. These men were “thinking not aright” although they may have believed they were acting on God’s behalf. Not very different from suicide bombers of the present day believing they act in the name of God and for his glory.

On this day we’re reminded that correct thinking depends on truly knowing and loving God. In your reflection on the readings for today, remember that correct thinking must follow the command of Our Lord to love God and neighbor in all we do. Acting out of hate is always “thinking not aright.”

Father J. Francis Jones, C.Ss.R.
Canandaigua, N.Y.
March 17, Saturday of the fourth week  
*Jeremiah 11:18-20; Psalm 7; John 7:40-53*

In our Caribbean church and culture, everyone seems to know something about everybody else. If you hold a firm conviction about your belief and you’re not afraid to express it, your life will resound just like that of the Prophet Jeremiah.

We’re called to preach and “speak a word” against the injustices plaguing our nations, but we often feel uncomfortable doing so, especially when it seems only God is on our side. We feel we’re caught between a rock and a hard place.

When I was a student in Whitestone, New York, Brother Jeffrey Rolle, C.Ss.R., then our formator, would always remind us to stretch beyond our comfort zone when it came to doing what was right. Yes! It’s love of God that allows us to “break the rock in pieces” (Jeremiah 23:29), like the Prophet Jeremiah. Despite our deep personal discomfort, no person is immune to the call to do what is right.

*Father Elton Letang, C.Ss.R.*
*Malick, Barataria, Trinidad & Tobago, West Indies*

March 18, fifth Sunday  
*Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-33*

We’re now deep into the season of Lent 2018, and today’s Scripture readings give us much to ponder about life and death, dying and rising: Unless we fall to the earth and die, we will not have life. Unless we serve, we won’t have life. Unless we experience pain, we won’t have life.

The Gospel calls us to imagine Jesus as a grain of wheat and to reflect on his death as a “planting.” Despite the agony of Jesus’ death, it is the only way new life can come forth!

Lent is meant to be a template for our life as Christians. Lent
would be no more than a religious joke if it meant only that I engaged in some fasting and self-sacrifice to lose weight. Lent is about truly learning how to die—not when I’m 85, but now, today!

At the beginning of today’s Gospel we hear the words, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus” (John 12:21). Do we really want to see Jesus? Then we must follow him on a path that leads through death to life.

Maybe it’s time for us to plant ourselves.

Father Raymond Collins, C.Ss.R.
Philadelphia

March 19, St. Joseph

2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16; Psalm 89; Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22; Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24

St. Joseph is honored as foster-father of Jesus, spouse of the ever-virgin Mary, and patron of the Universal Church.

Christians through the ages have seen Joseph as the village carpenter who led the Holy Family, taught Jesus his trade, and watched over his growth “in wisdom, age, and grace.”

As spouse of Mary, Joseph is in agony at Mary’s questionable pregnancy. But God’s angel reassures Joseph so he can marry Mary and support her as her husband. Mary’s trust and faith become contagious. We see Joseph by Mary’s side during her difficult hike from Nazareth to Bethlehem and cheer his daring and grueling journey to Egypt, protecting the infant Savior from Herod.

Perhaps as Joseph lay dying, he worried about how Mary and Jesus would do without him. Maybe his trust in God is a big factor in his becoming the patron of a happy death.

Lastly, St. Joseph is honored as patron of the Church, and Christians know they can count on his example: His search for a cave when Mary needed a place to deliver her child reminds us we have someone to turn to when we can’t pay the rent. His coura-
geous years in Egypt inspire Christians who are refugees in foreign lands. Joseph was the homebody of Nazareth, yet for centuries the Church has expanded throughout the world under his patronage.

We too can turn to this “guardian of Mary, nurse of her child” when “our ways are all weary” and life’s desert is “wild.” Support of Jesus and Mary, “We lean upon thee.”

*Father Joseph Krastel, C.Ss.R.*
*Annapolis, Md.*

March 20, Tuesday of the fifth week
*Numbers 21:4–9; Psalm 102; John 8:21–30*

Sometimes an event in the Old Testament prefigures one in the New. In today’s first reading God tells Moses to make a bronze serpent and lift it up for the children of Israel to see. Those who look at it are healed of poisonous snakebites and escape certain death.

In today’s Gospel Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man, who must be lifted up and who always does what is pleasing to the Father. Earlier in that same Gospel he says, “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that all who believe may have eternal life in him” (John 3:14).

