

1st Sunday of Lent

Year C

GOSPEL

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Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days. During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf.' But Jesus replied, 'Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone.'

Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, 'I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been committed to me and I give it to anyone I choose. Worship me, then, and it shall all be yours.' But Jesus answered him, 'Scripture says:

You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.'

Then he led him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said to him 'throw yourself down from here, for scripture says:

He will put his angels in charge of you to guard you,

and again:

They will hold you up on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.'

But Jesus answered him, 'It has been said:

You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Having exhausted all these ways of tempting him, the devil left him, to return at the appointed time.

(Luke 4:1-13)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Numbers are often significant in the Bible. The number forty denotes an extended period. Thus in the story of Noah, rain falls for forty days; the Israelites wandered for forty years in the desert; and both Elijah and Moses fast for forty days before an encounter with God.
- Lent, a time of fasting, prayer and giving for all Christians, also runs for forty days and is a special time of final preparation for people who will be receiving the sacraments at Easter.

- This text comes immediately after the baptism of Jesus in Luke's Gospel. The baptism takes place in the lower reaches of the Jordan River, just north of the point where it enters the Dead Sea. This is a particularly desolate and barren region of dry river beds (wadis) and steep, rocky cliffs rising up from the Jordan Valley.
- The temple precinct in Jerusalem was built on a mountain. It comprised the temple itself and several courtyards surrounded by a very high wall. This is the parapet referred to in this text.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Jesus' fast of forty days in the wilderness recalls the stories of Elijah and Moses, and his temptation recalls the severe testing to which the people of Israel were subjected when they too wandered in the desert. Israel was found wanting and succumbed to the temptations, worshipping false gods, but Jesus uses the word of God to defeat the power of evil: 'Man does not live on bread alone' (Deuteronomy 8:13); 'You must worship the Lord your God' (Deuteronomy 6:13). In testing Jesus, Satan is testing God himself and is dismissed from the story with the words 'You must not put the Lord your God to the test' (Deuteronomy 6:16). Jesus has reversed Israel's experience in the desert and become the founder of a new people.

- Do you have the courage, like Jesus, to become sons and daughters of God?
- Which of the temptations faced by Jesus—material security, power or prestige—offers the greatest challenge to you?
- How do you overcome temptation when it arises?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What are the great temptations in your life?
- In what ways have you been 'led by the Spirit through the wilderness'?
- 'Man does not live on bread alone.' What nourishes your spiritual life?
- Today's gospel presents Jesus' struggle to remain true to himself and his faith. Spend time reflecting on how you are feeling about the Rite of Election and the commitment you will make at Easter. Share your hopes and fears.
- Spend time this week contemplating the difficult periods of your life and how they led you to new understandings of yourself, others and God. Reach out to someone who may be experiencing a difficult time in their lives.
- Use the response to today's psalm as your prayer this week:
Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.

2nd Sunday of Lent

Year C

GOSPEL

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Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up the mountain to pray. As he prayed, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became brilliant as lightning. Suddenly there were two men there talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah appearing in glory, and they were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were heavy with sleep, but they kept awake and saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He did not know what he was saying. As he spoke, a cloud came and covered them with shadow; and when they went into the cloud the disciples were afraid. And a voice came from the cloud saying, 'This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him.' And after the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. The disciples kept silence and, at that time, told no one what they had seen.

(Luke 9:28–36)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- This event is traditionally known as 'the transfiguration'. Although the place is not mentioned in the gospels, this event has, since the fourth century, been associated with Mount Tabor in Galilee.
- The white robes and changed appearance of Jesus represent his glory and divinity, revealed here to the disciples.
- Moses and Elijah are two of the greatest heroes of Israel. They represent the law and the prophets—two of the most important sections of the Hebrew Bible. Like Jesus, both of them suffered rejection during their lives.

EXPLORING THE WORD

One of the overriding themes of Luke's Gospel is Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Just a few verses on from this text, Jesus 'resolutely took the road for Jerusalem,' and his resolve is foreshadowed here in the conversation he is having with Moses and Elijah as they speak of 'his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem.' Jesus is revealing not only his true identity to his chosen companions but also his destiny: the 'passing over' of his death and resurrection, by which his divinity will be definitively revealed to all. Through that event, all that the law (represented by Moses) and the prophets (represented by Elijah) stood for will be accomplished. Peter misunderstands and thinks that the event on the mountain is the end of the story—he wants to erect tents there. He has not yet grasped the need to continue with the journey to Jerusalem. As a Christian, one cannot simply remain on the mountain in contemplation of divinity; one must also come down from the mountain and take the earthly road of living the faith to its ultimate conclusion.

