

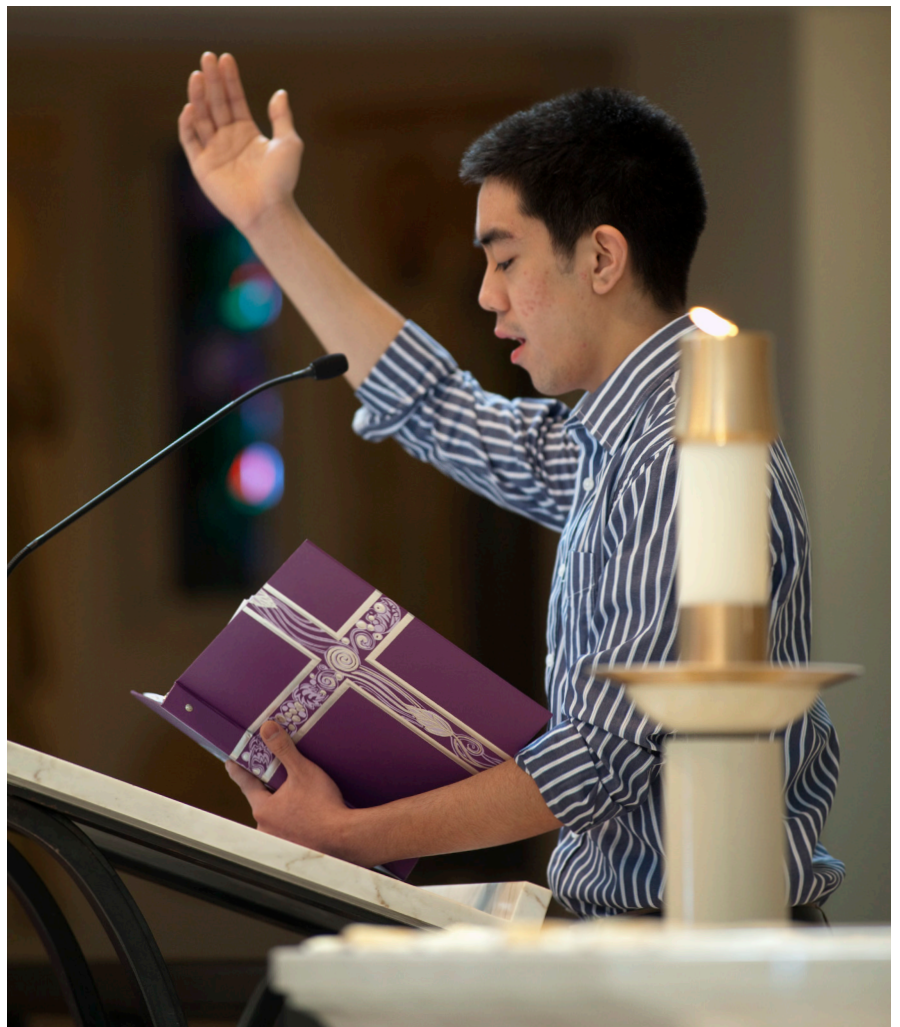
# Rejoicing in God’s Salvation

As we approach these final weeks of Lent and prepare for the celebration of the Sacred Paschal Triduum, the first reading on the Fifth Sunday of Lent invites us to reflect on the ways that God is at work in us and in the world. “[S]ee, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19) Indeed, during this season we remember all the ways God has been working to renew humanity from within and bring about our salvation. We celebrate the culmination of his saving work—the death and resurrection of Jesus—on Easter. As the weeks of the Easter Season unfold, we hear how the Christian community, so overjoyed at Christ’s victory over death and sin, cannot keep this to themselves and begin to share it boldly. On the Third Sunday of Easter, the first reading tells us how they continue to rejoice, even amidst persecution, and to speak of all that Jesus did (Acts 5:41). These readings invite us to reflect on what God has done for us, and to allow our hearts to overflow with joy and gratitude such that we, too, cannot help but share all that God has done for us.

