

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 Forty 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.

Question from the last session

What is the significance of the breaking of the bread?

Answer from General Instruction of the Roman Missal.

The Fraction of the Bread (Fraction Rite)

83. The Priest breaks the Eucharistic Bread, with the assistance, if the case requires, of the Deacon or a concelebrant. The gesture of breaking bread done by Christ at the Last Supper, which in apostolic times gave the entire Eucharistic Action its name, signifies that the many faithful are made one body (1 Corinthians 10:17) by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life, which is Christ, who for the salvation of the world died and rose again. The fraction or breaking of bread is begun after the sign of peace and is carried out with proper reverence, and should not be unnecessarily prolonged or accorded exaggerated importance. This rite is reserved to the Priest and the Deacon.

Question from the last session

... and the comingling of the body and blood?

The Priest breaks the Bread and puts a piece of the host into the chalice to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation, namely, of the Body of Jesus Christ, living and glorious. The supplication Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) is usually sung by the choir or cantor with the congregation replying; or at least recited aloud. This invocation accompanies the fraction of the bread and, for this reason, may be repeated as many times as necessary until the rite has been completed. The final time it concludes with the words grant us peace.

Question from the last session

“May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.”

As the celebrant quietly says this prayer he breaks his host into pieces and prepares a fragment of it to place in the chalice.

The comingling of the Body and Blood in the chalice remind us that the bread of life we receive is Our Lord's Body, broken on the cross, mingled with his Blood. We are not just eating spiritual food; we are partaking of a sacrifice voluntarily given so that we might have eternal life.

Question from the last session

Related: Adding a drop of water to the wine.

During this action in the Mass, the priest or deacon says quietly:

“By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.”

The water represents Jesus’ humanity and the wine His divinity. The mingling of the water and wine in the chalice symbolizes the Incarnation of Jesus. It also recalls Jesus’ Passion, when the soldiers pierced His side with a spear and out flowed blood and water (John 19: 31-37), thus signifying Eucharist and baptism.

The wine also represents Jesus’ divinity and the water our humanity.

This is an early custom of the Church that St. Cyprian of Carthage (A.D. 250) writes in his epistle about the significance of adding a drop of water to wine.

Topical Outline



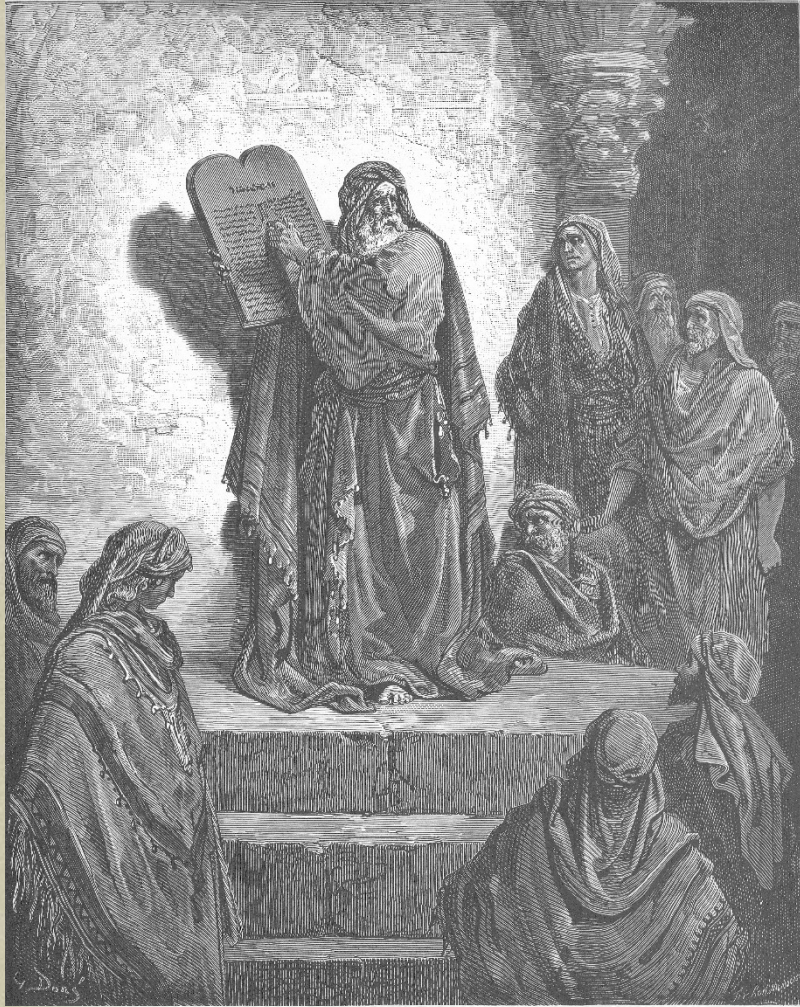
Today we will look at 3rd Sunday's of Lent Scripture readings:

