

A LONGER LOOK AT THE LESSONS

Study Guide and Leader Guide

for Pericopes as Listed in *Lutheran Service Book*

Series B

Lent 1–Easter 7

By Ken Behnken

Lesson 1

First Sunday in Lent

The Holy Gospel: Mark 1:9–15

In the Three-Year Lectionary, all three series assign the Temptation of Jesus to be the Holy Gospel for the First Sunday in Lent. This is fitting, for the season focuses on our Lord's ministry as Representative Man, and His temptation surely was part of that. Lent is traditionally a time for fasting and introspection. But the Sundays are called Sundays *in* Lent. They are breaks in the "40-day Lenten fast," for Sundays are "little Easters," a time for celebrating, not fasting. The Holy Gospels for Sundays in Lent, however, do point to the time of Jesus' suffering and its significance for our redemption.

When Jesus came to John to be baptized, it was not as an act of repentance for His own sins, but it was the right way for Him to begin ministry. Thus He put Himself in the place of all sinners, "to fulfill all righteousness," as Matthew's Gospel puts it (3:15). His saving work ultimately would involve Him in the same stance when He would carry our sins in His body and give Himself in suffering and death as God's atoning sacrifice on the cross.

1. Why was the Spirit given to Jesus at His Baptism? (See Isaiah 61:1.) Why did the Spirit descend in visible form like a dove? (See John 1:32–34.) What significance is there in the fact that the Father spoke His affirming words at this time?

2. How does this event underscore the Christian doctrine of God's revelation of Himself as the Holy Trinity?

"[When] Jesus came up out of the water" cannot be used to argue exclusively for baptizing by immersion. Jewish tradition included many "baptisms," religious applications of water. The probability is that John stood in a shallow eddy and baptized by scooping up water and pouring it on those who came down into the water to him. "Came up out of the water" simply means Jesus returned to the river's bank.

Jesus' testing in the desert followed immediately after the exalting experience of His Baptism, when the voice from heaven identified Him as the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit came to fill Him with power for His ministry. "Immediately" the Spirit sent Him out to be tested. This sequence of events has been the experience of many.

3. Why is a time of spiritual uplifting so often followed by a time of testing? Why was it important that the man, Jesus, face Satan's testing immediately and alone as He began His public ministry?

Mark's account is very brief. He does not describe the temptations. That the Greek for "being tempted" is in the present tense indicates a time of continued testing rather than some isolated incidents. The other evangelists tell of three tests, possibly as a summary of what Jesus was experiencing: being tempted with physical satisfaction, with personal success, and with political power. The most pointed aspect of the testing was that it was a temptation to take another way, an easier way, to achieve His purposes through self-serving instead of going God's difficult way of sacrifice.

While "forty days" is the Hebrew way of indicating a period of time long enough to accomplish what was intended, there is nothing in the context of this passage to suggest anything other than 40 chronological days. Jesus was tempted by Satan, "the adversary." His name implies "one who lies in ambush."

4. Who is Satan, and why was he immediately lying in ambush to trip Jesus and lead Him away from His Father's will? (See Jude 6.) What feeling is conveyed to you by Mark's "He was with the wild animals"? What comes across with Mark's "angels were ministering to Him"?

5. What does it mean for us in our lives as Christians that Jesus overcame all temptations and passed all tests? (See Hebrews 4:14–16.)

John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod Antipas, Rome's puppet who ruled Galilee and Perea. John had ministered in Perea, east of the Jordan, and had even fearlessly denounced Herod's marriage to his brother's ex-wife. Jesus' Baptism and this time of testing took place in Perea; then Jesus carried out a brief ministry in Judea. When Herod acted against John, Jesus left the vicinity of Jerusalem, the center of Jewish authority, and returned to Galilee, where people generally were more free and receptive.

6. What three elements are to be seen in Mark's summary of Jesus' preaching?

The Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 22:1–18

This pericope is based on God's direct communication with Abraham—communication the patriarchs enjoyed before the time of the written Word.

7. "God tested Abraham." How is God's *testing* different from Satan's *tempting*?

God's ordering Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, as a burnt offering did not come "out of the blue." Many of Abraham's Canaanite neighbors practiced human sacrifice and would offer their children to pagan gods as part of their religious devotion. It was because of this and other abominable practices that the Lord later ordered Israel to destroy the Canaanites utterly when they were taking the Promised Land. At this time, however, the Lord used this unthinkable act as a test of Abraham's reverence toward Him and his commitment to obedience.

8. Why did this test of Abraham's faith and obedience focus on Isaac and require that Isaac be surrendered to the Lord? What did his obedience to this difficult command do for Abraham? What did seeing his father's dedication to the Lord do for Isaac?

Abraham was sent to the region of Mount Moriah. Bible scholars identify this as the mountain that later became the site of the temple (see 2 Chronicles 3:1). This adds significantly to the incident's typological nature. Abraham's heroic faith that "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering" was virtually prophetic of the many lambs that would be offered on the great altar of the temple. This father, willing to offer up his son at this site, was a type of the heavenly Father, who gave His Son for our redemption through His death outside the wall of Jerusalem.

"The angel of the LORD" stopped the sacrifice. This phrase was often used in the Old Testament to indicate a revelation by God of Himself as Rescuer or Redeemer. The traditional interpretation of this passage sees the angel as a preincarnate manifestation of the Son of God, acting as God's Messenger.

9. What does the Lord's "Now I know that you fear God" say about Abraham and his faith and commitment? What, next to God, is of highest priority to you in your life? How might you be called on to surrender what you value most to God? How can you take a conscious step in doing that now in your life?

Abraham's heroic faith was rewarded. God did provide a ram for the offering, and Abraham called the place *Yahweh-jireh*, "The LORD Will Provide."

10. How is it significant that God prescribed not only *what* Abraham was to do but also *where* he was to do it? Does it make a difference in our lives *where* we take our steps of surrender to the Lord?

11. When Abraham had successfully passed the difficult test, the angel of the Lord called a second time to Abraham. What part of the promise was stated again at this time that is especially significant to us?

12. How does this lesson tie in with the Holy Gospel for today?

The Epistle for the Day: James 1:12–18

James wrote to Jewish Christians who had fled Jerusalem to take up life in the villages of Judea and Samaria. He understood their circumstances. They were not being actively persecuted by their fellow Jews, but their establishing their own messianic synagogues or house churches probably had led to their being shunned by other villagers and possibly had disadvantaged them economically. They were being

put to the test regarding their faith in Jesus as the Promised One and their allegiance to the fellowship of believers.

James offers a two-step process in dealing with temptation. Both steps require honesty and faithful acceptance of God's Word on the matter. They require not just our intellectual agreement that they are good principles, but our putting them into practice in our daily living.

13. What does James's first step require of us? What results when we are not ready to take personal responsibility for our sinfulness and our sinning? (See Genesis 3:10–13.) What is the deadly process that takes place when we nourish sinful desires? If we may not say "God made me do it," may we say "The devil made me do it"? (See John 16:7–11.) How may we apply in practical ways James's truth about what causes sin?

14. What does James's second step require of us? In our struggle with the deadly process that is the result of giving in to sinful desires, what will the Gospel of Jesus do for us that God's Law cannot do for us?

Lesson 2

Second Sunday in Lent

The Holy Gospel: Mark 8:27–38

Jesus asked His disciples about the opinion of others as a way of focusing the disciples' minds on their own convictions. They said some thought of him as:

John the Baptist—John was dead, beheaded by Herod Antipas. But because of Jesus' miracles, a superstitious notion held that John had returned from the dead and was working through Jesus.

Elijah—Malachi's prophecy about Elijah as the Way-Preparer was well known. In the New Testament, John is identified as that Elijah, first by the angel announcing his coming, and then by Jesus Himself.

One of the prophets—Moses' words about God raising up a prophet like him may also have been behind this idea (see Deuteronomy 18:15).

When Jesus asked "Who do you say that I am?" Peter spoke up and boldly confessed, "You are the Christ."

Jesus then began to speak plainly about the suffering and dying that awaited Him. The Greek *dei* is very explicit. Jesus was teaching His disciples that it was *necessary* for these things to happen. But they neither expected nor wanted to hear it.

Later, as Peter told Mark his eyewitness testimony, he was open enough to reveal his downside. Peter admitted that at the time, he hadn't understood about the Christ and His mission in God's saving will. Peter took Jesus aside and *rebuked* Jesus for suggesting that His clash with the religious leaders would end with His suffering and death. Peter and the others had seen Jesus' power in action. Surely Jesus would not let that happen!

"Turning and seeing His disciples" suggests that when Jesus responded to Peter, He turned, first, to put Peter behind Him, and second, to speak so that the others would hear.

15. Why did Jesus call His concerned friend and disciple "Satan"? Why would He want the others to listen in as He spoke these strong words of correction to Peter?

Jesus made it clear that all attempts to reduce the nature of the Christ and His kingdom to earthly, political considerations mean you do not have in mind ___ but ___. In expanding on this, Jesus addressed Himself to the whole crowd of those who were following Him. As we consider His words, we need to think of *ourselves* in that crowd and listen carefully to what He says to us. "If anyone would . . ." The Greek *thelei* places this into the area of the will—"If anyone *wills* to . . ." Its present tense makes it "If anyone keeps on willing to . . ."

The Bible is clear that our believing and following Jesus are *not* just a matter of our decision. They are a result of the Father's drawing and the Holy Spirit's enabling (see John 6:44; 1 Corinthians 12:3). But Jesus' words strongly urge us to *make up our minds* about Him, and in that very urging, there is the Father's drawing and the Spirit's enabling. God's Word is always power to make things happen according to His saving will.

16. What are the essential requirements placed on *anyone who keeps on willing* to come after Jesus?
17. What does “deny himself” require as we follow Jesus in faith? (See Philippians 3:7–11.)
18. What is meant by the “cross” that every disciple must take up? (See Matthew 15:18–21.)
19. If we are ready and willing to follow Jesus, to what will He inevitably lead us in our daily lives as His disciples? (See Matthew 20:25–28; John 15:12–17.)
20. In the light of all this, interpret Jesus’ paradoxical statement about saving one’s life and losing one’s life.
21. What kind of circumstances might tempt us to be “ashamed of [Jesus] and of [His] words”? How serious a problem is it when we sidestep opportunities to stand up and be counted for Jesus?

The Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16

Abram was 75 years old and his wife, Sarai, was 65 years old when the Lord came to him in Haran to establish with him the covenant of grace and blessing. The essential feature of the covenant promise was “I will make of you a great nation . . . and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:1–3).

Obedient to the Lord, Abram moved his household to the land of Canaan, “as the LORD had told him” (Genesis 12:4). But the years passed by, and Sarai did not conceive. The necessary ingredient for the covenant’s fulfillment was still missing—a son to carry on the family line. So Abram and Sarai took matters into their own hands. At her urging, Abram fathered a son with Hagar, Sarai’s maidservant, and, in this instance, her surrogate birth mother. This practice was not unusual in that society, as we see from their grandson Jacob’s family. Abram was 86 years old when Ishmael was born. Abram hoped the Lord would approve their actions and accept Ishmael as the son of the covenant.

Again the years passed, and the Lord appeared to Abram to make it clear that in this matter, His ways were not Abram’s ways, and Abram’s ways were not His ways. In this contact with Abram, Yahweh

called Himself *El Shaddai*, “God Almighty,” to reassure Abram that He had all the power needed to do what He had covenanted to do.

22. How was Abram to demonstrate his faith in Yahweh’s covenant?

23. When did God call us to a similar “newness of life” covenant?

The change of name from *Abram*, “Exalted Father,” to *Abraham*, “Father of Many,” is significant in two ways. First, giving a name was seen in that society as exercising authority and ownership over someone. That the Lord changed *Abram* to *Abraham* gave Abraham a continual reminder not only of *who* he was but also *whose* he was. Second, the promise that the Lord would make Abram “a great nation” (Genesis 12:3) was expanded to “a multitude of nations.” While Ishmael was not the son of the covenant, in changing his father’s name, the Lord was honoring also him appropriately. Ishmael, too, would be the father of a nation.

God’s promise about “a multitude of nations” referred to the great expansion of Abraham’s genetic family. Ultimately, the New Testament reminds us, that finds its fulfillment in the Church. All of us who share Abraham’s faith are also his children (see Galatians 3:26–29).

24. What is the significance for us that the Lord renewed His covenant as “an everlasting covenant” and specifically spoke of Abraham’s “offspring . . . throughout their generations”?

Note that God initiated the covenant with Abraham, not the other way around. God initiated, Abraham received.

25. What added assurance was Abraham given by the Lord’s changing also Sarai’s name to *Sarah*?

26. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 5:1–11

Many Christians find great spiritual impact when they memorize this passage and keep it in their hearts’ treasure-houses. The New International Version’s (NIV) title, “Peace and Joy,” is most fitting. Peace with God does provide the basis for a deep joy that endures through all circumstances.

27. What is the basis for our having peace with God? Why is it vital for us that Paul wrote “we *have been* justified by faith” and not “we *are being* justified by faith”?

28. What is the ultimate reason for rejoicing as we stand in God’s grace?

29. What process is God implementing in us when He allows suffering to be part of our experience? Can we really rejoice in such suffering? (See Romans 8:28.)

30. What Good News! “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” What, according to Paul, constitutes just the right time for God to provide His help? (See 2 Corinthians 12:7–10.)

31. What if instead of “Christ died for the ungodly,” Paul had written, “Christ died for the good people”?

32. What does it say about God’s agape love that Christ died for us “while we were still sinners”? Paul takes this matter of peace and joy a significant step further. He reminds us that we have been ___ by the blood of Christ, that we were ___ to God through the ___ of His Son, and that we will be ___ through His ___.

33. What does “reconciled to God” say about our relationship with Him?

34. What does Christ’s being risen and alive add to our assurance of salvation in Him?

As a result of all this, Paul tells us, we may ___ in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have missed the point if our Christian faith and worship and service have become a drudgery. As Christians, we, of all people, should *enjoy* life because we can *enjoy* God in Christ! The early Christians knew something their neighbors did not know—and we know it too: through Jesus Christ our Lord, God is our loving Father, and we are His beloved children! Think of yourself as the son (or daughter) returning home to the welcoming Father. Listen to the “party music” beginning in the background as you hear Him say, “Let’s have a feast and celebrate, for this child of Mine was dead and is alive again; was lost and is found.”

Lesson 3

Third Sunday in Lent

The Holy Gospel: John 2:13–25

Did John record a cleansing of the temple that took place early in Jesus' ministry, or is this the same incident that the synoptic Gospels record as part of Holy Week? Bible scholars are divided about this. All recognize that the Gospels are not just chronological accounts, but were organized by their authors, and this was especially true of the Gospel of John. The synoptics, which are more chronological than John, say nothing about an earlier cleansing. Only John records Jesus' "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." John's explanation that Jesus was referring to His body and his comment that the disciples recalled His words after He was raised from the dead also seem to point to an occasion closer to the time of His death and resurrection. All of these considerations lend weight to the conclusion that there was only one cleansing, and that it took place just before—and precipitated—His arrest and trials and crucifixion. It is likely that John placed the incident as one of the first events in the life and ministry of Jesus to further the point he was making about Jesus.

"Jesus went up to Jerusalem." Jerusalem is some 70 miles south of Capernaum, so in our idiom, we quite naturally say He went *down* to Jerusalem—but not so the Jews.

35. Why did the Jews always speak of going *up* to Jerusalem?

The temple's Court of the Gentiles, an outer section bounded by magnificent colonnades, had, in effect, become a marketplace. Concessionaires sold animals and birds for sacrifices. At the time of the Passover, there were large pens with lambs for purchase for the Passover supper. Money changers traded Jewish half-shekels for coins of the empire so the Jewish men could pay their half-shekel temple tax without using coins that had the emperor's image stamped on them. All this was a convenience for the people, and it brought large sums of money into the temple treasury and made the chief priests wealthy—but it also turned the outer temple court into a busy, noisy, smelly marketplace. Incensed at all of this, Jesus boldly took charge and drove the merchants and the animals out and overturned the tables of the money changers.

36. What reason did Jesus give for His actions? Why didn't the Jewish authorities just arrest Jesus for disrupting the arrangement they had approved and which seemed to benefit everybody?

37. What was the reaction of the disciples to Jesus' unexpected action?

Instead of arresting Jesus, the authorities asked for a miraculous sign by which He could prove His authority to take this bold action. Jesus answered them with a *mashal*, a cryptic statement that requires careful consideration to understand it: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Greek is significant. Earlier, as John referred to the temple, he used the word *hieron*, which meant all the temple structure with all its courts. Here, quoting Jesus, he used *naos*, which pertained only to the inner sanctuary, God’s dwelling place. John explained that Jesus was speaking of ___ as the holy place where deity dwells. Thus John underscored again the truth of the incarnation of the eternal Word, a truth at the center of his purpose in writing his Gospel.

38. Why were the Jewish leaders able to respond only in terms of the temple building in which they were standing? When did Jesus’ disciples finally understand and believe the meaning of Jesus’ *mashal* and its application to Scripture prophecy?

39. What guidance does this incident give us in our use of the buildings we have dedicated to God for His worship?

40. God does not dwell in the *hieron* of church buildings. What is the *naos* in which He dwells? (See 1 Peter 2:4–5; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20.) What does this say to us for our daily living?

The Old Testament Lesson: Exodus 20:1–17

We call the laws set forth in these verses “the Ten Commandments.” They are the moral law. As ~~distinguished from ceremonial laws and civil laws that the Torah directed specifically to the Israelites as~~ God’s covenant people, the moral law sets forth principles for all people of all time. Its commandments require a reverential love for God and a respectful and helpful love for one’s fellow man. The principles of The Ten Commandments are not unique. All religious codes incorporate them.

They are the *Ten* Commandments, so perceived from earliest times (see Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 4:13). Ten is the biblical number of completeness. Seeing them printed as they are in the English Standard Version (ESV) helps us to understand that Christians differ in their numbering of the commandments. Lutherans follow ancient tradition and include the prohibition against making idols in the First Commandment and divide the commands about coveting into the Ninth and Tenth Commandments. Some Protestant Christians, however, number the prohibition against forming idols as the Second Commandment and combine the two commands about coveting into the Tenth Commandment. How you number the commandments makes no theological difference, but when talking with other Christians, you cannot just cite a commandment by number, for they may not think of the one you have in mind.

41. On what basis did the Lord call for Israel’s obedience to His laws? (See Exodus 19:3–8.) What were the setting and the circumstances in which the Lord gave His Ten Commandments to His people?

42. What was the Lord saying with His “I the LORD your God am a *jealous* God”?

43. What effect did hearing the moral law from the mouth of God have on the people of Israel? (See Exodus 20:18–20.) Why did the Lord appear to them in such an awesome display of holiness and power?

44. What do these commandments always make us recognize about ourselves when we take them seriously? (See Romans 3:19–20.) To what does this first effect of the Law drive us? (See vv. 21–28.)

Torah means far more than the Ten Commandments. It means all the instruction which God gave through His prophets; it’s the whole content of God’s revelation. In Lutheran terms, *Torah* is both Law and Gospel. This is why the psalmist could say, “Oh how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psalm 119:97).

45. When may we see the Ten Commandments not just as a mirror that reveals and condemns our sins, but as God’s instruction for happy, healthy living as His children? (See Galatians 3:10–14; 1 John 5:1–5.)

46. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Corinthians 1:18–31

The Jewish authorities in Jerusalem asked Jesus for a miraculous sign to prove His right to cleanse the temple, and though they had heard of and investigated many of His miracles, they would not accept Him. Later, Jesus’ apostle Paul experienced the same stubborn unbelief on the part of some as he proclaimed the Good News of Jesus’ atoning death and victorious resurrection in synagogue and marketplace. Synagogue leaders demanded signs of Paul to verify his message, and they would not believe even when they saw him do miracles in Jesus’ name. The Greeks, who boasted of their philosophers and philosophies, demanded logical argument to substantiate new ideas. In this pericope, Paul explains why for both Jews and Greeks he had only one message.

47. Why do those who are wise in terms of the world’s wisdom have difficulty believing the message of the cross? How is it, then, that some intelligent, learned people are Christians?

48. Why was the message of Christ crucified a stumbling block especially to Jews? Why did the Greeks think the idea of God's Son becoming a man, dying as the atoning sacrifice for sin, and then rising again bodily was folly?

49. Who are today's "Jews" who stumble over the cross of Christ? Who are today's "Greeks" who consider the Gospel of Jesus to be folly?

