

ASH WEDNESDAY | MARCH 5 – SATURDAY, MARCH 8

The epistle for Ash Wednesday states: "For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him." The perfect Son, who is God, willingly became man and entered the fallen world so that sinful men and women

might become children of God. This divine paradox is echoed in the Gospel for Thursday, March 6, where Jesus states, "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Lk 9:24). Lent is a season for seeing the world through the eyes of Christ, which means many of our as-

sumptions will be challenged or even turned upside down. And one of those involves prayer. In the Gospel for Ash Wednesday, from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus condemns those who give alms in order to gain attention, who purposefully appear gloomy while fasting to appear pious, and who pray in public in a way meant to garner praise. "But when you pray," Jesus said, "go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret.

And your Father who sees in secret will repay you." After all, the call to follow Jesus is not meant for those who think they already are saved and spiritually whole. As we hear in the Gospel for Saturday, March 8: "I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners."

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**THEMES:** Repentance, Fasting, Mercy, Salvation, Following Christ

FIRST WEEK OF LENT | SUNDAY, MARCH 9 – SATURDAY, MARCH 15



**THEMES:** Creation, Temptation, Sin, The Fall, Prayer, Perfection

The first Sunday of Lent begins at, well, the beginning: Creation and the Garden of Eden. The story of the temptation and fall are a reminder of our sinfulness and our need for salvation. Tempted by the serpent, Adam and Eve failed to love, trust and obey God. The first sin severed man's relationship with God. According to the catechism, "He chose himself over and against God, against the require-

ments of his creaturely status and therefore against his own good" (CCC, No. 398). Our first parents were driven out of the garden and into the desert of a fallen world (Gn 3:23-24). Sin had entered the world, and with it came death,

pain and suffering. The Gospel for the first Sunday of Lent presents Jesus' dramatic confrontation with the devil. The three temptations Jesus underwent in the wilderness represented the temptations the Israelites

had failed to overcome while in the desert for 40 years. The 40 days and nights Jesus spent in the desert represent those years; likewise, the 40 days of Lent are based upon the fast of our Lord (CCC, No. 540). Led by the Spirit

and guided by the Church, we enter into a desert of sorts, renouncing various comforts and making more time for prayer and self-sacrifice. We ask: Do I trust in God? How can I grow in obedience and love?

**PRAYER**

"Grant me, O Lord, to know what I ought to know, to love what I ought to love, to praise what delights thee most, to value what is precious in thy sight, to hate what is offensive to thee. Do not suffer me to judge according to the sight of my eyes, nor to pass sentence according to the hearing of the ears of ignorant men; but to discern with a true judgment between things visible and spiritual, and above all, always to inquire what is the good pleasure of thy will. Amen."  
— Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471)

SECOND WEEK OF LENT | SUNDAY, MARCH 16 – SATURDAY, MARCH 22

The readings for the second Sunday of Lent highlight the themes of calling, blessing and anticipating. Abram was called by God to leave his family, land and culture and to "go forth" in faith to a new and unknown land. It required everything of Abram, but it also came with immense blessing: "I will make you a great nation, and will bless you." We, too, are called to give everything to God in complete faith, trusting that what he has in store for us is of incomparable value. St. Paul told Timothy that God has called us "to a holy life" that is filled with grace, leading to liberation from

