

**THE FIFTH WEEK IN LENT – A &
The SOLEMNITY of the ANNUNCIATION of the LORD
March 22 – 28, 2026**

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Sunday

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

A Commentary by St Peter Chrysologus

On his return from the underworld, Lazarus comes forth from the tomb like death confronting its conqueror, an image of the resurrection to come. Before we can fathom the depths of meaning behind this miracle, we must consider the way in which our Lord raised Lazarus to life. This action appears to us as the greatest of all his signs; we see in it the supreme example of divine power, the most marvelous of all his wonderful works.

Our Lord had raised up the daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue; but although he restored life to the dead girl, he left the law of death still in force. He also raised the widow's only son. He halted the bier, forestalled the young man's burial, arrested the onset of physical decay, but the life he restored had not completely fallen into the power of death. The case of Lazarus was unique. His death and resurrection to life had nothing in common with the other two. Death had already exerted its full power over him, so that in him the sign of the resurrection shone out in all its fullness...

His sisters sent a message to Jesus saying, Lord, the friend whom you love is sick. With these words, they appeal to his affection, lay claim to his friendship, call on his love, urging their familiar relationship with him to persuade him to relieve their distress. But for Christ, it was more important to conquer death than to cure disease. He showed his love for his friend not by healing him but by calling him back from the grave. Instead of a remedy for his illness, he offered him the glory of rising from the dead.

We are next told that *when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he remained where he was for two days*. You see how he gives full scope to death. He grants free rein to the grave; he allows corruption to set in. He prohibits neither putrefaction nor stench from taking their normal course; he allows the realms of darkness to seize his friend, drag him down to the underworld, and take possession of him. He acts like this so that human hope may perish entirely and human despair reach its lowest depths. The deed he is about to accomplish may then clearly be seen to be the work of God, not of man.

He waited for Lazarus to die, staying in the same place until he could tell his disciples that he was dead; then he announced his intention of going to him. Lazarus is dead, he said, and I am glad. Was this a sign of his love for his friend? Not so. Christ was glad because their sorrow over Lazarus' death would soon be changed into joy at his restoration to life. I am glad for your sake, he said. Why for their sake? Because the death and raising of Lazarus were a perfect prefiguration of the death and resurrection of the Lord himself. What the Lord was soon to achieve in himself had already been achieved in his servant. This explains why he said to them: I am glad for your sake not to have been there, because now you will believe. Lazarus needed to die, so that the faith of the disciples might also rise with him from the dead.

Monday

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

A Meditation by Thomas a Kempis

The one who follows me, says Christ, our Savior, does not walk in darkness but has the light of life. These are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by them we are told to follow his teachings and his manner of living if we wish to be truly enlightened and delivered from all blindness of heart.

Let all the effort of our heart be from now on to have our meditation wholly fixed on the life of Christ, for his holy teachings are of more power and strength than the words of all the angels and saints. One who, through grace, has the inner eye of his soul opened to the genuine grasp of the Gospels of Christ will find in them hidden manna.

It often happens that those who hear the Gospels find little sweetness in them. The reason is that they do not have the spirit of Christ. So if we desire to have a true understanding of the Gospels, we must exert ourselves to conform our life as nearly as we can to that of Jesus. What avail is it to anyone to reason about the high, secret mysteries of the Trinity if one lacks humility and so displeases the Holy Trinity? Truly, it avails nothing. Deeply inquisitive reasoning does not make anyone holy or righteous, but a good life makes one beloved by God. I would rather feel compunction of heart for my sins than merely know the definition of compunction. If you know all the books of the Bible merely by rote and all the sayings of the philosophers by heart, what will it profit you without grace and charity?

All that is in the world is emptiness apart from love and service of God. This is the most noble and the most excellent wisdom that can be in any creature: By valuing the world little and drawing daily nearer and nearer to the Kingdom of Heaven! It is, then, a great vanity to labor inordinately for worldly riches that will shortly perish or to covet honor or any inordinate pleasure or fleshly delight. How great a vanity it is to desire a long life and to care little for a good life. Keep the common proverb in your mind: The eye is never satisfied or pleased with seeing any worldly thing, nor the ear with hearing. Work, therefore, to withdraw the love of your soul from all visible things and to turn it to the things that are invisible. Turn to the things of God.