The connection is clear. Jesus’ death on the cross reveals the power of the Father’s love for humanity. Those who look to it in faith will not only find forgiveness for the infectious poison of their sins but also enjoy the graces of eternal life.

Let us look to the cross this day! Let us look to Jesus! With him, let us pray to the Father in the words of the Psalmist, “O Lord, hear my prayer, and let my cry come to you!” (Psalm 102:2).

*Father Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R.*
*Canandaigua, N.Y.*
March 21, Wednesday of the fifth week
Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95; Daniel 3:52-56; John 8:31-42

Toward the end of today’s Gospel Jesus says something that keeps echoing in my heart: “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and am here” (John 8:42). These same words Jesus spoke to the Jews of his day, he also speaks to us.

As we recognize God as our Father—creator, giver of life, supreme good, love divine, etc.—we are invited to respond accordingly. What then is our response?

For clues to our own response, all we have to do is look around us to see that Jesus is still here, sent from God and in our midst today. Jesus is present in the beggar at the street corner, the sick and the dying, our immigrant brothers and sisters, the unemployed, the poor, and the needy—as well as the lonely and misunderstood, who are often part of our own families.

This Lenten season invites us to get to the heart of who we are and how we live in relationship to God and our brothers and sisters. Jesus reminds us: “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and am here.”

Father Robert Wojtek, C.Ss.R.
Bronx, N.Y.

March 22, Thursday of the fifth week
Genesis 17:3-9; Psalm 105; John 8:51-59

In today’s Gospel Jesus says to the Jews, “Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever keeps my word will never see death” (John 8:51). The Gospel invites us to be disciples and to be free by remaining in the Word of the Son. Jesus frees us from the slavery of sin and makes us children of the Father.

Jesus lives in an intense communion with God the Father. This communion is so great that whoever knows Jesus also knows the
Father. Jesus teaches us and reveals what he has heard and seen in the Father.

In this climate of filiation and discipleship, we are getting closer to Easter, with the keen awareness that as we embrace the mystery of Jesus, his death and resurrection, we are led toward full freedom.

Lent is a time of change and conversion for us. Let us live this Lent as a way to Jesus Christ, listening to the Word of God, praying, sharing with our neighbor, and doing good works.

“Seek out the Lord and his might; constantly seek his face. Recall the wondrous deeds he has done, his wonders and words of judgment” (Psalm 105:4-5).

Father Edmundo Molina, C.Ss.R.
Baltimore

March 23, Friday of the fifth week
Jeremiah 20:10-13; Psalm 18; John 10:31-42

Someone once described the virtue of hope in words similar to these: There is a next step, and I can take it.

To feel hopeless, to feel despair, is to feel emotionally and spiritually paralyzed, to believe there is no future, no next step—and even if there were, I could not take that step.

Today’s first reading from the Prophet Jeremiah begins with terrifying words: “I hear the whisperings of many: ‘Terror on every side!’” (20:10). Jeremiah has fulfilled his mission and as a result has been rejected and persecuted. His very life is threatened.

Yet suddenly comes this outburst of hope: “But the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion” (20:11). Jeremiah takes a leap of trust, certain of the Lord’s presence and power. He has no doubt that there is a next step and that God will give him all he needs to take that step.

Remember today that the Lord is with you “like a mighty cham-
pion.” Today there is a next step, and you can take it because Christ is with you and will give you all you need to do so.

*Father Joseph Tizio, C.Ss.R.*
*Boston*

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**March 24, Saturday of the fifth week**

*Ezekiel 37:21–28; Jeremiah 31:10–13; John 11:45–56*

“What do you think? That he will not come to the feast?” (John 11:56).

Do we trust Jesus Christ? Do we trust that Jesus is king and redeemer of the world? Do we entrust our whole lives to Jesus and his holy will?

Let us ask Jesus to help us grow in our trust in him and his will, for Jesus “will guard us, as a shepherd guards his flock” (Jeremiah 31:10).

Jesus does indeed come to Jerusalem, ready to finish his mission of redemption. This is the Gospel, the Good News, the breaking news: in Jesus Christ, there is plentiful redemption (cf. Psalm 130:7)!

Let us be so on fire for Jesus Christ and his Church that we cannot help but preach the Gospel to the world around us.

