

CE—Lent 3-C  
March 7, 2010

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

**Exodus 3:1-15;**  
**Psalms 63:1-8;**  
**1 Corinthians 10:1-13;**

**Luke 13:1-9**

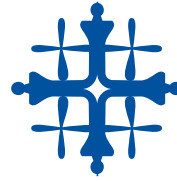
*<sup>1</sup>At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup>He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? <sup>3</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. <sup>4</sup>Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did." <sup>6</sup>Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup>So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' <sup>8</sup>He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup>If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"*

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# Synthesis CE

A Lectionary Study Guide following the Revised Common Lectionary

INTERPRETATION

## A Call to Repent

Luke, more than the other Gospel writers, emphasizes the theme of *repentance*. Our reading for today dramatically illustrates the urgency of the need to repent. The opening verses of the passage (Lk. 13:1-5) are unique to Luke, and reflect the commonly held conviction that illness and misfortune were God's punishment for sin (cf Dt. 28–30; Jn. 9:2-3).

As Jesus was teaching on his way to Jerusalem, some in the crowd related an incident that seemed to affirm the connection between sinful behavior and disaster. A number of Galileans were brutally slaughtered by Pontius Pilate's soldiers while they were presenting their sacrifices. In this horrific act, the blood of the victims was mingled with that of the sacrificial animals. Jesus responded by asking if they thought that these Galileans were "worse sinners than all other Galileans" (Lk. 13:2) because they suffered in this way.

Jesus then countered with another example of undeserved disaster when eighteen people died as the tower of Siloam in the Jerusalem wall fell on them. Before the tower fell there was nothing to indicate that those who died were unusually sinful. Indeed, there was no reason to suppose that the people in either group of unfortunates were worse offenders than others.

Jesus makes no comment here to affirm or deny the connection between sin and misfortune, but he uses the incidents as a warning: "... unless you repent, you all will perish just as they did" (vv. 3, 5). In both cases, whether as the result of intentional human actions or accident, these violent deaths occurred without warning, leaving the victims no opportunity to repent. Life is precarious; thus repentance cannot be delayed and must be an ongoing part of one's life.

Jesus saw the world as ripe for judgment, with his own ministry offering enlightenment and the opportunity to receive the Good News of the Kingdom. Such acceptance would empower people to recognize and turn away from their own wrongs.

Jesus illustrates his point with the parable of the fig tree (cf Mt. 21:18-19; Mk. 11:12-14). The fig tree was often used in the Old Testament writings as a metaphor for Israel (Jer. 8:13; Hos. 9:10; Mic. 7:1). A man planted a fig tree in his vineyard, but after three years it still had not produced any fruit. Thus he told the gardener to cut it down since it was "wasting the soil" (v. 7). However, the gardener pleaded for one more chance. He offered to provide extra care and fertilizer, digging a trench around the tree to provide additional moisture to the roots. If the tree failed to produce fruit at the end of another year, the gardener would agree to cut it down.

In light of Jesus' previous warning about the need to repent, the sparing of the fig tree is a reminder of God's grace and mercy. There is still the opportunity to repent, but there is a definite time limit.

However, while we are ultimately accountable for our own actions, we are not alone. Just as the gardener tended to the fig tree, God will be patient, and will forgive and renew us. In response, we are to be more responsible, more productive, and more compassionate in God's service.

The story of Moses and the burning bush in the Old Testament passage is the most detailed account of a Divine call recorded in Scripture. Here we see the typical pattern of commission, objection, reassurance, and sign as Moses is called to be God's agent in the liberation of Israel (Ex. 3:1—4:17).

Moses had fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian guard and had started a new life for himself in Midian. He was tending his father-in-law's sheep in the wilderness near Mt. Horeb (Mt. Sinai) when his attention was caught by the sight of a bush that was burning but was not consumed. As Moses stood before the bush, the Lord called him to remove his sandals as a sign of respect, for he was now standing on holy ground.

As the Lord spoke, Moses was filled with awe and immediately hid his face, since to look upon the Divine presence was too much for a mortal. The Lord had seen the misery and suffering of the Israelites and had come to deliver them from oppression. Furthermore, Moses was to be the one to go to Pharaoh and lead them to a new and prosperous land.

Moses immediately replied with the first of five objections, as he protested that he was not the one for such a vocation. However, God offered assurance that "I will be with you" (3:12), and that Moses would bring the people to worship at this very same mountain.