- This gospel emphasises the need to withdraw for prayer. How important is quiet contemplation and prayer in your journey?
- In what ways do you balance prayer and action in living your faith?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- 'Master, it is wonderful for us to be here.' Reflect on what these words mean for you as you approach the sacraments.
- 'Listen to him.' What might Jesus be saying to you at this time?
- This gospel relates the experience of a personal encounter with the divine. Recall an experience you have had of encountering God or an intuition of God touching your life. Share your reflections.
- Spend extra time this week listening to the 'beloved Son'. What is Jesus saying to you?
- Use today's collect as your prayer this week:

O God, who have commanded us to listen to your beloved Son, be pleased, we pray, to nourish us inwardly with your word, that, with spiritual sight made pure, we may rejoice to behold your glory.

3rd Sunday of Lent

Year C

GOSPEL

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Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did.'

He told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to the man who looked after the vineyard, "Look here, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down."'

(Luke 13:1-9)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The pool of Siloam was a reservoir that lay within the city walls of ancient Jerusalem. During the reign of King Hezekiah, an extraordinary tunnel was dug through bedrock to connect it to the spring of Gihon outside the city walls so that the city would have an ample water supply in times of siege.
- We have no evidence outside the biblical text of the incident referred to here where Pilate 'mingled the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifice,' but such an act is not out of character. Pilate had a reputation for being a brutal military leader.
- At the time in which Jesus lived, suffering was often considered to be a punishment from God for sin committed.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This gospel is really about the loving care and patience of God. It was commonly believed that a loving God could not be responsible for terrible calamities that befell people, but that these events must somehow be a result of their own sinfulness. Jesus takes the opportunity to say that the recent deaths of both Galileans and inhabitants of Jerusalem did not mean that they were any more sinful than others. They were no more deserving of death than anyone else. Indeed, we must not look to the sinfulness of others but to our own need for repentance.

The parable of the owner of the vineyard tells of God's infinite patience in dealing with the sinfulness of humans. Despite our failings, God will graciously allow us time to produce our best fruit. The theme of this gospel—God's forgiveness and care—will be taken up in the gospels of the next two weeks.

- Lent is a special time of preparation, particularly for the elect. In what ways can you cultivate your own garden of faith in this special time?
- Are there still areas of your life that are yet to produce their best fruit?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- How 'fruitful' has your life been? What 'fruit' have you borne?
- Do you need a second chance to bear good fruit?
- In what ways can you make it even more fruitful?
- Have you ever had an experience of needing to nurture someone or something for a long period before they 'produced fruit'? Were there failures along the way? What was it that eventually brought about the growth? Share your reflections.
- Attend carefully this week to cultivating your own relationship with God. Try to bring out the best in someone else as well.
- Use this section of today's psalm as your prayer this week:

*The Lord is compassion and love,
slow to anger and rich in mercy.
For as the heavens are above the earth
so strong is his love for those who fear him.*

4th Sunday of Lent

Year C

GOSPEL

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The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. 'This man' they said 'welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he spoke this parable to them:

'A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me." So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery.

'When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants." So he left the place and went back to his father.

'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate.

'Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. "Your brother has come" replied the servant "and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound." He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, "Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property—he and his women—you kill the calf we had been fattening."

'The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found."

(Luke 15:1–3, 11–32)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The son going to 'a distant country' shows that he has turned his back not only on his father but also on his faith. He has left his true heritage behind. His repentance and return becomes all the more poignant.
- Accepting work with pigs shows just how low the son had sunk because pigs are unclean animals to the Jews and touching them rendered the son unclean as well.
- By asking for his inheritance, the son was as good as saying to his father, 'I wish you were dead.' This makes the father's forgiveness all the more astounding.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The religious leaders at the time of Jesus felt that there was no place for sinners in God's kingdom. This parable shows that there is always hope and a promise of forgiveness for those who repent and turn again to God, and that God never tires of seeking the lost. The father allows his youngest son the freedom to choose his way and make his own mistakes, but he keeps the door of welcome open. Through his journey, this son comes to realise that his fulfillment lies with his father and returns. At this point, the elder son changes places with the younger and becomes the one who is alienated and outside the feast. The reaction of the father is consistent: he goes outside to meet his elder son, now the lost one, to tell him, 'All I have is yours.' The reward is for both the righteous and the repentant sinner.