*Brother Kevin McGraw, C.Ss.R.*
*Houston*

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**March 25, Passion (Palm) Sunday**

*Isaiah 50:4–7; Psalm 22; Philippians 2:6–11; Mark 14:1–15:47*

How is it possible that on Palm Sunday we celebrate the Lord’s entry into Jerusalem on a donkey, with the people proclaiming him Lord and king—yet so soon afterward they will shout, “Crucify him”?
The Lord knows what is in our minds and hearts.

Jesus came to do his Father’s will, to glorify his Father, and to redeem the world. He teaches us that when we pray the Our Father, we should bless the name of the Father, live for his kingdom, and do the will of God with our lives.

For Christians, Lent and Holy Week are the most important time of year. Let’s make this the best Holy Week of our life.

The Lord knows what is in our minds and hearts.

*Father Kevin Moley, C.Ss.R.*  
*Newton Grove, N.C.*

**March 26, Monday of Holy Week**  
*Isaiah 42:1-7; Psalm 27; John 12:1-11*

Isaiah 42:2-4 describes the Lord’s chosen servant as a man of tenderness, who without inflicting violence brings transformation, justice, and right relationship to the world.

Today’s Gospel then presents Mary, the sister of Lazarus, as she anoints the feet of Jesus. Her extravagant, tender care meets arrogant dismissal and resistance from Judas, yet the Savior sees the truth in Mary’s actions, and none of her love is wasted.

The anointing of Jesus’ feet foreshadows his death, but Jesus’ reception of Mary’s tender, humble service in the face of condemnation also foreshadows the Father’s reception of Christ’s extravagant love in the Passion.

Christ will pour out the treasure of his lifeblood in an action of unspeakably tender love for people who have betrayed or rejected him. His sacrifice will be mocked, but it will not be wasted. The Father will receive the Son’s offering and will raise him up to life again in the Spirit.

May we who claim to be Christian never give up on tenderness, and may we embrace the essential mystery that extravagant loving
care, true charity, is the path to transformation, to justice, to right relationship, and to resurrection.

Father Matthew Allman, C.Ss.R.
Brooklyn, N.Y.

March 27, Tuesday of Holy Week
Isaiah 49:1-6; Psalm 71; John 13:21-33, 36-38

John’s Gospel today tells of Jesus announcing at the Last Supper that “one of you will betray me” (13:21). Jesus then takes a morsel of food and gives it to Judas, who eats it and leaves. John adds, “And it was night” (13:30), perhaps signifying not so much the time of day but the disposition of Judas’ heart.

Tradition tells us that after he betrayed Jesus, Judas regretted what he had done and hanged himself out of despair. A question arises: which was the greater sin—betraying Jesus or despairing of his loving forgiveness?

By our baptism all of us have been called to be apostles and assist in the mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God by word and deed. And all of us have betrayed Jesus and shared in the darkness of night by failing to love him in our sisters and brothers.

During these last days of Lent, let us examine our conscience to see how we have betrayed him and one another. Rather than follow the example of Judas, who despaired of Jesus’ love and thought of himself as unforgivable, let us honestly admit our betrayals and open ourselves to the Lord’s loving forgiveness, especially through the sacrament of reconciliation.

Father Gerard Knapp, C.Ss.R.
Brooklyn, N.Y.
March 28, Wednesday of Holy Week  
Isaiah 50:4-9; Psalm 69; Matthew 26:14-25

Our Lord experienced the deepest wound any human being can experience: betrayal. Betrayal hurts so much because of love. In today’s Gospel Jesus is betrayed by one of his closest friends, someone he had taken into his confidence. As English writer John le Carré once said, “Betrayal can only happen if you love.”

Jesus risks love so we could learn to love in return. “He loved his own in the world, and he loved them to the end” (John 13:1). The apostles love him too. Their trust in Jesus is so complete and their confidence in the depth of his understanding so total that each examines himself with genuine doubt: “Surely it is not I, Lord?” (Matthew 26:22).

Jesus’ total self-gift and saving love should cause us to question ourselves. Have I returned love and understanding for the love and understanding I have received? Do I try to please God and the beloveds in my life as Jesus did? Can we say along with Jesus, “The Father loves me for this, that I always do what is pleasing to him” (John 8:29)?

May we abandon ourselves in love this week, risking betrayal, with the vulnerability and doubt that accompany true love.