50. Why did Paul stubbornly cling to the preaching of Christ crucified to a world that rejected His message?

51. What does Paul's apostolic example say to the Church of today in our mission to our science-oriented, humanistic world?

52. In what sense is Good News of the crucified and risen Christ both "the power of God and the wisdom of God"?

Paul pointed the Corinthian Christians to themselves as practical examples of how God's "foolishness" had worked out in their experience, saving those considered to be of no account by the prominent of the world. Most of the Gentile converts in the Early Church were slaves, who found the Good News of how much God loves them and values them appealing and liberating.

Apply what Paul said to them through this exercise: The Corinthian Christians were foolish enough to _____. They were weak enough to _____. They were lowly and despised nobodies who _____.

53. What was God's purpose in choosing to assert His saving will through the "foolish" Gospel of Jesus Christ?

54. What is the result for us when we see this truth in regard to our own call to life in Christ?

55. How is it that today, some of the world's "somebodies" are Christians?

Lesson 4

Fourth Sunday in Lent

The Holy Gospel: John 3:14–21

Jesus said, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” God uses conditions and customs in human history in working out His will and purpose. Had the Jews been an independent nation when the Sanhedrin found Jesus guilty and condemned Him to death, He would have been executed by stoning. But the Roman Empire ruled, and the Romans executed non-Romans by crucifixion. So Jesus spoke of being lifted up, and pointed to the bronze snake on the pole as God’s prototype of this. Elsewhere, John quoted Jesus’ “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself,” and commented, “He said this to show by what kind of death He was going to die” (John 12:32–33). The Greek word *dei* spoke of necessity: “the Son of Man *must* be lifted up.” His being lifted up was not a chance result of a turn of events. It was a result of God’s purposeful, saving will—“that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

56. What was the compelling factor behind the necessity of Jesus’ being lifted up on a cross?

57. John 3:16 is probably the most widely known verse of the Bible. Luther called it “the Gospel in miniature” because it states the truths of salvation in one sentence. One preacher said of it: “It is so wonderfully simple that it is simply wonderful.” State the important salvation truths that are inherent in its key words:

God

loved

world

gave

Son

whoever

believes

perish

eternal life

Because Jesus was lifted up in atonement for the sins of the world, sin and guilt are no longer the determining factors in human life and death. The question that determines eternal destiny is not “Are you a sinner?” but now is ____.

58. Whether one is a person of faith or of unbelief is evidenced in daily living. What does this Holy Gospel point to as the difference between one who “does wicked things” and one who “does what is true”?

Modern philosophies espoused by and practiced by many today, such as atheistic materialism and secular humanism, do not in themselves encourage a morally reprehensible lifestyle. That may result, however, because they repeat the original sin of making the individual the judge of what is good and what is evil. They tend to be permissive because their value systems are subjective, not objective, and relative, not absolute.

59. According to John’s words in this text, what is missing in the approach of such philosophies to human self-awareness and morality?

The Old Testament Lesson: Numbers 21:4–9

The Edomites were descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. They were “cousins” of the Israelites, but it was now 500 years since their ancestral brothers lived. Moses sent messengers requesting permission for Israel to pass through Edomite territory on their way to the Promised Land, but the request was refused, and the Edomites threatened to fight them if they proceeded anyway. Later, the Lord judged Edom for its enmity toward His people (see Jeremiah 49:7–10). At this time, however, Moses avoided conflict with the Edomites and led his people around their territory. They traveled through rugged desert to the south of the Dead Sea. It was a hard and discouraging journey that involved them in fighting the people who lived there (see Numbers 21:1–3). A new generation had grown up during the 40 years of wanderings, but they, too, grumbled against Moses and against the Lord.

60. What was the “worthless food” they detested? Why had they come to detest it?

This incident, like many others in Bible history, shows that God will not just continually put up with faithless grumbling against Him by His people. There comes a time when He disciplines His people because of their faithlessness. In this instance, He sent venomous snakes into the camp, and many Israelites died.

61. What was the Lord’s intention in punishing the complaining Israelites in this drastic way? What was the result of the Lord’s “tough love”? What does this say to us for our own lives as Christians?

62. In what ways was the bronze snake in the desert prototypical of what Jesus Himself would experience and accomplish?

63. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Ephesians 2:1–10

Paul reminded the Ephesian Christians regarding their lives of transgressions and sins when they “[followed] the course of this world.” Paul’s description of Satan, “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience,” points to Satan’s nature as one of God’s (fallen) spiritual creatures.

64. What was true about them that had led them to their pagan way of life?

Paul was born into and was dedicated to worship of Yahweh in a pious Jewish family. As a young man, he studied in Jerusalem under Gamaliel and became part of the Pharisee sect. He said of himself in Philippians that “as to righteousness, under the law [I was] blameless” (3:6).

65. How could he then include himself in “We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath”?

66. What is the key word in what followed, as Paul spoke of their being made alive with Christ? What does the word *grace* mean? How do Paul’s words strikingly emphasize that it is entirely by God’s grace that we have been made alive with Christ?

Paul’s words implicitly review our Savior’s experience in His exaltation. He was “made alive” and was “raised up” and now sits “in the heavenly places.” The amazing Good News that Paul has for us is that *we* experience the same with him. *We* were “made alive together with Christ” and “raised up with Him” and “seated . . . in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” In Greek, this emphasis is strong; the verbs are in the aorist tense, denoting a past, completed action that continues to have present significance. We readily understand that we have been made alive with Christ, through faith in Him, but here also, our having been *raised up* with Him and having been *seated* with Him in the heavenly places are stated as accomplished facts.

67. When did this take place for us? (See 1 Peter 3:18; Romans 6:4.) What was Paul underscoring here about our relationship with God in Christ? When will we fully appreciate the truth of how He has blessed us in Christ?

It is hard for human pride to accept that this is *all by grace*. It is said that everyone wants an insurance policy that guarantees eternal life, but most want it to be at least 10 percent deductible. St. Paul,

after “boasting” about his background as a Jew and a Pharisee, said he considered all that rubbish compared to knowing Christ Jesus and being found righteous in Him (see Philippians 3:4–11). After “boasting” about his hard work and his sufferings as an apostle, he said he would boast only in his weakness, which magnified the power of Christ in him (see 2 Corinthians 11:21b–12:10). Paul was determined to boast only in the cross of Christ (see Galatians 6:14).

68. What “boasts” might you have to discard as “rubbish” to be righteous in Christ alone? Why is it that we have no basis for boasting about our salvation—not even about our having accepted Christ as our Savior? (See 1 Corinthians 12:3.) What happens when you insist on and trust in your contributing at least 10 percent for your salvation? What is the only thing you can do when you receive a gift that lets it remain purely a gift?

69. Saved by grace through *faith alone* is complemented by “for *good works*.” What are some of the misunderstandings about these two teachings? In what way are good works an *essential* part of the “grace package” that is God’s gift to us in Christ?

70. Paul’s “we are [God’s] workmanship” emphasizes that good works flow out of the gracious action of the Holy Spirit. Does doing good works require conscious effort on our part? (See Philippians 2:12–13.) What does it say to us that God has “prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”?

71. With what good works are you consciously saying “thank You” to God?

Lesson 5

Fifth Sunday in Lent

The Holy Gospel: Mark 10:32–45

Jesus led His disciples and others who followed Him onto the road that pilgrims took from Jericho, low in the Jordan Depression, up to Jerusalem in the mountains, rising through the hills some 3,380 feet over the course of 17 miles. His disciples and the others were surprised that Jesus intended to observe the Passover there—and were fearful of what might happen in this center of the Sanhedrin’s power. Jesus took His disciples aside and told them clearly what lay ahead for Him. His hour had come. The fulfillment of the purpose of His coming was at hand. It was what they feared, but not what they expected.

Mark attached the approach of James and John to Jesus with their request to Jesus’ solemn words. It formed a study in contrasts: their Lord was ready to become the Lamb of God He had come to be, while the two disciples looking for places of prominence. Matthew’s Gospel says that Salome, their mother, was behind it and made the request for them. Mark deals directly with the two brothers. Ultimately, the request was their responsibility. Their approach was typical of supplicants approaching all-powerful Oriental potentates. Their “we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You” suggested that the All-Powerful One was able to grant any request and need not even know in advance what it might be.

Perhaps the fact that James and John had already been given special positions by Jesus in the inner circle encouraged their thinking about position and prominence. Some scholars believe Salome was a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. That would mean James and John were Jesus’ first cousins, which may have contributed to their expectations. None of this can be firmly established. We know only that they didn’t know what they were asking. They didn’t understand what lay ahead for Jesus, though Jesus had talked to them about it. Jesus gently instructed them again.

72. What is meant by “the cup that I drink” and “the baptism with which I am baptized”? What does their confident “We are able” tell us about James and John?

73. In telling James and John that they would indeed drink the cup and experience the baptism, why did Jesus add that this would not necessarily qualify them for what they wanted?

74. The other disciples saw the brothers as power grabbers and were indignant about their approaching Jesus in this way. What does the disciples’ indignation reveal about them?

Jesus again taught them about His paradoxical kingdom. Whoever wants to be great in His kingdom must be _____. The Greek is *diakonos*, meaning “one who serves willingly.” Whoever wants to be first must be _____ of all. The Greek is *doulos*, “one who has no choice in the matter, because it is his master’s will that determines his service.”

75. What thrust does each of these words give to your being a disciple of Jesus?

76. How may we go about learning this lesson for our own lives in our relationship with Jesus?

The Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 31:31–34

Jeremiah was God’s prophet to Judah during the years before they were conquered by Babylonia. Though his message was considered traitorous and brought him nothing but rejection and trouble, Jeremiah steadfastly proclaimed the Lord’s judgment against His faithless people: Judah and Jerusalem would be crushed by Babylon and the people carried away. But his message was not without hope. Chapters 30–34 speak of the restoration of Judah, and their highest expression is found in this pericope. (This passage is quoted at length in Hebrews 8:8–12).

Through Jeremiah, the Lord promised to establish a new covenant with His people. It would not be just a resumption of the old covenant established at Sinai, but would employ a new dynamic in the lives of God’s people.

77. What had made the old covenant ineffective? (See Deuteronomy 31:15–18.)

The new covenant was not to be written on stone, but in the _____ of God’s people.

78. What had happened to the system of ceremonial laws through which the Lord mediated His grace and forgiveness? (See Jeremiah 7:1–8; Hosea 6:6.)