2 Chronicles 36: 14-17a, 19-23

Psalm 137

Ephesus 2:4-10

John 3:14-21



Prophet Ezra

Scribe and Priest.

Esdras in Greek / Latin.

The second book of Chronicles we have for the first reading is about the fall of Jerusalem.

Ezra returned from Babylonian exile and reintroduced the Torah in Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 36: 14-17a, 19-23



¹⁴ All the leading priests and the people were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the Lord that he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

¹⁵ The Lord, the God of their ancestors, persistently sent his messengers to them, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; ¹⁶ but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his Prophets, until the wrath of the Lord against his people became so great that there was no remedy.

2 Chronicles 36: 14-17a, 19-23



^{17a} Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, ¹⁹ who burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels.

²⁰ The King took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹ to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

2 Chronicles 36: 14-17a, 19-23



²² In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom and also declared in a written edict: ²³ “Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him! Let him go up.”

¹⁴ All the leading priests and the people were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the Lord that he had consecrated in Jerusalem. ¹⁵ The Lord, the God of their ancestors, persistently sent his messengers to them, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place;

The citizens of the Kingdom of Judah failed to repent their personal sins and their communal sin of apostasy from their covenant with God despite the many warnings by God's holy prophets of an impending divine judgment.

¹⁶ but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his Prophets, until the wrath of the Lord against his people became so great that there was no remedy. ^{17a} Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, ¹⁹ who burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels.

²⁰ The King took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia,

Among the prophets Ezra had in mind in verse 16 were the 8th-century BC prophet Isaiah and the 6th-century BC prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In the summer of 587 BC, the Babylonians attacked and destroyed Jerusalem and the magnificent Temple of God built by David's son, King Solomon. Most of the surviving citizens were taken away as captives to Babylonia.

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God commanded the seventy years' exile punishment in the 6th century BC through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 25:11 and 29:10). Seventy years was the number of Sabbath years of rest the citizens of Judah failed to observe according to the Law (see Lev 25:1-4).

The Sabbath year was a test of faith and obedience in which the people had to rely on God to meet their food needs. The people failed to keep the Sabbath years, and therefore, they owed God's land seventy years of complete rest, which became the duration of the exile that was a communal penance for the people. The seventy years appear to run from the fall of Jerusalem in 587 to the Temple's rebuilding in 517 BC, with funds provided by King Cyrus of Persia.

²² In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom and also declared in a written edict: ²³ "Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him! Let him go up."

The 8th century BC prophet Isaiah was the first to deliver God's message that a king named Cyrus was to liberate God's covenant people from exile (Is 44:28-45:1). This prophecy was fulfilled historically in King Cyrus of Persia. The conquest of Babylon by Cyrus dates from the fall of 539 BC. In the first year of his reign over a united Persia, Cyrus issued an edict in the fall of 538 BC, commanding the return of Judah's citizens to their homeland.

¹By the rivers of Babylon —
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.
²On the willows there
we hung up our harps.
³For there our captors
asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”
⁴How could we sing the LORD’s song
in a foreign land?
⁵If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!
⁶Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy.

Responsorial Psalm
137:1-6 The Song of
the Exiles



St. Paul the Apostle

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

St. Paul reminds us that
Salvation in Christ is a gift of
Grace.

Ephesians 2:4-10



⁴ God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—for it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. ⁹ This is not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

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St. Paul states that salvation from sin and death is God's gift, and we should accept it in faith. Our good deeds alone cannot purchase our hoped-for justification and salvation; we cannot work our way to Heaven. Instead, our good deeds must be a manifestation of our purification and gratitude to God for His abundant love and mercy. The sinner who receives God's forgiveness and restoration of fellowship with Him and the faith community should desire to do something good in return for the gift of God's mercy and grace.

