

Sermon for February 1st, 2026

SEPTUAGESIMA

READINGS

Exodus 17:1-7

1 All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. **2** Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” **3** But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” **4** So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” **5** And the LORD said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. **6** Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. **7** And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

Psalm 95

1 Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
3 For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
4 In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.
6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
7 For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.
Today, if you hear his voice,
8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
9 when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.
10 For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart,
and they have not known my ways.”
11 Therefore I swore in my wrath,
“They shall not enter my rest.”

1 Corinthians 9:24-10:5

9:24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. **25** Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. **26** So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. **27** But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

10:1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, **2** and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, **3** and all ate the same spiritual food, **4** and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. **5** Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Matthew 20:1-16

1 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. **2** After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. **3** And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, **4** and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ **5** So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. **6** And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ **7** They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ **8** And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ **9** And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. **10** Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. **11** And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, **12** saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ **13** But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? **14** Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. **15** Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ **16** So the last will be first, and the first last.”

Our text for meditation this Septuagesima Sunday is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Testing From God

God tests us. When He told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac at Mount Moriah, it was explicitly a test of the patriarch's faith.¹ He tested Israel in the wilderness with the bread from Heaven, to see if they would obey His instructions.² After Israel conquered the Promised Land and started to fall into idolatry, God permitted the pagan peoples to remain in the land in order to *test* the loyalty of His people.³ By the time David and Solomon reigned, it was common knowledge that this was simply something God did to those who would be His.⁴ The Psalmists sing about this dynamic.⁵ The entirety of the Book of Job details one man's trial as God permits one of the most brutal tests of faith imaginable. This is something that He always does.

1 Genesis 22

2 Exodus 16:1-4

3 Judges 2:20-22, Judges 3:1-4

4 1 Chronicles 29:17, Proverbs 17:3

5 Psalm 7:9, 11:4-5, 66:10, etc.

Truth be told, He does not *need* to test us. He already knows the hearts of men.⁶ But the fact is, with these tests He shows us who we really are. These are not temptations to *sin*, for God does not tempt anyone to sin;⁷ instead they are opportunities to show Him what we are truly made of. Either we are obedient and doing well, or there is sin already present in our heart that needs to be addressed. You see, salvation is a matter of the *heart*. If our hearts remain untested, then our relationship with Him is shallow at best and inauthentic at worst. For those who would follow God, such trials show us who we are and where we must improve so as to please Him.

I cannot stress enough that we need this sort of thing if we wish to grow as Christians. Fruit trees are pruned so they can bear more fruit. Athletes are made to endure harsh physical circumstances to make them winners. Christians are tested so as to have direction and spiritual growth. And no my friend, we cannot learn about ourselves in the deepest sense without it. A man does not know if he is a coward or brave until he has been put in a situation where he must be brave to make it through. A woman does not know how she will do in childbirth until she has been through it. Men and women do not know how truly good they would be as parents until they *are* parents. Sure, we can *prepare* for these things to some extent, but the only way to show our character is to be *tested*.

Testing God

The believer can expect to be tested occasionally throughout their entire lives. This is a part of our relationship with God, and it makes it *real*, as opposed to the therapeutic and shallow deism of most religious people. God treats you like you matter, precisely because you matter to Him and He wants to work with you. But over the course of this process, there is one very important rule: don't test God back. He can test you, you cannot test Him.

In our Old Testament reading, the quarreling and testing from the Israelites so offends God that the area is named after the ordeal.⁸ For that matter, this incident was cited in a later commandment: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah." Moses comments that this incident provoked great wrath in God – not once, but three times he brings it up!⁹ In our Psalm reading, the Psalmist cites it as the opening offense for the *forty years* of rebellion in the wilderness. Suffice it to say, our Lord hates being tested, especially when it's from the people that He is testing!

