



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2016 SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT Take and drink

The word *covenant* is used often in scripture and the liturgy. It's a bond, in some ways like a contract, but far more serious. The flame and smoke in the Genesis story were signs that God approved of the arrangement, but the remains of slaughtered animals were a grim reminder: May this be the fate of the one who breaks this bond. At every Mass, we remember Christ's words about the "new and everlasting covenant" as he bids us share his cup, his blood. When we do, our bond with God is sealed by far more than the blood of beasts. Consider the language you use today, the choices you make. Do they show that you are everlastingly sealed to Christ?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 9:28b-36 (27)*. "On that occasion the Lord made a covenant."

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22 FEAST OF THE CHAIR OF PETER THE APOSTLE Approach God's throne of grace

The Latin for "chair" is *cathedra*, and it is the place from which someone in authority presides and teaches. When the Holy Father teaches *ex cathedra*, "from the chair," his teaching has the assurance of God's infallibility. Your diocesan cathedral has a bishop's chair. In biblical language, it is better called God's "Mercy Seat," the "Throne of Grace." Christ placed his trust and authority in Peter and his successors, and today we remember not only to *seek* God's mercy, but also to lead others to it. Anyone need your forgiveness? Do you need to forgive yourself? No better day than today.

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, FEBRUARY 23 FEAST OF POLYCARP, BISHOP From age to age and from east to west

His name might sound odd to our modern ears, but Polycarp is a pretty popular guy, especially for someone who died back in the *really* olden times—like the year 167! The wisdom of his writings is embraced by churches of all stripes—from Roman Catholic to Eastern Orthodox, from mainline Protestant to every other type of Christian. Some researchers even think Polycarp was the one who first compiled, edited, and published the collection we now revere as the New Testament. Maybe that's why he was named Polycarp, which means "rich in fruit." Here was one fruitful author you want to remember! Thank all who came before you and left you this great legacy of faith.

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, FEBRUARY 24 LENTEN WEEKDAY Threatened with Resurrection

During the decades of political violence in her land, Guatemalan poet Julia Esquivel penned the poem, "Threatened with Resurrection." Her words cut to the heart of the Lenten journey and Christian life: "There is something here within us / Which doesn't let us sleep, which doesn't let us rest, / Which doesn't stop pounding deep inside . . . in this marathon of Hope, / there are always others to relieve us / in bearing the courage necessary / to arrive at the goal which lies beyond death." The goal of our journey is Resurrection; to attain it we must face death and trust that all we give now will lead us to new life.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 18:18-20; Matthew 20:17-28 (232)*. "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve."

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25 LENTEN WEEKDAY To keep a true Lent

The 17th-century poet and clergyman Robert Herrick asked himself the same questions we do today during Lent. Why are we fasting? Is it "to keep the larder lean"? Is it to fast from meat, but "fill the platter high with fish"? Is it to fast long and look sour? No, says Herrick, "It is to fast from strife, from old debate, and hate." It is to "starve thy sin, not bin." And that is how to keep "thy Lent."

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31 (233)*. "For the Lord watches over the way of the just, but the way of the wicked vanishes."

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26 LENTEN WEEKDAY; DAY OF ABSTINENCE Feed my soul

The Fridays in Lent are days of fasting and abstinence, when Catholics are asked to abstain from eating meat and snacking between meals and to keep nutrition basic. Why do this? You can fast and abstain to purify your mind and body, to offer sacrifice for the needs of the world, to acknowledge your need to make amends for failures. And in doing so, you can become mindful of the poor and hungry of the world who struggle to have enough to eat every day. As Doctor of the church Saint John Chrysostom put it centuries ago: "Dost thou fast?" Then give us proof of it by your works: "If thou sees a poor man, take pity on him!" As you fast today, reach out to those with less, and pray for the grace to made amends with someone you have hurt or excluded.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a; Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46 (234)*. "When the brothers saw that their father loved him best . . . they hated him . . . and they would not greet him."

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27 LENTEN WEEKDAY Step-by-step penance

It's one thing to feel sorry for a wrong you've committed, but another to fully repent. Saint John Chrysostom offers guidance on how to do that in his Five Paths of Repentance: condemnation of your sins, forgiveness of your neighbor's sins against you, prayer "that is fervent and careful and comes from the heart," almsgiving "whose power is great and far-reaching," and humility. He said, "We have learned how to heal those wounds of ours, let us apply the cures. Then . . . we can approach the Holy Table with confidence, go gloriously to meet Christ."

TODAY'S READINGS: *Micah 7:14-15, 18-20; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 (235)*. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son."



Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time.

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