Moses went on to say that no one would believe that he acted for God because he didn't even know God's name. The name that God then gave Moses can be translated as "I AM WHO I AM" or "I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE" (v. 14). This is God's name forever, for "all generations" (v. 15b).

The name of God conveys a sense of Being in which the nature of God will be made evident through God's actions. The freedom, majesty, and mystery of God are revealed here as God promises to be in relationship with the Israelites and to be faithful to them.

Using the story of Moses and the Exodus as an example, the Apostle Paul delivers a message of God's promises as well as a warning to his converts in Corinth. In the first four verses of the passage for today, Paul recounts the miraculous events of the Exodus from Egypt in which God provided protection for Israel during the wilderness journey from slavery to freedom. The manna that came down from heaven and the water that flowed from the rock

were their spiritual food and drink and conveyed the same Divine life that Christians find—for "the rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4).

Yet these manifestations of God's providence did not mean that the Israelites were not to be held accountable when their behavior was displeasing to the Lord (v. 5). Thus Paul cites four instances of Israel's sinfulness in verses 7-10 as a warning to the Corinthians that these things happened "to serve as an example" to instruct them (v. 11).

Paul goes on to remind the Corinthians that they too might fall if they fail to resist temptation. Yet while we will all face testing, we can also be assured that God is always faithful and will not let us be tested beyond what we are able to overcome. When temptation comes, God's grace is always present to make possible our endurance.

Thomas G. Long wrote in *The Christian Century* (March 7, 2001):

"The signs of this new reality breaking in and summoning us to a new way of life are all around us. But what are we looking for? . . .

"'You haven't a clue,' Jesus said, 'about how to interpret the present time.' No sooner had Jesus issued this challenge than some in the crowd stepped forward. 'Don't say we cannot read the times. How about that terrible incident in the temple, the one where Pilate's police slaughtered some innocent worshipers from Galilee?' 'No,' Jesus responded, 'it isn't a sign. And don't bother bringing up the tragic case where the tower of Siloam collapsed, killing 18 people,' he added. 'That is not the kind of sign I mean either.'

"What is the sign of God's pregnant time? We must watch closely and faithfully, or we will miss it. To sharpen our vision, Jesus tells a parable about an orchard owner who was frustrated by a barren fig tree and ordered the gardener to cut the tree down. 'Sir,' pleads the gardener, 'let's nurture it, care for it and give it one more year.'

"*That's it.* That is the sign of the times, the clue to the breaking in of God's reign. . . . Not wars or rumors of war, but instead the gracious and patient hand that reaches out to halt the ax, the merciful gesture woven into the fabric of life that stays all that would give up on the barren and the broken, the merciful voice that says, 'Let's give this hopeless case one more year.' 'Even now,' cried John the Baptist, 'the ax is lying at the root of the trees.' But Jesus said, 'The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to bring good news to the poor and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Let's give this one more year.'" #

## IMPLICATIONS

1. In the Gospel passage, Jesus is asked about the connection between sin and suffering (Lk. 13:1-5). How did Jesus address this issue? How do we continue to struggle with unexplained suffering and disaster in our lives and in the world today?

2. In verses 3 and 5, Jesus calls for his listeners to repent. How do you define repentance? What must one do in order to repent from the heart?

3. Read the parable of the fig tree in verses 6-9 and consider the following questions:

a). How is the parable related to the events in verses 1-5? What do we learn from this parable about repentance?

b). Think of yourself as the fig tree. What is the "fruit" that is expected from us as followers of Jesus?

c). The gardener provides extra care and nurture for the

fig tree. How are we nurtured for God's service? What else do we learn from the actions of the gardener?

d). As you consider the metaphor of the fig tree, what changes are necessary in your own life to foster your spiritual growth? What is the main point of this parable for you?

4. As you read the quote by Thomas G. Long in the Interpretation section, what does the Gospel passage tell us about life in the Kingdom of God?

5. Refer to the Old Testament Lesson in Exodus 3:1-15. What do we learn about God from Moses' encounter at the burning bush? When have you felt you were in the presence of God? When have you stood on holy ground?