The reflections on each Sunday’s readings in this article are followed by citations from documents from our teaching tradition that connect to the readings. These connections provide perspectives to aid your understanding and application of the readings to your parishioner’s lives. The questions under Liturgy and Life may be discussed among staff or the liturgy commission or inserted into the bulletin for parishioners’ reflection. The petitions with the universal prayer may be used at Mass or during staff or liturgy committee meetings. Finally, you may find it valuable to end your meeting or reflection with the concluding prayer.

## FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT Readings

Not long after Jesus’ birth, Israel had come under direct Roman rule. When this happened, Jewish courts lost the power to inflict the death penalty. Although permitted in biblical law for a variety of crimes, the death penalty was enforced rarely. Almost no



The psalm on the Fifth Sunday in Lent joyfully proclaims that God has done great things for us.

biblical passages speak of inflicting death on adulterers, and non-biblical legal documents from the second century reveal that the usual result of adultery was divorce, not death. Still, the Roman prohibition was a symbol of Israel’s subjugation and was unpopular among many Jews. The “test” that today’s Gospel passage references may have had more to do with Jesus’ thoughts on capital punishment than adultery. If he had favored a strict interpretation of the law of Moses, they could have insinuated to the Romans that Jesus had questioned their rule.

Jesus subverts the hopes of his questioners when he employs a Jewish tradition that treats the law of Moses as a rem-

edy for sin, not a justification for violence. Israel's judges tried to find penalties that would lead the accused to a change of heart. In a brilliant move, Jesus applied that principle in a way that led the accusers to a change of heart. By avoiding any conversation about the death penalty or adultery, he was able instead to remind the scribes and Pharisees of compassion.

A consistent theme in the Scriptures is God's ability to act in ways that transcend human imagination. In this Sunday's first reading, the old ways of sin and war and conquest have given way to redemption and hope for new life. St. Paul also knows this; his past troubled him, and he speaks often of his total dependence on God's mercy, as this Sunday's second reading shows. Just so, as we approach Holy Week, we too can let ourselves be surprised with mercy and grace, knowing that God has provided for our salvation.

### Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

St. Paul tells the Philippians that he has "accepted the loss of all things . . . that I may gain Christ and be found in him." By putting behind the things of this world "for the good of knowing Christ" the apostle is looking forward to sharing in the resurrection. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, "For those who die in Christ's grace it is a participation in the death of the Lord, so that they can also share in his Resurrection" (1006).

When Jesus refuses to give in to the scribes and Pharisees and condemn the woman caught in adultery, he offers a model of mercy that we should mirror in our lives. Practicing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy are a response to the mercy God has shown us. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities" (2447).

### Liturgy and Life

(1) What new thing is God doing in your life? What have you left behind to deepen your relationship with Christ? (3) What does the Gospel teach you about the difference between our attitude toward others and God's?

### Universal Prayer

The Lord does great things for us and fills us with joy, and so we have the courage to offer to him our prayers.

For the Church, that she may be a sanctuary for those who need safe haven, we pray: **Lord, show us your mercy.**

For people of every nation, that they will work together to build a world of peace and justice, we pray: **Lord, show us your mercy.**

For women and girls who face abuse and terror, that they may be rescued and protected, we pray: **Lord, show us your mercy.**

For those involved in peace work, that they may bring calm to unsteady situations, we pray: **Lord, show us your mercy.**

For those who have been killed, that they may be received into your loving arms, we pray: **Lord, show us your mercy.**

For the elect, that they may open their hearts to God's love and mercy, we pray: **Lord, show us your mercy.**

For our Jewish sisters and brothers, God's first Chosen People, we pray: **Lord, show us your mercy.**

For those who have gone before us as faithful servants of Jesus, that they bask forever in the sight of him and the glory of his divine presence, we pray: **Lord, show us your mercy.**

### Concluding Prayer

O God,  
your Son brought mercy to all kinds of situations.  
He showed us how to act justly and walk humbly.  
May we follow this example  
and create space for mercy and justice in all that we do.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### PALM SUNDAY

#### Readings

The Gospels agree on the major points of Jesus' passion and death but differ in perspective. Each evangelist had a different reason for telling Christ's story, and each Gospel takes a different point of view. Luke's passion narrative highlights Jesus' obedience: the cross was God's will, and Jesus offered himself freely to suffering and death.

