Why do we fast for forty days? Formerly many believers approached the sacraments without any particular preparation, especially at the time when Christ first gave them to us. But when the fathers realized the harm that could result from such neglect, they took counsel together and decreed that a period of forty days of fasting be set aside, during which the people would meet to pray and listen to the word of God. During this Lenten season each of the faithful would undergo a thorough purification by means of prayer, almsgiving, fasting, watching, repentant tears, confession, and every other remedial measure. Then when they had done all in their power to cleanse their consciences, they could approach the sacraments. It is certain that the fathers did well to use such lenience in
their desire to establish us in the habit of fasting. As we know, we could proclaim a fast throughout the whole year, and no one would pay any attention. But now, with a set time for fasting of only forty days, even the most sluggish need no exhortation to rouse themselves to undergo it; they accept it as a regular observance and recurring encouragement.

So, when someone asks you why you fast, you should not answer: because of the Passover, or because of the Cross. Neither of these is the reason for our fasting. We fast because of our sins, since we are preparing to approach the sacred mysteries. Moreover, the Christian Passover is a time for neither fasting nor mourning, but for great joy, since the Cross destroyed sin and made expiation for the whole world. It reconciled ancient enmities and opened the gates of heaven. It made friends of those who had been filled with hatred, restoring them to the citizenship of heaven. Through the Cross our human nature has been set at the right hand of the throne of God, and we have been granted countless good things besides. Therefore we must not give way to mourning or sadness; we must rejoice greatly instead over all these blessings.

Listen to the exultant words of Saint Paul: God forbid that I should boast of anything but the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. And elsewhere he writes: God shows his own love for us because when we were still sinners Christ died for our sake.

Saint John’s message is the same. God loved the world so much, he declares, and then, passing over every other
manifestation of God’s love, he comes at once to the crucifixion. God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, that is, he gave him up to be crucified, so that those who believed in him might not perish but might have eternal life. If, then, the Cross has its foundation in love and is our glory, we must not say we mourn because of the Cross. Far from it. What we have to mourn over is our own sinfulness, and that is why we fast.

St John Chrysostom, Oratio 3 Adversus Iudaeos (PG 48, 867-868); from Word in Season II, 1st ed. Thursday after Ash Wednesday Year II

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST LEO THE GREAT

Among all the days which Christian devotion holds honourable in many ways, there is none more excellent than the Paschal Feast, through which the dignity of all the solemnities in the Church of God is consecrated. Even the very birth of our Lord from a human mother is credited to this mystery, for there was no other reason for the Son of God to be born than that he could be fixed to a cross. Our mortal flesh was taken up in the womb of a Virgin, and in this mortal flesh the unfolding of his Passion was accomplished. Thus the mercy of God fulfilled a plan too deep for words: Christ’s humanity became for us a sacrifice
of redemption, the destruction of sin, and the firstfruits of resurrection to eternal life.

When we consider what the entire world owes to our Lord’s Cross, we realize our need to prepare for the celebration of Easter by a fast of forty days if we are to take part worthily in these sacred mysteries. It is not only the highest bishops or the priests of the second order, nor the ministers who administer the sacraments alone, but the whole body of the Church and the entire company of the faithful who must be purified, so that in the Temple of God, whose foundation is its Founder himself, every stone may be beautiful and all parts radiant.

If it is reasonable to embellish a king’s palace or governor’s residence with every ornamental art, so that the greater a person’s importance the more splendid his dwelling, what zeal ought to be expended in building the House of God himself, and how distinguished should be its furnishing! No doubt such a task can be neither undertaken nor completed without the architect; nevertheless the builder of the house has given it the power to grow in stature through its own efforts. In the building of this Temple living and intelligent materials are being used, which of their own free will assemble themselves into a single structure at the prompting of the Spirit of grace. There was a time when they neither loved God nor sought him; but he loved and sought them so that they might begin to love and seek him in return. This is what the blessed apostle John speaks of when he says: Let us love God, for he first loved us.
Since therefore the entire company of the faithful and each believer in particular form one and the same Temple of God, there must be the same perfection in each individual as there is in the whole; for even if all are not alike in beauty nor is there equal merit in such a diversity of membership, yet the bond of love ensures communion of beauty among them all. While those who are united in holy love may not all have received the same gifts of grace, they rejoice nonetheless in their mutual blessings. Nothing that they love can be wanting to them, for they become rich in their own increase when they rejoice in another’s progress.