This might sound unfair. Why would God have such a double standard? First, allow me to say this: God *is* the standard. He is perfect, infinite, holy and good – and He *knows* it. For anyone who would believe in our Lord, they must believe that He is always faithful, always good, and that He has our best interests in mind. This is a central part of the faith – obedience to the First Commandment. Commenting on the words "You shall have no other gods before me," Luther writes:

Therefore it is the intent of this commandment to require true faith and trust of the heart which settles upon the only true God, and clings to Him alone. That is as much as to say: "See to it that you let Me alone be your God, and never seek another," i.e.: Whatever you lack of good things, expect it of Me, and look to Me for it, and whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, creep and cling to Me. I, yes, I, will give you enough and help you out of every need; only let not your heart cleave to or rest in any other.¹⁰

The Israelites saw God deliver them from slavery in Egypt. They saw Him give them manna from heaven. They saw all of His great power and the supernatural compassion which led them out of bondage. For them to turn around and test God and doubt Moses's words tells our Lord that they don't expect anything good from Him – they don't trust Him! It was not only insulting on account of their

6 Luke 16:14-15

7 James 1:13

8 "Massah" means "testing" or "trial."

9 Deuteronomy 6:16, 9:22, 33:8

10 <https://bookofconcord.org/large-catechism/ten-commandments/#:~:text=Therefore%20it%20is,in%20any%20other.>

ingratitude, it also demonstrated a lack of the trust that is so, so so important to having a relationship with God.

Without faith in the goodness of God, tests from Him appear like tyranny. If you don't trust God to have your best interests in mind, then when He tests you it will look like He is merely trying to harm for harm's sake. Since the Israelites did not trust in God's benevolence or count on the faithfulness that He showed with the Exodus, they truly thought that the lack of water was our Lord was trying to kill them in the desert for no reason. Just imagine how it would have went, if instead of berating Moses and quarreling with our Lord they had prayed! How much easier would the desert sojourn have gone if they were willing to simply tell Moses what they needed, but then immediately appeal to God. Then they would have passed the test and all would have been well.

Conclusion

Of course, we ought not judge the Israelites too harshly. They failed a test that day, and then turned around and sinned worse by testing God. Yet we all fail from time to time. That is only natural. On occasion, everyone fails a test. Every mother occasionally neglects her children when they might need her. Every man occasionally shirks his responsibilities or flees when he ought to stand his ground. We are presented with people in need or opportunities for evangelism, and instead of listening to the prompting of the Holy Spirit we find ourselves ignoring these key moments and disappointing God. When we fail these tests, God desires that we should learn from the mistake, go to the Cross for forgiveness, and ask for helping doing better next time.

But most crucially, whether we pass or fail we must *trust*. I do not know what trial you are going through. Perhaps your mother just got a positive cancer diagnosis. Maybe you were just laid off at your job. Maybe life is just hard, and you are weathering the slings and arrows of life in this world. It may be that God is testing you, showing Him what you are truly like. It could be something else as well, whether that is discipline to help us stop sinning or merely being in the crossfire of a sinful world. But whether it is a test, in the midst of it, I implore you to have faith in Him, for He shall not disappoint – even if things get worse. He is the true God, the *good* God, and His generosity knows no bounds. Especially when, after you pass one of these tests, you find yourself blessed beyond measure as a reward.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for February 8th, 2026

SEXAGESIMA

READINGS

Isaiah 55:10-13

- 10** “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
12 “For you shall go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall break forth into singing,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall make a name for the LORD,
an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

Psalm 84

[Collect reading in **bold**]

- 1** How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
- 2** My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
- 3** Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.
- 4** Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise! *Selah*
- 5** Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
- 6** As they go through the Valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.
- 7** They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion.
- 8** O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah*

9 Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed!
10 For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

**11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.**

**12 O LORD of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you!**

Hebrews 4:9-13

9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, **10** for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. **12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **13** And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Luke 8:4-15

4 And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, **5** "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. **6** And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. **7** And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. **8** And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

9 And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, **10** he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'" **11** Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. **12** The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. **13** And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. **14** And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. **15** As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

Our text for meditation this Sexagesima Sunday is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction: The Seventh Day of the Week

Question: is Saturday the sixth day of the week or the seventh? This question was a topic of debate between my wife and I for years. I was raised with the belief that it was the sixth. For me, Sunday simply had to be the last day in a week because on Monday we all go back to work or school.

