

## March 2012 Prepare the Word Weekday Reflections

### THURSDAY, MARCH 1

#### LENTEN WEEKDAY

#### Persistence pays off

The story of Queen Esther told in the Bible book that bears her name is a fascinating novella filled with subterfuge and intrigue. Esther uses her wit and wiles to get what she wants from the king, but her masterstroke is to use prayer and petition to get what she needs from God: namely a plan for deliverance for herself and her people. As we begin our Lenten journey, our first step should be to ask God to help us chart our course. Then, like Esther, we must fast, pray, and wait, and soon God's plan for us will be revealed.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Esther C 12, 14-16, 23-25; Matthew 7: 7-12 (227)*

*"Turn our mourning into gladness and our sorrows into wholeness."*

### FRIDAY, MARCH 2

#### WORLD DAY OF PRAYER; DAY OF ABSTINENCE

#### Out of the depths I cry to you

For some, prayer seems like a natural talent. For others, pulling teeth is easier! But for all, prayer is a necessary component of the life of faith. We seek a vital relationship with our Maker, and no relationship is complete without deep and meaningful communication. God begins the conversation with the words of scripture. You add your part in interceding for needs, offering thanks for gifts received, and singing praise for a world of wonders. As you abstain from meat on this global day of prayer, recommit yourself to the ways of fairness in family, work, civic, and international relationships.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ezekiel 18:21-28; Matthew 5:20-26 (228)*

*"Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair?"*

### SATURDAY, MARCH 3

#### FEAST OF KATHARINE DREXEL, VIRGIN

#### Share your gifts

When you think about Catholic stewardship, does your mind go to collection envelopes and fundraising appeals? While certainly that is part of what it means, stewardship goes far beyond financial contributions. The U.S. Catholic Bishops wrote that stewardship is a call to receive God's gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly with others, and return them with increase to God (*Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*). We see examples of

such stewardship in the church through people like Saint Katharine Drexel. She made good use of her education and financial resources, and she also made it her life's work to help people in need, an effort that continues through the religious community she founded, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. How can you create a legacy of stewardship?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Matthew 5:43-48 (229)*

*"The Lord . . . is to be your God and you are to walk in his ways and . . . hearken to his voice."*

### SUNDAY, MARCH 4

#### SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

#### Be-loved, and loving

One of the deepest human spiritual longings is to know ourselves as the beloved of God. Maya Angelou, in her memoir *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now*, recalls being asked by her teacher to read a section from a book that ended with the words, "God loves me." He instructed her to say the passage again and again. Eventually it dawned on her there might be truth in those words. She writes: "I suddenly began to cry at the grandness of it all. I knew that if God loved me, then I could do wonderful things. I could try great things, learn anything, achieve anything." This Lent know that God loves you, and ask God to use you to help another know that he or she is beloved.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Romans 8:31b-34; Mark 9:2-10 (25)*

*"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*

### MONDAY, MARCH 5

#### LENTEN WEEKDAY

#### Let's give it up for Lent

If you grew up Catholic, you probably heard the question (perhaps more often than you would have liked!): "What are you giving up for Lent?" Often enough it was about forgoing goodies such as chocolate or your favorite television show. Good enough as far as it goes, if it taught you something about healthy self-denial. But there is another, more interior way to give things up for Lent—things such as the judgmental comments that come from a secret sense of superiority or the condemning attitude that is nothing more than self-righteousness dressed up in sharp clothes. The real action in the spiritual life, we learn as we age, is interior. So: what will you give up this Lent?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Daniel 9:4b-10; Luke 6:36-38 (230)*

*"The measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you."*

## **TUESDAY, MARCH 6**

### **LENTEN WEEKDAY**

#### **That's the reality of the situation**

Every so often a Milwaukee mother of five teens was in the habit of having what she called a "reality check." She and her husband would get everyone together to make plain the rules of the house and their expectations of mutual family responsibility and respect. She joked about it with friends, but those frank and honest meetings succeeded in keeping the family healthy as the children all grew to become mature and happy adults with children of their own. It's a way of looking at Lent: Reality-therapy in which you stand back and assess how it is between you and God, not by your own standards but by God's.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 1:10, 16-20; Matthew 23:1-12 (231)*

*"Cease doing evil; learn to do good."*

## **WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7**

### **FEAST OF PERPETUA AND FELICITY, MARTYRS**

#### **Give it your all**

*The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas* is an early Christian document that records the martyrdom of four catechumens—Perpetua, Felicitas, Saturninus, and Revocatus—and their catechist, Satorus, Perpetua's brother. Although Christians were heavily persecuted in the third century, these young people were so compelled by the life and message of Jesus that they were willing to face torture and death to be part of the Christian community. The process for most catechumens today is not as dangerous, yet still there remains a profound sense of giving one's life to God and being willing to give one's life for others. Let us pray for catechumens who this Lenten season are being immersed in the mystery of our faith. May they and their catechists have the spirit, courage, and peace of these martyrs.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 18:18-20; Matthew 20:17-28 (232)*