- Do you have a sense of God seeking you out, even in your anger or confusion, and saying to you, 'All I have is yours'?
- In what ways is the elder son 'lost', even though he has lived a model life?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Which of the characters in this story do you identify with the most: the younger son? the father? the elder son? How might you react in such circumstances?
- Recall a moment in your life when you experienced something of either the father's joy at reconciliation, the younger son's change of heart or the elder son's jealousy and resentment. Describe this experience for others.
- Reach out to someone with an invitation, a gesture or a word of forgiveness.
- This line from the gospel is particularly apt during Lent, the time of repentance. Use it often this week:

Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. Forgive me.

5th Sunday of Lent

Year C

GOSPEL

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Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them.

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in full view of everybody, they said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?' They asked him this as a test, looking for something to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he looked up and said, 'If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained standing there. He looked up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir' she replied. 'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus 'go away, and do not sin anymore.'

(John 8:1-11)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the great festivals and who could not find lodging in the city often stayed the night on the Mount of Olives, just outside the city gates.
- On the Mount of Olives is a garden area called Gethsemane, which means 'oil press' in Hebrew.
- The Mount of Olives offered a spectacular view across to the temple.
- The death penalty for adultery is stipulated in both the book of Leviticus (20:10) and in Deuteronomy (22:22), but both these texts make clear that both parties should be thus punished. In this text, the man is missing.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This gospel combines the themes that have been emerging during Lent: the goodness and mercy of God and the need for repentance. It is an interesting exercise to concentrate on the woman in this story. She is dragged in by the religious authorities to be used as a 'thing' to test Jesus. In this early phase of the encounter, Jesus does not look at the woman or acknowledge her presence but addresses his response to the crowd and to the scribes and Pharisees. It is only after they have left the scene in shame that he turns his attention to the woman and establishes personal contact with her, confirming that she is a human person and not a 'thing'. The intimacy of his address to her as 'Woman' echoes the term he uses in addressing his mother (John 2:4, John 19:26). Jesus neither condemns nor condones. He simply accepts the woman as she is and invites her to a new life. It is acceptance and love that allows repentance and change to occur in others.

- Have you had the experience of being unconditionally loved and accepted by another?
- Who are those people in your life who you love and accept unconditionally?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Have you ever been too hasty in your judgment and condemnation of others?
- Have you ever been forgiven by someone for an offence you committed against them? How did you feel?
- What do you think Jesus wrote on the ground? The text does not tell us. What might it have been?
- Are there times or situations when you find yourself being judgmental or self-righteous? What is the best corrective to this attitude? Have you ever experienced the condemnation of others? How did you feel? Share your reflections.
- Is there someone who is on the outer to whom you can offer support this week?
- Use the psalm response as your prayer this week:

*The Lord has done great things for us;
we are filled with joy.*

Passion (Palm) Sunday

Year C

GOSPEL

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... When they reached the place called The Skull, they crucified him and the two criminals also, one on the right, the other on the left. Jesus said, 'Father forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.' Then they cast lots to share out his clothing.

The people stayed there watching him. As for the leaders, they jeered at him. 'He saved others,' they said 'let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.' The soldiers mocked him too and when they approached to offer him vinegar they said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.' Above him there was an inscription: 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals hanging there abused him. 'Are you not the Christ?' he said. 'Save yourself and us as well.' But the other spoke up and rebuked him. 'Have you no fear of God at all?' he said. 'You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it; we are paying for what we did. But this man has done no wrong. Jesus,' he said, 'remember me when you come into your kingdom.' 'Indeed, I promise you,' he replied, 'today you will be with me in paradise.'

It was now about the sixth hour and, with the sun eclipsed, a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. The veil of the Temple was torn right down the middle; and when Jesus had cried out in a loud voice, he said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' With these words he breathed his last ...

(Luke 22:14-23:56 heavily abridged)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper is reported in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke but not in John. In John (6:1-15), the setting is the multiplication miracle of the loaves. Instead, in John's Gospel, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper (13:1-11) in an act of service.
- All four gospels report the trials of Jesus before the Sanhedrin or governing council of the Jews and before Pilate, but only Luke tells of Jesus being sent to Herod.
- Luke's Gospel emphasises the mercy and forgiveness of the Lord towards those who repent. Even on the cross, Jesus continues in this. He assures the repentant thief of his place in paradise. This incident is only reported in Luke's Gospel.
- Jesus is crucified at Calvary, a Latin translation of the Semitic word *Golgotha*, which means 'skull'.

- Since the fourth century, the site now marked by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has been revered as the site of Calvary.

