

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Third Sunday of Lent

Year B

3 March 2024



Collect

O God, author of every mercy and of all goodness,
who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving
have shown us a remedy for sin,
look graciously on this confession of our lowliness,
that we, who are bowed down by our conscience,
may always be lifted up by your mercy.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Readings and Commentaries

The English word “Lent” originated in the northern experience of spring as the days lengthened. Here in the south we can usefully shift from “lengthen” to “deepen,” even if it’s too soon to speak of the depths of winter. During Lent we seek to deepen our understanding of Jesus and our belief in him. Today’s readings invite us to reflect more deeply – on the Ten Commandments, on the crucified Christ, and on the Body of Christ. Are the commandments life-giving words for us, as they were for God’s people of old? Have we grasped the foolish divine wisdom of the cross? Are we conscious of Christ dwelling in us and us in Christ? Now’s the time to welcome the wisdom of the Spirit.

A reading from the book of Exodus 20:1–17

The Lord spoke all these words. He said, 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the house of slavery. 'You shall have no gods except me.

[You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven or earth beneath or in the waters under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, the Lord your God am a jealous God and I punish the father's fault in the sons, the grandsons, and the great-grandsons of those who hate me; but I show kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.]

'You shall not utter the name of the Lord your God to misuse it, for the Lord will not leave unpunished the man who utters his name to misuse it.

'Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. [For six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath for the Lord your God. You shall do no work on that day, neither you nor your animals nor the stranger who lives with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that these hold, but on the seventh day he rested; that is why the Lord has blessed the sabbath day and made it sacred.]

'Honour your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the Lord your God has given to you.

'You shall not kill. 'You shall not commit adultery. 'You shall not steal. 'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

'You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his servant, man or woman, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is his.

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 18:8–11

R. Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.

The law of the Lord is perfect,
it revives the soul.

The rule of the Lord is to be trusted,
it gives wisdom to the simple. **R.**

The precepts of the Lord are right,
they gladden the heart.

The command of the Lord is clear,
it gives light to the eyes. **R.**

The fear of the Lord is holy,
abiding for ever.

The decrees of the Lord are truth
and all of them just. **R.**

They are more to be desired than gold,
than the purest of gold
and sweeter are they than honey,
than honey from the comb. **R.**

First Reading

This is not the place to debate the pros and cons of the catechism version of the Ten Commandments, but it's worth noting that even the shorter form of today's first reading has a bit of flesh not found on the catechetical bones. Like its longer counterpart, it begins by setting the "Ten Words" in the context of God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The unabbreviated text enlarges this perspective to encompass God's original work of creation.

The effect of these statements is to establish the identity of Israel's God as creator and redeemer. The commandments in turn identify Israel as God's own people. Far from being abstract moral imperatives, they are the norms that distinguish Israel from other peoples and make it a saving sign for the nations. There is no fixed and final formulation of these norms. A variation of the list is found in the book of Deuteronomy (5:6-21), and individual commandments are mentioned in other places. Allied with the strictures of the prophets, they reveal that Israel's creed and code were always a work in progress, forged in the furnace of history.

This being the only time in the three-year Sunday cycle when this passage appears, proclaiming the longer version would seem the preferable option. If this is taken, readers should take care not to hurry through the text. Each "word," whether accompanied by further elaboration or not, deserves to be heard in its own right. Since the whole reading is presented as God's speech, it should be delivered with appropriate solemnity.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 18/19 is something of a hybrid. It begins by extolling God's glory revealed in creation, moves to praise of God's wisdom embodied in the Law, and finishes with a plea for forgiveness and acceptance. The psalm's central section on the Law provides the verses of the responsorial psalm.

Complementing the reading from Exodus, it celebrates the Law as a treasure of wisdom entrusted by God to Israel. It bestows life, gladness, light, truth and justice. The Law binds God and people together in an eternal covenant. Contemporary worshippers may not find themselves in immediate sympathy with its stress on precepts, commands and decrees. They need to recall that for Israel these are but manifestations of the life-giving words of God that gave them identity and wisdom. That's why the psalmist acclaims them as sweeter than honey and more desirable than gold.

By way of exception, the response comes not from the psalm or even the Old Testament, but from the gospel. It's Simon Peter's faith-fired response to Jesus' question to the Twelve at the end of his discourse on the bread of life (John 6:68).

The wording of the psalm is succinct and the lines are short, so readers will need to lead the psalm thoughtfully, giving the congregation time to hear and absorb each phrase. Hebrew poetry is characterised by repetitive variation, as if one were viewing a gem from different angles. Readers who appreciate this quality and respect the psalm's poetic form will serve the assembly well.

