### **Readings for April 6, 2025 – Fifth Sunday in Lent**

‘In the Desert I Make A Way’

### *We are all sinners, but we are loved sinners. That’s what Jesus shows us in this Gospel passage. Long before Jesus walked the earth in human form, the prophet Isaiah also wanted to remind us that God is always doing something new! God continually helps us to make a way forward – God focuses on renewal, not on holding us in sin.*

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### **Opening Prayer:** Dear Lord, as we gather today, we ask for the grace to keep moving forward, always seeking a deeper life with you. Open our hearts to hear your message of mercy, forgiveness and renewal. Give us the courage to respond in gratitude, and to show these same qualities to others. Amen.

**Reading I** [**Is 43:16-21**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/43?16)

Thus says the LORD, who opens a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters,
who leads out chariots and horsemen,  a powerful army,
till they lie prostrate together, never to rise, snuffed out and quenched like a wick.
Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not;
see, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
In the desert I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers.
Wild beasts honor me, jackals and ostriches, for I put water in the desert
            and rivers in the wasteland for my chosen people to drink,
the people whom I formed for myself, that they might announce my praise.

**Responsorial Psalm** [**Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6.**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/126?1)

**The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion, we were like men dreaming.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with rejoicing.
**The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**Then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.”
The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad indeed.
**The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the torrents in the southern desert.
Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.
**The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown,
They shall come back rejoicing,  carrying their sheaves.
**The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

**Reading II** [**Phil 3:8-14**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/philippians/3?8)

Brothers and sisters: I consider everything as a loss
because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.
For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things
and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him,
not having any righteousness of my own based on the law
but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God,
depending on faith to know him and the power of his resurrection
and the sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death,
if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.
It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity,
but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it,
since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus.
Brothers and sisters, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession.
Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead,
I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling, in Christ Jesus.

**Gospel** [**Jn 8:1-11**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/john/8?1)

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area,
and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them.
Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery
and made her stand in the middle. They said to him,
“Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery.
Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women.
So what do you say?” They said this to test him,
so that they could have some charge to bring against him.
Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he bent down and wrote on the ground.
And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders.
So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her,
“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”
She replied, “No one, sir.” Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you.
Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”

Related Reflections

“The strategy of Jesus is not centered in taking the right stand on issues, but rather in standing in the right place – with the outcast and those relegated to the margins.” – Fr. Greg Boyle, S.J.

**Outreach to the Alienated**

A woman accused of adultery is dragged before Jesus. She is not condemned for prostitution or promiscuity, but the relational sin of adultery, a violation against marriage and social stability. We know little of her story, nor is Jesus told anything of the circumstances surrounding her transgression. He asks for no explanation. Rather, he notes her humiliation, surrounded by self-righteous men who disregard their own sinfulness. Jesus is handed the heavy burden of judgment. He is caught between the law, which is meant to protect the sanctity of marriage, and the vulnerability of the woman who stands before him. He knows the intention of entrapment by those who drag her there. It seems an impossible situation.

First let us recall a story from the Desert Fathers in which Abba Moses is called to an assembly to judge a guilty brother. Initially he refuses to go, but is prevailed upon. So, he fills a leaky old basket with sand and walks to the assembly.

“Father, what is this?” the brothers inquire as he arrives.“My sins are running behind me and I do not see them. So how can I come today to judge the sins of another person?”

The brothers relent and forgive their brother. Jesus chose mercy as his solution to judgment. Abba Moses deferred to humility and refused judgment. Our sins are all around us. Others see what we do not. The challenge is to remain mindful of our own vulnerabilities and thus, arrest our tendencies to reduce another. Through thoughtful awareness of our own inclination to sin, we discover that we share the same humanness of the ones we judge. If we cultivate compassion and forgiveness toward ourselves, are we not less likely to pick up that stone and throw it?

(Prayer Time, Cycle C, Renew International)

**See the Mercy**

I sit among the shamefaced, especially during the Lenten season. A wrinkled-faced man admits to me in our softly lit confessional that he regrets so many decisions of his past. A woman with jittery lips and red eyes cannot fully admit to God that her drinking drains her life of meaning. Some sit in my office with teary eyes and broken lives.