79. What would the new covenant establish that the old covenant had failed to establish? (See 1 Peter 2:9–10.)

The emphasis of the new covenant was not on obedience to ritual laws, but on the fact that His people would personally _____ the Lord through His full revelation of Himself. God’s people will have direct and intimate contact with Him. What was promised in this new covenant is experiential, not just intellectual (see John 14:15–21). The new covenant will supersede the old covenant, not abolish it.

80. What is the dynamic that enables forgiving love to accomplish what the requirements of laws cannot? (See 2 Corinthians 3:6; 5:14–15.)

81. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Hebrews 5:1–10

The Letter to the Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians when some were having second thoughts about being Christians and were tempted to revert to Judaism. Judaism had been officially recognized by Rome, and Jews were granted exemptions and privileges. But Christians were feeling the pressure of official persecution, which finally led to Christianity being declared an illegal religion in the empire. Jews who had accepted Jesus and had become part of the Christian community no longer enjoyed the old legal safeguards, but were under the same threat as Gentile Christians. It is not surprising, then, that some were reverting to the safety of the familiar old ways. Hebrews was written to show that the Good News of God's forgiving love in Christ Jesus is the fulfillment of the old covenant and is vastly superior to it in every respect.

The section from which this pericope is taken compares the high priests of Judaism with Jesus, God's own High Priest. Israel's high priests did not take this honor on themselves. It was the Lord who appointed the tribe of Levi to provide those who would serve in His house, and who appointed Aaron to serve as the first high priest, to be succeeded by his sons. With quotes from two messianic psalms, the writer showed that also High Priest Jesus had not assumed His priesthood on His own. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, not of Levi. His priesthood was not according to the Levitical order, nor was His high priesthood through Aaron. Jesus was High Priest through God's unique ___ of Him who is His ___. God said to Him, "You are a priest ___, after the order of ___."

Melchizedek appeared on the scene suddenly in the Genesis account after Abraham's rescue of Lot from the northern kings. Melchizedek came out to bless Abraham and received a tithe offering from Abraham. He was called the "king of Salem" and a "priest of God Most High" (Genesis 14:18). He appeared this once, and then was heard of no more. He is seen as the classic example of a priest ordained directly by God and not the product of any cultic priestly system. Quoting Psalm 110, the writer of Hebrews made the point that Jesus had received His high priesthood in the same way as Melchizedek—by God's own direct designation and appointment.

82. As the writer talks about the high priests of Judaism, what contrast is immediately apparent between their being able to "deal gently with the ignorant and wayward" (v. 2) and Jesus, God's own High Priest, being "[able] to sympathize with our weaknesses" (Hebrews 4:15–16)?

Priests offer up repeated sacrifices, first for themselves and then for the people. Jesus, God's High Priest, offered Himself once for all on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That's why He came.

83. Why, then, did Jesus pray “with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death”? How can this text say that God heard His prayer when things did not change for Jesus and His suffering and dying on a cross still awaited Him?

Jesus, God’s High Priest, is the fully obedient Son of God. He was the “Second Adam,” the first man since Adam to be born fully in the holy image of God.

84. What does it mean here that He “learned obedience through what He suffered”? How can the writer say that Jesus was “made perfect” by His obedience? What did Jesus accomplish through His perfect obedience?

85. Why did the writer say “salvation to all who *obey* Him,” not “salvation to all who *believe in* Him”?

86. Can we ever validly separate “obey” from “believe” or “believe” from “obey” in our Christian lives?

87. On what basis did God designate Jesus to be “high priest after the order of Melchizedek”?

Lesson 6

Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion

The Holy Gospel: Mark 14 and 15

In the Three-Year Lectionary, the Palm Sunday celebration is preliminary to the Sunday of the Passion emphasis. This is a fitting combination, for the eager reception of Jesus as the promised King, the Son of David, precipitated His arrest, trials, and crucifixion. The Holy Gospel for the Sunday of the Passion is the entire Passion history from Mark. For our purposes, we will focus on sections that show five of the principals in the drama of Jesus' suffering and dying.

A. The Sanhedrin—Mark 14:55–65

The 71 members of the Sanhedrin constituted the Jews' supreme court, and were responsible for the final oversight of the religious life of the people. In a night session, contrary to the rules of their own body, they placed Jesus on trial.

88. How did Mark speak of their prejudice as they approached the trial? Why did the false witnesses focus on Jesus' words about destroying the temple?

89. How was Jesus finally put into a position in which they could judge Him to be guilty? Why did they consider His words to be blasphemy?

B. Governor Pontius Pilate—Mark 15:1–15

Pilate had a history of difficulties in carrying out political assignments. He was basically on trial by Rome in being named prefect of the Roman province of Judea, and he had made some serious mistakes also there. It was a ready-made opportunity for the Jewish leaders, with influential friends in Rome, to pressure Pilate to do their will.

90. Why did Pilate have to be involved in the verdict against Jesus? What charge did the Sanhedrin bring against Jesus in Pilate's court? Why didn't they repeat the charge of blasphemy for which they had condemned Him?

91. Why did Pilate try to release Jesus? To what lengths did he go in this?

92. Why did he finally satisfy the crowd and order Jesus' crucifixion?

C. The Crowd at the Cross—Mark 15:25–32

When bullied into ordering Jesus' crucifixion, Pilate had the public notice of the charge against Him read "THE KING OF THE JEWS." John tells us the Jewish leaders tried to get him to change this, but Pilate, probably wanting to salvage some sense of his authority by one-upping them, insisted that it remain as written (see John 19:19–22).

93. What was the effect of the notice on passersby and on the religious leaders?

D. God—Mark 15:33–34

The setting was dramatic: from noon until 3:00 p.m., the daylight was darkened. From out of the gloomy darkness there came the voice of Jesus, crying out the words of Psalm 22: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

94. What was it that the eternal Son of God was experiencing in this "eternal moment" on the cross?

E. The Faithful Women—Mark 15:40–47

Though it was the faithful women who had cared for Jesus' needs in Galilee and who watched in sadness at the cross, they had to stand aside while someone with more influence, Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, stepped forward to acknowledge his faith in Jesus and arrange for the entombment of His body. John tells us that Nicodemus, another member of the Sanhedrin, who had carried out his own private investigation of Jesus, stepped forward to join Joseph in the hurried procedures.

95. Why was haste required in placing Jesus' body into Joseph's tomb?

The Old Testament Lesson: Zechariah 9:9–12

Zechariah means "Yahweh remembers." A priest and a prophet, Zechariah brought God's Word to the returned remnant of Judah, encouraging them to complete the rebuilding of the temple. In 538 BC,

Cyrus the Great, king of Persia and conqueror of Babylon, had authorized their return under Zerubbabel, a prince of the Davidic line. Some 50,000 Jews had set about rebuilding Jerusalem and its temple. In two years, the foundations were completed, but then opposition by the Samaritans and others halted the work. Under Darius of Persia, the project was promoted again. Zechariah and Haggai brought prophetic encouragement, urging spiritual renewal and rededication to the task. Darius supported the effort, and in 516 BC, the temple was finished and dedicated.

The prophecy of Zechariah has a strong messianic emphasis, assurance that the saving will of the Lord would be fulfilled. We are accustomed to hearing this pericope on Palm Sunday. It is the Old Testament Lesson, the prophetic basis, for that celebration. Its picture of the humble King supports the Sunday of the Passion emphasis as well.

96. What is strikingly different about this promised King? What does He bring with Him when He comes?

In ancient times, when a king approached in this humble manner instead of on a prancing war-horse it was an indication that he was coming in peace and was ready to serve the people instead of dominating them.

97. Why are chariots and war-horses and battle bows eliminated when this humble King comes to rule? What do the boundaries of His domain say about His rule?

98. How did Zechariah's use of "the blood of my covenant" encourage the rebuilding of the temple? What did it mean that these "prisoners of hope" were to return to their stronghold? What is the point of "restore to you double"?

99. What is the only appropriate response when this humble messianic King comes to you?

100. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Philippians 2:5–11

This pericope is assigned to be the Epistle for the Day for Passion Sunday in all three series of the Three-Year Lectionary. Its lofty words describe the Lord as the Servant and, in turn, the Servant as Lord. Theologians mark them as a seat of doctrine. They describe more fully than any other Scripture the "state of humiliation"—the humbling of the eternal Word to be the Savior—and Jesus' subsequent "state of

exaltation” to God’s right hand. Some think it was a liturgical poem in use as a creedal statement in the Early Church when Paul included it in his Letter to the Philippians.

101. What does this great statement make clear about Christ Jesus from the outset?

While the One who is “in the form of God” did not hang onto His equality with God, but “made Himself nothing,” He did not lose His essential nature as God. Jesus was still “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God” also in His state of humiliation, but did not fully use His power or majesty as God. In humble obedience to the will of God for salvation of sinners, He emptied Himself to take on the very nature of a ____.

102. To what extent did His obedient service take Him? What was the basis of His then being exalted to the highest place?

103. What is significant about the fact that it is the name *Jesus* that is now the name that is above every name?

104. How is it that at the name of *Jesus*, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord?

105. What will be the end result of this acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord?

106. What was Paul encouraging in the Philippian Christians—and in us—with his description of the willing humility of our Lord Jesus Christ? How can we grow in developing a similarly humble servant attitude?

Leader Guide

How to Use the Leader Guide

Put in time and effort to make these thoughts your own. Notes on your Study Guide will help you remember them in class. If you think a point is stated particularly well in the Leader Guide, you may want to quote it—but do not use the Leader Guide continually as “the last word.” Your group’s ideas about themes and emphases and applications may differ from those in the Leader Guide. That’s okay; explore their insights. Since each study is a unit in itself, you may easily use substitute leaders. Provide them with a Study Guide and Leader Guide, with instructions for their use, well in advance.

Each lesson in the Leader Guide begins with the collect assigned for the day. You may use this prayer, or another prayer suitable for your needs, to begin your study. Suggested also are the hymns and songs, listed topically in the index of *Lutheran Service Book*, appropriate for the season or day. The index begins on page 993.

Lesson 1

First Sunday in Lent

O Lord God, You led Your ancient people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide the people of Your Church that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Mark 1:9–15

Jesus has been called the “Representative Man” because in His life of obedience and in His suffering for sin, He took our place. In Him we enjoy God’s gift of a vicariously won righteousness and a vicariously won atonement for sin.