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians

1:22–25

While the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, here are we preaching a crucified Christ; to the Jews an obstacle that they cannot get over, to the pagans madness, but to those who have been called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is the power and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

2:13–25

Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money changers sitting at their counters there. Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market.' Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: Zeal for your house will devour me. The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said.

During his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he gave, but Jesus knew them all and did not trust himself to them; he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him.

Second Reading

As the season of Lent progresses, the cross comes into sharper focus. This short passage from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians has Paul doing what "the Greeks" prided themselves on, engaging in rhetoric and the play of ideas.

Paul writes eloquently about the paradox of the cross. On the one hand it defies the logic and rationality so beloved of Greek philosophers. On the other it is an enigma for Jewish interpreters of the Torah. Paul accuses them of wanting a sign that would persuade them to believe that the crucified Jesus was indeed the long-awaited messiah.

The challenge of the cross is not confined to Paul's contemporaries; it is perennial. Paul lays down the gauntlet for believers of every generation. With this text, readers have the opportunity to provoke the assembly to engage with the foolish wisdom of the cross and find in the crucified Christ "the power and wisdom of God." A strong and clear proclamation will serve the community well.

Gospel

John signalled a recurring theme of his gospel in the very first chapter: "He [the Word] came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him" (1:10). He wastes no time illustrating this assertion. Unlike the synoptic gospels who place the cleansing of the Temple just prior to the passion, John locates it within the opening phase of Jesus' ministry. This makes it the first of numerous occasions of conflict with "the Jews," a term which must be carefully understood as referring to the Jewish authorities, not the people as a whole. Clashes like this will grow in intensity as the story unfolds.

The episode also introduces a feature that is typical of John's gospel – that of misunderstanding. Time and again Jesus speaks of himself in terms that are interpreted at one level by his hearers but whose real truth eludes them. Here it's Jesus' reference to "this sanctuary" ("this temple," NRSV). His antagonists assume he means the temple building, but, as John helpfully explains, "he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body." Even Jesus' disciples will not realise the full import of his words until after he has risen from the dead.

John had already described the preceding event, the changing of the water into wine at Cana, as the "first of the signs given by Jesus" (2:11). He underscores the importance of these signs by mentioning them again in the conclusion to today's reading and noting their role in prompting belief.

The dramatic character of this scene, combining description, action and dialogue, lends itself to strong proclamation. The exclusive language of the final verse is rendered inclusively in the NRSV.

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT – YEAR B

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of Exodus

20:1–17

God spoke all these words:

I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of slavery;
you shall have no other gods before me.

[You shall not make for yourself an idol,
whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above,
or that is on the earth beneath,
or that is in the water under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or worship them;
for I the Lord your God am a jealous God,
punishing children for the iniquity of parents,
to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me,
but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation
of those who love me and keep my commandments.]

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God,
for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.

[Six days you shall labour and do all your work.
But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God;
you shall not do any work — you, your son or your daughter,
your male or female slave, your livestock,
or the alien resident in your towns.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them,
but rested the seventh day;
therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.]

Honour your father and your mother,
so that your days may be long in the land
that the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house;
you shall not covet your neighbour's wife,
or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey,
or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

[*Short Form: omit text in brackets.*]

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians

1:22–25

The message about the cross
is foolishness to those who are perishing,
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom,
but we proclaim Christ crucified,
a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,
but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks,
Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom,
and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to John 2:13–25

The Passover of the Jews was near,
and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves,
and the money changers seated at their tables.
Making a whip of cords,
he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle.
He also poured out the coins of the money changers
and overturned their tables.
He told those who were selling the doves,
"Take these things out of here!
Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"
His disciples remembered that it was written,
"Zeal for your house will consume me."
The people then said to him,
"What sign can you show us for doing this?"
Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple,
and in three days I will raise it up."
They then said,
"This temple has been under construction for forty-six years,
and will you raise it up in three days?"
But Jesus was speaking of the temple of his body.
After he was raised from the dead,
his disciples remembered that he had said this;
and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.
When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival,
many believed in his name
because they saw the signs that he was doing.
But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them,
because he knew all people
and needed no one to testify about anyone;
for he himself knew what was in everyone.

Concluding Prayer

Prayer over the People (Third Sunday of Lent)

Direct, O Lord, we pray, the hearts of your faithful,
and in your kindness grant your servants this grace:
that, abiding in the love of you and their neighbour,
they may fulfil the whole of your commands.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
come down on us and remain with us for ever.