We call Saturday and Sunday the “weekend,” not the “week-end-and-then-start-again” after all. But my wife would always bring up that the Church has always met at the beginning of the week, not the end.

After a decade or so of spousal teasing and debate, I decided to look into it more deeply, and to my chagrin my wife was correct. It was only in 1988 that the International Organization for Standardization proclaimed that Sunday is the seventh day of the week. The churches have joined together in rejecting that proposition, because they have universally agreed, along with most if not all cultures around the world, that Saturday is the seventh. To begin with, there is the ancient Sabbath day, which is always on what we call Saturday. The word *Sabbath* in Hebrew is *Shabbat*, which is connected to the word *Sheva*, which means *seven*. In ancient Western cultures too, the week took the same ordering. The word itself originates from the Latin “Dies Saturni,” or “Saturn's Day,” out of the belief that the planet Saturn exerted influence over that particular day of the week;¹ since they believed there were seven “planets,” there were seven days, and Saturn is last on the list. When the Julian calendar came into prominence, everyone in the Roman Empire began using a seven-day structure for time. But it was not only Western countries and ancient Israel that held to this. Even the Chinese, far off from both Rome and Jerusalem, have Saturday, or “Xing qi liu,” listed as their seventh day.² The Babylonians observed it going as far back as 2000 B.C.

Where it Matters

So in the end, my wife is vindicated. But does that matter? In one sense it does. Scripture tells us that God rested on the seventh day,³ and this forms the reason behind the Third Commandment - “You shall remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.” Here is how God puts it when He speaks from Sinai in the book of Exodus:

8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”⁴

So in this sense, identifying the correct day is of utmost importance. Every seventh day is a celebration of the rest that our Lord enjoyed when He took a look at the complete creation. And from there, even though we do not have to rest on exactly the same seventh day like the ancient Israelites did, God is still giving us a good *principle* to live by. People need rest and recuperation, and even more importantly they need to take time to rejoice in the fruits of their labors and be grateful for what God has given them. The least we could do is get the ordering of the days right.

Where it Doesn't Matter

Here is where it matters less though, and this is more important than merely having a day of rest every week. The author of our Epistle reading tells us that there is a Sabbath that isn't so much a single day of the week, but a *state of being*, something that we are called to actively enter instead of wait for. Here, in the heavenly state of rest, one is seeing God's actions and rejoicing in them the same way that He rested. The Sabbath rest that remains is a parallel term for being in a state of Grace – that is, our souls being at peace because we are saved. When you can say with full confidence that you are going to Heaven if you shed your mortal coil, then you are in the Sabbath rest that our Epistle reading is

1 Vitius Valens describes this reasoning in his *Anthologies*. A more concise history of the days can be found here: <https://articles.adsabs.harvard.edu/pdf/1999JRASC..93..122F>

2 The earliest record of a seven day week in Chinese chronology is in the seventh century A.D., but it can be surmised that they had been doing so for much longer.

3 Genesis 2:2-3

4 Exodus 20:8-11

bringing up.

This is why the Church has no problem holding the Divine Service on Sundays. *Could* we have it on Saturday? Sure. But do we have to? Absolutely not! The *old* Sabbath from the *Old* Covenant has been replaced by the *new* Sabbath in the *New* Covenant. One does not enter into God's Rest by being at Church on the approved day, and nor are you denied salvation if you have to do to work every day this week. With the Sabbath, what matters is not getting the correct day identified as the seventh in the week, but getting the correct *Sabbath* nailed down and *entering it*.

Entering God's Rest

Most importantly, the emphasis is on being in that resting state at all times. How do we enter God's Rest? Not by waiting, and not by ceasing our activities. After all, this is rest more for our souls than our bodies. The true way to enter the true Sabbath is by *faith*, which comes from the Word of God. To be at rest from the pressures of the Law and to rest from the terrors of death, to be at rest from slavery to the devil – *this* is the true Sabbath state for believers, peace for their souls. Someone who believes in Jesus can find themselves doing all sorts of tasks for their job, perhaps even taking extra shifts, but by faith in Christ they are still at rest. Maybe their week takes a cycle that makes Sunday look like the last day of the week, but this is no matter; even if feeding one's family requires *never* getting a day off, the believer's heart belonging to Christ means that they are still with our Lord and being refreshed by His gracious preservation. But this requires the Word.