St Leo the Great, Sermon 48.1 (CCL 138A:279-280); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.
Friday after Ash Wednesday Year II

A READING FROM THE TREATISE ON THE HOLY SPIRIT BY ST BASIL

The type manifests things to come by imitating them, foreshadowing future events in order to make them understood. For example, Adam was a type of the One who was to come, the rock was a type of Christ, and the water that flowed from the rock was a type of the life-giving power of the Word, for the Lord said: If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. The manna typified the living bread that came down from heaven and the serpent fixed to the pole typified the saving Passion consummated
upon the Cross, which is why all who looked at it were saved. Similarly, the reason the story is told of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt is that they prefigure those who are saved by baptism. The firstborn of the Israelites were saved in the same way as are the bodies of the baptized, since grace was given to those marked by the blood. For the blood of the lamb was a symbol of the first man who was created and who of necessity still exists in us, transmitted through succeeding generations until the end of the world. The sea and the cloud had the immediate effect of producing faith because of the amazement they aroused, but in relation to the future they were types foreshadowing the grace to come. Who is wise enough to understand these things, to understand how the sea is a type of baptism because it separated the Israelites from Pharaoh just as baptism separates us from the tyranny of the devil? In its waters the sea destroyed the enemy and in baptism is slain our enmity with God. From those waters the people emerged unharmed, and we emerge from the waters of baptism as though we had died and come to life again, saved by the grace of him who called us. As for the cloud, that foreshadowed the gift of the Spirit, who cools the heat of the passions by the mortification of our body.
A READING FROM THE LIFE OF MOSES BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

Let us, like Moses, live a solitary life, no longer entangled with adversaries or mediating between them. Let us live among those of like mind who are fed by us, while all the movements of our soul are led by reason like sheep by their shepherd. Then, as we are living at peace, the truth will shine upon us and its radiance will illuminate the eyes of our soul.

Now this truth is God. Once in an ineffable and mysterious vision it manifested itself to Moses, and it is not without significance for us that the flame from which the soul of the Prophet was illuminated was kindled from a thorn-bush.

If truth is God and if it is also light – two of the sublime and sacred epithets by which the Gospel describes the God
who manifested himself to us in the flesh – it follows that a
virtuous life will lead us to a knowledge of that light which
descended to the level of our human nature. It is not from
some luminary set among the stars that it sheds its
radiance, which might then be thought to have a material
origin, but from a bush on the earth, although it outshines
the stars of heaven.
This also symbolizes the mystery of the Virgin, from whom
came the divine light that shone upon the world without
damaging the bush from which it emanated or allowing the
virgin shoot to wither.
This light teaches us what we must do to stand in the rays
of the true light, and that it is impossible with our feet in
shackles to run toward the mountain where the light of
truth appears. We have first to free the feet of our soul from
the covering of dead skins in which our nature was clad in
the beginning when it dis¬obeyed God’s will and was left
naked.
To know that which is, we must purify our minds of
assump¬tions regarding things which are not. In my
opinion the definition of truth is an unerring
comprehension of that which is. He who is immutable, who
does not increase or diminish, who is subject to no change
for better or worse, but is perfectly self-sufficient; he who
alone is desirable, in whom all else par¬ticipates without
causing in him any diminution, he indeed is that which
truly is, and to comprehend him is to know the truth.
It is he whom Moses approached and whom today all
approach who like Moses free themselves from their
earthly coverings and look toward the light coming from the bramble bush, at the ray shining on us from the thorns, which stand for the flesh, for as the Gospel says, that ray is the real light and the truth. Then such people will also be able to help others find salvation. They will be capable of destroying the forces of evil and of restoring those enslaved by them to liberty.

St Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, 2.17-26 (SC 1:36-39); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.
Sunday of the First Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

As we begin our annual Lenten observance with its solemn call to conversion, it is incumbent upon me to make the customary solemn exhortation to all of you. Indeed, it is more than ever my pastoral duty to nourish your minds with the word of God when you are about to mortify your bodies by fasting, for once you have been inwardly refreshed by the food of the spirit you will be able to undertake physical hardships more courageously and endure them with greater stamina.

We are soon to celebrate the Passion of our crucified Lord. It is therefore in keeping with our commitment to him that we should crucify ourselves by restraining the desires of the flesh. As the Apostle says: You cannot belong to Christ Jesus unless you crucify all your self-indulgent passions and desires. Such is the Cross upon which we Christians
must continually hang, since our whole lives are beset by trials and temptations. Not for us, as long as we live, to be rid of those nails we read of in the psalm: Pierce my flesh with the nails of your fear.

