



**5th SUNDAY OF LENT 2024**

**MARCH 17, 2024**



Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat.

JOHN 12:24

©JPPC

### Mission Statement

“Good Shepherd parish, under the guidance of the true Shepherd Jesus Christ, is a Catholic faith based community seeking to proclaim and live the gospel message. Recognizing our diversity, we strive to bring together a church family, welcoming all people as we grow together in faith, hope and love.”

**954 Stuyvesant Ave Irvington NJ 07111 Phone: (973) 375-8568**

**Fax (973) 375-7040 Email [gsirvington@comcast.net](mailto:gsirvington@comcast.net)**

**Website: [www.goodshepherdnj.com](http://www.goodshepherdnj.com)**



**SERVED BY**

Rev. Valentine Ugwuanya Pastor  
 Ed Stolarz Director of Music Ministry  
 Denise Perry Secretary

For more information on our parish please go to:  
[Goodshepherdnj.com](http://Goodshepherdnj.com)  
 Or email us at  
[gsirvington@comcast.net](mailto:gsirvington@comcast.net)

**REFLECTION FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK ON 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT.**

Our Blessed Lord has resolutely gone to Jerusalem, he is now in Jerusalem for the third time in John's gospel today. His popularity has been on the rise. Jesus has been at the center of some amazing events, and even some controversies. Today's gospel tells us that among those who go up to Jerusalem to worship at the feast of Passover are some "Greeks". The reference is probably to a group known in the early Church as mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles were those known as "God-fearers", These people were, in relation to Judaism, a bit like RCIA candidates of today in the Catholic tradition. They certainly have active interest in Judaism in the Jewish faith. Some were Greeks, probably Jews from Alexandria and who approached Philip with the request: "Sir, we want to see Jesus" (Jn 12:21). This is an expression of the desire that lies hidden in every human heart- the desire that the psalmists express so powerful: "It is your face, O Lord, that I seek, hide not your face. (Ps.27:8). "Like the deer that yearns for running stream so my soul thirsts for you, my God" (Ps. 42:1).

For Jesus, the arrival of these God-fearing Greeks signals his "hour". Earlier in John's gospel, Jesus has insisted that his "hour" has not yet come. Now that his message receives global acknowledgement, "the world has gone after him" (John 20:19), he can announce that the hour of his glorification has come. If no other passages of the Christian scriptures survived except those which reference the last days of Jesus' life or his hour, there would be sufficient evidence as to who he really was and sufficient substance on which to base our faith.

In his spiritual manifesto, *Why I Am Still a Christian*, Hans Küng suggests that the church is to emulate the "Spirit of the One crucified" by entering into those struggles which continue to scar humankind. He defines the church's share of Jesus' hour and its pathway to glory as "a struggle to ensure respect for human dignity against all animosity, even to the point of love for one's enemies; a struggle for freedom against all oppression, even to the point of selfless service; a struggle for justice against all injustice, even to the point of voluntarily surrendering one's rights; a struggle against all selfishness, even to the point of giving up the things we own; a struggle for peace against all strife, even to the point of infinite reconciliation." It would seem therefore that believers are charged to come away from today's celebration with a renewed appreciation of Jesus' saving scars as well as a deepened sense of dedication to the struggle of the human experience. The scars of human suffering are all around us; it is ours to soothe and offer assurance, that, just as the sufferings of Christ were the pathway to life, so shall every human struggle lay the groundwork for the glory of the resurrection.

The first reading today from the Prophet Jeremiah. In this text the prophet is clear that the relationship of God with His people has been difficult and that the previous Covenants have been broken and that there is a need for a New Covenant that will last forever. Prophet Jeremiah shows us a God who is always seeking us out, who is willing to start a New Covenant with us, who always wants to love us. And so we hear in this reading today: "All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more." The second reading comes from the Letter to the Hebrews. This letter is used more and more during the time we come close to Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The letter speaks so clearly of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus: "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

God has taken on our flesh and our human weakness even though God in Christ never sins. God in Christ knows our sinful nature and truly suffers. The carrying of the Cross and the death on the Cross are real and unite Jesus to us in a way that is unimaginable for God to share in our lives. Yet God chooses this way to draw us to Himself. We are invited to learn obedience to the will of the Father, even though we know that in the process of obedience, we also shall suffer. The challenge in this last part of Lent is to LISTEN to the Lord, to the whole of the Old Testament and to the Church. Like the voice that came down from heaven glorifying Jesus, God is speaking to us. Will we answer? Will we give our lives in obedience to the Lord Jesus—always with love and joy?