*"Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?"*

## **THURSDAY, MARCH 8**

### **FEAST OF JOHN OF GOD, RELIGIOUS**

#### **Do something spontaneous for God**

Even before making a total commitment to serving the sick and the poor, it was clear that the 16th-century Portuguese Saint John of God was a compassionate person who wanted to serve others, even though his early life was a bit

colorful—he left home at 9 to become a shepherd and then a soldier. After the army he went on a trip to Africa intending to ransom Christian hostages from Muslim captivity, came to the aid of a grieving family at the docks who had been exiled from Portugal, and became a traveling religious goods salesman so that more people could have access to spiritual books and images. Such an impetuous desire to help others could have come only from utter trust in God. It's an impulse you, too, can follow.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31 (233)*

*"Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord."*

## **FRIDAY, MARCH 9**

### **FEAST OF FRANCES OF ROME, RELIGIOUS; DAY OF ABSTINENCE**

#### **How do you encourage others?**

Recent studies of families suggest that parents have favorites among their children. It's hard not to take special delight in the accomplished daughter, the charming son, the child who's remarkably trouble-free to bring up. Yet good parents know that tucking these biases away is important because the struggling child needs encouragement and support even more than the darling. In a biblical story Jacob wasn't good at hiding his preference for Joseph, to the predictable outrage of his brothers. Today as we abstain from meat we might resolve to offer extra encouragement to those who need it—and "fast" from the impulse to favor or disfavor.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a; Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46 (234)*

*[Joseph's brothers said], "Come on, let us kill him . . . We shall then see what comes of his dreams."*

## **SATURDAY, MARCH 10**

### **LENTEN WEEKDAY**

#### **Tolerate the truth**

Today marks the feast of Saint John Ogilvie, a Jesuit priest executed for practicing Catholicism in Glasgow in 1560. John used scripture to preach tolerance. During Lent we not only prepare for the Resurrection of the Lord but also work on being more accepting and respectful toward each other. John believed that the Catholic Church embraced all people and that is why he preached the gospel, even though it got him killed. As we continue to grow this Lent, let us work on being more tolerant and, as John said, "Come to the knowledge of the truth."

TODAY'S READINGS: *Micah 7: 14-15; Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32 (235)*

*"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."*

## **SUNDAY, MARCH 11**

### **THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT**

#### **Let yourself fall into the hands of love**

You may have had the experience of a "trust fall" in which you allow yourself to fall backwards trusting someone to catch you. The exercise is sometimes satirized but it has its impact. Saint Francis of Assisi used the image of falling to suggest abandoning ourselves to God. Quoting scripture, he would say: "It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of God." He didn't mean *terrible* as in frightening but in the sense of *awesome*. Falling is always scary. But when you trust God's open arms, you place control of your life in the hands of the loving creator. Whether you are a lifetime Christian or preparing to make that commitment at Easter, Lent ought to be that kind of plunge.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Exodus 20:1-17 or 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25; John 2:13-25 (29)*

*"I, the Lord, your God . . . bestowing mercy . . . on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments."*

## **MONDAY, MARCH 12**

### **LENTEN WEEKDAY**

#### **This Lent's to-do list**

Wondering what the talk of "giving alms" is all about during Lent? The corporal works of mercy are a good place to start when looking for examples. Those include: feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and imprisoned. "Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God," says the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Make the corporal works of mercy your to-do list this Lent.

TODAY'S READINGS: *2 Kings 5:1-15b; Luke 4:24-30 (237)*

*"If the prophet had told you to do something extraordinary, would you not have done it?"*

## **TUESDAY, MARCH 13**

### **LENTEN WEEKDAY**

#### **Give what you want**

Jesus' entire ministry was grounded in love and forgiveness, yet often enough those who call themselves followers of Jesus fail to offer love and forgiveness to others. Instead, they nurture their grudges, hurts, and resentments, keeping them alive and in the present by retelling themselves the same old stories where it's

everybody else's fault. Lent is a very good time to practice abstaining from this habit. When you find yourself wanting to judge and blame others, turn your gaze inward. How often have you refused to give what you so dearly wish to receive?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Daniel 3:25, 34-43; Matthew 18:21-35 (238)*

