

SEGMENT NINETEEN

THEME: LITURGY OF THE WORD FOR THE SUNDAYS OF LENT

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18 (Gospel for Ash Wednesday)

INSTRUCTORS' SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

The Lenten season, beginning on Ash Wednesday, is a time of spiritual purification and renewal. During Lent the entire Christian community is invited to return to God with our minds in renewed prayer, our bodies in Lenten sacrifices of fasting and almsgiving, and our hearts in renewed service of God and neighbor. Our Lenten observances draw us into the central mystery of our redemption: the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord.

For catechumens Lent marks the start of the period of final, more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation, the stage referred to as the "Period of Purification and Enlightenment." The Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names closes the period of the *catechumenate* and signifies the Church's acceptance of the catechumens, founded on their election by God, in whose name the Church acts. The names of "the *elect*," as they are now called, are enrolled in the book of those chosen for sacramental initiation as a pledge of fidelity and their election by God. The celebration of certain rites, such as the *Dismissal of the Elect* after the Sunday Gospels are proclaimed, the *Scrutinies*, and the *Presentation of the Creed* invite the *elect* to purify their minds and hearts in preparation for Easter.

The Lenten Gospels guide the *elect* through this time of intense spiritual preparation for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. By their reading, reflection and discussion of scripture, the *elect* are invited into a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

❖ **First Sunday of Lent (Cycle C): Luke 4: 1-13**

Lent is a time of purification and renewal when we throw off the weight of sin and old and destructive habits that cling to us. In the Gospel for the First Sunday of Lent we follow Jesus into the desert as he overcomes his temptations with faith in God and obedience to the will of his heavenly Father. In our reading and reflection on the Gospel we are challenged to root our lives in faith so that we might overcome the difficulties and temptations we face.

❖ **Second Sunday of Lent (Cycle C): Luke 9: 28-36**

From the wilderness of desert temptations we follow Jesus to the mountain of his transfigured glory in this Sunday's Gospel. Jesus is the Son of God who fulfills the promises of the Old Covenant.

In the Bible, mountains are often places where God reveals his awesome presence. In this Gospel Jesus takes his disciples up on a mountain and is transfigured before their eyes. Before they witness the agony and suffering of the Cross, the disciples are given a foretaste of the glory of the resurrection. We too are given a glimpse into the victory and power over sin and death that is ours to claim from the power of his self-sacrificial death on the cross. We are invited to deeper faith in the future victory of His resurrection.

❖ **Third Sunday of Lent (Cycle C): Luke 13: 1-9**

The Church once again invites us to turn away from sin and love of self to love of God and neighbor. God's faithfulness and patience calls us to return with all our hearts and minds fully confident in divine forgiveness and healing.

In today's Gospel a group of people report to Jesus the recent news of a violent massacre of Galileans by Pontius Pilate. Jesus takes the occasion to teach the people about the need for repentance. He also challenges the idea that those who died were more sinful than others. Jesus' call to repentance and trust in divine mercy and forgiveness is given to us as well through the parable of the landowner that follows (vv. 6-9)

❖ **Fourth Sunday of Lent (Cycle C): Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32**

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is one the most well known of Jesus' parables. This Gospel story might be familiar to us but during this Lenten season we are called to ponder its meaning anew. Like the "Prodigal Son" all of us have wandered away from God. Like the father in the parable, God is full of mercy and forgiveness seeking out and welcoming back his children.

How often we set limits to God's mercy and forgiveness in our own lives. This parable invites us to set aside the limits we put on God's love and accept his boundless and unconditional mercy in our minds, our hearts and our attitudes. Being reconciled to God and to one another frees us to live the life of grace we receive in Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

❖ **Fifth Sunday of Lent (Cycle C): John 8: 1-11**

The last of the Lenten Sunday Gospels confronts us once again with the mercy of God that is the basis of our Lenten journey of repentance and conversion. Like the woman caught in adultery, our sinfulness leaves us in need of divine forgiveness and reconciliation.

Jesus' enemies seek to trap him by asking him to judge the woman without the man who was part of the adultery. Jesus' reply goes to the heart of the matter – the person without sin should cast the first stone of condemnation. The irony is that Jesus, being without sin, is the only one who could meet that challenge. Yet he refuses to condemn the woman but forgives her and sets her free. As we conclude the Lenten season may we too experience the freedom and healing that comes when we accept God's mercy and love.

CLOSING PRAYER

To close each Lenten Sunday reflection read the Gospel passage that was the focus of the group discussion.