Amen.

(Adapted from the Prayer over the People for the Third Sunday of Lent, Roman Missal p. 262)

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Third Sunday of Lent

Year A Readings - Optional

3 March 2024

Since the Year A gospels for the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent are of major importance in regard to Christian initiation, the readings of Year A can be used every year on these three Sundays. The Year A readings are particularly appropriate where there are Elect (Catechumens).

Collect

O God, author of every mercy and of all goodness,
who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving
have shown us a remedy for sin,
look graciously on this confession of our lowliness,
that we, who are bowed down by our conscience,
may always be lifted up by your mercy.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Readings and Commentaries

There are no witnesses to Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman. He and she are alone at Jacob's well, away from the village in the heat of the day. The spareness of the scene makes Jesus' claim all the more telling. He has water to give, he tells her, that will become a "spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14, NRSV) in those who drink it.

It's a different setting altogether when he cries out later in similar words, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink" (7:37-38, NRSV). This time Jesus is in a Jerusalem thronged with pilgrims for the feast of Tabernacles. It's "on the last day of the festival, the great day" that he declares this to all and sundry. Like the Samaritan woman, they too are told that "out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."

These wonderful promises of Jesus bring to mind many appealing texts about water, spirit and life in the psalms and prophets, such as Psalm 77/78, Ezekiel 47:1-12, Isaiah 44:3 and Zechariah 14:8. They also offer a timely reminder at this stage of Lent, that it's the water flowing from Jesus' pierced side that signifies the outpouring of the Spirit upon his disciples.

A reading from the book of Exodus

17:3–7

Tormented by thirst, the people complained against Moses. ‘Why did you bring us out of Egypt?’ they said. ‘Was it so that I should die of thirst, my children too, and my cattle?’ Moses appealed to the Lord. ‘How am I to deal with this people?’ he said. ‘A little more and they will stone me!’ The Lord said to Moses, ‘Take with you some of the elders of Israel and move on to the forefront of the people; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the river, and go. I shall be standing before you there on the rock, at Horeb. You must strike the rock, and water will flow from it for the people to drink.’ This is what Moses did, in the sight of the elders of Israel. The place was named Massah and Meribah because of the grumbling of the sons of Israel and because they put the Lord to the test by saying, ‘Is the Lord with us, or not?’

First Reading

Today’s story may be ancient, but there’s a perennial human theme to it. Having claimed their freedom from Egyptian oppression, but now faced with the hardship of thirst on the desert, the Israelites pine for the “good old days.” “Why did you bring us out of Egypt?” they ask Moses. Earlier complaints about hunger and thirst had won them manna and drinkable water (15:25; 16:4), but these successes were not enough to rid them of nostalgia for the predictability of their enslaved life.

Once more their complaints bear fruit. With the rod that he had used to divide the Red Sea, Moses strikes the rock and water flows. The question the people have been asking – “Is the Lord with us or not?” – is plainly answered. The incident was striking enough to find its way into the psalms, as we will see, and from there into the letter to the Hebrews (3:7).

The story is well told. The problem is raised, a remedy sought, and an answer given. There’s plenty of emotive energy carrying the action forward. The people’s complaint elicits Moses’ plea, and Moses’ plea prompts the Lord’s authoritative response. Divine exasperation is implied in the reference to putting God to the test. Good story-telling skills will enable readers to engage the assembly well in this drama.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 94:1–2, 6–9

R. If today you hear his voice,
harden not your hearts.

Come, ring out our joy to the Lord;
hail the rock who saves us.
Let us come before him, giving thanks,
with songs let us hail the Lord. **R.**

Come in; let us bow and bend low;
let us kneel before the God who made us
for he is our God and we
the people who belong to his pasture,
the flock that is led by his hand. **R.**

O that today you would listen to his voice!
‘Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as on that day at Massah in the desert
when your fathers put me to the test;
when they tried me, though they saw my work.’ **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 94/95 is one of four psalms which explicitly refer to the incident described in the first reading (see also 77/78, 80/81 and 105/106). The people’s complaint at Meriba (meaning “contention”) and Massah (“testing”) seems to have become emblematic of Israel’s unwillingness to heed the word of God. The whole shadow side of their history – their refusal to listen and submit to God’s word – is summed up in this one episode. It’s even more succinctly expressed in the response: “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

Given that the responsorial psalm opens with this admonition, it’s a surprise to find the first two stanzas are full of joyful praise. God is hailed as rock, as creator, and as shepherd. The people are called to honour their wonderful God with songs and gestures of reverence. The third stanza shifts the register from praise back to pleading and provides the text of the severely-worded response. This change of tone makes sense if the early part of the psalm served as a processional chant for entry to the temple, and the latter part as a stern call for the people to pay attention to a liturgy of the word.