1. The Spirit was given to enable Jesus for His ministry. We must remember that while Jesus was truly God’s Son also throughout His earthly life, He did not continually or fully use the divine power that is His. Paul said Jesus “made Himself nothing” to be our servant (see Philippians 2:5–8). His human life was not a pretense. He lived life as a true man. He depended on the power of the Spirit as He faced temptation and as He carried out His ministry. The visible dove was confirming evidence for John regarding Jesus. This experience became part of his witness to Jesus as the Promised One, the Son of God. The voice from heaven was positive reinforcement for Jesus at the outset of His mission, giving Him encouragement for what lay ahead (see Mark 1:12–13).

2. It is not hard to relate this revelation of God at Jesus’ Baptism to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. God in three persons is seen in the Father speaking from heaven, in the Son being baptized, and in the Spirit descending on Him as a dove. This event, combined with other events in Scripture and with God’s name as stated by Jesus in the Great Commission, makes us see that this is God’s revelation of Himself. He wants us to acknowledge Him as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

3. A time of spiritual uplifting is often followed by a time of testing, perhaps because Satan feels he has to work harder after a person has been drawn close to God. It may also be because in experiencing spiritual uplifting, there is a built-in temptation to exalt oneself or to base one’s confidence on the feelings that the “high” produced. God may allow a circumstance to test our “growth” for its base and substance. Both Satan’s tempting and His Father’s testing applied to Jesus’ time in the desert. Satan was allowed to confront Jesus right at the outset of Jesus’ ministry, tempting Him by offering an easier way than God’s way of the cross. Jesus, having just been blessed beyond any other man, would be strengthened for His task by reaffirming that His life and His strength lay in confidence in His Father and in the power of the Spirit. It was essential that Jesus face the time of temptation and testing alone. As Representative Man, He needed to repair by rejecting Satan’s temptations what Adam had wrecked by acting on them. No one could pass this test for Him, nor could anyone other than the Spirit assist Him in it. He had to establish

Himself immediately as the one who came to do His Father's will completely—in the place of and for the benefit of all of us.

Jesus' very determination to fast added to the stress He experienced in facing the test, but He wanted to be confronted by a full test of His dedication to His mission.

4. Scripture explains that Satan, the adversary, is a fallen angel who, with others who joined his rebellion against the Creator, is under the sentence of eternal condemnation. He is the evil one. He works to thwart and overthrow God's will—even though he has to know he has been defeated. In his hatred of God and God's way, he works to prevent people from responding to the call of the Gospel and enjoying the new life and freedom it brings. He surely focused with all his guile on the one who is God's Son, as He set about His task of implementing and effecting God's saving plan. "He was with the wild animals" conveys a sense of the isolation Jesus felt. He was separated from all human companionship and support, facing the test alone. "Angels were ministering to Him" speaks of God's sustaining and strengthening Him during the ordeal, and their ministering to Him states clearly that He consistently overcame all the temptations of Satan.

5. That Jesus overcame all temptations and passed all tests assures us that His work of salvation was fully successful. He was stating the truth when He said, "The ruler of this world is judged" (John 16:11). Now people can be rescued from his domain and be kept forever safe in the kingdom of our Lord. In our daily living, we can count on the help of the One who overcame. He knows what we go through and sympathizes with our weakness.

6. Jesus' message was essentially the same as John's (see Matthew 3:1–2, 17). The three elements of Jesus' message are these: "The time is fulfilled"—*kairos*, the opportune time, not *chronos*, chronological or sequential time; "The kingdom of God is at hand"—God is not distant, but has come and still comes to us in Christ; "Repent and believe in the Gospel"—a call to a turnaround, a change of life direction based on faith.

The Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 22:1–18

7. God does not *tempt* (see James 1:13). It is Satan who tempts us in many circumstances, wanting us to fall (see 1 Corinthians 7:3–5). God *tests* us in order to strengthen our faith and deepen our commitment (see 1 Peter 1:6–9).

8. The test of faith focused on Isaac because Isaac's remarkable birth was proof to Abraham that the Lord really meant all that He had promised. In Abraham's view, everything the Lord promised rested on Isaac and Isaac's growing up to father children of his own. Going forward in obedience strengthened Abraham in his relationship with the Lord even though—or perhaps because—he did not understand at all why God was asking him to do such a thing. He acted because he was told to act, and he left the outcome of the action up to the Lord. The New Testament calls Abraham "the father of all who believe" (Romans 4:11) and credits him with a faith that "considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead" (Hebrews 11:19) if that were necessary to fulfill His covenant promise. Seeing his father's dedication to the Lord surely was faith strengthening for Isaac, as it always is for children when they see their parents really demonstrating their faith in God and their love for God.

9. The word *fear* in the Old Testament means more than "be afraid of." It implies a sense of profound respect, reverence, and trust. Abraham passed the test. He would withhold nothing from the Lord. There was no command he would not obey. Highest priorities—spouse, children, grandchildren, church, health, work, and so on—all are essentially good in themselves, but all may compete with the Lord for top spot. We might be asked to surrender high-priority things when circumstances threaten to take them away. Then we must "order priorities" again. We can take conscious steps to surrender every thing and every one to God *now* by renewing our commitment to our Lord Jesus in our lives.

10. Abraham was called to do things God's way, not his own way; so also, the selection of the place for the sacrifice was the Lord's prerogative. It required obedient effort to make this journey. With every

step, there was the possibility of turning around and going home—but Abraham steadfastly moved to the place God had designated for his ultimate test of faith. We may renew our conscious commitment to the Lord Jesus anytime or anyplace. Jesus meets us everywhere. But a special significance attaches to certain locations: where we have our personal devotions; where we read and study the Word; where we gather with fellow Christians to worship and to praise the Lord.

11. Of greatest significance to us is “In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Jesus is the descendant of Abraham in whom also non-Jews are blessed as “the seed of Abraham” (see Galatians 3:6–9).

12. This lesson ties in with the Holy Gospel in a number of ways. Abraham’s testing relates directly to that of Jesus; the result in both instances is the one desired; the Good News in the covenant promise, the blessing of all nations, was later announced by Jesus as being near at hand.

The Epistle for the Day: James 1:12–18

13. James’s first step requires that we accept personal responsibility for temptation to sin. It comes from our sinful nature as part of a sinful humanity. When we don’t accept personal responsibility, we blame circumstances, others, even God. The process: desire is conceived within us; it gives birth to sin; and when fully grown (given expression), sin gives birth to death (deadens spiritually). Jesus overcame and judged the devil. With Jesus as our Lord, we are no longer ruled by the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. Devoting ourselves to things that are positive and good helps us control our sinful desires all the while, wearing the armor of God (see Philippians 4:8–9; Ephesians 6:10–18).

14. The second step requires that we continually look to God in thanks and praise for “every good and perfect gift,” especially His gift of rebirth in Christ Jesus. By nature, we are sinful and unclean; the Law can only be an impossible burden that reveals our sin. If the Law is all we have, it leads either to false pride or despair (see Romans 7:7–13). Rebirth in Christ, however, frees us to live by the Spirit, motivating us to love our Lord and one another freely and willingly, becoming His gifts to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ (see Romans 8:1–16).

Lesson 2

Second Sunday in Lent

O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Mark 8:27–38

The second paragraph stresses the *necessity* of the suffering and death of Jesus in God's plan of salvation. It is what drove Jesus throughout His ministry; it is what surprised His disciples; it is what offends self-righteous humanists still today.

15. Peter's expectations of the Christ were those common to the Jews of his day. Subjugated for centuries, the Jews had keyed on the prophecies of a kingly Messiah, and had identified the promised messianic kingdom with an earthly kingdom of Israel. In Peter's suggestion that this was not the way for Him to go, Jesus heard again the temptation of Satan in the wilderness, when he offered an easier way to Jesus. It's striking that Jesus *said the same words* to Peter that He had spoken to Satan in the desert. In suggesting what he did to Jesus, Peter was being the tempter. Jesus had all the disciples listen to what He was saying to Peter because He knew they all held to the same views that Peter expressed (see Matthew 20:20–28; Acts 1:6). Reducing Jesus' mission to the establishment of an earthly realm would mean we do not have in mind *the things of God* but *the things of man*.

16. The essential requirements for coming after Jesus are: deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him.

17. "Deny himself" requires that we give up all self-righteous confidence in our own goodness to make us right with God. Self-righteousness is the antithesis of justification by faith (see Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:20–21; Luke 18:9–14). We are called to surrender our self-will and invite Jesus and His Spirit to determine the direction of our lives.

18. The "cross" Christians must take up is not the suffering and calamities common to man. It is the world's hatred that results directly from identification with Jesus.

19. Following Jesus will inevitably lead us to confess Jesus publicly and to proclaim His Gospel as the Holy Spirit gives us opportunities. It will lead us to imitate His way of life by producing in us a willing self-denial that is expressed in loving service in Jesus' name to those around us. A Christian whose lifestyle says "I want Jesus to serve me, but I don't want to be actively involved in the life of the Church and in serving others" is an anomaly.

20. Jesus' seeming paradox bids us see that an attempt to save our lives just for ourselves and our pleasures will cause us to lose out on real life, which is ours only as we put on Christ and walk His way. We are to "walk the walk, not just talk the talk." In contrast, a willingness to lose our lives, to give up

self-service to serve Jesus and to serve others in His name, leads to a relationship with God that was God's original intention in creating man. It is to be enjoyed now and to be enjoyed fully in eternal life.

21. To be "ashamed of [Jesus] and [His] words" basically means not really to believe Him and His promises and, as a result, not to declare publicly that we belong to Him by word and deed. Many circumstances tempt us to blend in with the world instead of standing out for Christ. Your group will suggest some. Just how serious this is may be seen in Jesus' saying, "of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

The Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16

22. Abram was to walk before the Lord and be blameless. The word *blameless* carried the idea of "free from guilt" and "beyond reproach." This was the Lord's call to Abram to live up to the covenant, to trust Him to do things right by doing them His own way and not Abram's way. As the patriarchal head of the covenant line, he was to set the tone for all to follow. His covenantal walking before the Lord would make his life significant.

23. God called us to a similar newness of life when we were joined with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in Holy Baptism. As Christians, we have no license to sin more so we will receive even more grace (see Romans 6:1–11). In our Baptism, that whole attitude and lifestyle were placed in the tomb with Christ. We go forth from our Baptism in the power of His Spirit. We are not only called to believe in Jesus, but to walk before Him in newness of life.