Luke drew these themes from biblical traditions. Isaiah writes several times of a future "suffering servant," an innocent but persecuted man who will communicate a divine message. By trusting in God alone, the servant will overcome his suffering and redeem humanity. Early Christians believed that Jesus fulfilled these prophecies, and Luke portrays Jesus as the suffering but obedient servant who fulfills God's will.

This Sunday's second reading also contains a tradition that Luke probably knew. Many early Christians believed that Christ, despite his divine status, emptied himself and chose a life of humility and suffering to save humanity. Jesus' self-emptying was done as a gift to the Father and results in his glorification and a sharing of freedom with all of humanity.

Throughout today's Gospel reading, Luke emphasizes Jesus' freedom in the face of betrayal, lynching, and an indifferent police state. In Luke's account, although several characters in the passion narrative make decisions that lead to Jesus' death, none of them has real power. By the choices they make, they take their place in a drama that has been unfolding since sin first entered the world. Jesus, by contrast, uses his freedom in the service of others. When he offered up his will in the garden, proclaimed to the high priest that he was the Son of Man, or asked God to forgive his murderers and receive his spirit, he freely chose what was right. He did this despite his suffering, and his choice to do so made this use of his freedom an example to the whole human race.



The first reading on Easter Sunday reminds us that we are called to be witnesses of Christ's resurrection.

## Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

Isaiah's third Song of the Servant depicts Jesus as the model suffering servant. His humility is a model for those who follow him. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "In all of his life, Jesus presents himself as our model. . . . In humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate, through his prayer, he calls us to pray, and by his poverty he calls us to accept freely the privations and persecutions that may come our way" (520).

## Liturgy and Life

(1) How can you make time this week to participate in the services of the Sacred Paschal Triduum? (2) What does Jesus' humility show us about how we are to act? (3) Can you identify with Peter's denial of Jesus?

## Universal Prayer

The Lord has given us a well-trained tongue that we might know how to speak up for those who are weary, and so we pray.

That all the members of Christ's Body act with patience and compassion, we pray: **Lord, in your great mercy, hear our prayer.**

That leaders of nations turn their eyes and ears to the living God, we pray: **Lord, in your great mercy, hear our prayer.**

That victims of wrongdoing seek justice over vengeance, we pray: **Lord, in your great mercy, hear our prayer.**

That we welcome those who have just begun to seek the Lord, we pray: **Lord, in your great mercy, hear our prayer.**

That those who have died will sing the eternal hymn of glory with all the saints and angels, we pray: **Lord, in your great mercy, hear our prayer.**

## Concluding Prayer

God our Father,  
just as your Son claimed his authority over Jerusalem,  
so he enters our own hearts  
in order to guide and govern us.  
May our Lord Jesus Christ reign triumphant in all that we do  
and in every moment of our lives,  
for he lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

## EASTER SUNDAY Readings

New Testament writers speak of God as "able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine," as Paul says in one of his letters (Ephesians 3:20). They derive this insight from the resurrection,

which was an outcome vastly beyond what Christ's disciples expected. The readings this Sunday show New Testament writers coming to terms with God's ability to wrest from even the worst tragedy a glorious reversal.

This is obvious in the Gospel. The empty tomb is a source of confusion and anxiety for Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the beloved disciple. Mary and the beloved disciple do not even enter at first. Only Peter does, and what he finds there perplexes him utterly. But as the beloved disciple reflects, he finds reason for hope. Anyone moving Jesus' body would have left it bound; it would have been much easier to transport fully wrapped. The discarded burial cloths signify that the one once bound by them was now free.