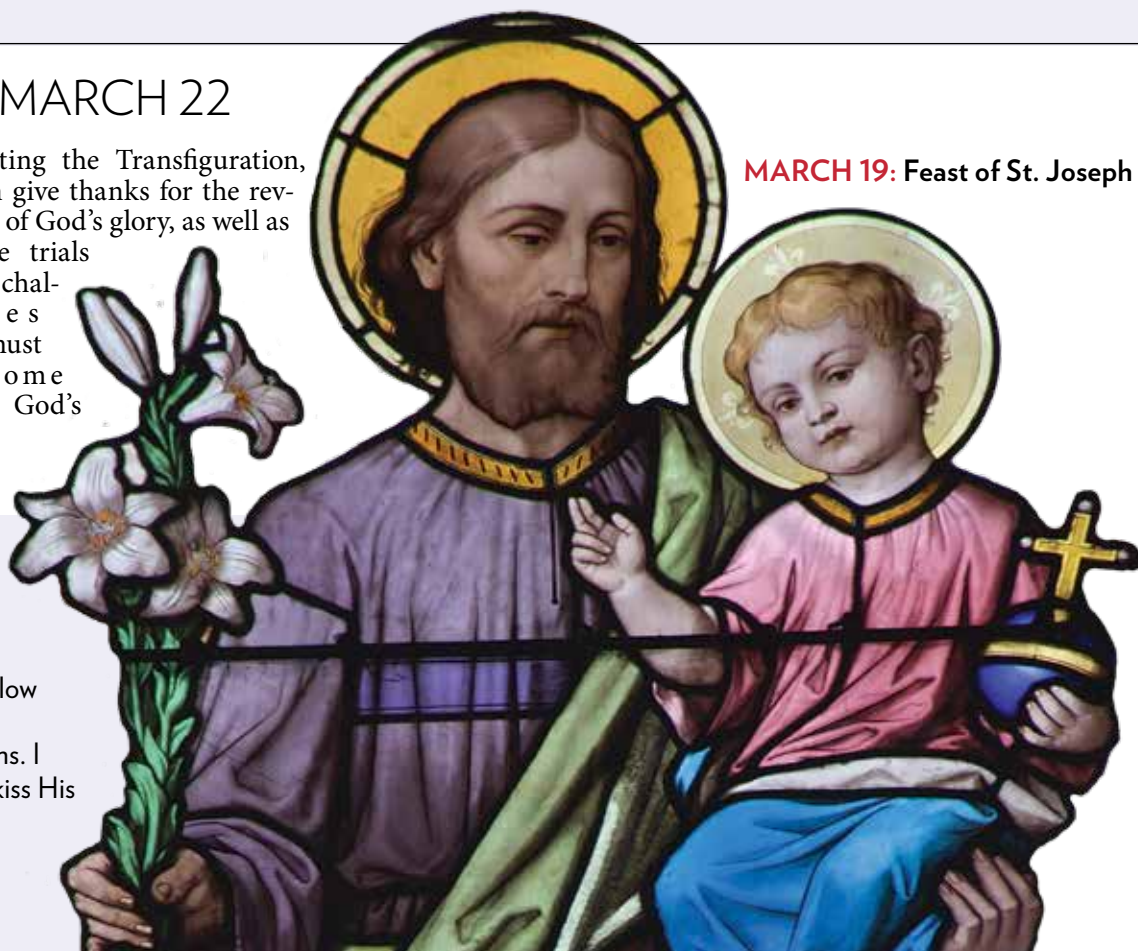
**THEMES:** Transfiguration, Glory, Calling, Blessing, Mercy, Purity, Humility, Trust

death and the blessing of "life and immortality." It might seem odd that the Transfiguration is so prominent during Lent, but it is a reminder that the goal of eternal glory is worth the trials, struggles and moments of darkness. Jesus took Peter, James and John up Mount Tabor in order to call them to deeper discipleship, to a better un-

derstanding of Jesus' identity and calling, and a clearer knowledge of their own identity and calling. They were already blessed, but their blessing was to come to fullness by the way of the cross. The Transfiguration was a foretaste of the power and glory of God; it was a grace meant to shine in the dark night that enveloped the apostles following the crucifixion. By con-

templating the Transfiguration, we can give thanks for the revelation of God's glory, as well as for the trials and challenges we must overcome by God's grace.

**MARCH 19: Feast of St. Joseph**



**PRAYER**

"O St. Joseph, whose protection is so great, so strong, so prompt before the throne of God, I place in thee all my interests and desires. O St. Joseph, assist me by thy powerful intercession and obtain for me all spiritual blessings through thy foster Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord, so that, having engaged here below thy heavenly power, I may offer thee my thanksgiving and homage.  
O St. Joseph, I never weary contemplating thee and Jesus asleep in thine arms. I dare not approach while He reposes near thy heart. Press Him in my name and kiss His fine head for me, and ask Him to return the kiss when I draw my dying breath.  
St. Joseph, patron of departing souls, pray for me. Amen."  
— Ancient Prayer to St. Joseph

THIRD WEEK OF LENT | SUNDAY, MARCH 23 – SATURDAY, MARCH 29

Lent is a journey, an encounter and a time of purification. On the third Sunday of Lent, we come upon liberated but grumbling Israelites wandering in the desert. Come to think of it, that might describe you and me! We've been baptized, but we still complain. We find ourselves thinking with nostalgia about certain

**THEMES:** Thirst, Faith, Hope, Love, Living Water, Healing, Cleansing, Deliverance

sins and temptations. Our faith wavers; our hope bends; our love wilts. We might even be tempted to blame God for our struggles with sin. But in the midst of fasting and struggles and doubts, God provides sustenance. He is the rock from which issues the gift of living water. He sits and

waits for us to come to the water — that is, to him. The Samaritan woman, who had gone from husband to husband and whose life was a wreck, encountered and tasted this water, of course, when she spoke with a mysterious Jew at Jacob's well. Her encounter is a turning point, but it does not come easily or without ques-

tions. But as she asked questions, she found answers. And prayer is often about asking questions — not in anger, but with honesty, seeking an answer.

