

# Fourth Sunday of Lent



## Blessing the Seekers

Compassionate God,  
you welcome all seekers,  
from the Greeks of Jesus' time,  
down through the centuries to  
catechumens and candidates today.  
Give us courage to venture forth  
from familiar places  
and persistence in our searching.  
Help us to recognize your Son  
when we find him.

Be with all who seek,  
reassuring them along the way  
with your supportive word and community,  
and providing a warm welcome  
at the journey's end.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Sunday, March 18, 2012 Not to Condemn, but to Save

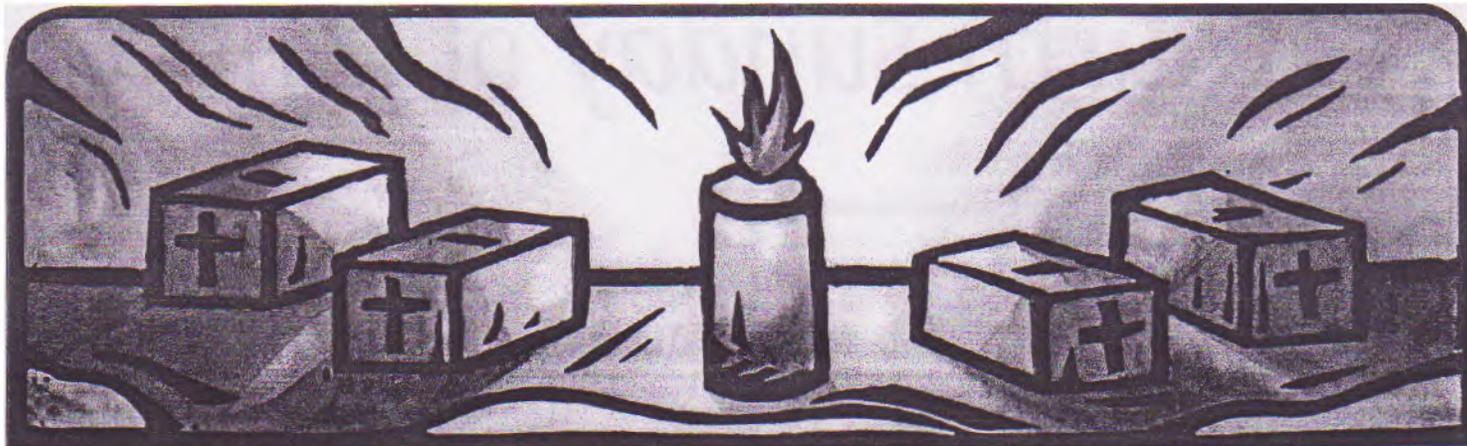
Today's Readings: 2 Chronicles 36:14–16, 19–23; Psalm 137:1–2, 3, 4–5, 6 (6ab); Ephesians 2:4–10; John 3:14–21. What Jesus explains to Nicodemus in today's Gospel will be fulfilled in John 19:18, when Jesus is lifted up on the cross. This mysterious, contradictory sign—the cross—will bring life, just as the serpent lifted by Moses in the desert did for the Israelites (Numbers 21:4–9). It wasn't magic that cured the people stricken in the desert; it was their faith that God would care for them.

God didn't send the Son to condemn the world, but to save it. We might nod in agreement: how obvious. But when we look at our behaviors, do we model this positive welcome? Or are we quick to condemn? Something pernicious in

human beings generates a negative thought every 20 seconds. Could we love darkness more than light? Do we give as many compliments as criticisms?

Earlier in this Gospel (v. 10), Jesus teases Nicodemus: how can a teacher of Israel not know how people are reborn of the Spirit's breath? Jesus describes something beyond Nicodemus' frame of reference and invites him to imagine it. Nicodemus goes off to ponder Jesus' words.

Jesus' challenge is also for us: do we believe superficially, fulfill obligations, and observe religious ritual, without a trusting heart? Or are we open to the surprising paths where the Spirit may lead us, and the new winds of change through which God re-creates us?



## This Week at Home

### Monday, March 19

#### Solemnity of Saint Joseph

Today's Readings: 2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16; Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 27 and 29 (37); Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22; Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a or Luke 2:41-51a. As we celebrate this great saint, Matthew shows us Joseph's distress at the prospect of condemning Mary to public shame because of her pregnancy. Inspired by a dream, he rises beyond the constraints of the law. Luke depicts Joseph's terrible ordeal of losing the child Jesus in the temple. To honor Saint Joseph, many people of Italian and sometimes Polish backgrounds today host "Saint Joseph's table," a feast for the poor.

### Tuesday, March 20

#### First Day of Spring

Today's Readings: Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; Psalm 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9 (8); John 5:1-16. The vernal equinox marks the time when day and night are equal: each 12 hours. After today, days will be longer. In today's Gospel, Jesus offers life and hope to the man who waited 38 years for a cure. He begins by asking, "Do you want to be made well?" (5:6). The answer seems obvious, but sometimes there is a payoff in remaining an invalid or dependent. Ask yourself Jesus' question.

### Wednesday, March 21

#### The Son's Gift of Life

Today's Readings: Isaiah 49:8-15; Psalm 145:8-9, 13cd-14, 17-18 (8a); John 5:17-30. In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of the marvelous life shared between Father and Son, which he later invites his followers to join (see John 17). His assurance that the Father and he are still working (5:17) gives courage to endure even bleak times. To those who suffer or mourn, who feel lifeless or disappointed, Jesus promises: "The Son gives life to whomever he wishes" (5:21).

### Thursday, March 22

#### The Testimony of Good Works

Today's Readings: Exodus 32:7-14; Psalm 106:19-20, 21-22, 23 (4a); John 5:31-47. Jesus' works, according to today's Gospel, testified on his behalf (5:32). Can we say that for ourselves? Have we been faithful to prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and service? If we're feeling proud of our accomplishments, Jesus asks, "How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?" (5:44).

### Friday, March 23

#### Saint Turibius de Mogrovejo

Today's Readings: Wisdom 2:1a, 12-22; Psalm 34:17-18, 19-20, 21 and 23 (19a); John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30. This Spanish saint, whose optional memorial we may celebrate today, served as Bishop of Lima, Peru, from 1581 until his death in 1606. Upon arrival, the new Bishop did not act as the Spanish overlords expected. He traveled the country, on mule or foot, and spoke out against the terrible oppression of Peruvians by Spaniards. His diocese was huge, and he traversed it three times, learning native dialects, uncovering abuse, and founding hospitals, schools, and churches. Division among peoples and opposition from authorities are themes also found in today's Gospel.

### Saturday, March 24

#### Voice of the Voiceless

Today's Readings: Jeremiah 11:18-20; Psalm 7:2-3, 9bc-10, 11-12 (2a); John 7:40-53. When he was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero (1917-1980) was regarded as a conservative who wouldn't cause disturbance. The murder of his friend, Jesuit Rutilio Grande, however, was a turning point. Romero's weekly radio broadcasts fiercely opposed a violent military regime and made him the voice for the voiceless poor. Just as in John's account of Jesus, some thought him a prophet; others wanted to arrest him. Romero was assassinated while saying Mass, and was mourned by the poor he defended.



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 Keeping the Seasons

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