Our Epistle reading presents the Word of God as a sword that can cut through just about anything. When hearing the Word as it is read aloud or preached, it will show you whether you have entered the true Sabbath that God wants you to inhabit. The Word slices open our hearts and shows us what's inside. When you read the Gospels and see Christ having risen from the dead, do you believe it? Then yes, you are in the Sabbath rest. When the Word proclaims that greed or coveting or murderous hate are all sins, do you agree with that? If not, then perhaps you decided to walk outside of the rest that God intended for you, and going back to penitent faith will bring you back.

Conclusion

So let us enter that rest, my friends. Not just on one day of the week, but by true faith in all that God proclaims in His Word let us *always* inhabit this holy Sabbath state, that all days may be holy to us. After all, this interior rest foreshadows the eternal peace which we shall enjoy when Christ returns, brings our bodies back to life, and lets us enjoy a kind of Sabbath that includes living and reigning with Him forever and ever.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for February 15th, 2026
QUINQUAGESIMA

READINGS

Isaiah 35:3-7

- 3** Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
4 Say to those who have an anxious heart,
“Be strong; fear not!
Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you.”
5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
7 the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

Psalm 89:18-29

[Collect verses in **bold**]

- 18** For our shield belongs to the LORD,
our king to the Holy One of Israel.
19 Of old you spoke in a vision to your godly one, and said:
“I have granted help to one who is mighty;
I have exalted one chosen from the people.
20 I have found David, my servant;
with my holy oil I have anointed him,
21 so that my hand shall be established with him;
my arm also shall strengthen him.
22 The enemy shall not outwit him;
the wicked shall not humble him.
23 I will crush his foes before him
and strike down those who hate him.
24 My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him,
and in my name shall his horn be exalted.
25 I will set his hand on the sea
and his right hand on the rivers.
26 He shall cry to me, ‘You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation.’
27 And I will make him the firstborn,
the highest of the kings of the earth.

**28 My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,
and my covenant will stand firm for him.
29 I will establish his offspring forever
and his throne as the days of the heavens.**

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. **3** If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. **4** Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant **5** or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; **6** it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. **7** Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **8** Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. **9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part, **10** but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. **11** When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. **12** For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. **13** So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Luke 18:31-43

31 And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. **32** For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. **33** And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." **34** But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. **35** As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. **36** And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. **37** They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." **38** And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" **39** And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" **40** And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, **41** "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me recover my sight." **42** And Jesus said to him, "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well." **43** And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

Our text for meditation this Quinquagesima Sunday is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Our reading includes two passages that are *seemingly* unrelated. First, our Lord Jesus tells the Apostles plainly that in Jerusalem He will be beaten, mocked, killed, and then Resurrected. Then our Savior heals a blind man on the side of the road. This leads us to ask three important questions. First, why did the Apostles not understand what Jesus said plainly? Second, why did God want us to know about the healing of this blind man? And finally, why are these two incidents included in one reading?

Why the Apostles didn't get it

We might be left scratching our heads at the Twelve Apostles not understanding what Jesus said.

The text says it was hidden from them, but let us not think that this meant God was forcing a brain fog on them or that Jesus mumbled the message under His breath. Christ would not have communicated this to them if He did not want to be heard. So we remain, for a moment, confused as to why they didn't get it. After all, He lays it out pretty plainly, saying that He “will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.” How much clearer could Jesus have been? But before we judge the Apostles too harshly, keep in mind that they had heard Him speak in parables for a long time, and if He wanted them to understand a parable He would explain it to them privately. So at the time, they had no clue that He was speaking literally about being Crucified at Golgotha. Making it even more difficult for them, He had told them before; in fact, this was the *third* time that He told them.¹ The first time, when St. Peter understood it literally and protested, Jesus *rebuked* him and told him that he wasn't thinking the way God thinks about these things.² So here they were, hearing this again just before Holy Week; they had no clue how to make sense of it and were frankly afraid to ask.