6. In the Epistle (1 Cor. 10:1-13), what advice does Paul give us about overcoming the temptations that we face in our lives? #

CE—Lent 4-C  
March 14, 2010

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Joshua 5:9-12; Psalm 32;  
2 Corinthians 5:16-21;

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

<sup>1</sup>Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." <sup>3</sup>So he told them this parable.

<sup>11</sup>Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them.

<sup>13</sup>A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup>When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need.

<sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup>He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!

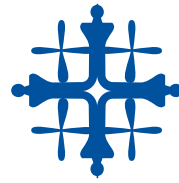
<sup>18</sup>I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" <sup>20</sup>So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

<sup>22</sup>But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his fingers and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup>for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup>Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. <sup>27</sup>He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.'

<sup>28</sup>Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. <sup>29</sup>But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.'

<sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' <sup>31</sup>Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup>But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'



# Synthesis CE

A Lectionary Study Guide following the Revised Common Lectionary

## INTERPRETATION

### The Lost Son

Our Gospel parable today about a man and his two sons illustrates for us the limitless mercy of God. It is the culmination of a series of three parables in chapter 15 of Luke that celebrate the joy of finding what was lost—a lost sheep, a lost coin, and finally a lost son. Jesus told these parables of grace in response to the grumbings of the Pharisees and scribes who criticized Jesus for eating with known sinners (15:2).

The narrative parable for today is unique to Luke and has several layers of meaning that provide a deep richness of interpretation. As the story begins, a man's younger son demands to be given his share of his father's inheritance. According to Jewish law, a younger son would receive a third of his father's estate (Dt. 21:17). Upon receipt of his assets he immediately leaves his homeland for a distant country and squanders all that he has been given in "dissolute living" (v. 13).

When a severe famine strikes, the young man has to resort to the most demeaning occupation for a Jew, as he becomes a herder of pigs in order to survive. Pigs are unclean animals in the Jewish tradition (Lev. 11:7-8); and because they were used for sacrifices in Roman and Greek worship rituals, pigs were also associated with paganism and apostasy. Here the son, as he faces starvation, finds that his irresponsible actions have alienated him from his family, his country, and his religious heritage.

Yet the young man is not totally lost, as he "comes to himself" (v. 17a). He realizes that his father's field hands are better off than he is now. He has forfeited his claim as son; but if he can get home, he can ask his father to at least let him become a hired hand. In verses 18-19, the young man repents and confesses his sins against God and his father as he turns homeward.

In the meantime, the father awaits the possibility that his wayward son may someday return home. As soon as he sees the young man approaching, the father is "filled with compassion" (v. 20; cf Lk. 7:13; 10:33) and runs to him—an unusual act for a dignified elderly Jewish man. He embraces and kisses his son as a sign of forgiveness (cf Gen. 33:4; 45:14-15; Acts 20:37) even before the son repeats his earlier confession.

Disregarding his son's words, the father orders new clothes for the young man and plans an extravagant celebration including a feast with a "fatted calf" (v. 23). Serving meat was a rare occurrence in the ancient Near East. *The one who was dead is now alive, the one who was lost is found.* These words of the father reflect those of Jesus in 15:7 and 15:10 in which he proclaims the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. Here we see that the love of God is unconditional and reaches out to the sinner even before he repents.

Now the focus of the story turns to the older son, who hears the sounds of celebration as he comes home from working in the fields. He is angry when he learns the reason for the festivities and refuses to go in and take part. Now the father goes out to welcome his elder son and pleads with him to come in. But the son bitterly asks why such a party was never given for him.

After all, he has served his father as an obedient son, indeed “working like a slave” (v. 29). He feels alienated and believes that he has been treated as lower than a hired hand. While he has never even been given the gift of a goat to celebrate with his friends, “this son of yours” (v. 30), who wasted his inheritance, is treated as an honored guest.

However, the father does not rebuke his elder son for his resentment, as he insists that “you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours” (v. 31b). His compassion and mercy extend to both of his sons as a reflection of the prophetic mission of Jesus to extend the invitation of reconciliation to all.

The two parts of the story are linked by the phrase “He was lost and has been found” (vv. 24, 32). The one who was dead to his family is alive again. This is truly cause for celebration. The attitude of the elder son toward his brother is similar to that of the Pharisees and scribes who criticize Jesus for associating with sinners (15:2). To their way of thinking, unconditional forgiveness appears to be condoning sinful behavior. But here we see that God is always eager to receive those who have wandered away. God’s mercy goes beyond human concepts of how God should act toward sinners.