*"Moved with compassion the master . . . let him go and forgave him the loan."*

## **WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14**

### **LENTEN WEEKDAY**

#### **Show some real zeal**

Zeal is an obscure virtue during the season of Lent. We aim often for the virtues of self-denial, humility, fortitude, and others that seem to lend themselves to our desire for repentance and movement toward the new life of the Resurrection. With that repentance, however, is an opportunity to look at our life in relationship with God and make some real and positive change. That is where zeal can help. Zeal is the quality of eagerness and ardent desire in pursuing something. In Catholic language, zeal is love in action. Let us continue this Lenten season with zeal, allowing love to impel us to look realistically, without judgment, at our life and make choices that more fully reflect Christ's life within us.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32 (226)*

*"However, take care and be earnestly on your guard not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen."*

## **THURSDAY, MARCH 15**

### **LENTEN WEEKDAY**

#### **How to be more prophet-able**

Many think of biblical prophets as people whom God gave the mysterious power to see into the future. Prophets, however, were not crystal-ball-gazers who "predicted" what was to come. Most of the time they talked about the present—their present—and sometimes about the past as well. They focused on what the people of God were doing—or not doing—in their relationship with God. In bringing God's word to a situation, they called people back to God and showed them that God was still a guiding force in their lives. God summoned a long line of prophets to serve the Israelites, and there have been Christian prophets, too—just read 1 Corinthians 12:28 or Ephesians 4:11. A few prophets might even be around today.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 7:23-28; Luke 11:14-23 (240)*

*"I have sent you untiringly all my servants the prophets."*

## FRIDAY, MARCH 16

LENTEN WEEKDAY; DAY OF ABSTINENCE

### When will we forgive?

Nobody likes a traitor. From Brutus to John Wilkes Booth to Judas, those who betray ultimate loyalties like patriotism or friendship seem beyond redemption. A still deeper bond exists within families that can be trespassed or broken. In times of infidelity, mistreatment, severed trust, or divorce, it can seem that the idea of family itself has been lost. While people often don't feel the capacity to pardon such violations, emotion plays only a part in the task of forgiveness. Forgiving is also an act of will, not only of feelings. God models the decision of forgiveness for us, allowing the healing to begin. Abstain from meat today—and from withholding the healing power of forgiveness.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Hosea 14:2-10; Mark 12:28-34 (241)*

*"I will heal their defection . . . I will love them freely; for my wrath is turned away from them."*

## SATURDAY, MARCH 17

FEAST OF PATRICK, BISHOP

### A not so super event

During last January's Super Bowl, a little-known fact came to light: Like other major international sports events, the Super Bowl is a major market for human trafficking. According to the U.S. government, as many as 17,500 women, children, and men are trafficked in this country every year. Almost half are forced into prostitution, about a quarter into domestic servitude, and others into agricultural and factory work and other forms of coerced labor. Saint Patrick was born in Roman Britain. He got to Ireland thanks to Irish raiders who kidnapped him and took him there to be enslaved for six years. Why not honor Patrick this year by educating yourself more about the injustice of modern slavery? Some places you can start are [polarisproject.org](http://polarisproject.org); [stopenslavement.org](http://stopenslavement.org); [freetheslaves.net](http://freetheslaves.net); and [unodc.org](http://unodc.org).

TODAY'S READINGS: *Hosea 6:1-6; Luke 18:9-14 (242)*

*"For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice."*

## SUNDAY, MARCH 18

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

### Do you mind?

In the Bible people are often urged to remember that God loves them. They are urged to think of their ancestors, whose faithfulness—and unfaithfulness—brought the people to where they are now, however comfortable or not their

situation. They are urged to be grateful for the God who is with them always. To cultivate mindfulness is to cultivate gratitude in your life. It is not only gratitude for the good things or the times when life is easy and comfortable. It is thankfulness that comes from greater awareness of life in and around you—the joys and pains that are part of daily living for yourself and others. During Lent consider a way you might cultivate mindfulness in your life.

TODAY'S READINGS: *2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21 (32)*

*"Whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God."*

## MONDAY, MARCH 19

SOLEMNITY OF JOSEPH, SPOUSE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

### Walk a mile in their shoes

Saint Joseph knew a thing or two about having to uproot a family and leave for another country in a hurry. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Joseph fled to Egypt with Mary and the infant Jesus when he learned that King Herod planned to kill all the male infants in Bethlehem. For this reason Joseph is a patron saint of immigrants. In every age and region people have felt compelled to immigrate for a variety of reasons, but rarely for convenience. Pulling up stakes on one's life and seeking it elsewhere is never an easy or pleasant task. Take a moment to honor Joseph by reaching out to an immigrant in your own community. It may give you a new perspective on one of the day's hot-button issues.