Nicknames or pet names given to friends or loved ones often are more personal and meaningful than their real names. They stress the relationship and the closeness that you feel with the person who is more to you than just the name that he/she was given at birth. Your special name for the person expresses a special relationship, special expectations, special privileges. This is sort of how the ancients felt about the giving of a name.

24. That the Lord renewed His covenant as an everlasting covenant with Abraham's descendants for generations to come revealed the far-reaching scope of the covenant. The covenant thus was initiated not only with Abraham but also with all of Abraham's "children" to come. We see ourselves in that covenant, and we rejoice that we, too, have been given a new name through the covenant: *Christian*.

25. The Lord's giving Sarai a new name told Abraham that his wife Sarah, not Hagar, was explicitly involved in the Lord's plan to give Abraham a son and make him "the father of a multitude of nations." They had previously taken matters into their own hands, but now were being called again to put themselves into God's hands. They were reassured that the Lord would work things out His way and not in a way that Abraham might choose.

26. In this lesson, Abram is called to a covenant in which he is to let the Lord act in His own way. In the Holy Gospel, Peter was suggesting to Jesus that He approach His mission in a way that would not require Him to suffer and die.

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 5:1–11

27. We have peace with God because we have been justified by faith. "*We have been justified*" emphasizes that our having been declared righteous by God has already occurred through the once-for-all atoning sacrifice of His Son. There is nothing for us to add; we can only receive the gift by faith. *Dikaiōthentes*, "justified," is an aorist passive participle, implying an accomplished fact, not a process.

28. The ultimate reason for rejoicing is "the hope of the glory of God."

29. The process: "Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." We *can* rejoice even in suffering if we know that God is at work for our good in everything. The true good He wants for us is our having a living relationship with Him. He sometimes

uses sufferings as the soil in which this true good grows, as they cultivate perseverance and character and drive us to sink our roots deeply into hope.

30. The “right time” for God’s help is when we cannot help ourselves, and we fully recognize and acknowledge the fact. It was true when Christ came to free us from the curse of sin and law, and it is true in daily life when, in our weakness, we lean on Him.

31. “Christ died for the good people” would always leave us in doubt as to whether we qualify, whereas it’s not hard to see ourselves included among the “powerless” and “ungodly” and “sinners.”

32. God’s agape is not in any way conditional on our goodness, but is God’s nature as God. He *wills* to love sinners and want the best for all, even those who reject Him (see Ezekiel 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9). God *is* agape!

Fill-in answers: We have been justified by the blood of Christ, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, and will be saved through His life.

33. “Reconciled to God” says that those formerly God’s enemies have become His friends.

34. *Saved* has the root meaning of “healed.” When our living Savior lives in us, our relationship with God, with ourselves, with others, is healed—given new life.

Fill-in answer: As a result of all this, we may rejoice in God (enjoy God) through Jesus Christ.

Lesson 3

Third Sunday in Lent

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy, be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: John 2:13–25

35. The Jews always went *up* to Jerusalem, and for them, this was a physical reality. Jerusalem lies on a small rock plateau at an elevation of 2,550 feet above sea level. The Sea of Galilee, where Capernaum was situated, is 600 feet below sea level. Galileans traveling to Jerusalem usually crossed the Jordan and traveled south along its east bank to avoid Samaria. They crossed back near Jericho. From Jericho, 820 feet below sea level, the road rose through the hills some 3,380 feet over the course of 17 miles. Their “going *up* to Jerusalem” also carried some spiritual and ethical significance. It was a purposeful journey that pilgrims carried out for religious purposes. Their intent was to get close to the Lord in the house dedicated to His name, and the prescribed sacrifices could be offered only in the temple. As pilgrims walked to Jerusalem in large groups, they often expressed their faith and their devotion by singing some of the “Psalms of Ascent,” Psalms 120–134.

36. The synoptic Gospels tell us that Jesus quoted Isaiah’s “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?’” and concluded with Jeremiah’s “You have made it a den of robbers” (see Mark 11:17). The Jewish leaders did not arrest Jesus because of His popularity with the people, and because they knew that Jesus’ judgment of the merchandising in the temple was justified. Many of the Jews, though they made use of this convenience, felt cheated by this priestly monopoly.

37. The disciples of Jesus remembered Scripture and saw Jesus consumed with zeal for God’s house.

Fill-in answer: The secret to understanding Jesus’ mashal was stated by John when he said Jesus was speaking of His body as the holy place where deity dwells.

38. The Jewish leaders, because they rejected Jesus as the promised Messiah, could only understand His words in their earthly sense (see John 10:24–32). Jesus’ words were probably just as mysterious for His disciples when they were spoken, but when Jesus had risen from the dead, He instructed them and gave them the Spirit so they could understand that this was all part of God’s saving plan, and they knew, as they remembered this event, that He had been saying His own body would rise again in three days (see Luke 24:36–49).

39. Jesus’ devotion to His Father’s house and to its proper use surely encourages us to respect and value the churches that we dedicate to the Lord and to our hearing of His Word and our celebration of the Sacrament together, for in that setting, we enjoy our Lord’s presence with us in a special sense (see

Matthew 18:20). There are indeed activities that are improper for that sacred setting. This text does not mean that a congregation may not engage in bazaars and fairs and sales for good purposes, but the house of worship is not the place for such activities. When all congregational activities have to take place in one multipurpose room, propriety at least dictates that the sacred appointments—altar, font, pulpit, and so on—be removed or screened from view during social activities.

40. God's *naos* is His people—living stones built into His spiritual house. There is comfort and assurance for us in knowing that God lives in us, but there is also a significant challenge for us to live in ways that will “glorify God in [our bodies]” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

The Old Testament Lesson: Exodus 20:1–17

Traditionally, the Commandments are divided into one through three, which pertain to our relationship with God, and four through ten, which have to do with our relationship with others.

41. The Lord called for Israel's obedience on the basis of the covenant of blessing He had initiated with their ancestor Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3). He had repeated the covenant to Isaac and to Jacob (Israel), and now was renewing and establishing His covenant with the children of Israel as a nation. That He reminded them of how He had led them safely out of Egypt and had brought them to this point stated clearly that He is the initiator of the covenant; it is His covenant of *grace* and blessing. The people were camped at the base of Mount Sinai, “the mountain of God,” led there by Moses as God had explicitly commanded (see Exodus 3:12). They were forbidden to set foot on the mountain or its slopes. There, the Lord appeared in the awesome display of the thunder and lightning, the thick cloud, the very loud trumpet blast, the fire, and the earthquake (see Exodus 19:9–22).

42. The Lord's “I the LORD your God am a *jealous* God” states that as the one and only God, He is not willing to share the hearts and lives of His people with false gods. There is a cumulative, deadening effect that spiritually burdens also the descendants of those who reject Him and His will and ways when they continue to do so.

43. The people trembled with fear. They were immediately aware that they had failed and would continue to fail to live up to the Lord's commands. Because of this, the Lord gave them the Gospel in the form of “the Law of the Covenant,” the sacrifices and ceremonies through which He would mediate His grace and forgiveness to His covenant people. Moses explained that the Lord had come to test them so that the fear (awe and reverence) of God would be with them to keep them from stubborn, willful sinning.

44. The first effect on those who take the Ten Commandments seriously is always that we become conscious of our sin and guilt. We are driven by the Law's judgment of our sins to repent, and through the Gospel to find our life-giving relationship with the heavenly Father in the Good News of Jesus Christ—a faith-love relationship with His Son.

45. We may see the Ten Commandments as God's instruction for happy, healthy living when we get beyond the curse of the Law to recognize that God has only our good in mind. He did not give them to spoil our fun, but to protect us, and to help us find the meaning and purpose in life for which He created and redeemed and sanctified us.

46. Jesus' cleansing of God's house of prayer ties directly with the First Table of the Law: love God, honor His name, and observe His day.

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Corinthians 1:18–31

Paul did not change his Gospel to accommodate anyone. He himself had been dramatically converted to faith from the legalistic Judaism to which he had dedicated his life by the appearance to him of the risen Jesus Himself! He then spent years in the Holy Spirit's school, being led to see the death and resurrection of the Messiah as God's fulfillment of covenant plan and promises in the prophecies of the

Old Testament, His sacred Scriptures. Convinced through this that God was acting in ways that we could not expect and cannot fully comprehend, Paul saw himself redeemed by grace alone through faith alone, and that became his only message for others.

47. Human wisdom values concepts that agree with logical understanding and that promote scientific analysis and proof. It is not logical that an almighty, holy God would love sinners and want a renewed relationship with them and would act on our behalf to rescue sinners through the suffering and death of that Son. What was foolishness to the wise of Paul's day is still foolishness to the worldly wise of today. As Paul says, "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." In Romans 1, Paul writes, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power [*dunamis*] of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (v. 16). In ending this pericope, he says, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." God can and does draw His chosen ones to Himself through the message of Christ Jesus!

48. The message of Jesus dying on a cross caused most Jews to stumble and fall into unbelief because, in their minds, this *proved* to them that Jesus was not the Messiah. They had keyed on the prophecies of a kingly Messiah who would restore the kingdom of Israel. They had no patience with a message about a crucified Messiah. Greek philosophy generally looked at life in terms of dualism: spirit is good; matter is less good, even evil. To such an outlook, the message of God's eternal Word really becoming part of the material world would be foolishness. Even more foolish would be the idea of the Spirit God dying for the sins of mortals—and equally foolish the message of this Crucified One's physical body being restored to life again. Much more logical than a message about a Son of God who would die for sinners would be a message about a Son of God who would impart new wisdom as to how sinners might emphasize their spiritual side, do good things, and thus gain the Spirit God's favor.

49. Today's "Jews" are those who see themselves as right with God because of a legalistic observance of a religious code or because of their own generally moral behavior. Today's "Greeks" are those who follow and promote spiritualism such as that of the New Age Movement. They see God only as the spirit quality within them. In this view, meaning and purpose have to come from within them. Neither these "Jews" nor "Greeks" see the need for a Savior to die for them, so they reject salvation by grace alone through faith alone out of hand.

50. Paul knew the message of the Gospel, Christ crucified for sinners, as the power of God for salvation of all who believe (see Romans 1:1–17). The Gospel of Christ is the venue in which the life-renewing Holy Spirit operates.

