

Reading for Weekday in the Fifth Week of Lent

March 24th 2026

First reading

Numbers 21:4-9

If a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

In those days: From Mount Hor the Hebrews set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go round the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.' Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 102(101):2-3. 16-18. 19-21. R2

*Hear my prayer, O Lord,
and let my cry come to you.*

Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come to you.

Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress.

Turn your ear towards me; on the day when I call, speedily answer me.

The nations shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the earth's kings your glory.

When the Lord shall build up Sion, he will appear in all his glory.

Then he will turn to the prayers of the helpless; he will not despise their prayers.

Let this be written for ages to come, that a people yet unborn may praise the Lord;

The Lord looked down from his holy place on high, looked down from heaven to the earth,
to hear the groans of the prisoners, and free those condemned to die.

Gospel Acclamation

Glory to you, O Christ, Son of the living God.

The seed is the word of God, Christ the sower;
all who find him will live for ever.

Glory to you, O Christ, Son of the living God.

Gospel

John 8:21-30

'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he.'

At that time: Jesus said to the Pharisees, 'I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.' So the Jews said, 'Will he kill himself, since he says, "Where I am going, you cannot come"?' He said to them, 'You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.' So they said to him, 'Who are you?' Jesus said to them, 'Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.' They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said to them, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.' As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Short reflection on the reading for today

The symbol of Israel's sin, the serpent that with its poisonous bite, is changed into an instrument of salvation. Moses made a bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole, so that all who look upon it admitting their sin and regretting their offense were cured by the Lord. Acknowledgment of sin purifies the mind and heart, exposing all excuses and calling evil by its proper name "sin" i.e. an offence against the God who guides our lives. The people come to a new outlook when they admit that sin brings sorrow and death, that their grumbling is destructive, and that their contempt for the Manna provoked God's anger. This bronze serpent has a somewhat murky history. Long before Moses cast this figure in copper, the serpent was a popular figurine in Canaanite fertility rituals. It was a serpent that symbolized the devil in Genesis 3. Perhaps it was because of this pagan background that Moses' bronze serpent later became an object of false worship and was destroyed as an idol by King Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:4).

Paradoxically the early church recognized in this symbol a sign of Jesus on the cross. Saint Paul wrote: "For our sake God made the sinless one to be sin, so that in him we might become the very holiness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). In the goodness, compassion and forgiveness of Jesus we recognize by contrast our own violent and harsh attitudes. The very image of Jesus on the cross shows the effects of human violence but also reveals "the kindness and love of God our Saviour" (Tit 3:4). The "miraculous interchange" of which the liturgy speaks is that while Jesus conforms to us externally (adopting our humanity), we are enabled to conform to him internally, becoming children of God. His goodness forces the poison of our sinfulness out of our system, by his enduring with love the violence of the crucifixion, and through his act of loving self-surrender, we come to belong like Jesus to the Father who is above all.