

**Weekly Gospel Readings**  
**The 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the Holy Lent**

**The Lent's Journey &  
The Importance of Seeking Christ**

On the first Sunday of the Holy Lent, we read Matthew 6:19-33. In this passage, the Lord emphasizes the importance of seeking what is pertaining to Christ: “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt 6:33).

However, before we more thoroughly dive into this passage, let us reflect on the Holy Lent's entity, or as it was called in the early days of Christianity “The Pre Paschal-Fast”. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann in his book “Great Lent” refers to the fast as a “Journey to Pascha”, and oftentimes the fast was likened by the Church Fathers as a spiritual journey of the soul through the wilderness of the world to her final resting place in Heaven. Hence, it is an expedition leading us to the freedom from sins and joining the Lord in His death and into Resurrection, like the Israelites exodus from Egypt's slavery.

Documenting this understanding, when our Church Fathers organized the Lent's readings, they included on Monday of the first week the reading from Exodus “And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Ex 2:24), to alert us that to reach our destination with the Lord in His resurrection, we need to cry out to Him as the Psalmist said “Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me!” (Psalm 31:2), and remind the Lord of His covenant with us.

Then, it is very appropriate to start our own journey on the first Sunday of the fast with the reading from Matthew 6:19-33, where Jesus challenges us to examine our priorities and to seek Him.

The first half of this reading is pertaining to the importance of seeking God. He warns us about excessively working for earthly profit that may decay. Rather we should seek the heavenly treasures that will last forever (Matthew 6:19-20), and He provides us this analogy of our eyes as a lamp: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (Matthew 6:22-23).

By looking at the other liturgical readings of this day, it is clear that our bodies are full of light when we have Christ in us. That means the only way to be full of light is to set your eyes on God--in other words, to seek God.

For example, St. Paul explicitly states “The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” (Romans 13:12-14). In these verses, St. Paul compares the seeking of worldly pleasures as works of darkness, and he compares the armor of light to the Lord Christ. Furthermore, at the end of those verses St. Paul emphasizes that by putting on Christ, we should not also make our goal to gratify worldly desires.

In the Catholic Epistle, we read “Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). St. James is saying that the Word of God is able to save our souls, further demonstrating how the only way to achieve this light is through Christ.

In the Acts reading for today (Acts 21:40-22:16), we read St. Paul’s testimony and conversion to Christianity. While Paul was persecuting others, God blinded him, making him full of darkness. When St. Anianus opened the eyes of St. Paul, St. Anianus said, “Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16). In a literal sense, St. Paul’s eyes were full of light; he was able to see only after turning from the way of persecuting Christians.

Light and darkness contrast each other and therefore, they simply cannot coexist. Seeking the pleasures of this world and seeking what is pertaining to God cannot coexist. That is why God says then you can not serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24).

Perhaps this leads to some worry. That is why God provides us words of comfort in the second half of today’s Gospel (Matthew 6:25-33). He addresses how the Father feeds the birds and clothes the grass of the field. If He does this to others, how is he not going to feed and clothe us, creatures who were created in **His** image? In seeking the Kingdom of God, God will provide what we need to survive.

As we start the journey of Lent, this Gospel reading serves as a reminder of the importance of seeking the Kingdom of God. We are reminded to not seek worldly pleasures, which is partly done through dietary restrictions, but this encompasses so much. Subsequently, we are reminded to put on Christ and to serve Christ. Once we seek the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness, then some of the things of the world that our earthly needs--food, clothing, and more--will be given to us (Matthew 6:33).

## **Recourses**

- Coptic Church Review. Volume 31, Number 1, 2010
- Liturgical Readings of the Coptic Church (Arabic), Fouad Naguib Youssef, 2010

- Fr. Alexander Shmemann, Great Lent, Journey to Pascha (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001)
- <https://catenabible.com/mt/1>
- Bible ESV

**Readings of the Day**

- Pauline: Romans 13:1-14
- Catholic: James 1:13-21
- Acts: Acts 21:40-22:16
- Psalm: Psalm 24 Coptic Reader (25: 1-2,4) ESV
- Gospel: Matthew 6:19-33