51. We err if we try to argue people into accepting the Gospel, or if we somehow bend it to make it more palatable and appealing to the proud human spirit. We do need to explain it as God's surprising truth as clearly and as convincingly as we can and proclaim it as powerfully as we can, but within that context, we always need to remember that only the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit can bring life-renewing faith.

52. Christ is the power and wisdom of God because He accomplished for us and accomplishes in us that which restores us to a living, loving relationship with God.

Fill-in answers: The Corinthian Christians were foolish enough to shame the wise. They were weak enough to shame the strong. They were lowly and despised nobodies who brought to nothing the somebodies.

53. God's purpose was to eliminate all proud boasting by sinful people and to bring glory to Himself and to His Son through His display of the ultimate wisdom of His forgiving love.

54. There are two results for us: Our boast is not in our religious performance but in the Lord; and we are assured that we don't have to be somebody in our own right to qualify for a place in the Lord's kingdom of grace.

55. The influence of Christianity has done much to transform society, especially western society. The Church has been part of our society for 2,000 years. Today, followers of Christ are to be found in every level of society. All of us, somebodies and nobodies, gratefully acknowledge that we are nothing

without our Lord Jesus Christ, and we rejoice that in Him, we have become truly somebodies in God's kingdom.

Lesson 4

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: John 3:14–21

56. Behind the necessity of Jesus' being lifted up on a cross as the atoning sacrifice for sin is the compulsion of God's agape love.

57. The key words of John 3:16 tell it all: *God*—He is the initiator and implementer of our salvation; *loved*—it was not something in us that prompted Him to save; it was God's agape; it is His nature to seek the welfare even of sinners; *world*—God's love is for all, not just for some; *gave*—salvation as a gift that was costly to Him; *Son*—God acted Himself in the person of His only Son, the eternal Word, caring enough to send the very best; *whoever*—this word qualifies everyone and leaves no one out; *believes*—faith is the hand that simply receives the gift from God's grace; unbelief rejects the gift; *perish*—sin and death are realities; without Christ, we perish under God's just judgment of sin; *eternal life*—our life here is not the whole story; it is just the beginning of life with God forever.

Fill-in answer: The question that determines eternal destiny is not "Are you a sinner?" but "Where do you stand in relation to Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners?"

58. One who "does wicked things" stays away from a relationship with Jesus Christ, the Light. Whoever "does what is true" and acknowledges his basic need, gladly sees it fulfilled in Jesus—then gladly walks in His power and presence.

59. What is missing in humanistic and materialistic philosophies is acknowledging God and the need for a personal relationship with God. Such human philosophies repeat the basic human sin. They shut God out by denying or ignoring Him, and they set humanity up as the determiner of what is good or evil for itself.

The Old Testament Lesson: Numbers 21:4–9

60. The food the Israelites detested and complained about was manna, the bread from heaven that God had supplied through their years of wanderings. It's not hard to understand that after 40 years, they would be tired of that diet. Besides, the manna was a constant reminder that they were still wandering

nomads. They were eager to settle in the Promised Land and to have their whole lives, also their diet, to return to normal.

61. The Lord's intention in chastising His people always was to bring them to repentance and to renewal of their covenant relationship with Him. The Lord's tough love produced the desired effect. They were led to cry out to Him—and He responded with healing and help. God wants nothing more than our Christian faith and life, our relationship with Him, to be strong and healthy. To that end, He uses circumstances also in our lives to discipline us and to guide us (see Hebrews 12:1–13).

62. Similarities between the type and antitype include: both were lifted up from the earth to be looked to in time of need; faith in God's promise appropriates what is promised and brings it to effect in both instances; some see in both a principle of "like healing like": the bronze snake healed those suffering from snake bites; Jesus, the Word of God who became our Brother, healed us of the sin that threatens us with eternal death by carrying it to the cross and atoning for it.

63. The obvious tie is Jesus' reference to the bronze snake. Both lessons proclaim the grace of God in providing to repentant people just the help and healing they need.

The Epistle for the Day: Ephesians 2:1–10

64. They were led into pagan lifestyle not only by their culture but by the fact that they were by nature "children of wrath," spiritually dead, and unable to know and understand God by themselves.

65. In his proud Pharisaism, Paul was spiritually dead and by nature a child of wrath because its legalism exalted its adherents, not the Lord. Paul's determined rejection of his need of a Messiah who is a Savior had even made him a persecutor of the Church. He had been confident that he was earning God's favor through his work-righteousness and his defense of what had become a legalistic Judaism.

66. The key word, of course, is *grace*. Grace means completely undeserved and uncaused love and mercy. God's grace is emphasized by the fact that His great love and rich mercy made us alive with Christ *even when we were dead in our trespasses*. Only when we truly acknowledge this about ourselves do we have the backdrop against which we fully appreciate God's grace and reject all works-righteousness.

67. We were made alive and raised up and seated with Christ when He accomplished redemption for us (objective justification), and it became fully ours when we were united with Him in Holy Baptism for a new life of faith (subjective justification). That Paul states these blessings as accomplished facts in Christ underscores their nature as pure grace. These blessings are not something we grow into; in Christ, we have them already. They are not a process; they are God's gifts of grace, certified to be ours through His declaring us to be right with Him through our Lord Jesus Christ. We will appreciate this truth fully when we are shown the incomparable riches of His grace in the coming ages, during our life in His eternal kingdom.

68. Give your group a chance to think about this and express themselves. We might boast about our faithful church membership and generous financial support, our serving as pastors or teachers or officers, our love for family and friends, our acts of kindness and charity—but all these are rubbish when it comes to being right with God. That blessing is enjoyed only through His grace in Christ. We cannot boast about any aspect of our salvation. Even our saying "Jesus is Lord!" is possible only through the gracious enabling of the Holy Spirit. Insist on and depend on contributing even 10 percent to our salvation, and we introduce a deadly element of doubt. We can never be sure we have met the deductible—indeed, we can be sure we have not! The truth that we cannot save ourselves, even incrementally, drives us to seek refuge in God's boundless grace, grace alone. To let salvation remain God's free gift to us, all we can do is say thank you.

69. A misunderstanding of "justification by faith *alone*" is the idea that good works are not important, not vital—that we can live selfishly and sinfully, as we may please, as long as we "believe in Jesus." Works do not contribute to our salvation, but they are part of the "grace package." They are

motivated by Jesus and enabled by the Holy Spirit so that they glorify the Father in heaven (see John 15:1–8). Our doing them for Jesus, or not doing them for Jesus, will be on display when He comes in glory as the judge of all (see Matthew 25:31–46).

70. A life of good works requires our conscious Christian effort because we still carry around our sinful nature (see Ephesians 4:17–5:20). That God has prepared in advance the good works we are to do suggests that He will provide the natural abilities and spiritual gifts we need to do our best for Him.

71. Urge some personal introspection here. The really searching question is “What am I *not* doing that the Lord gives me both opportunity and ability to do for Him?”

Lesson 5

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Mark 10:32–45

After the first paragraph of the Study Guide is read, ask, “What did they expect?” The expectations of the disciples and the crowd of followers were that at some point, Jesus would assert Himself, establish the kingdom of Israel again, and rule from David’s throne.

72. “Drinking the cup” was frequently used in the Old Testament to signify some suffering that someone had to endure. Jesus used the term in His prayer in the garden (see Mark 14:36). The “baptism” He would endure would be all that God’s justice would “pour out” on Him as He was fulfilling the role of mankind’s Savior (see Matthew 27:45–46). Note that in “the cup I drink,” the verb is active; in “the baptism I am baptized with” the verb is passive. Together they say that Jesus was ready to do and to have done to Him whatever was necessary to atone for our sins. That James and John answered “We are able” shows their readiness to do whatever it might take to enjoy the favored positions they wanted—and it shows they didn’t really realize what lay ahead for Jesus and for them.

73. James was the first of the apostles to die a martyr’s death (see Acts 12:1–2). John lived to an old age, but experienced persecution and exile as leader of the Church in Ephesus and its surroundings. They did drink the cup and experience the baptism, but many others of God’s servants experienced the same (see 1 Peter 4:12–13; 2 Corinthians 4:7–11). Martyrdom in itself did not make the apostles unique, so it cannot be seen as the basis of special positions of favor in the kingdom. Jesus wanted His disciples to see their service and their suffering as part of God’s gracious outreach to them—a privileged result of His love, not a means of gaining merit.

74. The indignation of the other disciples was probably a cover for their own sense of ambition and for the competitive spirit that still existed among the followers of Jesus.

Fill-in answers: Whoever wants to be great in Jesus’ kingdom must be a servant; whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

75. *Diakonos* calls us to willing service of our Lord in serving others; *doulos* reminds us that we have no other option if we want to walk with Him in faith and love. Ultimately, Christ is “first” among us because He became the supreme servant, the supreme slave, for us.

76. We learn to serve instead of wanting to be served, first of all, by humbly accepting the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the ransom for us—the *lutron*, “the price paid to free one from slavery.” When we fully acknowledge that, it precludes our standing proudly or deservingly before Him in any way. It’s as we appreciate the wonder of having been served by Him in undeserved love that, enabled by His Spirit, we learn to imitate Him (see Philippians 2:1–11). It is the security that His love gives us that

enables us to give ourselves in service, without thought of personal gain—for in Christ, we have it all. As slaves bought with a price, our freedom in service (or service in freedom) is not optional!

The Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 31:31–34

77. It is the faithlessness and disobedience of Israel that made the covenant ineffective. The Lord was ready to be their “husband,” but again and again, they were unfaithful to Him and went whoring after false gods. There’s a play on words in Hebrew. *Husband* has its root in *ba'al*—and the Israelites’ downfall was their participating in the immoral worship of the Baals, the fertility gods and goddesses of their neighbors. They truly needed a new covenant.

Fill-in answer: The new covenant was to be written in the hearts of God’s people.

78. The ceremonial laws had been hardened into a legal code that could be satisfied by just outward, perfunctory performance of its requirements. In Jeremiah’s day, the temple ritual was being carried out—but it had become a basis for false confidence that this guaranteed Jerusalem’s safety. False gods were being courted by the people at the same time, and social injustices were rampant. The prophets warned against an insincere, mechanical religious practice that does not affect and influence lifestyle (see Isaiah 1:10–20; Amos 5:21–24; Micah 6:6–8).

79. The new covenant would establish a true relationship: “I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

Fill-in answer: The emphasis of the new covenant was that His people would personally know the Lord and His forgiveness. In the Hebrew tradition, a man was said to “know” his wife in their most intimate relationship. The new covenant promised a knowledge of the Lord on the basis of His most intimate, full revelation of Himself in the Promised One.

