

You give us strength to purify our hearts,
and control our desires, and so to serve you in freedom.
You teach us how to live in this passing world,
with our heart set on the world that will never end.

- Preface for Lent II

Guide for Prayer for the Fourth Week of Lent: March 18-24, 2007

The Fourth Week of Lent

In many of our parishes, on the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent, at least one Mass will use the Cycle A readings for the RCIA program. On the **Fourth Sunday**, that includes **John's gospel** of the man born blind. (For more information, see [Praying the Gospels of Weeks 3, 4 and 5.](#))

For the rest of us using the Cycle C readings for this liturgical year, the Sunday readings include the powerful story of the Prodigal Son. The younger son who asks for his inheritance and spends it all, returns and asks to be a servant at his father's house. Instead he is welcomed home with open arms by his father who was filled with compassion, ran to his son and forgives him. The older son is jealous and will not share in the happiness but the father says, "now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found."

Monday is the **Solemnity of Saint Joseph, husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary**, with special readings. Whether we use the gospel about Joseph's dream or the losing of the child, Jesus, in Jerusalem, we honor the trust and fidelity of Joseph, as husband.

The first readings this week can be read as powerful messages to us from our God about our Lenten journey. They also seem to be chosen with an eye to the persecution Jesus will experience.

From Tuesday on, our gospels this week are all from **John's Gospel**. The opposition against Jesus builds. In Jerusalem, he heals a man who was sick for 38 years, incurring the wrath of his enemies because he did it on the sabbath. Because of this, and that he called God his Father, they now plot a way to kill him. Jesus say his opponents do not want to come to him for life. Unafraid of them, Jesus goes to Jerusalem for a feast and openly tells people that he has come from God. They did not arrest him then, "for his hour had not yet come." Thinking they know where Jesus is from (in both senses: where he lived now and his origin in heaven), his enemies insist that prophets

Daily Prayer This Week

The readings this week make it very clear that Jesus faced opposition that couldn't accept who he is. We see that Jesus comes to lay down his life that we might live. So, this week of Lent is an important time for us to ask ourselves if there are any parts of our hearts, any of our patterns, that oppose Jesus and his desire to give us life. This kind of honesty can transform our lives. It can allow the grace of God to bring reconciliation and healing we might not have imagined.

If it hasn't been easy to get really engaged with Lent so far, we can still make a beginning, even now. The key is openness and desire. If we can feel any attraction, any sign that the Lord is possibly drawing us, then the Lord can work with us – no matter what resistance or fear we might also be experiencing. All we have to do is act out of these desires and simply ask the Lord for the grace to help us be more honest and more open to what he is offering us. For example, we can ask for the grace to examine our consciences more thoroughly. We could try a different approach to facing any resistance we might have to the Lord's working in us. We might not commit the big sins, but we may not have examined what we fail to do. Who am I failing to love, to forgive, to be generous to? With whom am I withholding affection, care, reconciliation? Where can I live more honestly, with more integrity? How might I proactively change patterns of escape with patterns of care for others?

don't come from where Jesus is from.

For the **Fifth Sunday of Lent** the prophet **Isaiah** tells us that God gives us encouragement in the face of change: "Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new!" In **John's Gospel** Jesus challenges religious leaders who try to test his respect for the law by bringing before him a woman caught in adultery. Jesus says simply, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

It is a time of grace when we can experience moments of "recognition," or self-understanding. It isn't grace to "beat up on" ourselves. It is grace to feel grateful to the Lord for showing us obstacles to the life he is offering us. It is grace to feel our spirits lighten as we feel drawn to greater freedom and peace. It is incredible grace when we are drawn to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This week, let us give thanks to the Lord who deeply desires our greater freedom and joy. As we go to bed each night. let us thank the Lord for what we saw that day and renew our desires for the next day of grace.