Tuesday

SERPENTS THAT BITE US AND THE MEDICINE OF FAITH **A Reflection from a Gospel Commentary by the Venerable Bede**

With the wonderful skill he has in imparting heavenly teaching, Our Lord shows us the Law's spiritual meaning. He recalls ancient history and explains its symbolic reference to his own passion and to our salvation. The Book of Numbers relates that the Israelites grumbled against the Lord and Moses, and fiery serpents came among them. When the people cried out, Moses prayed for them, and the Lord commanded him to make a bronze serpent and set it up as a sign. Those bitten had only to look at it and live.

Now the bites of fiery serpents are for us temptations to sin and to sin in a way that brings spiritual death. The people who grumbled against the Lord felt the burning that is foolish and futile desire. They were made sick in this way so that, by physical pain, they might realize how much inward damage they suffered due to their grumbling at not having what they wanted. Those bitten by such serpents are healed by our Redeemer. The kingdom of death and sin is conquered only by faith in him. It replaces the foolish and futile longing with what will truly satisfy and give life fullness.

The sins that drag both soul and body to destruction are well described as serpents. Consider that a serpent persuaded our first parents, who were immortal, to commit the sin through which they became subject to death. Our Lord, who came in the likeness of sinful flesh, is rightly portrayed as the bronze serpent because there is in him nothing that leads one away from genuine life and immortality. He is, in a sense, the same as we are but there is in him nothing poisonous or hurtful or causing a burning longing for mere passing things. The redeemer of humankind clothed himself not in sinful flesh but in a flesh "like" the sinful. Thus, by suffering death on the cross, he delivered those who believe in him from all sin and even from death itself. He teaches us to desire what is above and not what is merely here below.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. As those who looked at the bronze serpent were, for a time, healed of physical sickness and death, so those who gaze upon the mystery of the Lord's passion, who believe, confess, and sincerely imitate him, are saved completely and forever from the death of both soul and body. Accordingly, the text continues: So that all who believe in him may not perish but have eternal life. These words make it clear that whoever believes in Christ not only escapes the pain of punishment but also receives a life that is eternal.

See the difference between symbol and truth. The symbol prolongs this temporal life, but truth gives a life that will be endless. Yet it requires the truths our minds grasp to be given fitting practical expression by confessing the true faith and living devout, disciplined lives. Those who grumble reject their cross and so reject true faith. Those living by the discipline of faith find nothing to grumble about because they see that it is by faith that all is made to work for their good and the good of their brethren.

Wednesday

WHAT ACCEPTING GOD'S CALL DEMANDS

A Reflection from Spiritual Exercises by Fr. Karl Rahner

The Annunciation begins a process John describes joyfully by saying, "and the Word became flesh". Doing this is God's victory over all that is godless. It is the triumph of grace over all opposition! It is an unexpected, incomprehensible revelation of the immense love of God. The magnificence of this news about salvation is anticipated when Gabriel says to Mary: "You have found grace before God, and you will conceive and bear a Son. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord will give Him the throne of his father David, and he will rule over the House of Jacob forever."

But the incarnation has a scandalous character. From now on, we find glory in humiliation, fullness in emptiness, riches in poverty, and life in death. That is part of what St. Paul implies when he reminds us that the Word came in the flesh of sin, under the Law, in the form of a slave, and under the power of death. His failure and death agony already begin when he is received by Mary. His kenosis has begun and the cross is becoming his throne.

God wanted these things and wanted us to find them in Jesus. The desert he entered was our human existence and its poverty and weakness and sickness and imprisonment in darkness, and life lived on a dead-end street. And yet it is life lived with a freedom that is real and true, despite the majesty of Divine Otherness. We no longer have to seek God because God is right where we are. God is looking at us from every point on our compass, carrying our burdens, tasting how bitter life can seem, traveling our streets, and meeting us in our own human brothers and sisters.

