

# THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT

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**Sunday**    **The Second Sunday of Lent**  
**March 12**   **The Hope at the Heart of Lent**  
A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

**Mon**            **Monday of the Second Week of Lent**  
**13**              **Carrying a Cross is no Shame**  
A reflection taken from a homily by St. Leo the Great

**Tues**           **Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent**  
**14**              **Appreciating God's Love for You**  
Developed from a catechesis by St. John Chrysostom

**Wed**            **Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent**  
**15**              **Staying on the Road to Life**  
A reflection from a homily by Origen of Alexandria

**Thurs**          **Thursday of the Second Week of Lent**  
**16**              **God's Food Meets Our Every Need**  
A reflection from The Life of Moses by St. Gregory of Nyssa

## **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**

**Fri**              **Friday of the Second Week of Lent**  
**17**              **The Great Mercy of Our God**  
A reflection from a psalm commentary by St. John Fisher

**Sat**              **Saturday of the Second Week of Lent**  
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From Cyril of Alexandria's Commentary on Exodus

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# **THE HOPE AT THE HEART OF LENT**

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

Listen carefully to the Responsorial Psalm for today's Eucharist: "Our soul waits for the Lord; the Lord is our help and our shield". With this in mind turn your attention to the story of Abraham in the first reading. Abraham was chosen because God loves all human kind and planned to bring the greatest of all blessings to our race, and each of us, through Abraham's life and service—even though Abraham didn't realize what was happening or what would come of it. God loves us so much and so constantly!

But, as we are reminded by St. Paul, God didn't do this to receive something from us but to invite us to be instruments of his grace. Every good we have or will ever have is a pure and undeserved gift of God. When God created the universe he had in mind giving us this opportunity to accept such gifts, and God continues to offer them to us even when we refuse or try to misuse them. There is no time or place where we are not enfolded in God's love.

Three disciples went with Jesus up the mountain of transfiguration. We are going with them. What is going to happen to us? We will encounter God. The Scriptures—the Law represented by Moses and the prophets represented by Elijah—tell us this and Jesus uses them to reassure us. God has been preparing for this self-revelation to us through thousands of years and the lives of millions of people who have also made this journey. We will find ourselves in our God's presence, if we allow Jesus and Moses and Elijah to open our eyes so we can genuinely see Jesus glorified and are see that this is what God has planned for us—if we listen to Jesus.

We need this experience because we are going to accompany Jesus to the cross. For example, we too are going to feel utterly abandoned by God in the midst of pain and suffering that we are convinced we don't deserve. Yet it is the supremely loving God's will for us. And this is all part of our transfiguration, as it was of Jesus' own. We believe that Jesus has risen from the dead and that if we die with him we shall also live with him—always and forever. It is a life of fidelity in the face of such challenges that make us "holy" and pleasing to God. We only have to look at God's beloved Son, in whom God is well-pleased, to see the wonder that comes with transformation with Christ. This is our hope and it is a hope that grows vital and alive only if we walk the path of Lent and of giving ourselves wholly to God's plan for us and all peoples.

# **CARRYING A CROSS IS NO SHAME**

**A reflection taken from a homily by St. Leo the Great**

In the presence of chosen witnesses the Lord unveiled his glory. His face shown like the sun and his clothes became as white as snow. The primary purpose of this transfiguration was to prevent our faith from being shaken by the suffering we endure and the self-abasement it requires. The cross is not a scandal for Christians. In his transfiguration Jesus laid the foundations for our hope by showing the whole body of Christ the nature of the change all are to undergo, the glory all are to share.

The Lord had told his disciples about his cross before he revealed his majesty. *“The just will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of the Father.”* Blessed Paul repeats this: *“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us”*. For *“we have died and our life is hidden now with Christ in God, but when Christ, who is your life, appears then you too will appear in glory.”*

The Lord’s transfiguration strengthened our understanding of God’s plan for us. Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the prophets, appeared to three disciples, speaking of the Lord’s suffering and glory. Now Scripture says that on the evidence of two or three witnesses every assertion stands or falls and here we have five. What, then, could be more firmly established than the statement made together by the Old and New Testaments? What was promised beforehand mysteriously is revealed clearly and distinctly in the radiance of glory. As St. John says, *“the Law was given by Moses but grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ”*.