TODAY'S READINGS: *2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16; Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22; Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a or Luke 2:41-51a (543)*

*"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home."*

## TUESDAY, MARCH 20

LENTEN WEEKDAY

### Refresh and recommit

For some the weeks of Lent are a time of preparation for baptism; for all it is preparation to renew that promise with conviction. Because most of us were baptized as infants, the sacrament can seem remote. Why not prepare for the renewal of your baptism at Easter by digging into family records for the date on which you were baptized and marking it for some simple celebration? If you are a godmother or godfather, ask yourself whether you have been active in helping parents hold Christ at the center of the lives of their children. Time in prayer, self-scrutiny, celebrating the sacrament of

Reconciliation in a careful and thoughtful way can make the questions “do you believe in God?” and “do you reject sin?” not only words of a ceremony but a fresh commitment.

TODAY’S READINGS: *Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; John 5:1-16 (245)*

*“Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall live.”*

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21

### LENTEN WEEKDAY

#### Glad to be of help

The feeling that you are doing God’s will on Earth activates a deep source of inner peace. On the other hand, the thought that you really should be doing something else creates a low-grade feeling of anxiety that you can ignore for only so long. Eventually the unease accumulates until life becomes a heavy burden, or you get sick—or both. Your fear might be that God wants you to go to some hard place, to do some difficult task. Not so. As theologian Frederick Buechner put it, God calls you to “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” To find that place of deep gladness you have to go within and you have to listen. Lent is the perfect time to do both.

TODAY’S READINGS: *Isaiah 49:8-15; John 5:17-30 (246)*

*“I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me.”*

## THURSDAY, MARCH 22

### LENTEN WEEKDAY

#### The risen Christ is worth the wait

Often when Jesus is portrayed in scripture he is confidently preaching the Good News. When he encounters doubters and has to start explaining himself and his mission, though, we might begin to have our own doubts about our faith. Jesus testifies that he is sent by the Father to carry out his work, but Jesus’ followers at times have trouble believing in him. Lent is a time when we may grow weary waiting for the Resurrection of the Lord. During this season, however, remember that waiting for Christ and trusting in him will lead to eternal life.

TODAY’S READINGS: *Exodus 32: 7-14; John 5: 31-47 (247)*

*“Remember us, O Lord, as you favor your people.”*

## FRIDAY, MARCH 23

### LENTEN WEEKDAY; DAY OF ABSTINENCE

#### How do we endure differences?

If it were up to us, everyone would share our opinions, uphold our values, imitate our manners, and vote the way we do. What a

wonderful world that would be! What a land of harmony! We live, however, in a land of free will and endless variety, and that—regrettably at times—includes the way other people think, act, perceive reality, and believe. We can therefore proceed in historically predictable ways. We can kill everyone who thinks differently (obviously that hasn’t worked). We can suppress all other perspectives. Or we can learn to dialogue across the differences. As you fast from meat today, imagine a world of mutual respect, free of the spirit of condemnation.

TODAY’S READINGS: *Wisdom 2:1a, 12-22; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30 (248)*

*“Merely to see him is a hardship for us, because his life is not like that of others, and different are his ways.”*

## SATURDAY, MARCH 24

### LENTEN WEEKDAY

#### “God made me do it”

Some folks claim God told them to do something—run for political office, for example. Interestingly, you don’t hear much about people saying God told them *not* to do something. At any rate, discerning messages from God can be a tricky business. The prophetic books of Hebrew scripture record many of what are presented to be direct quotes from God. These prophets, however, were not using God to advance themselves or gain power. Instead they were reminding the nation of the ways of God the people knew perfectly well but were ignoring. So the next time you hear someone speaking of how God told them to do such-and-such, ask who’s really doing the talking. The best way really to hear from God is through prayer and a life of faith.

TODAY’S READINGS: *Jeremiah 11:18-20; John 7:40-53 (249)*

*“I knew their plot because the Lord informed me; at that time you, O Lord, showed me their doings.”*

## SUNDAY, MARCH 25

### FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

#### Stepping out

*TeamRCIA.com*, a free online resource for Catholic parishes, offers a helpful interpretation of the Scrutinies that catechumens undergo today for the third consecutive Sunday: They are about developing a way of seeing—of seeing sin as it really is and seeing Christ as the one who liberates from sin. “The Scrutinies . . . are experiences of the freeing touch of grace, which restores our sight . . . The Scrutinies are repeated so that we will learn to see well . . . . When we see sin in its right aspect, we become

free to choose something different, to step away from sin and into the light of Christ,” suggests Rita Ferrone on *TeamRCIA*. Whether we were baptized as infants, adolescents, adults, or await baptism, we need to take that step.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-33 (35)*  
“*Sir, we would like to see Jesus.*”