So they didn't get it. How could they? They were not any better men than the rest of the world, and my friend it is patently obvious that the rest of the world is full of foolishness. If you go out to any number of nonbelievers out there, by and large they will not be able to accurately tell you what the Gospel is. There are sets of cults that think Jesus was a space alien. Islam claims that He was nothing more than a prophet. Almost everyone in this “information age” has access to the Scriptures, but precious few actually read the Scriptures and even fewer are able to understand them. Do not think that the Apostles should have been better just because they spent time with our Lord; rather, we ought to say that even *with* Christ present *right next to someone*, their own sin fogs their understanding. This is because the eyes of their souls remain blind until the Holy Spirit opens them.

The Blind Man's Healing

It is no coincidence that we see this happening *physically* right after the Apostles fail to understand what they are told. The blind man approaches Jesus, and he remained blind until Jesus opened his eyes. Now, truth be told the blind man was only blind *physically*. Though he was unable to read or watch a sunset, the man could see clearly that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of David, and that only Jesus can save him from his wretched condition. In this moment, our Lord showed us a man who, after a fashion, represented where the Apostles were at. They knew that Jesus is the Christ, just as he did. They followed Jesus wherever He went, seeking to be with the Messiah as much as they could. But in this moment, they simply could not *see* Jesus as He truly is, for He had not opened their eyes.

Let us not judge the Apostles here in light of the blind man. It would be tempting to say that the man had faith while the Apostles did not, but that would be a grossly unfair way to put it. The Apostles absolutely had faith in Christ, albeit an undeveloped one. They had left their homes, wives, jobs, friends and opportunities to go be with and learn from the Son of David – if that does not tell us that there was faith in their hearts, what on earth could? So it is not faith that makes the difference, but something *else* that the Apostles lacked which the blind man had. And it is simply this: the blind man *asked*.

The blind man asked and Jesus gave him his sight. Had the Apostles asked our Lord what He meant when He said that He was to be crucified, I am certain that Jesus would have told them plainly. He would have told them that it was no parable nor metaphor, and that indeed He was to be physically nailed to a cross. They would have gone into Jerusalem knowing exactly what was going to happen, and they could have steeled their hearts for what was to come. But they did not ask, for they were afraid to do so. Perhaps their faith was in Jesus, but they likely did not believe that He would answer them. So they had to wait for their understanding until after Jesus rose from the dead. Meanwhile, the blind man cries out to Jesus and receives the opening of his eyes *immediately*.

1 Luke 9:21-22, 9:43-45, and our reading in Luke 18

2 Matthew 16:21-23

Conclusion

If someone is spiritually blind, and they wish to have their eyes opened, they must hold on to God as the One who rewards those who seek Him.³ They must hold onto the confident hope that our Lord will open their eyes. This counts both for those who seek to believe in our Lord *and* those who are already followers. Do you feel lost my friends? Go straight to our Lord. Are you unsure of where to go or what to do? Go straight to Him and count on His mercy. Even the saints, those Baptized believers who are bound for Heaven, still go through seasons of not knowing what is going on. We walk through life beholding everything through a mirror darkly, unable to see what God is up to and what He has planned.

This especially counts for the dark times we are in today. Russia and Ukraine are still at war, Israel and Gaza are still at war, and there are countless violent guerrilla movements threatening instability everywhere. Crime is increasing while the values of our currency are decreasing, and few people can even afford to own a home. The Epstein files showed us that there are evil people with lots of money doing whatever horrifying things they want without any consequences here on earth. We see bad news all around us, there is no denying that, but how many of us have asked God to open our eyes? How many of us have asked for clarity and wisdom from on high about what is going on? And if we do not receive an answer, have we asked God for the peace of mind and heart that come from knowing that He will fix these things? Let us pray my friends. Let us be like the blind man who was healed and let us never forget that our Lord will save us whether we understand it or not. Remember that Jesus still rose from the dead even though the Apostles did not understand what He had said: He remains faithful even if we are in the dark. This way, as we move forward in serving Him and going against the evils of our time, at *least* we remain confident in the ultimate victory promised by Christ our Lord.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

3 Hebrews 11:6

Ash Wednesday, February 18th

The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross.