EXPLORING THE WORD

So much of what is at the heart of Christianity is present in today's long gospel reading:

- The institution of the Lord's Supper: '*This is my body which will be given for you; do this in memorial of me... This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you*'. It is in the Eucharist that we find the source and summit of our faith. Explore what that means.
- The ministry of service: '*I am among you as one who serves*'. The church and all its members are at the service of the world.
- Peter's denials: like Peter, we so often fail, but we too can repent and reorient our lives.
- The centrality of the cross reveals that God, in Jesus, entered into human suffering and death and overcame the darkness. This death revealed for all time that God is in solidarity with all the pain of human beings, and that nothing can separate us from the love of God.
- Read the three statements that Jesus made from the cross: the plea for forgiveness for those who harm him, the invitation into paradise for the repentant thief, and the prayer of utter faith as he gives his spirit to God—forgiveness, hospitality and faithfulness. What is being asked of you in this gospel?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- '*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*.' Are you ready for this commitment? What will it mean for your life in the future?
- In our society, the idea of being 'selfless' is constantly challenged. Our culture of individualism emphasises the 'I' rather than the 'other'. But it is in self-giving and self-emptying that we find life. Discuss this dichotomy. How does individualism manifest itself? How can we live selflessly in our daily lives?
- Die with Christ a little this week. Fast from food, TV or entertainment. Try to be less distracted as you prepare for Easter.

Lord, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Reflect on these words and what they mean for you as you prepare for the Easter sacraments this week.

Easter Sunday

Year C

GOSPEL

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On the first day of the week, at the first sign of dawn, they went to the tomb with the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, but on entering discovered that the body of the Lord Jesus was not there. As they stood there not knowing what to think, two men in brilliant clothes suddenly appeared at their side. Terrified, the women lowered their eyes. But the two men said to them, 'Why look among the dead for someone who is alive? He is not here; he has risen. Remember what he told you when he was still in Galilee: that the Son of Man had to be handed over into the power of sinful men and be crucified, and rise again on the third day?' And they remembered his words.

When the women returned from the tomb they told all this to the Eleven and to all the others. The women were Mary of Magdala, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James. The other women with them also told the apostles, but this story of theirs seemed pure nonsense, and they did not believe them.

Peter, however, went running to the tomb. He bent down and saw the binding cloths but nothing else; he then went back home, amazed at what had happened.

(Luke 24:1-12)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- At the time of Jesus, women were not considered to be reliable witnesses in a court of law.
- The burial practices of the time required that the body be anointed with spices, but Jesus had been buried in haste before the Sabbath, so the women are now returning at the first opportunity to complete the process of his burial rites.
- The Jewish Sabbath runs from sunset on Friday night to sunset on Saturday night, so the dawn of Sunday morning (the first day of the week) was when this action could take place.
- The first witnesses to the resurrection are women. This echoes the faith demonstrated by Mary at the beginning of Luke's Gospel, when she says 'yes' to God's plan for her.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Spend some time reading over the many Scripture texts used in the past three days, especially those of the Easter Vigil liturgy, which trace the relationship between God and God's people. The first three tell the story of creation, the promise to Abraham and the deliverance of Israel from bondage. The extracts from the prophets give voice to God's love for God's people. The New Testament readings reflect on the final and definitive act of God—the passing over of Jesus from death to life and our sharing in this mystery through baptism. These are the 'mighty works' of God on behalf of the people.

- What 'mighty works' has God done for you?
- As you read through and discuss the texts, identify the dominant motifs and major themes.
- Which of the readings speak most clearly to you at this moment? Why?
- What connections can you make between what has just happened to you and what is spoken of in the readings?
- How did you celebrate your new life with family and friends after the events of the Easter Vigil? Share your experiences.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- It is the women who first give witness to the risen Christ. What was it that first led you on the journey that has culminated in today's events?
- How will you give witness to this event?
- Are you 'amazed at what had happened'?
- Reflect together on all that has happened in the last three days. Identify the most powerful moment for you. Why was it so meaningful? Congratulate each other. Celebrate.
- Follow the example of the women by telling your story to others this week. Celebrate your birth into new life in Christ.
- Use the first memorial acclamation this week:

*We proclaim your Death, O Lord,
and profess your Resurrection
until you come again.*

2nd Sunday of Easter

Year C

GOSPEL

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In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you', and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you.'

'As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.'

After saying this he breathed on them and said:

'Receive the Holy Spirit.
For those whose sins you forgive,
they are forgiven;
for those whose sins you retain,
they are retained.'

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord', he answered, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.' Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him:

'You believe because you can see me.
Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.'

There were many other signs that Jesus worked and the disciples saw, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name.

