

Suggested Opening Song: All Are Welcome, #215

On this final Sunday before Lent, our readings remind us of the commandments. God's infinite wisdom has given us laws that enable us to live a good, righteous life. Since we enter Lent later this week, today is a good opportunity to ask ourselves how we are keeping the commandments, especially the supreme commandment to love God and neighbor. Let us reflect on this as we prepare to receive the Lord in the Eucharist.

As we gather let us begin our service by professing what we believe.

Profession of Faith p. 144

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, (*bow as we say*) and by the Holy Spirit he was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Introductory Rite:

Greeting:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Blessed be God forever. **Blessed be God forever.**

Penitential Rite: p. 12

Brothers and sisters, let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to participate in this sacred celebration.

I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life. **Amen**

Opening Prayer:

O God, who teach us that you abide in hearts that are just and true, grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace as to become a dwelling pleasing to you.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Liturgy of the Word:

First Reading p. 104

A reading from the Book of Sirach

Sirach 15:15-20

If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you too shall live; he has set before you fire and water to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand. Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him. Immense is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in power, and all-seeing. The eyes of God are on those who fear him; he understands man's every deed. No one does he command to act unjustly, to none does he give license to sin.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34

R/. Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!

R/. Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!

Blessed are they whose way is blameless, / who walk in the law of the LORD.

Blessed are they who observe his decrees, / who seek him with all their heart. **R/.**

You have commanded that your precepts / be diligently kept.

Oh, that I might be firm in the ways / of keeping your statutes! **R/.**

Be good to your servant, that I may live / and keep your words.

Open my eyes, that I may consider / the wonders of your law. **R/.**

Instruct me, O LORD, in the way of your statutes, / that I may exactly observe them.

Give me discernment, that I may observe your law / and keep it with all my heart. **R/.**

Second Reading

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

1 Corinthians 2:6-10

Brothers and sisters: We speak a wisdom to those who are mature, not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away. Rather, we speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory, and which none of the rulers of this age knew; for, if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: *What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him*, this God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Matthew 5:17-37

Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven. I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

"You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, *You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment*. But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; and whoever says to his brother, 'Raca,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna. Therefore, if you bring

your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.

“You have heard that it was said, *You shall not commit adultery*. But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna.

“It was also said, *Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce*. But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife -- unless the marriage is unlawful -- causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

“Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, *Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow*. But I say to you, do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’ Anything more is from the evil one.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection on the Word:

- God is mighty in power, Ben Sira asserts, but we are rather powerful as well, for we have the power to choose whether to obey or disobey God, to sin or not. Whether we are conscious of it or not, making the choice to sin is saying that our wisdom and judgment are better than God’s. It is saying that allowing our anger toward someone to fester and flame is preferable to reconciling. It is saying that the pleasure we get from fooling around with someone who is not our spouse is greater than honoring our marriage commitment. It is choosing to do what is objectively unwise but subjectively attractive. Acknowledging that God is wiser than us leads us to use our power to choose good over evil and life over death.
- Over the last three Sundays, we have heard the beginning of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, when he starts teaching his disciples the very foundations of a Christian life. All three passages go together. We started with the Beatitudes: Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the clean of heart. When we hear Jesus expand on the commandments today, we hear the beatitudes at their heart. When we are truly merciful, we aren’t merely prohibiting murder. We are reconciling with our opponents instead. If we are clean of heart, we are not merely avoiding adultery, we are respecting the commitments we and others have made. Our humility and righteousness mean we stand behind our yes’s and no’s without equivocation or embellishment. When we act this way, we enable others to see what is morally good, as a light shining from a lampstand. It all goes together.
- In a similar way, we have heard the beginning of Saint Paul’s letter to the Corinthians over the last few weeks. Two Sundays ago, we heard Paul tell how Jesus embodied God’s wisdom. That wisdom, we hear today, is God’s plan for our salvation. That plan, which leads us to what God has prepared for us, is now revealed to us by the Holy Spirit, who guides us on the right path.

Question of the Week

In what aspect of my life do I need to accept God’s wisdom and the Spirit’s guidance and change my behavior?

Prayer of the Faithful:

Before we bring our gifts to the altar, we offer prayers for our brothers and sisters in need.

- For the Church, as we strive to live out the spirit of the commandments, that we may grow in understanding of the wisdom of God, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**
- For legislators, civil authorities, and members of the judicial system, that they may exercise judgment and mercy in creating, enforcing, and applying our laws, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**
- For those suffering in broken relationships, that they may receive the support and hope they need, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**
- For our Muslim sisters and brothers, who begin celebrating Ramadan later this week, that the holy month may be filled with peace and joy, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**
- That we may grow in discernment, recognize the wisdom of God's commands, and keep them with all our heart, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**
- For what else should we pray? Let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**
- For all the prayers that we hold in the silence of our hearts; for all our intentions spoken and unspoken, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

God of infinite wisdom, you blessed us with the ability to choose the ways of righteousness. Help us take your commands to heart so that we may choose rightly. Grant this and all our prayers, through the one who revealed your wisdom to us, your Son and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Communion RiteThe Lord's Prayer: p. 180

Let us pray with confidence to the Father in the words our Savior gave us.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Rite of Peace:

The sign of peace outwardly expresses a deep spiritual reality; through this sign we acknowledge Christ's presence in each other and share the peace we have received from Him. Let us offer each other the sign of peace.

Communion:

Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

The body of Christ. **Amen.**

Prayer after Communion:

Having fed upon these heavenly delights, we pray, O Lord, that we may always long for that food by which we truly live.

Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Concluding Rite:

Final Blessing:

May the Lord bless us,  protect us from all evil and lead us to everlasting life. **Amen**

Go in peace! **Thanks be to God.**

Suggested Closing Song: Eye Has Not Seen, #221