In today's second reading, Paul teaches that Jesus' resurrection gives us hope for a glorious end to our lives. Even as we live, death eats away at us through misfortunes such as illness, fear, injury, and persecution. Discipleship in Christ means that our life has somehow mystically merged with his. When we pray and perform acts of mercy, we rely on Christ's conquest of death to overcome our earthly misfortunes. When we die in faith, we rely on Christ to raise us as he himself rose. God can even subvert the universal dominion of death.

Although subtle, a reversal of sorts also appears in this Sunday's first reading. Peter, explaining the significance of Jesus' resurrection, describes the mission that Christ left the apostles. They are to preach forgiveness, even to the very people who killed him. No human mind could have conceived of such mercy. Only God, whose wisdom is beyond anything that can be asked or imagined, is capable of such love.

### Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

Peter preaches about how Jesus "went about doing good and healing all those possessed by the devil." Just as the first Christians recalled what Jesus did, Christians today are to rely on what Pope Francis calls "grateful remembrance" in *The Joy of the Gospel*. The pope states: "The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance. . . . The apostles never forget the moment when Jesus touched their hearts. . . . [T]his remembrance makes present to us 'a great cloud of witnesses' (Hebrews 12:1). . . . Some of them were ordinary people who . . . introduced us to the life of faith. . . . The believer is essentially 'one who remembers'" (13).

Peter did not fear for his life as he preached. In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis describes an evangelizing community as supportive, patient, and concerned with fruit and seeing God's word accepted. The pope states, "The disciple is ready to put his or her life on the line, even to accepting martyrdom, in bearing witness to Jesus Christ, yet the goal is not to make enemies but to see God's word accepted . . . an evangelizing community is filled with joy. . . . It celebrates at every small victory, every step forward" (24).

### Liturgy and Life

(1) How can you nurture today's joy of the resurrection and keep it alive within you for more than a day? (2) How does knowing that your sins are forgiven impact your life? (3) Whose witness to Christ has helped you to believe?

### Universal Prayer

This is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad. With faith in the Lord's resurrection, we offer our prayers for the needs of the world.

For the Church, that we may be witnesses, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

For women, that they may be believed, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who fear, that they may be comforted, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who are surprised, that they may rejoice, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the newly baptized, that their fervor will nurture them and our faith community, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

### Concluding Prayer

O God,  
who fills us with the joy of resurrection  
and moves us to a resounding Alleluia,  
grant that we may testify  
to the glory of Jesus' resurrection in all we do.  
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

### SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER Readings

John the evangelist wrote for disciples who did not have firsthand knowledge of Jesus. Over time, those with firsthand memories of Jesus died and were succeeded in the faith by people too young to remember Jesus. But these latter disciples believed with at least as much fervor as earlier generations. In his resurrection accounts, John helped his community understand this phenomenon by showing the power of faith.

Some early disciples had visual evidence of the risen Christ. For example, in this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus appears to his disciples on Easter night and demonstrates his triumph over death by showing his wounded hands and side and passing the Spirit to them through his living breath. His demonstration is so convincing that it converts their fear to joy.

This Sunday's second reading contains a different type of visual proof, a spiritual vision of the risen Jesus. The vision includes symbolic imagery that emphasizes that the exalted Christ is truly present. He speaks with a voice like a trumpet; he is surrounded with gold lampstands reminiscent of the furnish-



Photo by Steve Sharp (Unsplash)

The second reading on the Third Sunday of Easter calls us to praise and worship Christ, “the Lamb that was slain” (Revelation 5:12), for the gift of our salvation.

ings of the Jerusalem temple; he wears white and gold garments, like descriptions of the divine in Israelite tradition. These phenomena convince John that, although this is a mystic vision, he is somehow beholding the risen Christ.

