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Sunday, Feb 07, 2021

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Game on

The odds for Super Bowl Sunday 2021 were available last February. Tickets for the game have been on sale for as long. But things don't always happen the way we plan them. Last year, when the Chiefs were pitted against the 49ers, no one imagined how the world would change between one Super Bowl and the next. Still, Jesus comes into our midst wherever we are, whatever our circumstances, and grasps us by the hand. We can't be sure of the game plan for the future. But we can trust that Jesus will be there for us.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Job 7:1-4, 6-7; 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23; Mark 1:29-39 (74).* "Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. . . . [Jesus] grasped her hand, and helped her up."

Monday, Feb 08, 2021

MEMORIAL OF JEROME EMILIANI, PRIEST

Share the love to feel the love

Who hasn't felt all alone before? Perhaps let down or left by a loved one. Perhaps in such dire straits that you thought even God abandoned you. Jerome Emiliani is the saint for those low points. He found God in ultimate isolation—prison. Once free, he became a priest and devoted himself to the abandoned of 16th-century Venice—especially orphans and prostitutes. When you feel stricken with an orphan spirit, remember that you are a beloved child of a loving Creator who will never let you go. Show that same love to those who need you most.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 1:1-19; Mark 6:53-56 (329).* "They laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch only the tassel on his cloak."

Tuesday, Feb 09, 2021

Be the change

Gregory XV became pope by "popular acclaim" on this day in 1621—interesting, because he changed the tradition soon after. Instead, Gregory made the case for the first secret ballot when electing a pope. He also did other remarkable things, considering his papacy lasted barely two years. He established the first missionary organization of the Vatican, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. And he canonized these beloved saints: Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, Francis Xavier, and Philip Neri. Is there a change you've been meaning to make in your own practice of the faith? Begin today.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 1:20—2:4a; Mark 7:1-13 (330).* "The Pharisees and scribes questioned him, 'Why do your disciples not follow the tradition?'"

Wednesday, Feb 10, 2021

MEMORIAL OF SCHOLASTICA, VIRGIN

God's assistance rains down

There are few details of Saint Scholastica's early life, but we do know that this sister of Benedict of Nursia entered religious life and lived in a women's monastery a few miles from her brother's in Monte Cassino. Perhaps the most enduring story about Scholastica is one that pits her will against her brother's when she begs him to extend their yearly visit and spend the night in prayer and conversation. Benedict resists, not

wishing to break his own rule with a night away from home. Determined, Scholastica asks God for assistance, and a torrential rainstorm ensues that settles the matter in her favor—Benedict will spend the night. Never doubt that you are worthy to ask for God's help. Trust your heart to know what will draw you closer to God.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-17; Mark 7:14-23 (331).* "When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth."

Thursday, Feb 11, 2021

MEMORIAL OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES

Turn to Mary

Much of Jesus' ministry had to do with some form of healing, and today's memorial, Our Lady of Lourdes, recognizes Mary's 18 reported appearances in Lourdes, France, a place of pilgrimage known for healing powers. Millions of people a year travel to Lourdes in search of healing; many report spiritual peace and transformation, and a handful even report experiencing cures without medical explanation. Today is also World Day of the Sick. It's an ideal day to ask Mary to intercede on behalf of healing that we need—or that our friends and loved ones desire.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 2:18-25; Mark 7:24-30 (332).* "Soon a woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him. She came and fell at his feet."

Friday, Feb 12, 2021

Say their name

This day, falling between World Day of the Sick and Valentine's Day, brings thoughts of how many are left alone after COVID deaths. Advertisers are pushing candy, cards, and flowery bouquets, but the countercultural church also counsels that we pay kind attention to those who are grieving. Practical actions are often most helpful: not only shoveling a driveway or baking some bread, but also reaching out and just listening to whatever is on the grieving person's heart. Sometimes all a grieving person wants is to name the beloved and talk about them again. Being a good listener is a welcome gift.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 3:1-8; Mark 7:31-37 (333).* "They were exceedingly astonished and they said, 'He has done all things well.'"

Saturday, Feb 13, 2021

OPTIONAL MEMORIAL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Saturdays belong to Mary

For more than a thousand years, the Catholic Church has dedicated most Saturdays to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The reason for choosing Saturday above all other days has been lost to antiquity. But according to tradition, Saturday has been set aside to celebrate the maternal example of Mary and witness to her dedicated discipleship as a woman of God and a follower of Jesus. The weekly memorial serves as a reminder that she is continuously present and operative in the life of the church. Reflect on how the Blessed Virgin Mary has been present and active in your life.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 3:9-24; Mark 8:1-10 (334).* "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd."