(John 20:19-31)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The period from Easter to Pentecost is known as 'the Great Fifty Days' and is an integral part of the Lent-Easter-Pentecost cycle.
- There is an ancient tradition that Thomas preached the Gospel as far east as India.

- The next few weeks feature readings from John's Gospel, the last of the written canonical gospels. While the Synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) are read through the normal three-year cycle, John is featured in particular seasons throughout the normal cycle.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This gospel is one of transformation. The fear of the disciples, locked in their upper room and huddled in upon themselves, is transformed by the gift of peace that Jesus brings and his giving of the Spirit to strengthen them on their way. The doubt of Thomas is transformed by his encounter with the risen Lord. With this transformation, however, comes responsibility. Just as Jesus was sent by the Father, now, too, the disciples are sent into the world to act as Jesus did.

- You could discuss the concluding rite of the liturgy and how we are sent out into the world to continue Christ's mission. What does this mean in reality?

When Thomas is told by his companions that they have seen Jesus, he places his own conditions on faith. He will not believe unless he sees and touches Jesus. Jesus must fulfill the expectations that Thomas has!

- Are there times when we expect God to act as we wish rather than being open to the presence of the risen Christ in unexpected ways?
- What does the peace of Christ mean to believers today?
- In what ways does the world need the peace of Christ today?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- 'The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord.' What have been your feelings since the events of last week?
- 'Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.' This is addressed to you! How will you nourish that belief in the future?
- Share experiences of doubt you have had in your life: times when you doubted the love of another or doubted your own abilities. What drove doubt away?
- Look for ways in which a simple gesture of touch can convey friendship, compassion or support this week.
- Repeat Thomas' acclamation of faith this week:
'My Lord and my God.'

3rd Sunday of Easter

Year C

GOSPEL

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Jesus showed himself again to the disciples. It was by the Sea of Tiberias, and it happened like this: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two more of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said, 'I'm going fishing.' They replied, 'We'll come with you.' They went out and got into the boat but caught nothing that night.

It was light by now and there stood Jesus on the shore, though the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. Jesus called out, 'Have you caught anything, friends?' And when they answered, 'No', he said, 'Throw the net out to starboard and you'll find something.' So they dropped the net, and there were so many fish that they could not haul it in. The disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.' At these words 'It is the Lord', Simon Peter, who had practically nothing on, wrapped his cloak round him and jumped into the water. The other disciples came on in the boat, towing the net and the fish; they were only about a hundred yards from land.

As soon as they came ashore they saw that there was some bread there, and a charcoal fire with fish cooking on it. Jesus said, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net to the shore, full of big fish, one hundred and fifty-three of them; and in spite of there being so many the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, 'Who are you?'; they knew quite well it was the Lord. Jesus then stepped forward, took the bread and gave it to them, and the same with the fish. This was the third time that Jesus showed himself to the disciples after rising from the dead.

After the meal Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?' He answered, 'Yes Lord, you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He replied, 'Yes, Lord, you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Look after my sheep.' Then he said to him a third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was upset that he asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and said, 'Lord, you know everything; you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.

'I tell you most solemnly,
when you were young
you put on your own belt
and walked where you liked;
but when you grow old
you will stretch out your hands,
and somebody else will put a belt round you
and take you where you would rather not go.'

In these words he indicated the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God. After this he said, 'Follow me.'

(John 21:1-19)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Sea of Galilee is also known as the Sea of Tiberias.
- Jesus' triple repetition of his question to Peter, 'Do you love me?' echoes the three denials of Jesus by Peter on the morning of his execution.
- The Greek word for fish, *ichthus*, is an acronym of the Greek words for 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour'. The fish was an early symbol used by Christians to denote Christ.
- The appearance of Jesus to the disciples in last week's gospel occurred in the upper room in Jerusalem where they had celebrated the Passover feast. Here, the disciples have returned to Galilee in the north.
- Early tradition holds that Peter met his death by being crucified upside down in Rome.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This long gospel text has three movements: the extraordinary catch of fish; the meal on the shore, with obvious Eucharistic overtones; and the dialogue with Peter, which contains his commissioning as leader of the flock.

The great haul of fish of so many varieties indicates that the Good News of the Gospel will take root in many nations and bring many converts, but only with the help of the Lord. Alone, they had been unsuccessful!

- What are you able to achieve now that you have the Lord with you?

The open-air meal indicates that Jesus still nourishes his disciples and evokes the many meals that Jesus shared with his followers.

- In what ways does the Eucharist continue to nourish those who follow the risen Lord?