Many disciples did not have visual evidence of Christ, however. As the generations passed, other evidence became important. The first reading speaks of the many who came to believe that Jesus was Lord simply because of the merciful deeds done in his name. The story of Thomas in this Sunday’s Gospel reading probably speaks to the experience of even more individuals. They believed entirely through faith in the Gospel. They may have been in danger of becoming second-class disciples who never knew the “real” Jesus, but John secures them a place as blessed individuals who could come to the truth by faith alone.

### Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

In the Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” By our baptism, we too are sent to proclaim the kingdom. The Second Vatican Council document *Ad gentes* states, “The period, therefore, before the first and second coming of the Lord is the time of missionary activity, when, like the harvest, the church will be gathered from the four winds into the kingdom of God. For the gospel must be preached to everyone before the Lord comes (see Mark 13:10)” (9).

Just as the apostles acted as witnesses to Christ, so should today’s Christians. In the chapter “The Church’s Missionary Transformation” in *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis writes that the faithful are to go forth to preach the Gospel. He states, “Evangelization takes place in obedience to the missionary mandate of Jesus: ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of

the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’ (Matthew 28:19–20). In these verses we see how the risen Christ sent his followers to preach the Gospel in every time and place, so that faith in him might spread to every corner of the earth” (19).

### Liturgy and Life

(1) When have you been greeted with peace when you were in turmoil? (2) What difference would Jesus’ peace have made to the apostles, who were sequestered in a room with locked doors? (3) When have you granted mercy to another?

### Universal Prayer

The Lord is kind and merciful; he hears the prayers we offer to him and responds in love.

That the Church may boldly proclaim Jesus, the one who lives forever, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

That Christians everywhere may give firm, unhesitating witness to their faith in God, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

That the neophytes who were initiated into the Church at the Easter Vigil may deepen their relationship with Christ, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

That those who are dying and their loved ones may trust in the power of the resurrection, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

That the souls of the faithful departed may rest eternally in the peace of God’s mercy, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

### Concluding Prayer

Merciful Father,  
through his resurrection,  
your Son triumphed over death.  
Hear our prayers, and grant that,  
having lived as faithful disciples,  
we may one day share in that triumph with him.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

### Readings

New Testament writers often speak of the exaltation of Christ. His exaltation was the result of his obedience: when he accepted the cross rather than abandon his mission, God responded by lifting him up to rule over every creature. The resurrection, early Christians thought, was the most noteworthy sign of Christ’s exaltation, but not the only one. Christ could still make his presence felt among humanity in the Spirit, through which he guided his Church and interacted with individual disciples. These signs of Christ’s exaltation are the topic today.

Christ’s exaltation is clearest in the second reading, when the author of the Book of Revelation describes heavenly worship.

All the heavenly beings, as well as all of the human family, fall down to worship the Lamb of God. In this Sunday's first reading, the exaltation of Christ is subtler. The first effect is the bold speech with which the apostles address their captors, proclaiming the Gospel to them as a defense. Throughout the New Testament, bold speech is a sign that Christ is at work in someone. The second effect is the joy the apostles feel at having been dishonored on Christ's behalf. They could see through their suffering and recognize the presence of Christ who was lord even of their captors.

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Christ's exaltation consists in his ability to surprise people with his unexpected presence. The hallmark of these visits was a statement of love, such as the one he shared with Simon Peter. For John the evangelist, a critical aspect of discipleship was the search for signs of the exalted Christ still at work among his people. Giving witness to these unexpected visits was the primary way the faith was communicated. Just so today, we are called to pay attention to Christ's presence and share his love with all we meet.

### Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

In the first reading, we hear that the apostles were not deterred by the authorities who sought to keep them from preaching the Gospel. *Ad gentes* states that today also the faithful cannot be remiss about making Christ manifest in the world. The document states: "All Christians by the example of their lives and the witness of the word, wherever they live, have an obligation to manifest the new person which they put on in baptism, and to reveal the power of the holy Spirit by whom they were strengthened at confirmation, so that others, seeing their good works, might glorify the Father (see Matthew 5:16) and more perfectly perceive the true meaning of human life and the universal solidarity of humankind" (11).

