

Lenten and Easter Bible Study



Feb 11

Feb 18

Feb 25

Mar 4

Mar 11

Mar 18

Mar 25

Let's start with a prayer

Holy Father,

Help us to submit ourselves more fully to Your divine will for our lives in our 40-day Lenten journey to repentance and spiritual cleansing in preparation for the celebration of Your Son's glorious Resurrection on Easter Sunday. We pray that this Lenten journey, Father, brings about a change in our lives that leaves us, at the end of the journey, more committed to our faith and less drawn to the attractions of this earthly existence. As we begin our study of Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem, help us, Lord, to follow in His footsteps by denying selfish worldly interests and by humbly showing our gratitude to You through acts of charity, self-sacrifice, and service to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. We pray in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Topical Outline



Each Thursday we will study the Scripture readings of the next Sunday Mass of the Lent.

Today we will look at Ash Wednesday's Scripture readings:

Joel 2: 12-18.

Psalm 51: 1-4, 10-12, 15

2 Corinthians 5:20 – 6:2.

Matthew 6:1 -6, 16-18.



Prophet Joel

(Sistine Chapel Ceiling)

His prophetic mission was to call Israel to repentance and fasting in a solemn assembly of liturgical lamentation to purify themselves in preparation for impending divine judgment on the "Day of the Lord."

Joel 2:12-18



¹² Even now, says the LORD,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with
mourning;
¹³ rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the LORD, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast
love,
and relents from punishing.
¹⁴ Who knows whether he will not turn and
relent,
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
for the LORD, your God?
¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sanctify a fast;
call a solemn assembly;

¹⁶ gather the people.
Sanctify the congregation;
assemble the aged;
gather the children,
even infants at the breast.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her canopy.
¹⁷ Between the vestibule and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of the Lord,
weep.
Let them say, "Spare your people, O Lord,
and do not make your heritage a mockery,
a byword among the nations.
Why should it be said among the peoples,
'Where is their God?'"
¹⁸ Then the Lord became jealous for his land,
and had pity on his people.

Joel began by asking on behalf of God for His people's conversion:

"Even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart"

The warning "even now" is a reminder that we must not delay in confessing our sins.

If we linger too long, it may be too late for repentance before experiencing God's Divine Judgment.

It is our heartfelt sorrow for sins and humbly turning back to God that brings us to renewed friendship with the Lord.

¹³ “ *rend your hearts and not your clothing.*”

Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful”

Confession and spiritual renewal must be with sincere repentance and not in external acts.

God requires the inward grieving of the heart in a sincere penance.

God responds with His compassion and covenant love.

¹⁶ *“gather the people.*

Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast.

Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy.”

As a community, we can demonstrate sorrow for our sins and conversion through fasting, mourning our sins, and tears of regret when turning back to God. Then we can rejoice in His mercy.

17 Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep.

Let them say, "Spare your people, O Lord, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

18 Then the Lord became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people.

The priests need to call the people to repentance and offer prayers for them. (This happens on Ash Wednesday)

The message of hope:

God responds with His compassion and love for His people.



King David, the Psalmist

(King David statue on the Column of the Immaculate Conception on Piazza Mignanelli, Rome)

King David reminds us that confession of our sins opens us to God's mercy.

Psalm 51: 1-4, 10-12, 15



- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight. ...

Psalm 51: 1-4, 10-12,15



- ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
- ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹ *Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.*

² *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.*

³ *For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.*

King David feels the burden of his sins. He cries out to God for mercy and forgiveness. He admits his sins and takes his responsibilities for them.

*10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.*

*11 Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.*

*12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

*15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.*

King David asks God to renew him, reform him, and be with him.

Because of the Lord's mercy and blessings, King David will declare his praise.



St. Paul the Apostle

(St. Paul statue in front of the basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, Rome)

St. Paul calls us that now is the time to be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:20 – 6:2



²⁰ Brothers and sisters: we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6 As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ² For he says,

“At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

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

Through God's mercy, Jesus Christ has brought about our redemption. He was like us except without sin.

*6 As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ² For he says,
"At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you."
See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!*

To accept the "grace of God in vain" is to neglect the graces which God gave us through Jesus' sacrifice.



St. Matthew the Apostle

(St. Matthew the Apostle. Nave of the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran, Rome)

In the Gospel, Jesus told us how to give alms, how to pray and how to fast.

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18



Jesus said to the disciples: “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ...

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18



⁵ “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶ “And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Jesus gives direction on how to do:

Almsgiving – Conversion in relation to others.

Prayer – Conversion in relation to God.

Fasting – Conversion in relation to self.

"The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Church Fathers insist above all on three forms, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others" (CCC 1434).

On Almsgiving / Good Works

² *“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

Almsgiving is a form of penitence for our sins.

It is part of our obligation in sharing the love of God with others.

Almsgiving is a work of mercy in which we can thank God for the grace He has shown us by extending His mercy to others.

CCC 1434, 1438, 1969, 2447, 2462.

On Prayer

⁵ “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Prayer offered to God should come from a humble heart.

Prayer must be direct and persistent.

In our petitions, we trust in God's goodness because our Father knows what we need before we ask Him.

Pray for what are necessary for our salvation.

On Fasting

¹⁶ “And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

The emphasis is not to seek to be admired by others.
God sees all our intentions.

On Fasting

In accordance with the prescriptions of canon 1253, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops decrees that the days of fast and abstinence in Canada are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Fridays are days of abstinence, but Catholics can substitute special acts of charity or piety on this day.

<https://www.cccb.ca/document/keeping-friday/>

(For those who can, without health reason to keep from fasting or abstinence.)

Let us prepare our Lenten Journey.