But perhaps we don't want some of these things – like a saving victory that is concealed in weakness! Doesn't that just confirm the distressing reality of our situation? Yes, we want the incarnation of God, but in a way that enables us to escape what we don't like, and especially our boredom. Yet being called to Christian life is being called to a life of scandal to ourselves – that, for instance, of achieving glory only through the emptying that is the cross.

From the moment of the annunciation, Mary is drawn into such an inner tension. Her fate is that of her child – not only in glory but in labor, insults, and death. Oh yes, an angel greets her as perfectly graced so that her heart can be filled with joy and sing forth her Magnificat. But through this grace, she became Our Lady of Sorrows.

When Mary said "Yes!" she became a suspect and a kind of outcast. After she gave birth, Jesus himself was at times a puzzle to her, and she had to accept being abandoned by Him for the sake of God's call. She had accepted this when she said, "Behold, I am the slave of the Lord! Let it happen as you have said!" Lent is the grace of being made able to utter these words personally, becoming one with Mary and with Jesus. They always turn toward God and do God's will instead of their own.

Thursday

PERSEVERING IN THE WAY OF FAITH IN GOD

A Reflection taken from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

We have to persevere patiently in the course that faith has set us on and not let ourselves grow faint or discouraged. St Paul urges us: "Let's run the race that lies before us". Who will give us the example we need? Paul continues, "Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection". Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus means that we observe his example and follow it. In arts and athletics, the skill of an instructor is impressed on the minds of students as they watch, but then they must practice what they have seen. This is what we have to do if we want to run the race of life well. It is the only way to keep on a straight course towards our goal.

What is implied in these instructions? Surely, they tell us that Christ has given us faith and that we owe its impulses within us to his inspirations. He tells us, as he told his first disciples, "You didn't choose me; it was I who chose you." If Christ has given our faith its first impetus, we can be sure he will direct us to its goal. "He endured the cross and thought nothing of its shame for the sake of the joy that lay ahead." The Gospel records Jesus' own statement that the prince of this world was on his way but would find that he had no power over Jesus. Jesus, however, had the power to lay down his life for the Heavenly Father. If we are to follow Christ, we must bravely endure all the trials we encounter, and for love's sake, as he himself did.

Scripture says that Christ endured the cross, thinking not of its pain or shame but of what lay beyond. Christ chose an ignominious death, and he chose it in full freedom. He was not subject to sin, and so he did not act because he feared death. His example shows us how to face disgrace bodily and with peace of heart. Let me remind you of the goal that Christ achieved. "He has taken his seat at the right hand of God."

You see the prize that is to be won. St. Paul puts it as follows: "God has exalted him and given him the name that is above all others, so that at the name of Jesus every knee may bow". He is speaking in a human way about something that can't be expressed in human language. But even if there were no such reward to be won, wouldn't Christ's example be enough to persuade us to endure all trials willingly? We are, in fact, told that rewards do lie ahead of us, and that they are no ordinary honors but realities of such greatness that we don't even know how to describe them.

Whenever, then, we have to suffer some disgrace or pain, we have only to think of Christ and remember how many insults and rejections filled his life. He was continually hearing statements that he was mad or possessed by the prince of devils or a deceiver or magician. And these insults came from the very people among whom he went about doing good. He performed miracles for them. He revealed the works of God to them. He has done as much for us. Be of good heart. Marvelous things lie in store.

Friday

THE LOVE WHICH IS ALWAYS LOYAL

A Reflection excerpted from a text by Laurin Wenig

“Many good deeds have I shown you from my Father. For which of them do you stone me?” Jesus offers us the cup of my blood of the new and everlasting covenant. ‘Covenant’ is a word we hear at every Eucharist. It points to the solemn commitment we make to God and God to us. It means God will take care of us. It means we will ever be loyal and faithful to God. It means we will live by the laws exemplified in the command: Love one another.