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Sunday, Feb 14, 2021

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Staying the course

Quarantine is hard on relationships: both with the people you can't yet risk seeing in person, as well as those with whom you happen to be locked down. Families that have survived a long year of "acute togetherness" might congratulate each other on their success. Spouses, too, might reward each other for going the distance, without much distance, since last spring. On this World Marriage Day, take some time to reflect together on ways your vital relationships have been tested in a long period of crisis. Ask for forgiveness where necessary. Offer yours freely.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46; 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1; Mark 1:40-45 (77).* "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

Monday, Feb 15, 2021

Lead by example

Presidents' Day—celebrated every February between Lincoln's and Washington's birthdays—is an occasion to remember all the presidents of the United States. Certainly some of them have been better than others. Our job is not to sit on the sidelines and criticize and complain. The church wisely instructs us on our duty as citizens "to contribute along with the civil authorities to the good of society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom." That goes for participation in any community—get involved and raise it up!

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 4:1-15, 25; Mark 8:11-13 (335).* "Amen, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation."

Tuesday, Feb 16, 2021

Enjoy the feast before the fast

Today is Fat Tuesday. Whether you call it Mardi Gras, Carnival, or Shrove Tuesday, the popular practice of one last big, sumptuous feast—right before the asceticism of Lent—actually had a very practical motivation. In the days before refrigeration, people couldn't preserve certain foods (like eggs, cream, and butter) during the time of prolonged fasting. They had to use them up. Nowadays, that's not the case for most of us. So it's worth considering: What does the feasting of this day signify, in contrast to the great fast that's approaching? Perhaps it's gratitude—for God's generous abundance.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 6:5-8; 7:1-5, 10; Mark 8:14-21 (336).* "Do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand?"

Wednesday, Feb 17, 2021

ASH WEDNESDAY; DAY OF FAST AND ABSTINENCE Invitation to love

We enter the Lenten journey with the intention to draw closer to God by means of prayer, generosity, and fasting. Talk to God and share what is on your mind, read the daily scripture, practice the prayer of meditation. Find ways to be generous with time or treasure: write a card, heal a broken relationship, bake bread to share, donate to a group that cares for the underserved. And admit that some fasting—

whether from gaming, social media, or worrying—could improve your connection to God. This Lent is an opportunity, not a burden. Embrace it with hope. Live it with love.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Joel 2:12-18; 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 (219).* "Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart."

Thursday, Feb 18, 2021

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Choose life

Today's readings focus on the urgency of choosing life. Moses tells his people to choose life over death; Jesus says we save our life by losing it in him. Meanwhile, events nationwide and worldwide keep reminding us that black lives matter and, as Catholic bishops put it, "everyone belongs." The disproportionate death of people of color from poor healthcare, poverty, abortion, crime and violence, judicial bias, and more cries out for major reform. Support life in all its diversity by more about racial injustice as a prolife issue.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 9:22-25 (220).* "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

Friday, Feb 19, 2021

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY; DAY OF ABSTINENCE

Make abstinence a healthy habit

The wisdom of making Lenten Fridays meatless has endured for centuries. We now understand that meat consumption at current levels is not only unhealthy, but unsustainable. Ever more Amazonian rain forests are cleared for grazing. Hundreds of activists have been gunned down trying to protect this biodiverse land and its poor settlers against the interests of powerful ranchers and loggers. Among the martyrs is Sister Dorothy Stang, SNDdeN, whose death 15 years ago brought new attention to the plight of the farmers and the devastation of the Amazon for the sake of beef. Why not extend your meat abstinence beyond Lenten Fridays?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 58:1-9a; Matthew 9:14-15 (221).* "Would that today you might fast so as to make your voice heard on high!"

Saturday, Feb 20, 2021

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Off to a good start?

This is only the fourth day of Lent, and already we had a day of fasting and abstinence on Wednesday and another day of abstinence yesterday. During Lent back in the Middle Ages, Catholics weren't supposed to eat anything before 3 p.m. In the monasteries, that was the hour the "Nones" prayers were recited. So no eating until after Nones. But the monks would move the Nones hour up to 12 o'clock so they could eat earlier. That's how the 12 o'clock hour got the name "noon." While we can eat at any hour today, every day is a good day to control our appetites. What hunger stands between you and a peaceful heart? Can you put it on pause at least for a day?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 58:9b-14; Luke 5:27-32 (222).* "I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners."