Jesus' dialogue with Peter establishes that love is the basis from which a genuine Christian ministry of service springs. Along with other gospel texts, this passage reinforces the role given to Peter as the future leader of the flock, the one who entrusted with the task of caring for the sheep after the Shepherd has gone.

- 'Do you love me?' How might you answer this question from Jesus?

4th Sunday of Easter

Year C

GOSPEL

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Jesus said:

‘The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice;
I know them and they follow me.
I give them eternal life;
they will never be lost
and no one will ever steal them from me.
The Father who gave them to me is greater than anyone,
and no one can steal from the Father.
The Father and I are one.’

(John 10:27–30)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Latin word for shepherd is *pastor*. It is from this word that we derive many of the terms used in the church for people with a special role: pastor or priest, pastoral care, pastoral associate, pastoral council. These roles always imply a duty of love and care towards those for whom one is responsible.
- The Shepherd King was an ancient image of God used by the Hebrew people.
- In this gospel text, John is addressing one of the issues that confronted his community: the heretical voices of those who sought to lead people away from—rather than towards—God.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This text in John’s Gospel is set in Jerusalem, while Jesus is there for the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22), a feast celebrating the presence of God in the temple. The temple was not just a building for Israel. It was the visible place where God dwelt in the heart of God’s people; to go to the temple and worship was to ‘approach God’. Jesus is teaching something completely new here. He stands within the temple precinct and declares that it is only through him and through hearing his voice that people can come to the Father. The voice of Jesus is both seen and heard in the events of his life, death and resurrection. It is through all these events that the ways of God are made known to us.

- How do you ‘hear the voice’ of Jesus?
- What are some of the conflicting voices we hear in our world? Which voices are the loudest? Where do these voices lead us?
- What sense do you have of being called by name? How do you experience God’s constant care for you?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What are the things about the church and your particular community that make you feel like you belong?
- These words from Jesus are spoken with the utmost confidence in their truth! How confident are you feeling that you know Jesus and that he will give you eternal life?
- What are the things that may ‘steal you away’ from listening to the voice of Jesus?
- In your life, in what ways are you called on to act as a ‘shepherd’—a leader, provider, protector?
- Who are the people who act as a shepherd to you? In what ways do they carry out this role for you?
- Attend very carefully to the needs of those people who are in your care this week.
- Use today’s psalm as your prayer this week:

*Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Serve the Lord with gladness.
Come before him singing for joy.*

*We are his people, the sheep of his flock.
Know that he, the Lord, is God.
He made us, we belong to him.*

*We are his people, the sheep of his flock.
Indeed how good is the Lord,
eternal his merciful love.
He is faithful from age to age.*

We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God’s word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

It is now a few weeks since the newly baptised were initiated. Return again to the events of the Vigil and explore the symbolism of some of the service, especially the anointing and the presentation of the candle.

- You could trace the links between the oil and chrism ‘of salvation’ (RCIA §§291, 295) and the gospel reading for today. Where is salvation found?
- In what ways is Christ ‘priest, prophet and king’? How are we called to be these as well?
- How can the newly baptised be assisted in keeping alight the ‘flame of faith’ so they can ‘walk always as children of the light’ (RCIA §297)?
- What supports do we need to offer each other in the continued journey of faith?

5th Sunday of Easter

Year C

GOSPEL

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When Judas had gone Jesus said:

'Now has the Son of Man been glorified,
and in him God has been glorified.
If God has been glorified in him,
God will in turn glorify him in himself,
and will glorify him very soon.

'My little children,
I shall not be with you much longer.
You will look for me,
and, as I told the Jews,
where I am going,
you cannot come.
I give you a new commandment:
love one another;
just as I have loved you,
you also must love one another.
By this love you have for one another,
everyone will know that you are my disciples.'

(John 13:31-35)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The title 'Son of Man' is one that is often used by Jesus in the gospels to describe himself.
- In the Gospel of John, when Jesus speaks of being glorified or exalted, he is referring to his death on the cross. For John, this is the moment of supreme triumph for Jesus.
- This text comes from a section of John's Gospel known as the Farewell Discourse, which is delivered by Jesus to his friends just before his arrest. Here, Judas has already gone out to betray him.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The Gospel of John is often divided into two sections: the Book of Signs, detailing the public ministry of Jesus aimed at bringing people to belief, and the Book of Glory, which outlines the events leading to his death and resurrection. One part of that concluding section of the gospel describes the events of his final night with his followers. It is too late now for those who have not recognised that Jesus is the Messiah. He closets himself with those who do believe and gives them extended instruction on how they are to continue his mission after he is gone. Both today's reading and next week's gospel come from this section of the text.