Jesus is the herald of this proclamation that God’s love and forgiveness know no boundaries (Lk. 19:10). God loves the sinner even before he repents, and it is this love that makes repentance possible.

Just as the love of the father in the parable reconciled him with his estranged son, so are we reconciled to God through Christ who “has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). This extravagant grace is described by the Apostle Paul as a “new creation,” as he proclaims that old ways of being have

been replaced through life in Christ: “everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (v. 17).

In the past we failed to respond to God’s love and guidance; but we do not have to make up for this, for Jesus has lived totally without sin and claimed the world’s sin as his own. Now we are called to be reconciled with God and to be “ambassadors for Christ” (v. 20) to carry on this work of reconciliation in the world. Though we may have been as lost as the younger son in the parable, we are brought to God through Christ. Thus we are reminded that the whole purpose of God’s unconditional love has always been to bring this reconciliation to the world.

During this Lenten season, the Old Testament readings focus on various aspects of God’s covenantal relationship with Israel. In today’s reading, the Israelites have finally entered the promised land under the leadership of Joshua. When they came to the shore of the Jordan River, the waters parted so that the people could cross on dry land led by the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant. Now that they were safely on the other side, the disgrace of slavery in Egypt was left behind.

As a memorial of the miracle that made the crossing possible, Joshua took twelve large stones from the riverbed and set them up at the encampment at Gilgal. The stones were also a reminder of the Red Sea crossing “so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty” (4:24).

Now that they could eat the produce of their own land, there was no longer any need for the manna that had sustained the people through their wilderness journey. They could also celebrate the Passover in their new home in thanksgiving for God’s grace and mercy.



## IMPLICATIONS

1. As you read the parable in the Gospel passage, identify the thoughts and feelings of each of the three characters at the following points in the story:

- a). When the younger son asks for his inheritance and leaves;
- b). The period of the younger son’s absence;
- c). The day the younger son returns home;
- d). During the celebration for the younger son;
- e). When the older son learns of his brother’s return;
- f). The conversation between the older son and his father;
- g). How do you imagine all of the characters might have been changed by these events?

2. What different attitudes toward life are exemplified by the three principal characters? In what way do you identify

with each of these individuals? When have you experienced similar feelings?

3. In verse 24 and again in verse 32, what do you think the father means when he says that his son was dead and is now alive? What does this suggest about death and resurrection?

4. In verses 18-19 and 21, the younger son confesses and repents. What does this parable say to us about confession, repentance, and forgiveness?

5. What do we learn from this story about our relationships with others and with God? What is the most significant insight from this parable for you?

6. In the Epistle for today (2 Cor. 5:16-21), Paul speaks about the “ministry of reconciliation.” What exactly does this mean? In light of the Gospel passage, how are we as individuals and as the Church called to carry out this ministry in our lives and in the world?



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CE—Lent 5-C  
March 21, 2010

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126;  
Philippians 3:4b-14;

John 12:1-8

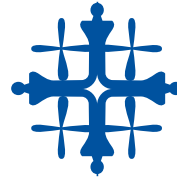
*<sup>1</sup>Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup>There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. <sup>3</sup>Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. <sup>4</sup>But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, <sup>5</sup>"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" <sup>6</sup>(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) <sup>7</sup>Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup>You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."*

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INTERPRETATION

## Extravagant Love

In today's story of the anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany, as well as the proclamations of the Prophet Isaiah and the Apostle Paul, we get a glimpse of the Lord's new works of redemption. Nothing that happened in the past can equal what God is about to do in Christ.

All four of the Gospel writers present an account of a woman anointing Jesus (cf Mk. 14:3-9; Mt. 26:6-13; Lk. 7:36-38; Jn. 12:1-8). However, there are a number of differences in the specific details among the four stories, including where and when the anointing took place and the identity of the woman.

Luke tells of an unnamed woman at the home of Simon the Pharisee, referred to as "a sinner," who bathed his feet with her tears and ointment and then dried them with her hair. When those present condemned the woman for her actions, Jesus praised her faith and forgave her sins.

The accounts recorded by Mark and Matthew take place in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper after Jesus has entered Jerusalem. Again the woman is not named, and she pours her ointment on the head of Jesus instead of on his feet. She is rebuked by the disciples for wasting the costly ointment; whereupon Jesus comes to her defense and praises her service to him. Both accounts end with the words, "Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her" (Mk. 14:9; Mt. 26:13).