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Sunday, Feb 21, 2021

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Doing the rite thing

Today, some of our neighbors are going to make a countercultural choice. They're going to sign the Book of the Elect, signaling their decision to be baptized, confirmed, and to receive First Eucharist at this year's Easter Vigil. These Elect have been studying for months or years to embrace the life of the church. Why would anyone make this choice in the 21st century? For some, it may have begun as intellectual curiosity. For others, it's a journey of the heart. For all, it's what they've seen in folks like us that make Catholic Christianity an inspiring choice. Let's help keep the inspiration going!

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 9:8-15; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:12-15 (23).* "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Monday, Feb 22, 2021

FEAST OF THE CHAIR OF PETER, APOSTLE

Recognize the chair

Jesus loved us so much that he entrusted us to someone he trusted deeply. In fact, in the Gospel of John, Jesus asked Peter three times if his devotion was assured. He named him "rock" so he would be a solid foundation upon which to build the church, and for 2,000 years Peter's successors have had the responsibility of tending his sheep. Today we celebrate the seat of the pope's authority as Christ's representative on Earth, the protector Jesus wanted for his flock. Ask the Holy Spirit to always guide the one who sits in Peter's chair.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Peter 5:1-4; Matthew 16:13-19 (535).*
"I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven."

Tuesday, Feb 23, 2021

MEMORIAL OF POLYCARP, BISHOP, MARTYR

Words to live forever by

Polycarp's death in 155 is one of the first accounts of Christian martyrdom in a public arena. The elderly bishop was resolute and serene even as he was burned and stabbed before a frenzied crowd. Included in the accounts is the two hours of prayer Polycarp began upon his arrest, so powerful it unnerved his Roman guards. But Polycarp was also an Apostolic Father, specifically a disciple of Saint John the Evangelist. Thus, he had firsthand knowledge of John's words from Jesus: "Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 55:10-11; Matthew 6:7-15 (225).* "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Wednesday, Feb 24, 2021

LENTE WEEKDAY

A good day to make amends

We are one week into this Lenten season, so perhaps it is time to have a conversation with our Lord. Imagine you are walking with Jesus, side by side, and he asks you, "Is there any person you think of who you have hurt or judged, or any action that comes to mind that you know was wrong? Anything you repent?" You take a moment, and standing next to him, you feel his love for you. Regret and sorrow

arise as you admit the mistakes that come to mind. You ask for the grace to make amends in whatever way possible. Find a way today to make something right.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32 (226).*

"At the preaching of Jonah they repented, and there is something greater than Jonah here."

Thursday, Feb 25, 2021

LENTE WEEKDAY

Has prayer moved you?

It is tempting to think about prayer in a transactional way: I ask, therefore God gives. Today's gospel may even appear to encourage this form of thought: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find." But Catholic teaching urges us to see God's response to prayer broadly. Pope Francis explains: "Prayer always transforms reality: if things around us do not change, at least our hearts are changed. Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to every man and woman who prays." If you have a prayer that seems unanswered, consider how your heart was moved by the mere act of praying.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Esther C:12, 14-16, 23-25; Matthew 7:7-12 (227).* "For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds."

Friday, Feb 26, 2021

LENTE WEEKDAY; DAY OF ABSTINENCE

The low rumble within

Anger is one of our human "passions," the Catechism of the Catholic Church instructs, neither good nor bad in and of itself. Anger can provide us with helpful information that we feel wronged by someone or something. It may be intense or a low rumble within. Lent is an opportunity to become still, listen to our anger, and examine its source. How might we invite God into these rough spaces for healing? Desiring healing does not disregard hurt or suffering; rather we seek to "unhook" from anger to live in peace. Unhooking might mean talking with a loved one who hurt us. It might mean protesting against injustice. It might mean forgiving ourselves. What might be rumbling within your heart?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ezekiel 18:21-28; Matthew 5:20-26 (228).* "Go first and be reconciled."

Saturday, Feb 27, 2021

LENTE WEEKDAY

Agree to disagree

There is no more timely message for our divided age of partisan politics than "love your enemies." But how is that even possible? One perspective that some find helpful is that "you don't have to like someone to love them." Love in this context is not a warm, fuzzy feeling but a decision to treat with respect, to "do unto others." A tall order, but it does help to remove the expectation that we have to become fast friends with those we oppose. And maybe it will lead to a time when we can see difficult folks as people with whom we happen to disagree, rather than mortal enemies. Jesus was all about reconciliation. Let's take up the mantle.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Matthew 5:43-48 (229).* "But I say to you, love your enemies."