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing. Luke 23:34

Luke 23:32-38

32 Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. **33** And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. **34** And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments. **35** And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” **36** The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine **37** and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” **38** There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus gave us seven “sayings” while He was on the Cross. This year, during Lent, I would like to focus on them. Far too often, we think of Lent as a road *to* the Cross, waiting in anticipation for the somber Good Friday service and the joyful Easter thereafter. Normally this is good, but let me remind you that Jesus has already been crucified and Resurrected, close to two thousand years ago at this point. We do a disservice to our Lord and to the faith if we only ever meditate on the Crucifixion and our Savior's suffering on Good Friday. So then, for this year let us spend Lent dwelling on what our Lord did for us. In particular, let us meditate on what He *said*, for these words, though spoken under extreme duress, nonetheless ring out through all history with just as great an impact as the Sermon on the Mount and the Olivet Discourse and every other speech Christ gave.

We begin with Luke's recounting of Christ saying “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.” Now, my friends I do not know if there has ever been a tragedy in your life which involved a great deal of pain. I have been in car accidents, broken my bones with falls, and I have been beaten up. Other times, I have been betrayed by others in ways that cost me opportunities, ruined jobs, ruined relationships, and cost friendships. In none of these moments did I ever think to myself, “do you know what I should do right now? Forgive them, and ask others to forgive them too.” Of course, I *did* end up forgiving them as our Lord commands, but that was not the first thing on my mind. I imagine that, if you have gone through similar pains and tragedies, did not think of forgiveness first either.

Yet this is exactly what our Lord Jesus does, for all the parties involved in His Crucifixion. Though He had just been beaten within an inch of His life, and had push-pin thorns pressed into His scalp, the very first thing He says is to request our Heavenly Father forgive. Though He had just been nailed to a cross by the Romans at the behest of Jewish authorities who hated Him, though He had been so terribly betrayed by people who once worshiped Him but were now mocking and jeering at His bloodied face, He still remembered mercy.

The popular thing nowadays for many a commentator is to be “edgy” and claim that Christ was only asking for the Roman soldiers who put Him on the Cross and cast lots for His garment to be forgiven. They want you to think that Jesus for one reason or another didn't think about how the people who betrayed Him were sinners for whom He was dying in that very moment – I tell you right now, if someone is trying to restrict who it was Christ was appealing our Heavenly Father to forgive, that person probably has an agenda and it isn't in line with what the Bible says. Scripture elsewhere tells us

that the people who “know not what they do” here is *everybody* involved with the death of our Lord. St. Paul writes, “none of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.”¹ The eyes of the high priests Caiaphas and Annas and all the pharisees and all the crowds of people who demanded His blood – all of their eyes had been *blinded* by their ignorance of exactly Who Jesus is. Even the Apostles did not understand when Jesus told them point-blank that He was to be tortured and killed when He went to Jerusalem. If the high priests and everyone else really, truly *knew* Who Jesus was and is, then they would never have laid a finger on Him. And so, from the Cross, He asks that the Father forgive them.

This is who our Savior is, my friends. His merciful attitude, being quick to forgive and willing to die, boggles the mind with the depth of compassion He has even for those who hate Him. He knew that He was dying for the men who drove thorns into His forehead. He knew He was dying for the men who drove nails into His hands and feet. And He most certainly knew that He was dying for all those men and women who screamed at Pilate, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” For the sins all those who proudly mocked Him, and who told Pilate “His Blood be on us and on our children,” He was there upon that Cross. Let us not attempt to carve out exceptions to His plea for forgiveness to the Father for these, as though we don't *want* for His will to be carried out in that forgiveness. To do so would be to betray the very reason Christ died for us in the first place. For we, fools that we are in our sinfulness, are no better than those people. After all, they did not know better when they betrayed the Messiah – we do. As Christians, we know exactly Who He is and why He arrived here on earth, and yet we sin daily anyway. Let us cherish and appreciate the mercy He asks for, and the mercy He wins with His precious Blood shed upon Golgotha for us.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

1 1 Corinthians 2:8

Sermon for February 22nd, 2026
FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

READINGS

Genesis 3:1-13

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” **2** And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, **3** but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” **4** But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. **5** For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” **6** So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. **7** Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. **8** And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. **9** But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” **10** And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” **11** He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” **12** The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” **13** Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Psalm 32

1 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
2 Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*
5 I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,”
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*
6 Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.
7 You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. *Selah*
8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
9 Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,

which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.