This is the season to restore every relationship. We long to be free from the weight of the judgments we cast on one another. We come to God in Lent with our eyes cast down and our brows furrowed, longing to discover God’s measure of mercy. God wipes shame away from our faces and offers love within our hearts.

Every Lenten season, through the mercy of God, I see full measures of love fall into the laps of those willing to come clean about their lives. When we speak the truth about our lives and our relationships in prayer and in our sacraments, gifts are given to us – “a good measure, packed together, shaken down and overflowing.” I listen carefully to people in Lent and watch the joy of Jesus’ forgiveness emerge on the faces of strangers. I sit among the redeemed with a smile on my own face that is soul deep.

 Fr. Ronald Patrick Raab

**Caught and Shamed:** The law of Moses prescribes stoning as the punishment for adultery. But it does not permit that you can do anything you want to a person caught in adultery. It is clear, however, that the scribes and Pharisees are using this woman just as bait to catch Jesus, and they have no hesitation about shaming her terribly in the process.

Maybe that is one of the reasons Jesus looks down at the ground to write in the dirt. If he is looking down and she is standing up, then he isn’t looking at her. And so he is protecting her in her shame by helping her be hidden from him, alone of all those men staring at her. In caring for her in this way, Jesus is doing something to protect her from the injustice of her captors.

And here’s another thing to see. If this woman was caught in the very act of adultery, as her captors say, then there had to have been a man with her when she was caught. Where is he? Why isn’t he here with her? Did the scribes and Pharisees just let him go? The law of Moses prescribes stoning him too.

The scribes and Pharisees are hypocritical, then; and Jesus catches them in it. He makes clear that they don’t care enough about the law of Moses to keep it themselves. They melt away when Jesus tells them to let the ones without sin be the first to cast stones.

By that move, Jesus diminishes the woman’s shame considerably, doesn’t he? Only when it is clear that her accusers have been caught in their hypocrisy and shamed by it, does Jesus lift up his eyes and look at her. And so, by his justice for her, and his mercy, Jesus catches her for the Lord. Of all those who came to Jesus because of her, she is the only one left standing by him at the end of the story. And she is the only one who calls him “*Kyrie*” (“Lord,” “Sir”).

 Eleonore Stump – published on St. Louis University Sunday Website – www.liturgy.slu.edu

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The scribes and Pharisees brought an adulterous woman to Jesus and “made her stand in the middle.” In their self-righteousness they wished to make an example of her as a grave sinner deserving of death. Ironically, Jesus makes an example of them as sinners. As they were exposed, they turned away from him and “went away one by one.”

The woman, however, remained with Jesus. Our own work during Lent is like that of the adulterous woman: truthfully face our sinfulness and faithfully remain with Jesus. Though we sin, Jesus only wishes new life for us.

 - Published on St. Louis University Sunday Website – www.liturgy.slu.edu

**From Sr. Miriam James Heidland, S.O.L.T.**

This story takes place as Jesus begins a day of teaching in the temple area. A group of Pharisees, the legalists of the day, bring to him a woman “caught in the very act of committing adultery.” Their concern isn’t for the state of her soul or for her temporal well-being (and they do not bring the other person caught in this act, the man). The Pharisees aim to use this woman (a use not so different from that of the man who was committing adultery with her) to catch Jesus in a legal trap so they can collect some concrete evidence to use against him. But Jesus won’t be trapped by anyone.

You can imagine the scene, full of people coming and going. Many people are gathered around Jesus to hear him teach, and there are also some curious onlookers present. The Pharisees interrupt Jesus, shoving the humiliated woman into his presence and proclaiming her sin. They challenge Jesus to find a way out of the quandary of either stoning her, a violation of Roman law, or letting her go free, a violation of the Mosaic Law.

Notice that Jesus doesn’t rush to respond. I imagine him being stopped mid-sentence, listening to the charge against the woman, looking deeply at her, and then silently bending down, crouching low to write in the dirt. Can you almost feel the weight of the silence while everyone watches Jesus with anticipation to see what he will do? The silence doesn’t last long, as the Pharisees begin to press Jesus again for an immediate answer. Undaunted, Jesus stands up. I can picture him brushing off his hands, looking squarely at the men and telling them, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Jesus then bends back down and continues writing in the dirt with his finger. This moment, too is pregnant with silence. No one knows what Jesus was writing in the dirt – John doesn’t tell us. Some people say that Jesus may have been writing the sins of these men in the dirt. Whatever he wrote had a profound impact. They began to walk away from the situation one by one.