In the first reading, and throughout Acts, we hear of the disciples witnessing to Jesus, even when preaching endangered them. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* quotes 2 Timothy 1:8, which insists that Christians bear their hardship and draw strength from God. The catechism states: "The Christian is not to 'be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord.' In situations that require witness to the faith, the Christian must profess it without equivocation, after the example of St. Paul before his judges" (2471).

### Liturgy and Life

(1) When Jesus cooks the fish and feeds the disciples, what does he teach us about leadership? (2) What would your answer be should Jesus ask, "Do you love me more than these?" (3) When have you allowed God to change your mourning into dancing?

### Universal Prayer

Filled with the holy Spirit, we offer to the Lord our prayers for the needs of the Church and of the world.

For the Church, that we may spread the Good News in all aspects of our lives, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For people of every nation, that they will discover ways to bring peace with justice into our world, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For missionaries, that they may be filled with zeal and courage in their ministry, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For all who work in the legal professions, that they may strive for justice, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who have died as faithful witnesses to God's love in Christ, that they may see God's face shining on them day after day in the heavenly kingdom, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

### Concluding Prayer

O God,

your holy name is worthy of all praise and honor.

Hear our prayers and grant that we may be true witnesses to you.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

### Readings

In early Christian thought, one of the signs that confirmed the resurrection was the explosive growth of the Church. The readings this Sunday each reflect on that growth from a different viewpoint. The Gospel reading especially notes the way that Jesus' death and resurrection opened the life he shared with God to any person who believed in him and followed his commandments.

This "opening up" is the topic of this Sunday's first two readings. Paul and Barnabas receive great hospitality in Antioch, but after a brief time they encounter opposition. Although Paul identifies his opponents as "Jews," it is important to remember that great crowds of Jewish people had also gathered to hear Paul and Barnabas, and that many more Jewish people came to follow Christ in the years that followed. In fact, for the first several generations of the Church, a majority of those who considered themselves Christians were Jews. Nonetheless, Paul found in this hostility a call to preach the Gospel among the Gentiles, the non-Jewish Greeks of the eastern Mediterranean area. From the start of Jesus' ministry, many non-Jews had expressed an interest in him and his teachings, and Paul now took up their evangelization in a systematic way. This Sunday's second reading, written several decades after Paul's death, illustrates the way the Church's composition had changed during that time: a numberless crowd from every part of the human family now shares God's life in Christ.

This Sunday's brief Gospel reading emphasizes the unity among God, Jesus, and the disciples who continue his mission. The eternal life Jesus offers is not simply immortality. Those who hear and respond to Jesus' voice are drawn into the divine nature. God continues to work through Christ's disciples for the salvation of humanity, to ensure that all might not perish, but have eternal life.

## Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

In the Gospel, Jesus describes an intimate relationship with his followers, who hear his voice. The Church continues to be the sheepfold who follow the Good Shepherd. *Lumen gentium*, the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, states: “The church is, accordingly, a sheepfold, the sole and necessary entrance to which is Christ (see John 10:1–10). It is also a flock, of which God foretold that he would himself be the shepherd (see Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:11ff.), and whose sheep, although watched over by human shepherds, are nevertheless at all times led and brought to pasture by Christ himself, the Good Shepherd and prince of shepherds (see John 10:11; 1 Peter 5:4), who gave his life for his sheep (see John 10:11–15)” (6).

Paul and Barnabas, we hear in Acts, supported new converts, urging them to remain faithful. These disciples were grounded in the knowledge of God’s love, who commanded them to be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, “It is from God’s love for all [humanity] that the Church in every age receives both the obligation and the vigor of her missionary dynamism, ‘for the love of Christ urges us on’” (851).