80. Laws can influence only outward behavior. Forgiving love touches hearts and can change them so that the recipient is ready to give a responsive love. A law principle leads either to pride in those who see themselves as living up to its expectations, or to despair in those who know they cannot live up to its expectations. The Holy Spirit operates through a Gospel principle, surprising people with the depth of God’s love for them, winning them for Himself, giving new life, and motivating them to its full, free Christian expression (see Romans 8:1–17; 1 John 4:7–19).

81. This lesson emphasizes God’s desire for a new, living relationship with His people. The suffering and dying to which Jesus resolutely gave Himself expressed a forgiving love that attracts us to Him and makes the covenant effective in us as we willingly become His servants.

The Epistle for the Day: Hebrews 5:1–10

Read Genesis 14 so you have its historical background in your understanding of Melchizedek, to whom Jesus is compared in this text.

Fill-in answer: Jesus was High Priest through God’s unique appointment of Him who is His Son. God said to Him, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

82. Jesus is fully able to sympathize with our weaknesses because He was tested just as we are—but without sin, passing every test. By contrast, the high priests of Judaism were sympathetic because they shared the people’s weaknesses. They had to offer sacrifices for their own sins before offering the sacrifices for the sins of the people.

83. In His true humanity, our brother Jesus did not go easily to the cross. But His prayers were not an attempt to get out of what He came to do. They were cries for help from an agonized soul. He needed to talk to His Father about the dreadful experience that awaited Him. The Father heard His prayer. He did not remove the cup—nor did Jesus want Him to. Instead, His Father strengthened Jesus’ resolve to do

what was necessary to win salvation for mankind. The Father's support was evidenced by the coming of a ministering angel.

84. Facing the suffering by which He would atone for sin was the ultimate test of Jesus' obedience. It was the setting in which He "matured" fully as the Man who was completely committed to the Father's will. Jesus was not "made perfect" in any moral sense, as if He had been flawed up to that point. *Teleiōtheis* says He was brought to His *telos*, the "end" or "purpose" of His saving mission. In His suffering and dying and rising to life again, Jesus was made perfect as the *complete* Savior, with everything fully accomplished for our salvation. Having completed everything that needed to be done, He became the source of salvation for all who would receive Him as Savior and Lord.

85. The New Testament uses both "obey the Gospel" and "believe the Gospel." *Obey* stresses the commitment involved in believing, which really always results in obeying. The Jewish Christians needed to understand that they could not go on privately "believing in" Jesus while publicly denying Him by reverting to Judaism.

86. It is helpful to distinguish between "believing" and "obeying" in terms of justification and sanctification. We are *justified* by grace through faith alone, trusting Jesus and what He has fully accomplished for us. Having been justified by grace through faith, we are led by the Holy Spirit to our obedient Christian life. Sanctification does not contribute to justification. But a justification devoid of sanctification is no justification. Saying no to our Lord's call to a sanctified Christian life diminishes our saying yes to Him in faith. "Faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26).

87. God designated Jesus to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek on the basis of His reverent submission, His learning through suffering, His becoming the perfect Savior.

Lesson 6

Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion

Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Mark 14 and 15

88. Mark showed that the Sanhedrin had prejudged Jesus by saying they “were seeking how to arrest Him by stealth and kill Him” (14:1). They were ready to take action to achieve this. John tells us that Jesus was referring to His body (John 2:21)—but their witnesses misquoted Him and accused Him of threatening the temple. It’s understandable that they focused on this to discredit Jesus. A threat to the temple was a threat to the religious system the people respected, and which the priests had manipulated to become rich and powerful.

89. The high priest finally put Jesus under oath (Matthew 26:63) and asked Him point-blank: “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” (Mark 14:61). Mark’s Greek gives Jesus’ answer as “*Egō eimi*”—an emphatic “I, I only, am!” Jesus did not let it go at that, but referred to Daniel 7:13 to declare His coming glory as the Son of Man. The chief priest and the Sanhedrin recognized in Jesus’ words the claim to the very name of Yahweh. What they didn’t understand is that only Jesus can make this claim and not be blaspheming.

90. The Romans had reserved the judgment of death for their courts. Since that was the judgment the Sanhedrin wanted, they had to approach Pilate with their accusations against Jesus. In Pilate’s court, the Sanhedrin brought a political charge against Jesus. The Roman prefect would not have concerned himself with a purely religious matter. Rome recognized and tolerated a multiplicity of religions and religious claims. But the Zealot movement for Jewish independence had been continuously troublesome to Pilate. He listened to and investigated charges against one who claimed to be king of the Jews.

91. In Mark’s Greek, Jesus’ response to Pilate’s “Are You the king of the Jews?” is “*Su legeis*.” The King James Version’s “Thou sayest it” and the Revised Standard Version’s (RSV) “You have said so” are literal translations of a Greek idiom and not very helpful. The New International Version’s (NIV) “Yes, it is as you say” is much better. The ESV is disappointing as it repeats the RSV’s literal “You have said so.” This idiom was the Greek way of saying, “Yes, that’s right!” Our “You said it!” is the closest English idiom. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent of the charges. Matthew tells us he knew it was because of envy that the Jewish leaders wanted to get rid of Jesus. Trying to release Jesus, Pilate offered the crowd a choice: the release of Jesus or of Barabbas, a known murderous criminal and insurrectionist.

92. The Romans valued the *Pax Romana*, “the Roman peace,” and they valued officials who could maintain the peace in their areas of jurisdiction. Judea had already known some uprisings during Pilate’s term of office, and he didn’t want an unruly crowd to cause another. Under pressure by the priests, Pilate caved in, showing his lack of regard for justice and integrity and how little he valued the life of an individual Jew.

93. Pilate’s insistence on “THE KING OF THE JEWS” was his attempt to get even. It surely prompted the religious leaders to react publicly to discredit this “king.” The Zealots distanced themselves from this “failure.” And the average Jew rejected, and was ready to mock, a “king” who didn’t have power enough to keep from being crucified.

94. Jesus was the sin-bearer experiencing God’s just judgment against sin. In one eternal moment the eternal Son of God suffered the eternal penalty for sin—separation from God. He, the Son of God and Son of Man, is the only one who could do that.

95. Haste was required because the Sabbath was to begin at sundown. While Jesus was on the cross, women stood at a distance lamenting the death of their Savior. When He was taken down, they helped prepare Him for burial. When He lay in the tomb they came early Sunday morning to attend to His body. They were the first witnesses of His resurrection, these faithful women.

The Old Testament Lesson: Zechariah 9:9–12

96. This King is strikingly different in His messianic qualities. He is “righteous,” doing what is right for His people; “having salvation,” bringing the ultimate gift promised in the covenant; “humble and mounted on a donkey,” approaching His people in humility and love that offers help rather than in a splendor that places demands on them. He brings salvation with Him—the healing of people’s relationship with God.

97. The rule of this unique King will not be based on power and force, so chariots and war-horses and battle bows will not be needed. He offers a peace that is internal, not an outward peace that is maintained by force and domination. The humble King will rule “from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” This was a way of speaking of the known world. It has international and universal dimensions, and it offers a promise that finds its true fulfillment in the Christian Church throughout the world, and ultimately in the eternal messianic kingdom.

98. The temple ritual involved the offering of animals designated by the Lord as acceptable for sacrifice. The principle was “without the shedding of blood, there is no salvation.” Zechariah’s words encouraged the completion of the edifice that was the appropriate site for this cultus. We may readily see in it our “redemption in Christ’s blood.” “Prisoners of hope” described the people who longed for the restoration of Israel. “Return to your stronghold” could be a reference to a completed Jerusalem and temple, but it could also refer to a return to Yahweh, Israel’s true fortress. The first son received a double portion as his part of the inheritance. This was Zechariah’s assurance of full and complete restoration of God’s people in Jerusalem and Judea. The messianic King provides those who trust in Him “a living hope . . . an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for [them]” (see 1 Peter 1:3–4).

99. The only appropriate response when this King comes to you is, as Zechariah suggested, to rejoice greatly and to shout! “Hosanna to the Son of David!” and “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” Our own enthusiastic Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion hymns and our singing of the Sanctus in the Divine Service are cases in point.

100. The humble King rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and was acclaimed by the crowd. But they didn’t understand the depth of His humility. He brought salvation by finally giving Himself into suffering and death as God’s own atonement for human sin.

The Epistle for the Day: Philippians 2:5–11

101. Paul's poetic statement makes it clear from the outset that Christ Jesus is "in the form of God," none other than God Himself. He is "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God," as the Nicene Creed puts it.

Fill-in answer: In His readiness to carry out the saving will of God, the eternal Word willingly "put His crown on the shelf" to live among us as one of us as Representative Man. As our brother in the flesh, He took on the very nature of a servant.

102. His obedient service took Him all the way to suffering and dying for our sins, "even death on a cross." Jesus, the God-Man, was exalted to the highest place because He had obediently and successfully carried out the saving mission. His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven to the Father's right hand are proofs positive to us that He is the Son of God, and that what He came to do was fully accomplished. In Him we have redemption!

103. It is significant to note that Christ's identification with us as our Brother was not a temporary pretense. He did not give up His human body. He is still our Brother Jesus, who now has all authority in heaven and on earth, and rules all things for the benefit of the Church. It is *Jesus* (His name as a man, meaning "Yahweh saves" or "Savior") that is the name that is above every name. All other names by which God has revealed Himself teach us something about Him, but *Jesus* is the vital name, without which we really don't know God and can't live with Him (see 1 John 2:22–23).

104. At the Day of Judgment, there will be no question about it: Jesus Christ is Lord! Every knee will bow before Him, and every tongue will confess this truth. Those who knew Him and trusted Him here will do so joyously; those who neglected or rejected Him will do so begrudgingly. But all will do it!

105. The end result is that God the Father will be glorified. It will be the full vindication and validation of the whole surprising, gracious plan of salvation.

106. Paul described the willing humility of our Lord in these lofty words to underscore his "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." We can grow in this as we pursue a determined discipleship that is continually nourished by the remembrance of Jesus' loving servanthood and the realization that He was the Servant of the Lord, the Suffering Servant, for our benefit. The Good News in Word and the Sacrament enables us to imitate His willing humility and service (see 1 John 4:7–21).