10 Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.

11 Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Hebrews 4:14-16

14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Matthew 4:1-11

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” **4** But he answered, “It is written, “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” **5** Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple **6** and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and “‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” **7** Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” **8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9** And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” **10** Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” **11** Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Our meditation for this first Sunday in Lent is on our Psalm reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.¹

Introduction

Everyone loves being forgiven. We like to hear the words of Absolution pronounced over us at the beginning of the Divine Service. We enjoy hearing about the forgiveness of our sins bestowed upon us in Baptism and given to us in the Lord's Supper, and most importantly we treasure that Jesus won all of this forgiveness for us by going willingly to the Cross. We hear that God's mercies are new every morning, and we take it to heart whenever our conscience troubles us as we sin throughout the week. Suffice it to say, Christians are forgiveness people, plain and simple. Except when we're not.

When it comes to forgiveness we often rob ourselves of the joy that could be ours. We might hold on to the promise of mercy, but there is a missing element that occasionally leaves us feeling cold, empty, or full of pain. You could go to Church every Sunday, hear Absolution, take Communion, remember your Baptism, and listen to the Gospel with full attention, but missing out on that one single precursor will keep you from benefiting from it normally. And that *thing*, my friends, is wrapped up in the single term *Confession*.

¹ Note to all Lay Leaders, Deacons and Chaplains. On account of a number of our Catacomb Synod congregations doing Wednesday night services (and me providing audio messages for them), the Lenten sermons will be focused on the Psalms and shorter than usual. If that does not suit your congregation, I recommend utilizing the previous year's Lenten homilies.

Dryness and Discipline

The Psalmist declares that the man who is forgiven is blessed. Indeed! We want that blessing for ourselves as well. But he notes that there was a period of time wherein he “kept silent.” That is, he pretended that he had no iniquity, acting as though he were perfect to guard his sin and keep committing it. But the result of this was a terrible feeling, a hollowness inside of him that ate away at his sense of self. This is what happens to believers who hold on to their sin. God cares about us, so when He sees us sneakily trying to “get away with” our transgressions He will not permit us to continue. Anxiety will weigh heavily on our shoulders, guilt will bear down on us, and our strength will falter. It will be hard to count our blessings, because all we will notice is calamity, which will increase for our lives. God will not permit us to continue lying to ourselves and pretending to be innocent.

The Psalmist warns us to not repeat his mistake, which he likens to being an unbroken horse or stubborn mule. God will treat us like that if we refuse to let go of our sins and confess them. What happens to a farm animal that won't do what its master wants? If the farmer wants to keep his animal, he will discipline it. A bridle for the horse's mouth, a bit for the donkey, harnesses and weights and a strict regimen of longeing,² saddles, and a whole host of other troublesome matters. That is what happens when believers begin to rebel. Act like an animal, and you will be treated like one until you are ready to approach God as His child, as a *human being* to Him, and confess.

The Joy of Contrition

But then the Psalmist surprises us. He praises contrition and confession as something which brought about *joy*. We typically dread these things and think of them as life-ruining occasions of self humiliation. Even in private prayer, when confessing our sins to God we often dislike saying what exactly it was that we did, as though our Lord doesn't know already. We are tempted to think of the way the modern world, with all of its cancel culture, has forced people to go on apology tours without any real forgiveness or restoration. But King David, who wrote this Psalm and had many sins to speak of, says it is the *opposite* when we are confessing unto God.