**Good Shepherd Parish Schedule for Mass & Worship (schedules are subject to change)**

Saturday (anticipated) 5:30pm  
 Holy Day TBD.

Sundays —9:00am, 11:00am  
 Reconciliation: Saturdays 4:45-5:15pm

National Holidays —9:00am  
 Adoration Mo-Fri 7:30am-5:00pm

**Mass Intentions For the week of March 16, 2024—March 23, 2024**

Saturday 5:30pm For the Repose of the Soul of Leonardo Paran  
Mar 16

Sunday 9:00am For the Repose of the Soul of Tristen brevik  
Mar 17 11:00am For the Repose of the Soul of Anne Ezemuambra

Monday 7:00am For God's Guidance and Protection of Avenella Samaroo  
Mar 18

Tuesday 7:00am For the Repose of the Soul of Sinibaldo DiPoola  
Mar 19

Wednesday 7:00am For the Repose of the Soul of Cicilia Okolo  
Mar 20

Thursday 7:00am For the Repose of the Soul of Bertie Julien  
Mar 21

Friday 7:00am Thanksgiving for the Birthday of Louis Ikebununo  
Mar 22

Saturday 8:30am For the People of Good Shepherd Parish  
Mar 23 5:30pm For the Repose of the Soul of Libera Armenti


*Kindly keep our parishioner's family, with health and other challenges, in your prayers*

Let us always remember in our prayers the sick members of our Parish

Paul Kocum	Sandi Mosley	Debbie Watson	Rihanna Scott
Elizabeth Cassata	Pope Francis	Frank Rocchi	Camile Laidlaw
Frederick Hamilton	Curtis Richards	Carlos Quinones	Venus Matthews
Jean Michelin	Corizon Abuzied	Bob and Barbara Nezlick	Patrick Roylance

\* Please advise if any names should be added or delete from the list


**Hospital Privacy | Please remember that current privacy laws regarding patients in hospitals do not allow hospitals/ pastoral care offices to contact parishes. If you or a loved one are in the hospital and want a priest to visit, please call the I office at (973)375-8568**

 **SAFE ENVIRONMENT CORNER**  
**HOW TO REPORT ABUSE**

The Archdiocese of Newark takes very seriously any and all allegations of sexual misconduct by members of the clergy, Religious and lay staff of the Archdiocese. We encourage anyone with knowledge of an act of sexual misconduct to inform us so that we may take appropriate action to protect others and provide support to victims of sexual abuse. Call the Coordinator for the Office of Accompaniment in the Archdiocesan Department for the Protection of the faithful at

**201-407-3256**

Please contact  
Fr. Valentine or call the  
rectory if you are interest-  
ed in Intensions, of a Sanctuary Lamp, Alter bread  
and wine or Alter Flowers



**Ministries:** If you're interested in ministries of service either as a Lector or Eucharistic Minister, please call the rectory at 975-375-8568 or fill out the Information below and place in the collection basket.

Name : \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone #: \_\_\_\_\_  
Lector \_\_\_\_ Eucharistic Minister \_\_\_\_\_

Collection Report		March 10, 2023
Weekly Target		\$6,500.00
Collection (Offering+ Fuel & Energy)		\$ 2,572.00
Surplus (Deficit)		\$ 3,928.00
<b>Fiscal Year to Date</b>		
Budget:		\$346,811.00
Actual:		\$60,036.00
Surplus (Deficit)		\$286,775.00
Rolling 4 Week Averages		
Average Collection:		\$ 2530.00
Average Surplus (Deficit)		\$3,970.00

**Minister Assignments Palm Sunday Weekend**

Saturday Sunday	Lectors	Eucharistic Ministers	Presider
3/23	<b>SIGN</b>	<b>UP</b>	Fr, Val
3/24	<b>in</b>	<b>The</b>	Fr. Val
3/24		<b>Sacristy</b>	Fr. Val