In Christ what had been promised by the prophets and signified in the Law’s precepts is fulfilled. By his presence Christ teaches the truth of prophecy and by his grace makes it possible for us to obey God’s commandments. We should all be confirmed in our faith. No one should be ashamed of the cross by which Christ has redeemed the world. No one must fear to suffer for the sake of justice or doubt the fulfillment of the promises Christ has made to us. It is through toil and difficulty that we come to rest and through death that we pass to life. Christ took upon himself our lowly nature and he conquered. We too will conquer. We shall receive what he promised us. Let the Heavenly Father’s voice never cease to ring in our ears: *“This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased! Listen to Him!”*

# **APPRECIATING GOD'S LOVE FOR YOU**

**A reflection taken from a catechesis by St. John Chrysostom**

Israel witnessed many miracles during its journey through the desert. You have not seen Pharaoh and his armies drowned and you have not seen water flowing from a rock or the signs by which the Egyptians were forced to set Israel free. But you have seen the destruction of the devil's power and you have been freed from him, and all his minions. You have escaped the most bitter slavery of all, that to sin.

Does this convince you that you are so highly prized that no one has ever been more highly prized than you are? Recall that the Israelites were given the shining face of Moses to remind them of God's closeness to them, and you have seen the face of Christ in his glory. St Paul exclaims: "*We behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces.*" Indeed, Israel had Christ to accompany them but this was not a greater thing than the way we are accompanied by Christ. They had to sustain hope for the Promised Land during forty years of wandering and we have to hope firmly in the life that is heaven. And God leads us!

Scripture says that Moses was very gentle, more so than anyone else on earth. Can't we say this of Christ, our Moses, and his spirit was the Spirit of God, with whom he is one and whom he sees face to face. Moses raised his hands to heaven and brought down the Manna. Christ raises his hands to heaven and brings down to us the Bread of Angels that gives us everlasting life. Our Moses touches the altar, strikes the heavenly table and makes fountains of the Spirit gush forth to give drink to the numberless flock which gathers around him from every part of the earth. We all drink of the saving waters and from the altar that has been placed in our midst.

We have such a marvelous, life-giving spring and such a laden table covered with a thousand good things and offering us endless spiritual gifts, that we must approach it with a sincere heart and a clear conscience to receive grace and mercy as an ever present help in time of need. We can do this through the grace and mercy of the only Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, through whom we too receive glory and the power to overcome every temptation and sin. How could our God love us more deeply or show love for each of us more truly? Come to God and come to Jesus Christ and be filled with good things. No journey is so difficult as to rob of us such a great and glorious hope for all that is yet to come.

# **STAYING ON THE ROAD TO LIFE**

**A reflection taken from a homily by Origen of Alexandria**

The Book of Exodus tells us that many times God told the Israelites during their desert journey that it was necessary for them to retrace their steps and do something again. We might suppose a path that is pointed out by God would be smooth and pleasant, free of obstacles and requiring almost no effort from those who travel along it. In fact God's way turns out to be an ascent and a climb that is both rugged and tortuous. This is what we experience during Lent.

There is no downhill road to perfection and virtue. It is uphill all the way, and the path is narrow and difficult. The Lord has warned us in the Gospel: "The way that leads to life is narrow and hard". Indeed, the challenge is to stay on the path and keep walking until it actually brings us to the life God has in store for us. If you look carefully at the Scriptures you will notice that the Gospel's warning repeats that of the Law. Both speak of the climb we must complete as tortuous, narrow and difficult. The Law and the Gospel come from one and the same Spirit.

So the road we follow is a winding ascent, but there is a beacon that shines out from its end. To talk about an ascent is to speak of the work that we have to do along the way but the beacon that reveals our goal is faith. In a certain sense, both faith and works involve the same laborious effort and tortuous path. There are many temptations to meet and to be overcome. There are many obstacles to faith as well. But our desire to be with our God burns so brightly as to almost blind us to the difficulties.

In the Book of Exodus Pharaoh says, "The Israelites are wandering in the wilderness". He thought anyone who obeyed God was wandering in a wilderness, because the way of wisdom is rugged and many can't see where it leads. When we profess faith in One God, when we assert that Father and Son and Holy Spirit are one God, and when we go on to say that the Lord of Majesty has become a Son of Man and descended from heaven and was crucified, unbelievers think we are wandering in a wilderness of nonsense.

But stand firm in your belief! Cast aside all doubt! We know that the way of faith has been built by God. We can't expect it to be a smooth road, free from trials. All who wish to live a godly life in Christ will suffer, says St. Paul. But suffering is preferable to failure to set out on the quest for life, and failure to stay on the one road that can really bring us to it is worse than any pain. Jesus Christ Risen shows us where hope leads.

# **GOD'S FOOD MEETS OUR EVERY NEED**

A reflection from The Life of Moses by St. Gregory of Nyssa

After the Israelites had crossed the sea, after bitter water had been made sweet for them, after the delightful rest given them among springs and palm trees, and after water came from a rock they ran out of all the supplies they had brought with them from Egypt. They had nothing left from their previous life to nourish them. Then God poured down from heaven a food that, we are told, was both varied and all of one kind. In appearance it was all of one kind but in flavor it was suited to every taste.