Father Francis Mulvaney, C.Ss.R.  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

March 29, Holy Thursday  

On Holy Thursday the Church commemorates the institution of two sacraments: the Holy Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood. These sacraments are intimately related.

The Eucharist constitutes the Church’s entire spiritual wealth and is revered as “the source and summit of the Christian life” (Lumen
Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane
The ministerial priesthood, in turn, guarantees the integrity of the Eucharist from one generation of believers to the next.

These sacraments are so closely bound because of their reference to Christ. Jesus is both priest and victim. He is the high priest of the New Passover and the sacrificial lamb whose blood is poured out for the sins of the world. He shares this twofold role with all Christians but in a special way with the priest.

Every priest is an *alter Christus* (“another Christ”), who celebrates Eucharist in order to immerse the faithful in the mystery of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection. As an *alter Christus*, he is called to give himself to others in a life of service. As Jesus humbled himself by washing the feet of his disciples, so every priest is called to offer himself as a nourishing, sacrificial presence for others.

*Father Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R. Canandaigua, N.Y.*

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**March 30, Good Friday**

*Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Psalm 31; Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9; John 18:1–19:42*

Free will: what an amazing gift we have been given! Starting around the age of 2 (the terrible twos, as that stage is often called), we begin to use our minds and to use the words *yes* and *no*. It’s a painful but necessary process for understanding the use of free will.

What is most amazing is the extent to which this gift has been given to us. We have the ability to say yes or no in many situations, even to say yes or no to God.

Today, Good Friday, is about the use, or more precisely, the misuse of this gift.

Jesus has come into our midst to reveal a view of God the Father, a way of prayer, and a way to live our lives, known as the Gospels.
Having proclaimed this message, Our Lord now lets us decide to follow him or not, using our free will.

Today we remember that the initial reaction of many people was “No!” But we gather today to mourn this response and to pledge ourselves to a different answer.

We freely gather together to say yes to Jesus and his message.

Father John Kingsbury, C.Ss.R.
Baltimore

March 31, Holy Saturday

Genesis 1:1–2:2; Psalm 104; Genesis 22:1–18; Psalm 16; Exodus 14:15–15:1; Exodus 15:1–6, 17–18; Isaiah 54:5–14; Psalm 30; Isaiah 55:1–11; Isaiah 12:2–6; Baruch 3:9–15, 32–38, 4:1–4; Psalm 19; Ezekiel 36:16–28; Psalm 42 or Isaiah 12:2–6; Romans 6:3–11; Psalm 118; Mark 16:1–7

“Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” (Mark 16:3)

The home of noted poet Paul Laurence Dunbar is open to the public in Dayton, Ohio. When Dunbar died in 1906 at age 33, his mother left his room exactly as it had been on the day of his death. On the desk of this brilliant man was his final poem, handwritten on a pad.

After his mother died, her friends discovered that Dunbar’s last poem had been lost forever. Because his mother had made his room into a shrine and not moved a thing, the sun had bleached the ink with which the poem was written until it was invisible. The poem was gone.

If we stay in mourning, we lose so much of life.

The faithful women are in mourning when they go to the tomb early on the first day of the week. “Who will roll back the stone?” They were not ready to move on but were seemingly stuck in their
ways . . . ways that embraced only loss and death.

They were able to move into a new place in their lives only when they heard the angel say, “Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here” (Mark 16:6). At that moment they left their tears and weeping behind and moved into a new life of faith in the risen Lord.

Are we still mourning and in despair—mourning over a “lost” season of Lent, despairing over not being quite ready for Easter Sunday? The message today is the same for us as it was for those faithful women: “Do not be afraid.”

Today we’re called to move from darkness into light, from death into life. Now we can leave behind the winter of Lent and move into the glorious sunshine of the Easter season.

Let’s not get stuck in wondering who will roll back the stone: Christ himself has rolled back the stone of our sorrow and sin and invites us into a new life.

Do not be afraid, but go forth into the world to share the joyful news that Our Lord has conquered sin and death.

He is alive!

May the risen Redeemer shine on each of us and our families this glorious Easter day and for the rest of our lives.

_Provincial Superior Father Paul Borowski, C.Ss.R._

_Brooklyn, N.Y._
Christ is risen!
With Him is plentiful redemption. (Psalm 130:7)