**GSP EVENT CALENDER**

Sunday Mar 17
Fifth Sunday of Lent
Monday Mar 18
Saint Cyril of Jerusalem
Tuesday Mar 19
Saint Joseph (Spouse of Blessed Virgin Mary) RCIA 4:00pm in the Rectory
Wednesday Mar 20
RCIA 4:00pm in the Rectory
Thursday Mar 21
Friday Mar 22
Stations of the Cross 12Noon and 7::00PM
Saturday Mar 23
Saint Turibius of Mogrovejo

**Good Shepherd Parish Information**

RECTORY HOURS: Monday Thru Wednesday 10:00AM-2:00PM; Thursday / Friday 9:00AM-12:00PM

Parish Registration Forms can be found at the back of the church or call the rectory at (973) 375-8568

THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION Saturday 4:45-5:15 pm

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM In order to have your child baptized at Good Shepherd, the parents must be registered and active members of our parish. Godparents or sponsors must meet qualifications as to have received both sacraments of Communion and Confirmation, attend Mass regularly and been a registered parishioner at a Catholic Church For more information please call the Rectory at (973) 375-8568

THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY Couples who are planning a wedding should call the parish office to meet the priest, to choose the date of the wedding and before any other arrangements are made call (973)375-8568

PASTORAL OF THE SICK Notify a priest of all who are hospitalized, home-bound, or Emergencies call (973)375-8568

ORDER OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS, RCIA. Adults interested in becoming members of the Catholic Church and Catholics in need of Sacraments, Confirmation or Eucharist; inquire at the Rectory. To register please call the rectory at(973-375-8568

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION Sunday of October-April from 10:00-11:00 am in the Church building. For more information please call the Rectory at (973-375-8568

## **Spiritual Exercise and the Church on the vulnerability of the Poor.**

*In March 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> 2021, Pope Francis traveled to the ancestral country or home of both Christians, Jews and Moslems -Iraq Abraham's homeland on Apostolic Mission of Solidarity, Unity, Peace and Reconciliation to the people of Iraq, to both Christians and Moslems to co-exist and recognize each other as brothers and sisters of One Father- God. Pope Francis is known as the pope of the periphery. Not only does he come from the ends of the earth- Argentina, as he introduced himself to the crowds at his election almost nine years ago, he also speaks and enacts the call to go to the periphery. Against opposition from all sides, he is simply unwavering in his solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, the outcast- those the society rejected and abandoned, the less fortunate and the marginalized. He challenges the whole Church to abandon the security of the status quo and to embrace the risk of vulnerability. This is also the call of God's word to us today. Pope Francis during address to the people of Iraq, said that the only way to rebuild their country, this ancestral home of both Christian, Jews and Moslems, because we have one common father Abraham in faith, is through acknowledgement, openness and acceptance of what God wants of us are the central to what it is to be a Christian a Jew or Moslem, particularly we Christians.*

*During this time of our Lenten season, a time of self-examination and conscientization, prayer, fasting and almsgiving give us the strength to remain open to understanding what God wants of us, acknowledging God's purifying grace that will wash us thoroughly from our iniquity and cleanse us, "forgive their evil-doing, and remember their sins no more" (Jeremiah 31:34). Through this willingness to be ever open to God, we enter into a new covenant and a new life, one in which God is our guarantor. It is only when we allow God to write in our hearts what is being asked of us that our covenant with God is assured. Our response to this must be unreserved and unconditional as the Blessed Virgin Mary unconditionally did when the Angel announced to her that she will be the Mother of God. In doing so, we must be transformed, die to ourselves and be open to God's word.*

*In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah speaks of the new covenant not written in stone as in former time but in the hearts of God's people. Jeremiah was one of the great prophets during the time of great change and upheaval in Israel. The Temple had been destroyed and the Ark of the Covenant had been captured. These unprecedented acts of sacrilege and destruction had caused the people to turn to despair and disillusionment. Yet Jeremiah set out to do the impossible task, which was to restore faith and hope. He reminded the people of the journey into freedom from Egypt and the God who accompanied them. This same God would lead them in a greater exodus to new life, freedom and hope. They were to be given to a new chance, a new heart in order to participate in God's program of renewal and reordering of his people. Only this time, it would not be simply an occupation of the Promise Land as in former time, but more importantly a formation of a just and compassionate society that God wanted them to be. The Prophet Jeremiah did not have an easy life. He is a Prophet who had to proclaim God's word, even though it brought many difficulties into his persona life. Yet this Prophet trusts God entirely. He proclaims this new covenant in which people will know God in their hearts and not just from another person.*