There is another word that hovers between the lines of every sentence that talks about our covenant with God. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word is ‘hesed,’ and it means covenant-loyalty lived as love. This is the kind of love that God shows Israel and shows us, and that we are to show to one another. This is the love Jesus kept talking about during his ministry.

This kind of love consists of actions done for others – what we often call “good works”. These are the kinds of activities that God does for us in covenant-love. Long ago, God sent Jeremiah to remind people of their obligation to God and to one another to be faithful and loyal to the covenant. It was not an easy mission. People didn’t want to be reminded of covenant obligations. They made his life miserable. God sent Jesus to accomplish those same goals. The Gospels continually describe Jesus healing the sick, telling the truth, bringing light to the blind and confused, and bringing forgiveness to the sinner, bringing life out of death.

Everyone who saw this should have seen God at work. Because some didn’t, Jesus had to ask, “For which of these good deeds do you stone me?” They planned to arrest Jesus in order to kill him. Their ancestors had tried to do the same thing to Jeremiah. Truth has powerful enemies.

Throughout the Gospel of John, we see how those whose hearts are open to the word of Jesus come to believe in Him. It takes time to figure out the difference between the influence of the “world” and the way of Jesus. The truth will win out.

That is what Lent is about, growing in faith, wanting more of Jesus and his life-giving love. That way we can continue to do the good works, the covenant works of loyalty to God in Jesus, that mark one off as belonging to God. How often do we hear the word ‘covenant’ without thinking about its meaning? It is not enough to support one another in pure faith, that is too intellectual. We need to bind ourselves to one another in good works.

May our good works increase in number and become ever more sacrificial as we move closer to the final sign of the covenant – the Cross and Good Friday. It is only a week away. Amen.

Saturday

JESUS CHRIST FULFILLS PROMISES

A Reflection from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom

We need endurance to do God's will. That means we need endurance to obtain what God has promised us. Are we on the very threshold of victory? Are we through with the contests, the imprisonments, afflictions, confiscations, and all the rest? In that case, we are standing here waiting for our reward. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us, "In a little while he who is to come will be here; he will not delay". The Scriptures are used to comfort people and answer their questions about when the Lord will come again. "The righteous shall live by faith; no one who shrinks back in fear is pleasing." This is not only an exhortation but a warning. Another quote comes: "We are not among those who shrink back and are lost; we have the faith that leads to life."

These words, directed to those for whom the Letter to the Hebrews was written, can just as well be used for us. We can get downcast and tempted to lose heart. People find it hard to endure the sight of the wicked flourishing when they aren't having success. Perhaps some of us long for vengeance and want punishment to be inflicted on sinners while they are rewarded for the pains they have borne.

Well, I, too, can assure the listless and negligent that there will be a time for punishment. The Lord certainly will come. The resurrection's consequences are not endlessly far off but in some sense "close at hand". How do I know this? I do not claim to have the knowledge from the prophets. Christ himself foretold things, and if these predictions had proven false, then we wouldn't need to believe what he foretold about the Last Days coming soon. But all the foretellings have come true. Why should we hesitate regarding to the Last Days?

Christ foretold the fall of Jerusalem. He declared that the city would suffer a defeat unlike any that had happened before. This prediction has been fulfilled. He foretold a time of great distress, which indeed has come. He described how the Gospel would spread abroad like a mustard plant growing from a tiny seed. In the world, he warned us, we would have affliction but should take heart. He said he had overcome the world, meaning that no one would gain mastery over us, and all this has come true, as we can see. He declared that the "gates of hell" would not prevail against the Church, despite persecution, and that no one would extinguish the light of the Gospel.

Thus, experience bears witness to the fulfillment of these prophetic words. So why are we distressed that the words about the Last Day have not yet been fulfilled? What is it that we want? Do we want our pleasures to take precedence over God's plans to bring many more into His Kingdom? When God tells us that we will be rewarded, we have no good reason to doubt. I can't tell you when it will happen exactly. What we must do is open ourselves wholly to God's will, no matter what it entails. Scripture tells us that, as God sees things, there is no delay.