Jesus is telling his disciples not just that they must love each other, but that they must love *as he has loved*. This moves beyond the commandment known to the Jews to love one's neighbour as oneself. The love that Jesus showed was the total self-giving and selfless love that led to his death on the cross—his glorification. It is this love that reveals the love of God, who *is* love. This new and difficult love is to be the true mark of a Christian in a truly Christian community.

- How do you understand this commandment to love as Jesus loved?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- How will people know that you are a disciple of Jesus?
- In what ways do you glorify God?
- How do you show love for others?
- Sometimes it is easy to love but at other times it becomes very difficult. Share an experience of being loved beyond what was expected or even deserved. Or share an occasion when you were called on to continue loving, even though it was very difficult.
- Can you take up the challenge and act with love towards all people you encounter this week?
- The Easter season is one of praise and glorification. Use the Gloria as your prayer this week.

*Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.*

*We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.*

*For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.*

6th Sunday of Easter

Year C

GOSPEL

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Jesus said to his disciples:

'If anyone loves me he will keep my word,
and my Father will love him,
and we shall come to him and make our home with him.
Those who do not love me do not keep my words.
And my word is not my own:
it is the word of the one who sent me.
I have said these things to you while still with you;
but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit,
whom the Father will send in my name,
will teach you everything
and remind you of all I have said to you.
Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you,
a peace the world cannot give,
this is my gift to you.
Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.
You heard me say: I am going away, and shall return.
If you loved me you would have been glad to know that I am
going to the Father,
for the Father is greater than I.
I have told you this now before it happens,
so that when it does happen you may believe.'

(John 14:23–29)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The meaning of the word *advocate* is 'one who is summoned to help another'.
- Another term commonly used for the Holy Spirit is *Paraclete*, which comes from a Greek term meaning 'called to the side of' and so has the same meaning as *advocate*.
- In the Hebrew Scriptures, peace was one of the distinguishing marks of the time of the Messiah—a time when swords would be made into ploughshares (Isaiah 2:4) and the wolf would live with the lamb (Isaiah 11:6). Jesus' gift of peace confirms that he is the longed-for Messiah.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Jesus has alluded to the fact that he is going away but that he will one day return. In the meantime, the disciples—the community to whom John is writing his gospel—are living in the 'in-between times'. Jesus has come once in the flesh and has promised to return at the end of the world, so this instruction is a continuation of the teaching on how disciples should live out their faith in Jesus' absence: they must keep his word, the word of God. *And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us* (John 1:14).

They will not be alone in this task, as Jesus has promised to send the Advocate or the Holy Spirit, who will continue to unfold the word as the church grows and meets new situations and challenges.

- You could look at the first reading from Acts, which highlights one such situation.
- In conferring the gift of peace on his disciples, Jesus is preparing them for his departure and his absence. This will be a trial for the disciples, but the peace of Christ and the Holy Spirit will help them to understand his return to the Father and to be confident that they too will one day make that journey.
- How do you cope with the 'absence' of Jesus? In what ways do you experience Christ's presence?
- How do you experience the Spirit in your life?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- 'Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.' What aspects of life frighten you?
- How do you experience the 'peace the world cannot give'?
- Reflect back on a period in your life when you were anxious, troubled or afraid. How did the situation resolve itself? In what ways did you experience a sense of peace after the turmoil? Share your reflections with others.
- Try to stand up for someone this week who may be in need of a defender. Take on the role of an advocate. Alternatively, you could try to bring the gift of peace to someone whose heart is troubled or afraid.
- This week, use today's prayer after Communion:

*Almighty and ever living God,
who restore us to eternal life in the Resurrection of Christ,
increase in us we pray, the fruits of the paschal Sacrament
and pour into our hearts the strength of this saving food.*

Ascension

Year C

GOSPEL

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Jesus said to his disciples:

‘You see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.

‘And now I am sending down to you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city then, until you are clothed with the power from on high.’

Then he took them out as far as the outskirts of Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. Now as he blessed them, he withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven. They worshipped him and then went back to Jerusalem full of joy; and they were continually in the Temple praising God.