## Liturgy and Life

(1) When do you take the time to listen to God’s voice? (2) Do you trust God to shepherd you? (3) Who has been a light of salvation to you?

## Universal Prayer

The Lord has made us an instrument of salvation and a light to the ends of the earth. Let us offer to him our prayers for the needs of the Church and the world.

That the leaders of the Church may speak with the voice of Christ, who is one with the Father, we pray: **Graciously hear us, O Lord.**

That all mothers, living and deceased, may be blessed beyond measure, we pray: **Graciously hear us, O Lord.**

That we disciples may be a faithful flock in all that we say and do, we pray: **Graciously hear us, O Lord.**

That we may heed the voice of God, who calls to us unceasingly, we pray: **Graciously hear us, O Lord.**

That those who have died will sing the eternal hymn of glory with all the saints and angels, we pray: **Graciously hear us, O Lord.**

## Concluding Prayer

Lord God,  
we are your people,  
the sheep of your flock.  
Hear our prayers

and shepherd us from sin and death  
to joy and newness of life.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

### Readings

In the first reading, Paul and Barnabas are on the move. They have made “a considerable number of disciples” (Acts 14:21), so surely they are glowing with success. But instead of crowing over their accomplishments, they remind the other disciples that the road of the Gospel is a long and hard one. Acts illustrates this truth through three words—strengthened, exhorted, and persevere—used in quick succession. Just as Jesus suffered, so will his followers.

When Paul and Barnabas arrive in Antioch, they gather the Church and report how God “had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). The Antioch Church, like most of the first Churches, is Jewish. Paul announces how Christ is inviting former outsiders and strangers—the Gentiles—into God’s household. Long before Paul and Barnabas were born, the psalmist encouraged all the “faithful ones” to speak about the glory of God’s kingdom and to make known God’s might to all the children of Adam—in other words, to the Gentiles, to all the nations.

The reading from the Gospel of John reminds these early Christians that they should be marked by love. How will the world look at them and know that they, whether Jew or Gentile, are followers of Christ? They will be known by the way that they love one another. This was no easy task, and it remains difficult today for Christians divided by other kinds of difference.

Finally, the second reading, from Revelation, shows a glimpse of God’s kingdom in all its glory: a new heaven and a new earth in which the suffering that Paul understood was necessary has finally ceased forever. In the new creation, God makes a home with human beings, and they dwell together in peace.

## Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

In the Gospel, we hear Jesus say, “As I have loved you, so you also love one another.” From the reception of the Eucharist, the sacrament of God’s love, the faithful spread that love to others. As the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* states, “The liturgy in its turn moves the faithful, filled with ‘the paschal sacraments,’ to be ‘one in holiness’; it prays that ‘they may hold fast in their lives to what they have grasped by their faith’; the renewal in the eucharistic of the covenant between the Lord and his people draws the faithful into the compelling love of Christ and sets them on fire” (10).

As Paul and Barnabas spread the news of Christ in their travels, they reflected on God’s work among them. “They called the church together and reported what God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles,” we hear in the first reading. In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis reflects on the social dimension of evangelization. He states: “To

evangelize is to make the kingdom of God present in our world” (176).

### Liturgy and Life

(1) This week how can you make it a point to show God’s love? (2) What does it mean to you to be a place where God dwells? (3) Who needs you to act graciously and mercifully?

### Universal Prayer

The Lord dwells among us. We are his people, the flock of the Lord. And as his people, we are called to offer to him the needs of the world.