The mood of the psalm thus oscillates between reproach and praise. Readers will do well to distinguish clearly between them by their tone of voice.

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans

5:1–2, 5–8

Through our Lord Jesus Christ by faith we are judged righteous and at peace with God, since it is by faith and through Jesus that we have entered this state of grace in which we can boast about looking forward to God's glory. This hope is not deceptive, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us. We were still helpless when at his appointed moment Christ died for sinful men. It is not easy to die even for a good man – though of course for someone really worthy, a man might be prepared to die – but what proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

4:5–42

Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well is there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, 'What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?' - Jews, in fact, do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied:

'If you only knew what God is offering
and who it is that is saying to you:
Give me a drink,
you would have been the one to ask,
and he would have given you living water.'

'You have no bucket, sir,' she answered 'and the well is deep: how could you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?' Jesus replied:

'Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again;
but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give
will never be thirsty again:
the water that I shall give will turn into
a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life.'

'Sir,' said the woman 'give me some of that water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water.'

'Go and call your husband' said Jesus to her 'and come back here.'

The woman answered, 'I have no husband.'

He said to her. 'You are right to say, "I have no husband"; for although you have had five, the one you have now is not your husband. You spoke the truth there.'

'I see you are a prophet, sir' said the woman. 'Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, while you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.' Jesus said:

'Believe me, woman, the hour is coming
when you will worship the Father
neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.
You worship what you do not know;
we worship what we do know;
for salvation comes from the Jews.'

Second Reading

This passage from Paul could be restated in a sequence like this. At the appointed time in the divine plan, and in proof of God's love for us, Christ died for helpless sinners. Sinners who come to faith in Christ are brought into right relationship with God. The Holy Spirit fills their hearts with divine love and assures them of the hope of eternal glory.

Paul, as we well know, doesn't express himself quite so simply. He has so many thoughts jostling in his head that they often tumble out untidily. Driving his argument here and throughout the letter to the Romans is his conviction that we are saved by faith. Sinners cannot save themselves; salvation is God's work. It's pure grace because God's love embraces us in all our unloveliness, in our sin.

It would be a useful exercise for readers to write their own summary of the text, once they have read it, reflected on it and analysed it. If the assembly is led to the insight that we are put at rights with God by God's gracious love for us in Christ, readers will have done their job well. As usual, the NRSV renders the text inclusively.

Gospel

Ministers of today's gospel are faced with a difficult choice. Either they proclaim the very long story of the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus in full, complete with apparent digressions on the place of worship and on the harvest of life, or they opt for the somewhat abbreviated version which omits some key elements such as her evangelising mission to the villagers.

The shorter version still draws us into the woman's journey of faith. Jesus leads her step by step from each misunderstanding to new understanding. Her idea of water evolves: well water becomes running water and finally the spring-water of the Spirit. Her insights into Jesus likewise progress. She identifies him successively as an unfriendly Jew, as "sir," as a prophet, and finally as the Messiah, before he declares himself to her as "I am he." Her apparent alienation from the village folk is eventually replaced by their solidarity in faith with her.

The woman's journey of faith has been beautifully dramatised by John. It will have special resonance in communities where there are candidates (the "elect") in the final weeks of preparation for initiation at the Paschal Vigil. Even if the shorter text is chosen, the story needs telling with freshness, enthusiasm, sensitivity, and a keen understanding of its dynamic development if the assembly's attention is to be held. This is all the more so with the longer version.

Some communities may decide that the story is better told when there's a variety of voices taking the roles of narrator, the woman, Jesus and others. This will only be the case if each of the readers is capable of quality proclamation and if all have rehearsed together to become an effective ensemble.

But the hour will come - in fact it is here already-
when true worshippers will worship the Father
in spirit and truth:
that is the kind of worshiper the Father wants.
God is spirit, and those who worship
must worship in spirit and truth.'

The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah - that is, Christ -
is coming; and when he comes he will tell us everything.' 'I
who am speaking to you,' said Jesus 'I am he.'

At this point his disciples returned, and were surprised to find
him speaking to a woman, though none of them asked, 'What
do you want from her?' or, 'Why are you talking to her?' The
woman put down her water jar and hurried back to the town
to tell the people, 'Come and see a man who has told me
everything I ever did; I wonder if he is the Christ?' This
brought people out of the town and they started walking
towards him.