In the context of John's Gospel, the anointing occurs in Bethany six days before the Passover and after the raising of Lazarus from the dead (Jn. 11:28-44). The woman who does the anointing is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. After Jesus raised Lazarus, the Jewish leaders were committed to having Jesus put to death, and he had gone into hiding to avoid arrest (Jn. 11:54).

The setting of John's story—a meal at the home of Lazarus, served by his sister Martha—is reminiscent of another meal with the same family in Luke's Gospel (10:38-42). In today's encounter, Mary would take "a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard," anoint Jesus' feet, and wipe them with her hair (12:3). The fragrance of the expensive perfume would envelope the whole house so that everyone present could enjoy it.

Judas Iscariot, who was about to betray Jesus, protested the waste of the perfume, which cost as much as the equivalent of a year's wages. The ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor. In the other accounts of the anointing, those who protest the waste of the ointment are identified as the disciples (Mt. 26:8) or some who were there (Mk. 14:4); only John specifically names Judas. In response, Jesus rebukes Judas saying, "Leave her alone" (v. 7) and praises Mary.

The anointing itself is an expression of loving extravagance on the part of Mary that anticipates the anointing of Jesus at his death and burial. After the crucifixion, his body would be anointed in secret by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (Jn. 19:38-42). But here Mary openly proclaims her love for Jesus for all to see while he still lives.

The anointing of Jesus' feet foreshadows Jesus' washing the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper (Jn. 13:1-20) as an example of servant ministry. Mary does for Jesus what he will later do for others. This action also shows Mary's love for Jesus in fulfillment of his command to love one another as he has loved them (Jn. 13:34). The actions of Mary and Judas are in marked contrast here. Mary is the true disciple who has acted selflessly for Jesus; whereas Judas proves to be a false disciple and traitor. While supposedly defending the obligation to provide for the poor, Judas actually stole money collected for their benefit.

In rebuking Mary, Judas claims to speak for the poor as he points out that the ointment could have been put to better use by selling it and using the money to give to those in need. However, Jesus comes to Mary's defense, saying that "You always have the poor with you" (v. 8). This statement is not meant to dismiss those in need and the obligation to give to the poor, but instead points to Jesus' impending death and the fact that he will not always be with them. Thus Mary's actions take on prophetic overtones that point to the all-important coming Passion and Resurrection of Jesus.

The proclamations of the Prophet Isaiah and the Apostle Paul also call attention to the new work of redemption that God is about to bring into the world. Second Isaiah envisions a future in which God will do a "new thing" (43:19) by rescuing Israel from exile in Babylon. Isaiah recalls the events of the first Exodus (vv. 16-17) when the Lord made a road through the sea and destroyed the chariots of Egypt.

But the people are to forget these former things, for what the Lord is about to do is far greater than anything that was done before. On this new journey, the Lord will make a road through the wilderness and "rivers in the desert" (v. 19b). The people's journey will be safe from predatory beasts, and they will be provided with water in order that they might proclaim their praise to the Lord. Psalm 126 provides joyful words of praise: "The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced" (v. 3). The Lord has restored the fortunes of Zion, and those who had once sown tears now "reap with shouts of joy" (v. 5).

The Apostle Paul also writes to the Philippians about the new thing that God has done through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The passage begins with a recitation of Paul's ancestral heritage as a member of the tribe of Benjamin and his status as a Pharisee. However, in contrast to the surpassing value of knowing Christ, all of this is as nothing (3:7). For Jesus' sake he was willing to withstand the loss of all these things that he now views as "rubbish" (v. 8b). To know the Messiah as Lord and to trust in God's work through Jesus by sharing his sufferings brings the assurance of salvation.

Before his conversion, Paul had possessed righteousness based on observance of the law. Now he claims righteousness through faith in Christ, granted to him in *God's redeeming act* of raising Jesus from the dead. Paul hopes to know for himself the power of Christ's Resurrection through *participation in Christ's suffering and death*. As he continues to grow into his call in Christ, he sets his sights on the future and does not look back—as he presses on "toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (v. 14). Paul himself has become a "new creation" as his life is being transformed through faith in Christ.