For the Church, that Christ may continually renew us and draw us to himself, we pray:

**Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who weep and mourn, that the tears may be wiped from their eyes, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who are recovering from serious surgeries and illnesses, that their pain may be transformed as they heal, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the grace to recognize those areas of our lives where God is calling us to change, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who have died, that with all the saints and angels they will sing the eternal hymn of glory, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

### Concluding Prayer

Mighty God,  
in your presence  
death and mourning  
are nowhere to be found.  
Fill us with Easter joy,  
and hear the prayers  
that we offer you this day  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

### Readings

Acts 15 records the first official gathering of the young Church: the Jerusalem council. They debate whether Gentiles should be circumcised when they convert to Christianity. Must Gentiles become Jews to worship Jesus? One obvious answer to this question is “yes!” Jesus and his first disciples were Jews. Surely following the Jewish messiah meant keeping the Torah as all faithful Jews did. But because there was “dissension and debate”



In the Gospel on the Sixth Sunday of Easter, Jesus speaks of the Spirit whom the Father will send in his name.

among the various Church leaders, they convened a gathering to hear all sides.

The reading omits verses 3–21, when Barnabas, Paul, and the apostle James argued that both Gentiles and Jews will be saved through God’s grace. They agreed to an interesting compromise: Gentiles should observe certain aspects of the kosher laws (which made it easier for Jews and Gentiles to break bread together) and refrain from sexual immorality.

The apostle James quoted from the Old Testament to support his case that the Gentiles will one day call upon the name of the God of Israel. He could have quoted from Psalm 67, which repeatedly prays that all the nations on earth will one day praise Israel’s God.



The reading from Revelation reminds us that God’s promises to Israel remain at the heart of the Gospel, since Jerusalem and the twelve tribes of Israel (representing the fullness of Israel) are woven into the new creation along with the twelve apostles (representing the fullness of the Church). Jesus’ promises to his disciples in John 14 have been fulfilled: God and the Lamb have indeed come and made their dwelling with God’s people. Just as he promised, Jesus returns to be with his followers forever.

## Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

In the readings from Acts, we hear of the debate in the Christian community. Pope Francis writes about the importance of faith permeating the culture. In *The Joy of the Gospel*, he states: “The immense importance of a culture marked by faith cannot be overlooked. . . . [A]n evangelized culture . . . has many more resources than the mere sum total of believers. An evangelized popular culture contains values of faith and solidarity capable of encouraging the development of a more just and believing society” (68).

“Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him,” we hear in the Gospel. Pope Benedict XVI states in the encyclical *Deus caritas est* that love is never stagnant but grows throughout life in a process that unites our will to God’s will. “Acknowledgment of the living God is one path towards love, and the ‘yes’ of our will to his will unites our intellect, will and sentiments in the all-embracing act of love. But this process is always open-ended; love is never ‘finished’ and complete; throughout life, it changes and matures, and thus remains faithful to itself” (17).

## Liturgy and Life

(1) Jesus gives the gift of peace to the apostles. How can you give that to another this week? (2) When do you praise God? (3) How are disagreements in your parish, family, or community resolved peacefully and respectfully?

## Universal Prayer

May God have pity on us and bless us; may he let his face shine upon us, as we offer to him our prayers.

That the living Body of Christ will give flesh to the Spirit of God, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

That nations torn by war will work for true peace, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

That healing may come to those relationships that have ended badly in our lives, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

That we will find joy in sadness, hope in despair, and new life in death, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

That all who have died serving their country may be welcomed into the heavenly kingdom, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

## Concluding Prayer

God, you are love itself.

Overturn sin and death

by the power of your love.

Transform the whole of creation

so that all people may welcome your friendship forever.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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REBEKAH EKLUND, THD, wrote the Scripture reflections for the Fifth Sunday of Lent through the Fifth Sunday of Easter, and MICHAEL R. SIMONE, SJ, wrote the Scripture reflection for the Sixth Sunday of Easter. These reflections were excerpted from *At Home with the Word 2025* (LTP, 2024). The citations in Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition have been excerpted from *Scripture Backgrounds for the Sunday Lectionary, Year C: A Resource for Homilists* (LTP, 2018). The petitions in the universal prayer and the concluding prayer have been adapted from *Sourcebook for Sundays, Seasons, and Weekdays 2025* (LTP, 2024).