(Luke 24:46–53)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Gospel of Luke opens with Zechariah praying in the temple and closes with the disciples praying in the temple. The temple plays a critical role in Luke’s account of the public life of Jesus.
- While the fact of Jesus’ ascension to the Father is mentioned several times in the New Testament (Mark 16:19; John 6:62; John 20:17, Ephesians 4:8–10), only Luke describes the event itself, both in his gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles.
- Bethany is a small town not far from Jerusalem, just over the Mount of Olives. It was the home town of Mary, Martha and Lazarus.
- The nine days between the ascension and Pentecost that the disciples spent in praying together gave rise to the ‘novena’, a devotional practice of praying in a particularly focused way for a special intention over nine consecutive days.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The reaction of the disciples to the absence of Jesus after his ascension is in stark contrast to the reaction they had to him leaving at his death. After his death on the cross, they shut themselves into the upper room in fear. Now they worship him and go joyfully rejoicing to the temple. Clearly now they have not lost the sense of his presence with them. Something has changed. His return to God opens the way to glory for all who believe, and this is the source of their joy. He is beyond their sight but truly with them, and he has repeated again his promise to send the help they will need to undertake their mission into the world. These final verses of Luke’s Gospel introduce what will become the story of his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles: ‘repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’ Acts tells the story of the Gospel being taken out to all the nations, a story that continues to this day.

- In what ways are you just like the disciples—beginning a new journey out into the world?
- In what ways is the Gospel still being taken to the ends of the earth?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What has the Father promised to you?
- How do you feel since you ‘were clothed with power from on high’ at the Easter ceremonies?
- ‘*You are witnesses to this.*’ Try to define what it is that you are called to give witness to. In what ways can you attest to the truth of that?
- This gospel tells the story of the closing of one era and the opening up of another. What experiences have you had of the closing off of one chapter of your life and the opening of another? Share your stories.
- Live joyfully this week. Try to bring joy to others. Practise continually praising God in all the small actions of your day.
- Today’s entrance antiphon is suitable as a prayer for this week:

*You kingdoms of the earth, sing to God;
praise the Lord who ascends to the highest heavens;
his majesty and might are in the skies, alleluia.*

Pentecost

Year C

GOSPEL

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Jesus said to his disciples:

'If you love me you will keep my commandments.
I shall ask the Father,
and he will give you another Advocate
to be with you for ever.

'If anyone loves me he will keep my word,
and my Father will love him,
and we shall come to him and make our home with him.
Those who do not love me do not keep my words.
And my word is not my own:

it is the word of the one who sent me.
I have said these things to you while still with you;
but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit,
whom the Father will send in my name,
will teach you everything
and remind you of all I have said to you.

(John 14:15-16,23-26)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Pentecost was originally a Jewish harvest festival, celebrated fifty days after the Passover. It was one of the great pilgrimage festivals of the Jews, and this is why so many pilgrims were present in Jerusalem on the day when the Spirit was manifested in the lives of the disciples.
- The Christian feast of Pentecost is fifty days after Easter and is the culmination of the Lent–Easter–Pentecost cycle.
- The church teaches that the Holy Spirit brings both gifts and fruits to the faithful (see Sharing the Tradition).
- Pentecost Sunday was often known as Whit Sunday or Whitsun, especially in England.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The Christian imperative to love as Jesus loved is again at the centre of the gospel. To love God and therefore to love the Son can be shown by keeping the commandments that Jesus gave—that is to say, by living life as a Christian should. To help in this task, Jesus promises to send the Advocate, the one who will teach and constantly remind the followers of Jesus of all that has been said to them.

- What are the demands of living as Christ has taught us?

The first reading of the Pentecost Mass tells the story of the events on that fateful day in Jerusalem.

- Read the text from the Acts of the Apostles together.

One of the things that is emphasised is that when 'they were filled' with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were able to overcome barriers and divisions and to 'preach about the marvels of God' to people from all parts of the world.

- In what ways does the Spirit continue to enable the disciples of Jesus to do just that, even in our own time?
- Invite those present to reflect on their own baptism, when they too received the Holy Spirit. What does this mean for them now?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- 'If you love me you will keep my commandments.' What are the commandments that Jesus gave? How easy or difficult is it for you to keep them and live them?
- 'The Advocate ... will teach you everything and remind you of all that I said to you.' How open are you to seeing the action of the Holy Spirit in the world around you?
- Recall someone you no longer see but who had a significant influence on shaping who you are; someone whose memory is alive for you and whose influence remains strong. Share your recollections of this person. Does this phenomenon give insight into the experience of the disciples at Pentecost?
- Spend some time this week thinking about the gifts of the Spirit that you can discern in yourself. Try to recognise and affirm the gifts of others this week, and use one of your own gifts to make life a little easier for someone else.
- Use today's gospel acclamation as your prayer this week:

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful
and kindle in us the fire of your love.*