The lesson this teaches is that we must allow ourselves to be purged of everything associated with the land of slavery we are leaving behind and its way of life. We must empty out the sacks in our memories which contain all the tainted food prepared by those who enslaved us so as to receive within ourselves in a kind of purity the food that comes down from heaven. No seed sown in the earth produces this food for us. This is a bread that comes down from heaven, already prepared and found lying on the ground all around us.

I hope you will understand what the real food foreshadowed by this experience of the Israelites is and that it is not merely a matter of ideas projected upon ordinary things. If it were like that how could it nourish the human body as it did the bodies of the Israelites and does for us as well? It has a bodily character yet its character was not produced by ploughing the earth and sowing seed. The earth remained unbroken and yet it was found on the earth. The earth was covered with a divine nourishment that could feed the hungry and yet was a miracle preparing our hearts and minds for mysteries.

Think of the mystery of the Virgin Birth. This bread produced whose substance is prepared without human labor possesses a diversity that adapts it to the needs of all who feed on it. In a sense, besides being bread it seems also to be milk and meat and vegetables, or whatever suits those receiving it. The Apostle Paul presents this in another way when he compares it to a solid diet of meat provided the advanced and of vegetables for the weaker and the beginners.

Remember, it feeds those who have left behind the foods of Egyptian slavery and have determined to place all their hopes in God's mercy. The more we depend on God the more God's nourishment, God's bread, will meet our every need.

# **THE GREAT MERCY OF OUR GOD**

A reflection from a psalm commentary by St. John Fisher

A psalm tells us that God looks down mercifully upon us from Heaven. Even after God has given us such unnumberable good things we fall continually into every sort of sin. Our great unthankfulness removes us so far from God that it is a marvel that God still looks upon us with grace.

He once brought his people from Egypt by many marvelous signs and wonders and brought them through the Red Sea dry-shod and sent down angel's food as well as wild fowl, caused water to flow out of a stone and gave them victory over their enemies. He made the Jordan's waters flow backwards and then divided up and shared out the Promised Land, and so often had mercy upon them after they committed idolatry. Now God has called us into grace from unbelief and has grafted us onto the true olive tree of faith while allowing the natural branches to be cut away. He spared not his own Son but gave him up for the redemption of us all. Yet we are ungrateful.

We pay little or no heed to God, nor do we reflect on how much love God has shown us. We forget, and so refuse to follow the example of our merciful Lord. We have such hard and steely hearts! O heart harder than flint, great unthankfulness that removes us so far from our God!

Marvel of all marvels, that God looks down with such mercy! Let these marvelous benefits be written as a remembrance by all the Christian people who shall come after us. Indeed, God has looked down mercifully upon us from Heaven! Because it has pleased our God, our Almighty God, to look upon us, so scattered across this earth and in such low estate then let us write about this goodness. Let us cause it to be forever remembered. Let all who live after us tell each other how mercifully our Lord has dealt with us. What better thing can we do to thank and praise him!

# **IMITATING GOD & JESUS CHRIST**

## **A reflection from St. Cyril of Alexandria's Commentary on Exodus**

Think of the manna God gave Israel when it dwelt in the desert and so depended wholly on God's loving care. Think of it as a foreshadowing of the spiritual gifts and the teachings of Christ, which come from Heaven and so have nothing earthly about them. Yet they are real food, not only for us human beings but for angels as well. In his own person, the Son revealed the Father to us and through him we have come to believe the teaching about the holy and consubstantial Trinity. We have been well guided into the paths to virtue and nourished by this food of the spirit.

To the Israelites, the manna was given at dawn, as the light began to shine. So when Christ, the Morning Star, had risen in our hearts and become the Sun of Righteousness, a spiritual manna appeared. Indeed, Christ himself is the true manna, not only a material manna but, in his own words, an image of his gift of self that will bring us to everlasting life. "This is the bread that comes down from Heaven so that anyone who eats it may never die. I am the living bread come down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever. The bread I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

Our Lord Jesus Christ nourishes us for eternal life, both by the commands that teach us how to live holy lives and by the Eucharist. In himself He is the divine, life-giving manna. God sent Israel manna like rain from above and ordered everyone to gather as much as necessary for their life. "Gather it, each of you, with those who share your tent; let none of it be left over till the morning." This means that we must fill ourselves with the divine teachings of the Gospel as quickly as we can and share them.

Christ gives to us all grace in equal measure, whether we are great or small by earthly standards; he bestows life giving food on all alike. He wants the stronger among us to gather for others and labor on behalf of their sisters and brothers. "As you have received without charge so give without charge." We are to continually encourage, instruct and convert people to what is praiseworthy and good, freely sharing with everyone the abundant grace we have received from Christ. We are helping one another as God and God's Christ help us. We are becoming like God as we help them become like God.