This is because God is quick to forgive, quick to restore, and quick to protect us from the slings and arrows of the devil's accusations. He forgives freely, but desires earnestly that we go to Him in contrition and confess what we have done. The Psalmist records that our Lord granted him pardon as soon as he confessed, without requiring priestly intercession or acts of penance. By all means my friends, King David made his offerings and did plenty of good works *after* receiving forgiveness from God, but that is because our Lord purified his heart after removing his sin – just as the Scripture promise to all of us.³

Conclusion

The king exhorts us to find the same solution that he found. Instead of kicking against the goads and stubbornly holding onto our sin, acting like an animal, he urges us to confess our sins and be restored by our Lord. Though God has shown us mercy through all the means of Grace,⁴ if we are open with Him and hide nothing, then we receive these rightly and our joy is made complete. As this season of Lent begins, let us spend time each day confessing before Him and imploring His mercy upon us, that our relationship with Him may as happy children with their loving Father, not as animals that need to be tamed.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

² That is, “rope training” during the breaking process.

³ 1 John 1:8-9

⁴ That is, Baptism, Communion, Absolution, etc.

Second Wednesday in Lent, February 25th

The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross.

Today, you will be with me in paradise. Luke 23:43

Luke 23:39-43

39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” **40** But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? **41** And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” **42** And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” **43** And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Why didn't Jesus come down from His cross?

The criminals on the cross, hanging there next to Jesus, deserved to die that day. One of them says it himself. We do not know what their offense was exactly, except that it involved robbery as St. Matthew records.¹ We also know that what they did was severe in nature. The Roman Empire had the sole authority in Judea to execute people, and they did not execute petty thieves. Someone who stole a sheep or a piece of jewelry could be fined, beaten, or jailed for a while but they would not be killed for it. So the two criminals there had gone beyond mere theft, engaging in robbery that either threatened Roman interests – like robbing a centurion – or there were casualties. Perhaps they attempted to steal from a merchant or priest and someone got killed. We do not know the specifics, only that by their own admission they *knew* that they deserved capital punishment.

Those two committed offenses worthy of execution. But what did Jesus do? Jesus did not do anything to deserve death on a Cross, not even by the letter of the law. If a missionary goes into a country where Christianity is illegal and evangelizing is punishable by death, then we would weep for him if he is caught and executed but no one will be surprised. But there was *no* law which condemns Jesus to death, neither by Roman writ nor by anything in the Law of Moses. Our Lord Jesus never blasphemed, never advocated for idolatry, never stole nor murdered nor committed adultery. He never bore false witness and never so much as coveted. Christ did not *deserve* to die there.

Yet He was there, submitting actively to death upon a Cross, which is a very painful and torturous death indeed. One of the criminals asks Him to save Himself and them. Truly He had every right to do so and every ability, but He chose not to. Think about that for a moment my friends. Jesus did not have to die, He did not *deserve* to die, and since He is Divine he could have at any moment come down from that cross. We are speaking about the Jesus who calmed the waves of storms, who rearranged the skin of lepers and grew leg muscles on paralytics, who walked on water and who avoided being stoned to death and thrown off a cliff. It would have been easy, all too easy, for Him to pull His hands and feet off of those nails, to float gently down, and with a mere word heal His injuries.

Instead, He submitted to death and injustice for our sakes. Why is this my friends? Well He endured it to do the same thing for us that He did for the robber who believed in Him. Jesus endured the Cross so that He could save the mass of humanity who deserves to die – which is all of us. Every

¹ Matthew 27:38

single one of us was slated for judgment unto damnation, and justly so because of our sins. But for each one that says to Jesus “remember me when you come into your kingdom,” He says to us “you will be with me in paradise.”

The Roman Empire had the authority to execute anyone they wanted in Judea. All governments today enjoy the same duty and privilege, having the gallows ready for any who deserve it. If they should so choose, they can also choose to bestow pardon on criminals and prevent their executions. But none of these human governments can prevent or enforce the eternal matter of salvation or damnation. Only Jesus could win the pardon that we so desperately need if we want to avoid burning in the lake of fire for all eternity. He knew He was the only one that could pull this off, and if He did not go through with the pain and humiliation of suffering like the scum of the earth who were crucified next to Him despite being perfect Himself... then we would have no hope. So He chose to die for us instead. He chose the harder and more painful option than to leave us drowning in our own wickedness. *That* is why He did not come down from that Cross.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.