Meanwhile, the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, do have
something to eat'; but he said, 'I have food to eat that you
do not know about.' So the disciples asked one another, 'Has
someone been bringing him food?' But Jesus said:

'My food
is to do the will of the one who sent me,
and to complete his work.
Have you not got a saying:
Four months and then the harvest?
Well, I tell you:
Look around you, look at the fields;
already they are white, ready for harvest!
Already the reaper is being paid his wages,
already he is bringing in the grain for eternal life,
and thus sower and reaper rejoice together.
For here the proverb holds good:
one sows, another reaps;
I sent you to reap a harvest you had not worked for.
Others worked for it;
and you have come into the rewards of their trouble.'

Many Samaritans of that town had believed in him on the
strength of the woman's testimony when she said, 'He told me
all I have ever done', so, when the Samaritans came up to
him, they begged him to stay with them. He stayed for two
days, and when he spoke to them many more came to
believe; and they said to the woman, 'Now we no longer
believe because of what you told us; we have heard him
ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the
world.'

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT – OPTIONAL YEAR A

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of Exodus 17:3–7

In the wilderness the people thirsted for water;
and the people complained against Moses and said,
"Why did you bring us out of Egypt,
to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"
So Moses cried out to the Lord,
"What shall I do with this people?
They are almost ready to stone me."
The Lord said to Moses
"Go on ahead of the people,
and take some of the elders of Israel with you;
take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.
I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb.
Strike the rock, and water will come out of it,
so that the people may drink."
Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.
He called the place Massah and Meribah,
because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord,
saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Romans 5:1–2, 5–8

Since we are justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom we have obtained access
to this grace in which we stand;
and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.
And hope does not disappoint us,
because God's love has been poured into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.
For while we were still weak,
at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.
Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person,
though perhaps for a good person
someone might actually dare to die.
But God proves his love for us
in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to John 4:5–42

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar,
near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.
Jacob's well was there,
and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well.
It was about noon.
A Samaritan woman came to draw water,
and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."
(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him,
"How is it that you, a Jew,
ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"
(Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)
Jesus answered her,
"If you knew the gift of God,
and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,'
you would have asked him,
and he would have given you living water."
The woman said to him,
"Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep.
Where do you get that living water?
Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well,
and with his children and his flocks drank from it?"
Jesus said to her,
"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,
but those who drink of the water that I will give them
will never be thirsty.
The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water
gushing up to eternal life."
The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water,
so that I may never be thirsty
or have to keep coming here to draw water."
[Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."
The woman answered him, "I have no husband."
Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';
for you have had five husbands,
and the one you have now is not your husband.
What you have said is true!"
The woman said to him,] "Sir, I see that you are a prophet.
Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain,
but you say that the place where people must worship
is in Jerusalem."
Jesus said to her,
"Woman, believe me, the hour is coming
when you will worship the Father
neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.
You worship what you do not know;
we worship what we know,
for salvation is from the Jews.
But the hour is coming, and is now here,
when the true worshippers will worship the Father
in spirit and truth,
for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.
God is spirit,
and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."
The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming"
(who is called the Christ).
"When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."
Jesus said to her, "I am he,
the one who is speaking to you."
[Just then his disciples came.
They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman,
but no one said, "What do you want?"
or, "Why are you speaking with her?"
Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city.
She said to the people,
"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!
He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"
They left the city and were on their way to him.
Meanwhile the disciples were urging him,
"Rabbi, eat something."
But he said to them,
"I have food to eat that you do not know about."
So the disciples said to one another,
"Surely no one has brought him something to eat?"

Jesus said to them,
"My food is to do the will of him who sent me
and to complete his work.
Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'?
But I tell you, look around you,
and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.
The reaper is already receiving wages
and is gathering fruit for eternal life,
so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.
For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.'
I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour.
Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour."]
Many Samaritans from that city believed in Jesus
because of the woman's testimony,
"He told me everything I have ever done."
So when the Samaritans came to him,
they asked him to stay with them;
and he stayed there two days.
And many more believed because of his word.
They said to the woman,
"It is no longer because of what you said that we believe,
for we have heard for ourselves,
and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world."

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

Concluding Prayer

Prayer over the People (Third Sunday of Lent)

Direct, O Lord, we pray, the hearts of your faithful,
and in your kindness grant your servants this grace:
that, abiding in the love of you and their neighbour,
they may fulfil the whole of your commands.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
come down on us and remain with us for ever.

Amen.

(Adapted from the Prayer over the People for the Third Sunday of Lent, Roman Missal p. 262)