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. ⁹ This is not the result of **works**, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

In the first “**works**”, what St. Paul meant about works was **works of the Law** (**Judaic Law**), because: 1. St Paul wrote to the **gentiles** of Ephesus, and 2. the **Judaic Law** was what made the people of God worthy of God before Jesus came. St. Paul’s intent becomes clear if we read further.

¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision” – a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands – ¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise,

¹⁵ He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace,
(A new humanity from Jews and Gentiles.)

¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

In this verse, as in Colossians 2:12 and 3:1-4, the use of the past tense indicates that the future event of Christians' resurrection and glory united to Jesus in Heaven is considered an accomplished event. In other words, Jesus is victorious; He has conquered sin and death! All we have to do is to have the faith to claim victory in our journey to salvation. It is another example that one's salvation is not a one-time event but is a process. St. Paul expresses this concept in his letters in the past, present, and future tenses. As Christians, who are God's masterwork, having received the gift of grace and a new life through the Sacrament of Baptism, we must provide a living example of our radically altered spiritual life. When we live up to the challenge of a holy life, we ratify God's calling in electing us for eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven (2 Pt 1:10). How we are saved: not by faith alone, and not by good works alone, but by both faith and works.



St. John the Apostle

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

In the Gospel, Jesus said to Nicodemus that He came to offer God's gift of Eternal Life.

John 3: 14 - 21



Jesus said to Nicodemus: ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ The one who believes in him is not condemned; but the one who does not believe is condemned already, for not having believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3: 14 - 21



¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,

Jesus compares Himself to the healing image of the bronze serpent God told Moses to construct and raise above the Israelites' heads on a pole in the wilderness journey to the Promised Land.

so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

The incident in the wilderness was a foreshadowing of Christ's crucifixion. We must look to the crucified Christ, believe that He is the only Son of God, and be "lifted up with Him" to be saved from eternal death. If we believe, we can receive true salvation, the gift of eternal life.

16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

This verse is one of the best-known verses in the Bible. When Jesus says God the Father did not send Him into the world to judge the world, He means that God sent Him into the world to announce the Kingdom of God and to offer the gift of salvation. Judgment comes later and depends on whether or not one decides to receive Christ as Lord and Savior.

18 The one who believes in him is not condemned; but the one who does not believe is condemned already, for not having believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

Jesus continues in verses 18 to 21 to say that to believe in His "name" is to believe everything that He revealed about His true nature.

It is to believe Jesus is the Son of God, to believe that He died for our sins and that He rose from the dead to raise those who believe in Him to eternal life.

In rejecting Christ, one rejects salvation and eternal life.

Acts 4:11-12

Peter said:

This Jesus is

‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders;
it has become the cornerstone.’

¹² There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

Those who never had the chance to know Jesus or had the chance to choose him will be judged by their conscience and the natural law that God had planted in every heart.

Outside the Church, there is no salvation (CCC 846 – 848).

846 How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body:

Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it.

Outside the Church, there is no salvation.

847 This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church:

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation.

848 "Although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him, the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men."

John 3: *Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.*

Jesus told Nicodemus: "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

God made us in his image, by our baptisms, we are reborn from above to become God's children. Being God's children, we receive the infusion of the life of Christ and are invited to share our lives with God. This made us possible to be justified in the eye of God.

Justification includes the remission of our sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner person, which is an on-going process in our lifelong journey toward salvation: "Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life" CCC#1994 – 1997.

We are justified of our salvation by turning away from sin and turning back to God. This is made possible because Jesus came to call all men and women out of their displaced exile of sin and into eternal life as citizens in the Promised Land of Jesus' heavenly Kingdom.



- ❧ As the Judeans in Babylon were exile from the promised land, we too are exile from Heaven, our true home.
- ❧ St. Paul reminds us that our salvation is a gift that we should accept in faith and should make us live a holy life.
- ❧ Jesus is the one who offers this gift that made us fit for His Kingdom by turning away from sin and turn to God in our life journey.