Donald S. Armentrout has written:

"The position of this text before Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem is clearly a preparation for the events to come in the last week of Jesus' life. As we enter the final days of Lent, we too will be led more deeply into the mystery of Jesus' death and Resurrection. We will participate in meaningful religious acts while being challenged to live our devotion through just and compassionate acts in the world.

"Even as Jesus is God's anointed one, we too have been anointed in Baptism. For us the body of Jesus is not in the tomb but is risen. Not only do we recognize the body of Christ in the Eucharist and in each other, we discover that he is with us in those who are poor and in all those who are awaiting God's salvation. With Mary we express devotion to our crucified and Risen Lord. With his disciples of all times, we learn again that to follow Jesus means that, like perfume, our lives will be poured out in love for others."



## IMPLICATIONS

1. As you read the Gospel passage, imagine that you are an eyewitness, and describe the scene as Mary of Bethany anoints the feet of Jesus. What is the atmosphere in the room? How do you think Mary herself might have felt at this time? What do you think might have prompted her to take this extravagant action in the first place?

2. How does this event anticipate the death and Resurrection of Jesus?

3. Contrast the actions of Judas and Mary. What did Jesus mean when he responded to Judas' criticism of Mary by saying, "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me" (v. 8)? What is the relationship between religious devotion and social action?

4. As you read the quote by Donald S. Armentrout in the Interpretation section, what is the example of discipleship that Mary presents to us? How can we show our love openly for Jesus in our lives today?

5. Since all four of the Gospel writers include an account of a woman anointing Jesus, it must have been an important story for the early Church. As you refer to the other passages (Mk. 14:3-9; Mt. 26:6-13; Lk. 7:36-38), what do the different versions contribute to your understanding of the event? What is the significance of this story for you?

6. In the Old Testament reading for today (Is. 43:16-21), the Prophet Isaiah proclaims, "I am about to do a new thing" (v. 19). What new things do you see the Lord doing in your life and in the world around you?

7. The Apostle Paul tells the Philippians in the Epistle for today (Phil. 3:4b-14) that he gladly gives up everything in his life because of the "surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (v. 8). How do you establish priorities in your life to make room for Christ?



CE—Palm Sunday-C  
March 28, 2010

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

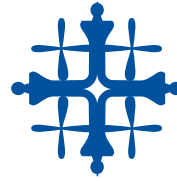
Isaiah 50:4-9a;  
Psalm 31:9-16;  
Philippians 2:5-11;

Luke 22:14—23:56

23 <sup>1</sup>Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. <sup>2</sup>They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." <sup>3</sup>Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." <sup>4</sup>Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man." <sup>5</sup>But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place." <sup>6</sup>When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. <sup>7</sup>And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. <sup>8</sup>When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. <sup>9</sup>He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. <sup>10</sup>The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. <sup>11</sup>Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. <sup>12</sup>That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies. <sup>13</sup>Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, <sup>14</sup>and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. <sup>15</sup>Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. <sup>16</sup>I will therefore have him flogged and release him." <sup>18</sup>Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!" <sup>19</sup>(This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) <sup>20</sup>Pilate, wanting

to release Jesus, addressed them again; <sup>21</sup>but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" <sup>22</sup>A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him." <sup>23</sup>But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. <sup>24</sup>So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. <sup>25</sup>He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished. <sup>26</sup>As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. <sup>27</sup>A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. <sup>28</sup>But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. <sup>29</sup>For the days are surely coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' <sup>30</sup>Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' <sup>31</sup>For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" <sup>32</sup>Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. <sup>33</sup>When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>34</sup>Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. <sup>35</sup>And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" <sup>36</sup>The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, <sup>37</sup>and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" <sup>38</sup>There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." <sup>39</sup>One of

the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup>But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup>And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup>Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup>He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." <sup>44</sup>It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, <sup>45</sup>while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup>Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. <sup>47</sup>When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." <sup>48</sup>And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. <sup>49</sup>But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things. <sup>50</sup>Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, <sup>51</sup>had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. <sup>52</sup>This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. <sup>53</sup>Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. <sup>54</sup>It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. <sup>55</sup>The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. <sup>56</sup>Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.



# Synthesis CE

A Lectionary Study Guide following the Revised Common Lectionary

## Jesus' Passion

## INTERPRETATION

**Liturgy of the Palms: Luke 19:28-40; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29.** The drama of the Passion began when Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk. 9:51). Now as he rides a colt into the city from the Mount of Olives, crowds gather along the way and spread their garments on the road before him, proclaiming, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” (19:38).