*These words sound as if we simply need to go into our own hearts to know the Lord-and there is some truth in that. But the Prophets are not proclaiming a religion of individualism! We know that in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Prophets authenticate the Word of God. We know that not every word claimed as inspired is accepted as such. In the new covenant, there is a Church that authenticates the Word of God for us with authority, even though the words of authority are spoken by humans. That is a huge leap, but one that Catholics take over and over. It is important to hear that God will pardon sins and no longer remember them. Sometimes an immense amount of energy is spent in trying to entice God to forgive us. That is never necessary! God loves to forgive. That is how Jesus reveals God to us. The letter to the Hebrews takes us to the theme of obedience and suffering. This is another theme strong in this time of Lent. Obedience is first and foremost obedience to God Himself: listening to His word, pondering His word, meditating that Word, listening to that word especially when it says things we would rather not hear. That is all obedience. And it leads us into suffering. The Prophets suffered over and over and over because of their obedience to the Word of God. Even today many people suffer because they strive to proclaim the word of peace in a time of war. At other times, it may be necessary to proclaim words that sound like war when there is an apathy of peace. Suffering results either way. The Gospel picks this up again when Jesus tells us that whoever tries to love his life in this world will lose it and that those who hate their lives in this world will save them. These are often words that we do not want to hear today. Instead, so many of our present values want us to act as though this is the only life, that there is no life other than the one we know now. And lots of people believe that there is nothing after this present life.*

*Here in the Gospel our Lord Jesus also speaks about the importance of vulnerability, the importance to take a risk, to give up the certainty of being a seed for the adventure of new life, new growth and new possibilities. The story begins with the Greeks or Gentiles wanting to meet Jesus. They had seen or heard of the many extraordinary things, or in John's cryptic language, the many "signs" Jesus had done. For instance, he had healed the man born blind; he had raised Lazarus to life and he had made a triumphant entry into Jerusalem. These were all messianic "signs", which pointed to the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah. The Gentiles were anxious to know who Jesus really was. Yet ironically, their curiosity was satisfied in the way they had not expected. Instead of confirming the cult of his own personality Jesus talks about himself in terms of an anti-hero and a countercultural force. He uses the image of the grain in order to speak of his impending passion, death and resurrection. "Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest". Like many of his parables, these words of Jesus compel us to look at his whole life and impact in order to understand their meaning. Jesus refuses the hero worship and the power over the people in the wake of his miracles and extraordinary deeds. He is not the Messiah one who dwells on success and feasts on popularity. We are reminded of the temptations that Jesus experienced in the desert at the start of his ministry. He was tempted to do spectacular things, to be powerful, dominant and in control. He rejected them and instead, chose the path of vulnerable trust, the path of an antihero, a humble suffering Messiah.*

*My brothers and sisters in Christ, as followers of Jesus, we are challenged by the message and example of Jesus. The Lenten journey requires of us to live more intensely the rhythm of dying and rising. What does it mean for us to be a wheat grain that is willing to die? How do we lose our lives in order to gain it back? These questions can only be answered by each of us as we endeavor to imitate Jesus who lived his life fully for others. As disciples, we recognize that life worth living is life poured out for others, life that embraces pain, suffering and even death for the sake of the one we love. This is what we call the paradox of the Gospel. Paul reminds us that while Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, we proclaim Christ crucified. The cross is at the heart of Christian discipleship. In some ways, we are like the Jews who were in despair and disillusionment on account of the unprecedented change and upheaval which are happening around us. Yet just as the prophet Jeremiah pointed them to the program of renewal that God had in store for them, we too must see with God's eyes our own crises. The church in Rwanda after the Reconciliation Commission was formed after the ethnic genocide and cleansing, like the Jews after the exile must be the place where justice, peace, compassion, mercy and the fullness of life are set above all other considerations. The Church must be on the side of the poor, to speak for the oppressed and the most vulnerable, and freedom, equality and the pursuit of happiness for all people. We need to convert to the radical vision of Christ and let it imbue our attitudes, actions and pastoral practices.*

*Let us be attentive to God's words knowing that He forgives us our sins and pray that we respond to the message of Jesus, not by words but by attitudes and actions that reflect the radical vision of Christian life.*