Then Jesus tells the woman, “neither do I condemn you.” Imagine the freedom these words bring to the heart of this woman. How often do we fear that God condemns us for our mistakes and sins? We often hide from him out of our own shame and fear. Jesus speaks to the depth of this fear... I hear Jesus saying, “I know you long for more than a life of sin… You are made for more. Go and live a life of freedom.” People are meant to be loved, not fixed.

 (*Loved As I Am*, Sr. Miriam James Heidland, S.O.L.T. , Ave Maria Press, 2014)

**Suggested meditation:**

***Living in Freedom***

Sr. Miriam, above, tells us what Jesus wants this woman to know – “You are made for more. Go and live a life of freedom.” Consider this statement again, and the following thoughts and questions silently. Write down any thoughts or words that come to mind:

Jesus speaks some life-changing words to this woman, who has been “caught” and made to stand in the middle of those who are condemning her.

Spend a few quiet minutes thinking about Jesus’ compassion for the woman who is about to be stoned. Also reflect on her fear and shame, and her feelings after Jesus releases her from certain death.

Think about the idea that his love and compassion frees her from her past sins – the idea of spiritual freedom. Can she recognize who she was created to be – a loved child of God – rather than only her sinful self? Sometimes we are blinded to our true selves.

Now ask, what might be holding me captive? Is it a pressure I place upon myself? A sin? Pride? An unhealthy relationship? A material thing? – I take a moment to bring before my consciousness anything that might be placing a burden on my life.

Am I free to acknowledge the truth of who God is calling me to be?

As Jesus showed great mercy and forgiveness, am I doing okay in forgiving others? Could I do better?

Are there times when I have cast stones, or been critical of others? I think about why I may have done it. To build myself up? Was it out of my own fear or insecurity?

Jesus said he came to give liberty to captives. I think again about who I am before God. What do I need to ask Jesus to free me from? What good news does he want to share with me? How can I “give liberty” to others, in imitation of Jesus?

I speak now with Jesus, like a friend, in my own words. I tell him all that is in my heart right now.

*As a group, share any thoughts that have come up from this meditation (only if you are comfortable in sharing). Adapted from* [*https://godinallthings.com/podcast/*](https://godinallthings.com/podcast/)

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Discussion Questions

*“The gospel is a gospel of love. But love demands justice. The gospel is therefore a gospel of justice also. It is the good news preached to the poor. – Pedro Arrupe, S.J.*

Look at the quote above, then talk about what kind of justice Jesus is seeking in this Gospel passage. Who is also in the wrong here?

Have you ever experienced a time when an event in your own life changed your attitude of righteousness? (For example, someone might have a different view of divorce after their spouse has left them, or if it happens in their own family).

How does “holding on” too tightly to things of the past (like grudges, righteous attitudes, prejudices) prevent me from moving forward – toward something new?

Do I find it hard to believe that God will help me “make a way” in the desert, or bring forth renewal from situations that seem hopeless? Why might this be?

If I look at the Psalm, remembering the times when “The Lord has done great things” for me, does this help to build my trust in God’s unending love? Can I turn to these remembrances of God’s love when I’m struggling with prayer or doubts?

***Closing Prayer:***

*Lord God,
You give me the gift of freedom,
guiding me to a life of joy,
calling me to be my truest self.
As you freed Lazarus from the burial cloths,
and gave sight to the blind, freed the woman from those who wanted to stone her,
and called the rich man to detachment,
free me from the unfreedoms that pile up,
which blockade me from the life-giving joy you have for me.
Remove those things which hinder my life with you.
I can freely choose this. And I do.
Amen.*

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Weekly Focus Questions:

What was my “desert place” this week?

Was I able to see something new and green springing forth from this?

***Also:***

Reflect again on the First Reading, and God saying, “remember not the things of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new!” What is the “something new” God is doing in your life recently?

What do you want to say to this God who does “great things for us” and “fills us with joy?” (See the Psalm)