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Sunday, Feb 28, 2021 SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT Go all in

Erin became a Roman Catholic in midlife. When asked why, she says she tried fiercely to make life work according to her plan. Erin told God many times how it should go, attempting to persuade the powers that be to see it her way. Then one day God replied: My plan for you is so beautiful, wonderful, elegant. Why not try it instead? When Erin celebrated the Rites for Candidates for Full Communion on a Lenten Sunday just like this one, she found the joy she was missing. Pray for this year's candidates—and for candidates for years to come.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Romans 8:31b-34; Mark 9:2-10 (26). "If God is for us, who can be against us?"*

Monday, Mar 01, 2021 LENTEN WEEKDAY Mercy me!

Pope Francis called mercy the "beating heart of the gospel." Mercy is forbearance, divine favor, compassionate treatment of the distressed and undeserving. It's another word for God's love. Consider showing devotion to it by reciting the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, a rosary-based prayer that was received by Saint Faustina, a Polish nun in the 1930s, through visions of Jesus. Divine Mercy Sunday is celebrated the week after Easter, but many make the Chaplet part of their regular Lenten practice by reciting it every day at 3 p.m. (the traditional hour of Christ's death). You can find the Chaplet on the website.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Daniel 9:4b-10; Luke 6:36-38 (230). "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."*

Tuesday, Mar 02, 2021 LENTEN WEEKDAY Celebrate humble history

Women's History Month celebrates well-known women but also unsung heroines. How appropriate, then, that today is the feast of Agnes of Bohemia, a lesser-known saint. First cousin of Elizabeth of Hungary—and descendent of Good King Wenceslaus—Agnes came upon her vocation naturally. She built a hospital for the poor, a Franciscan friary, and a monastery for Poor Clare nuns. When she also became a nun and was urged to become abbess, she referred to herself only as "senior sister." She continued to cook for her sisters and mend the clothing of lepers rather than live a royal life. Celebrate the unsung heroines in your life.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 1:10, 16-20; Matthew 23:1-12 (231). "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."*

Wednesday, Mar 03, 2021 MEMORIAL OF KATHARINE DREXEL, RELIGIOUS FOUNDER

We have work to do

Katharine Drexel (1858-1955) is a saint for our time. Born into a successful Philadelphia banking family, she used her wealth to improve the lives of others. Her Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament devoted their lives to education of Native and African Americans, building more than 100 schools in cities, rural areas, and on reservations. Though Katharine and her sisters at times faced

criticism, endured racist taunts, and were threatened by the Ku Klux Klan, they remained steadfast in their mission. Patron saint of racial justice and philanthropy, Saint Katharine epitomizes the sacrifice of the Blessed Sacrament. How will you commit your own life to making the world more just?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 18:18-20; Matthew 20:17-28 (232). "Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?"*

Thursday, Mar 04, 2021 MEMORIAL OF CASIMIR Grace under pressure

Saint Casimir seemed destined for riches and power, but this patron saint of Poland, called the Peacemaker, took a different path. Born in 1458 to the king and queen of Poland, he was a devout, ascetic child. At age 14 his father had him lead an army to install himself as king of Hungary, but with an overpowering enemy and troops beginning to desert, Casimir instead returned home. His furious father exiled him, but Casimir would never again take up arms. Rejecting violence when those around you embrace it can take great inner strength. Cultivate an inner compass that can pursue peace despite pressure.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31 (233). "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD."*

Friday, Mar 05, 2021 LENTEN WEEKDAY; DAY OF ABSTINENCE Pray for besieged people everywhere

Prayer is our life with God. Sometimes we carve out a particular time during the day, and sometimes there are specific words, images, or experiences that help us be more aware of or express our relationship with God. And so of course during Lent prayer is one of the pillars, along with fasting and almsgiving, that help us turn to God. On today's 2021 Day of Prayer, an ecumenical observance, we are invited to "Build on a strong foundation." This theme comes from the women of Vanuatu, an island hit by Cyclone Harold in 2020. Despite the perils they faced—and we've all faced in a year of pandemic—the message of today's prayer is one of confidence in God's steadfastness and the rock of faith. Unite in prayer for healing and recovery.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a; Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46 (234). "The kingdom of God will be . . . given to a people that will produce its fruit."*

Saturday, Mar 06, 2021 LENTEN WEEKDAY Sibling rivalry of biblical proportions

The Parable of the Prodigal Son could as easily be called the Parable of the Bitter Brother. The story might have ended with the celebration at the return of the repentant prodigal. But instead we are left to ponder the feelings of the "good son," the obedient one who followed all the rules but never got a party thrown in *his* honor. It's a very human story, reenacted in nearly every family in one form or another. "Mother always liked you best." "You were Dad's favorite." "All we ever did was bail you out of trouble." Will the bitter brother in the gospel story reconcile? Has bitterness or division in your own family been reconciled? Consider being the reconciler who brings it about.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Micah 7:14-15, 18-20; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 (235). "Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends."*