## MONDAY, MARCH 26

### SOLEMNITY OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

#### March through time

This year the church celebrates the Annunciation one day late because the actual date, March 25, falls on a Sunday. March 25 has an interesting history. Early mathematicians calculated and thought this to be the day on which Jesus died. They believed the creation of the world started on this day as well, which made it a natural date for the first day of the New Year. Thus for several hundred years March 25 was New Year's Day. Mary's willingness to bear the son of God also ushered in a new year, a new era. Every “yes” does that. Celebrate Mary's “yes” with one of your own today. Before you say an automatic “no” to your child, your spouse, your coworker, your neighbor, take a deep breath and reconsider whether you might say “yes.”

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 7:10-14, 8-10; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38 (545)*  
“*May it be done to me according to your word.*”

## TUESDAY, MARCH 27

### LENTEN WEEKDAY

#### Cross purposes

The idea of homeopathic medicine is that one can use a small amount of a pathogen to fight off what, in full strength, would make you ill. In mainstream medicine a similar idea lies behind immunization. In both cases the very thing that can cause disease becomes the means of healing. The bronze serpent that Moses crafted to cure his people if they looked at it, as well as Jesus' vision of himself lifted on the cross and drawing all people to himself, evoke the same idea: The very instrument of bitterness and death, through grace, becomes the source of life. During your Lenten prayer spend some time simply gazing at a crucifix, not to dwell on the agony of Jesus but upon the “wondrous love” and healing that the sign of the cross has become.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Numbers 21:4-9; John 8:21-30 (252)*  
“*When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM.*”

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28

### LENTEN WEEKDAY

#### That's a mouthful

W. C. Fields used to exclaim in his films, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego!” No doubt Fields enjoyed using these exotic biblical names as an expression, but behind them are three actual characters from Hebrew scripture. The Babylonian king had commanded them to worship the statue of a god or face immediate execution. Their response was an interesting one. Of course they wouldn't bow down, and if God saved them, so be it. But if not, they *still* wouldn't deny their God. Now that's faith—both the willingness to give up their lives but also their affirmation that God did not have to prove anything to deserve their trust. Faith does not begin with what God will do for you if you believe. It starts with believing because God *is* God.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95; John 8:31-42 (253)*  
“*Jesus then said to those . . . who believed in him, 'If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples.'*”

## THURSDAY, MARCH 29

### LENTEN WEEKDAY

#### Leave this stone unturned

Death-by-stoning is an ancient form of execution. Because it is slow, most would call it torture. Biblical examples are sparse but they do exist, though later limits on the practice in Jewish law and tradition became so restrictive as to prohibit it for all practical purposes. Sadly, this cruel punishment is still legal in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Sudan, Iran, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, and some states in Nigeria. Occurrences are documented as well in Afghanistan and Somalia. Stoning has been universally condemned by human rights groups and most nations and faiths. As Lent is a time of repentance, add your voice to the chorus calling the world to repent and do away with this and other cruel punishments.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 17:3-9; John 8:51-59 (254)*  
“*They picked up stones to throw at him.*”

## FRIDAY, MARCH 30

### LENTEN WEEKDAY; DAY OF ABSTINENCE

#### How do you live beyond fear?

Fear is a reasonable response in an unreasonable time. Check the daily news and within minutes you'll have a long list of motivations for barricading the door to keep the spirit of vengeance, violence, and evil away from yourself and those you love. But fear is not a

Christian response to the world or toward your fellow human beings. "Fear is useless," Jesus once told a man despairing for his daughter's life. "What is needed is faith." As you surrender the option of meat today you might also opt for courage over fear—a courage born of your trust in God.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 20:10-13;*  
*John 10:31-42 (255)*

*"I hear the whisperings of many: 'Terror on every side!'"*

## **SATURDAY, MARCH 31**

### **LENTEN WEEKDAY**

#### **Bread for the world**

As Christians prepare for Palm Sunday and Holy Week, Jews prepare for the beginning of Passover this coming week. There are many traditions that led to the Jewish use of unleavened bread, or matzah, during this feast. One of the most interesting is the usage of the Hebrew term *lechem onii*, "the bread of poverty," for matzah. This hard, flat bread is said to remind Jews of what it was like to be poor captives in Egypt and to promote humility and a greater appreciation of the gift of freedom. Food for thought for one and all—and for gratitude!

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ezekiel 37:21-28; John 11:45-56 (256)*

*"Now the Passover of the Jews was near."*

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