**MARCH 25: Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord**



**PRAYER**

"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

FOURTH WEEK OF LENT | SUNDAY, MARCH 30 – SATURDAY, APRIL 5

From the fourth Sunday of Lent until the end of the Lenten season, the Gospel readings for every day are from the Gospel of John. The fourth Gospel has several great themes that are unique to it, including that of light and darkness, which is set forth in the prologue (Jn 1:1-18). "What came to be through him was life," the apostle John wrote, "and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not

overcome it" (Jn 1:3b-5). This contrast is certainly evident in the Gospel reading for the fourth Sunday of Lent: the account of the man born blind. The man, who was blind from birth, knows very little until he encounters the healing Savior and is cured of both physical and spiritual blindness. The Phari-

**THEMES:** Light, Darkness, Blindness, Sight, Signs, Life, Death, Healing, Judgment, Resurrection

sees, who supposedly know everything of importance, show themselves to be blind and unwilling to see the light — even though they speak directly to Jesus Christ, the true light! "This blind man," commented St. Augustine on this story, "is the human race."

Every one of us is born into spiritual blindness — recipients of the original sin and the severed communion between God and man going back to Adam. Each of us, like the blind man, is un-

able to heal ourselves; desiring to see, we stumble about in darkness and misery. We are in need of Christ and his light, which comes through his word and the sacrament of baptism. Lent is a

good time to offer thanks for the gift of spiritual sight, and to go to confession to confess any sins, mortal or venial, that have either destroyed or damaged the life of grace.

The other Gospel readings for this week depict the growing animosity of many toward Jesus. He is questioned and persecuted; some begin to actively plot to arrest and ultimately kill him. The cross looms.

**PRAYER**

"Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fill all things; Treasury of Blessings, and Giver of Life, come and dwell within us, cleanse us of all stain, and save our souls, O Gracious Lord. Amen."  
— "Heavenly King," Byzantine Prayer

FIFTH WEEK OF LENT | SUNDAY, APRIL 6 – SATURDAY, APRIL 12

In the final week of Lent, death is front and center. Ever since the Fall, death has been the enemy, the constant source of pain, despair, sadness and woe. People seek to battle death in a million ways, all of them doomed to failure. Many of those who believe nothing exists beyond this temporal world and life. They want to live forever. But as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI noted in his encyclical on hope, "To con-

**THEMES:** Death, Resurrection, Mercy, Hypocrisy, Worship, Trust, God's Word, Faith

tinue living for ever — endlessly — appears more like a curse than a gift. Death, admittedly, one would wish to postpone for as long as possible. But to live always, without end — this, all things considered, can only be monotonous and ultimately unbearable" (*Spe Salvi* ["On Christian Hope,"] No. 10). The Christian perspective is that, yes, death is evil and horrible, but death can only be conquered by death. For the Chris-

tian, the darkness of the grave is the passageway to resurrection and everlasting life. This is made possible by the death and resurrection of Christ, as expressed by St. Paul in the epistle on the first Sunday of

Lent: "If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you" (Rom 8:11).

**PRAYER**

"I love you, O my God, and my only desire is to love you until the last breath of my life. I love you, O my infinitely lovable God, and I would rather die loving you, than live without loving you. I love you, Lord, and the only grace I ask is to love you eternally. ... My God, if my tongue cannot say in every moment that I love you, I want my heart to repeat it to you as often as I draw breath."  
— St. John Vianney, The Curé of Ars

**HOLY WEEK AND THE TRIDUUM**

SUNDAY, APRIL 13 – SATURDAY, APRIL 19

Lent officially comes to a close with the start of the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. With that liturgy begins the Triduum — the three days that depict Christ's passion, death and resurrection — and a continued opportunity for us to prayerfully grow closer to our Lord as we remember his great act of sacrificial love.



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