**Liturgy of the Passion.** As Jesus shares the Passover meal with his Apostles (22:14-38), he reminds them, “I am among you as one who serves” (Lk. 22:27). These words and actions of Jesus are a reflection of the Old Testament reading for today from the Third Servant Song of Isaiah that describes the suffering of God’s servant.

Before going to the Mount of Olives to pray, Jesus shared a final meal with his disciples to proclaim the “new covenant in my blood” (22:20) and prepare them for the coming events. He warned them of the trials to come and foretold Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s denial. As he prayed, he asked God to “remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done” (22:42).

In the garden, Jesus was arrested by the temple police after being betrayed by Judas. Jesus was then taken to the high priest’s house where he was mocked and beaten. His response as to whether or not he was the Son of God—“You say that I am” (22:70)—provided the excuse to take Jesus before Pilate. Peter had watched all these proceedings from the courtyard; but by the time the cock crowed, he had denied his master three times. He then “went out and wept bitterly” (22:62).

Pilate found no basis for a case against Jesus, and when informed that he was a Galilean, had him turned over to Herod’s jurisdiction. Herod had wanted to see Jesus, but found him uncooperative as he stood silently before his accusers.

Since Pilate’s effort to transfer responsibility to Herod had failed, he sought to avoid condemning Jesus by having him flogged, and then offering in amnesty to dismiss the charges

against him. However, the crowd cried out to Pilate for the release of Barabbas. After some hesitation on Pilate’s part, the weak procurator gave in and delivered Jesus to be crucified. Simon of Cyrene was pressed into service to carry the cross of Jesus.

Having been surrounded by accusers and mockers, Jesus now received sympathy from the women in the crowd. However, he warned them to weep for themselves and their children.

In Luke’s account, Jesus speaks three times from the cross. First he prays for forgiveness for his executioners. “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (23:34).

Luke also tells us about the two criminals crucified with Jesus. One mocked him, saying that if Jesus was indeed the Messiah, he should be able to save them all; the other asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his Kingdom. Jesus replies, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (23:43).

The passage goes on to relate how the soldiers threw dice for the clothing of Jesus and mocked him, saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” (23:37). There was darkness at noon and the rending of the curtain in the temple. But Jesus did not die with a feeling of abandonment. His final words as he breathed his last were: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (23:46a). Throughout these events, the women who had journeyed with Jesus from Galilee watched from a distance.

Joseph of Arimathea, a “good and righteous man” (23:50), went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. It was now evening before the beginning of the Sabbath, as the body was laid to rest in the tomb. The faithful women who have been with Jesus are there to help prepare the body for final burial. They will also be among the first witnesses of the Resurrection (24:10; cf Acts 1:14).

Throughout this ordeal Luke portrays Jesus in control of his destiny. The events of the Passion occurred in fulfillment of his own prophecies (9:22, 44; 17:25; 18:31-33); and his death was consistent with his life and teachings as God’s beloved Son. #

## IMPLICATIONS

1. As you begin your discussion of the Passion, also read the passage designated for the Liturgy of the Palms (Lk. 19:28-40). Describe what you think it might have been like to be in Jerusalem as Jesus entered the city. What was the significance of this event for the followers of Jesus in his day, as well as for us as we relive the event through the Liturgy?

2. During his last meal with his disciples (22:14-38), Jesus sought to prepare his closest followers for the events to come. What do we learn here about the Kingdom of God and true discipleship?

3. The trial and sentencing of Jesus is described in Luke 23:1-12. What are the specific charges against Jesus and how does he respond? In 23:5, Jesus is accused of stirring up the people. How do the words of Jesus continue to stir us up today?

4. On his way to the cross, why do you think Jesus warned the daughters of Jerusalem to weep for themselves and not for him (23:28-31)?

5. In Luke’s account of the crucifixion (23:32-49), Jesus speaks three times from the cross (vv. 34, 43, and 46). What do these words tell us about Jesus and his ministry? Pay particular attention to Jesus’ exchange with the criminals who were executed with him (23:39-43).

6. The women and others who had followed Jesus from Galilee watched all these things from a distance (23:49). What do you imagine their thoughts and feelings might have been as they reflected on the life of Jesus and now watched his death? What are our own responses today? #

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