Flesh means the desires of our lower nature; nails, the demands of God’s justice and holiness. With these the fear of the Lord pierces our flesh and fastens us to the Cross as an acceptable sacrifice to him. In a similar passage the apostle Paul appeals to us by the mercy of God to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. To hang on such a Cross brings no shame to the servants of God; it is something in which they glory, as Saint Paul does when he says: Far be it from me to glory in anything except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

This crucifixion, I repeat, is something that must continue throughout our life, not for forty days only. It is true that Moses, Elijah, and our Lord himself fasted for forty days; but in Moses, Elijah, and Christ we are meant to see the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel, and to learn from them not to cling to this present world or imitate its ways, but to nail our unregenerate selves to the Cross. Christians must always live in this way, without any wish to come down from their Cross, otherwise they will sink beneath the world's mire. But if we have to do so all our lives, we must make an even greater effort during these days of Lent. It is not a simple matter of living through forty days; Lent is the epitome of our whole life.
The mystery of the Lord’s Passion was ordained before the beginning of time for the salvation of the human race and foretold by many signs in every era of the past. No longer do we look forward to something yet to be made manifest; we bow in adoration before what has already been fulfilled. Both the Old and New Testaments agree for our instruction, and the Gospel story unfolds for us what the prophet’s trumpet had sounded. As Scripture says: Deep calls to deep in the roar of your torrents, since from the depths of each Testament voice answers voice, telling the same story of the glory of God’s grace. What was formerly hidden behind a veil of symbols is now clear in the light of Revelation.

Despite the miracles of performed by our Saviour for all to see, few recognized the presence of Truth himself. If his disciples themselves were troubled by the Passion he voluntarily undertook, and if they yielded to the temptation
of fear when faced with the scandal of the Cross, where can our faith find understanding, our minds find strength, except in the fact that all those events we know to have been accomplished were foretold in the Scriptures? Now the Saviour’s triumph has been accomplished, dearly beloved, and those things which all the words of the Old Testament announced have found their completion, let carnal Jews mourn while spiritual Christians rejoice! This Feast, which has turned into night for unbelievers, shines forth upon us with its light, because the same Cross of Christ brings glory to believers and punishment to unbelievers.

Now that his power and strength have been made manifest in the assumption of human weakness, there must be no sadness among the faithful to cast a shadow upon the Paschal Solemnity. We should not recollect the story of his sufferings with any sadness, since our Lord put the malice of the Jews to such use that his will to show mercy has been fulfilled through their intention to do harm. If, during the exodus of Israel from Egypt, freedom was restored through the blood of a lamb and the wrath of the destroying angel averted through the sacrifice of a beast. And if this deliverance was marked by the institution of a solemn festival, how great should be the joy of Christian people, for whose sake the almighty Father spared not his only Son but delivered him up for us all! Consequently that Passover in the killing of Christ became the true Passover and unique sacrifice, no longer saving a single people from subjection to Pharaoh, but delivering the whole world from
Those who love Christ should not be troubled at our taking the transformation of the staff into a serpent as a reference to the incarnation. The serpent may seem an incongruous symbol for this mystery and yet it is an image Truth himself does not repudiate, since he says in the Gospel: As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. And the meaning is clear. Holy Scripture calls the father of sin a serpent, so what is born of him must be a serpent too; sin must have the same name as its father. Now since the Apostle asserts that the Lord was made sin for our sake by clothing himself in our sinful nature, it cannot be inappropriate to apply this symbol to him. If sin is a serpent and the Lord became sin, it must be obvious to all that in becoming sin he became a serpent, which is simply another name for sin. He became a serpent for our sake, so that he could consume and destroy the serpents of Egypt brought to life.
by the sorcerers. Once he had done this he was changed into a staff again, and by this staff sinners are chastised and those who are climbing the difficult ascent of virtue are supported. With good hope they lean upon the staff of faith, since faith is the assurance of things hoped for. Those who attain an understanding of these mysteries become gods in comparison with people who resist the truth, who are seduced by the deceitfulness of the material and contingent, and disdain as useless listening to Him Who Is. They value nothing but material benefits satisfying to their irrational instincts.

On the other hand, those who receive strength from the Light and great power and authority over their enemies are like well-trained athletes, stripping to confront their opponents with courage and confidence. They hold in their hands the staff which is the teaching of faith, and by that staff they will conquer the serpents of Egypt.

St Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, 2.31-36 (SC
Nearly all readers of the Book of Exodus, both believers and unbelievers, are disturbed at the frequently occurring words, The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and, I will harden the heart of Pharaoh. For among many other causes of men’s disbelief we must include this: that things unworthy of God are spoken about God; and it is unworthy of God to bring about the hardening of any man’s heart so that he may disobey the will of him who hardens. For readers who are convinced that there is no other God but the Creator think that God arbitrarily has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and hardens whom he will, when there is no reason why this should be so. Others, better advised than these, say they look upon Scripture as containing many secrets, and do not on that account turn aside from the sound faith. One of the secrets they hold to be the true account of this portion of Scripture. Others, alleging that there is a God other than the Creator, will have him to be just but not good, very foolishly and impiously going the length of severing righteousness from goodness.

For ourselves, we are convinced, as we study the sacred Scriptures and contemplate creation with its evidence of orderly design, that things visible and invisible, things temporal and things eternal, come from God the Creator, who is the same with the Father of our Lord and Saviour,
the good and just and wise God. In handling the Scriptures we strive to keep that steadily in view, begging God our Saviour to show us all things pertaining to a good and just and wise God, for we suppose that the things we speak of cannot be regarded, at least by intelligent beings, as the result of chance, but that we must ask ourselves whether they are consistent with his goodness and justice and wisdom.

Something like this, then, we suppose is the meaning of the words, The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh. The Word of God is a physician of souls and uses the most diverse methods of healing the sick. Some of these methods of healing give pain and torment to those who are under treatment, some act speedily and some slowly. The whole of inspired Scripture abounds in proofs of each of these statements. The God who designed souls knows all their different constitutions, and, because he is an expert in the art of healing, it is for him alone to say what is best to be done for each, and when.

So it is, I think, when God says, I will harden the heart of Pharaoh. The one who hears this as the oracle of God accepts it, and whoever seeks, finds a way even here of showing the goodness of God. For through the many miracles the people of Israel were assured of safety; and there was even goodness as regards the Egyptians, because many, amazed at what took place, decided to follow the Hebrews. There was perhaps also a deeper and more secret purpose of benefiting Pharaoh himself, to enable him not to conceal the poison within but to bring it forth into the light,
and then perhaps put a stop to it. Thus, having gone through all the stages of the wickedness within him, he may find the tree which bore the evil fruit less vigorous when he is overwhelmed by the sea; not, as one might suppose, to perish altogether, but that he may be relieved of the burden of his sins, and, perhaps, descend to Hades in peace.

Origen, The Philokalia (compiled by SS Basil and Gregory Nazianzen) 27.1.3-5; tr. G. Lewis (1911).

Thursday of the First Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE TREATISE ON THE PASSOVER BY ORIGEN

Most of the brethren, perhaps all, think that the Passover takes its name from the Passion of the Saviour. Among the Hebrews, however, the real name of this feast means ‘passage’, and should one of us in conversation with Hebrews too rashly mention that the Passover takes its name from the suffering of the Saviour, he would be ridiculed by them as one ignorant of the meaning of the word.

Now when the Apostle says, Christ our paschal lamb has been sacrificed, let us, therefore, celebrate the feast, he teaches us that the Passover still takes place today, that the sheep is sacrificed and that the people come up out of Egypt. If Jesus Christ our Passover has been sacrificed,
those who sacrifice Christ come up out of Egypt, cross the Red Sea, and will see Pharaoh engulfed; and if there are any among you who would like to return to Egypt, they will not enter into the Holy Land.

But the lamb was sacrificed by the saints and Nazirites, while the Saviour was sacrificed by sinners. If the Passover lamb was sacrificed by saints and if Christ our paschal lamb has been sacrificed, then Christ has been sacrificed according to the type of the Passover but not by the saints; thus the Passover is indeed a type of Christ but not of his Passion. It is necessary for us to sacrifice the true lamb and to cook and eat its flesh, but if this did not take place in the Passion of the Saviour, then the antitype of the Passover is not his suffering; rather the Passover becomes the type of Christ himself who was sacrificed for us. To show that the true Passover is something spiritual and not this material Passover, he himself says, Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you. Are we then to eat his flesh and drink his blood in a physical manner? If these words are said spiritually, then the Passover is spiritual not physical.

If the Lamb is Christ and Christ is the Word, what is his flesh that is to be roasted with fire if not the divine Scriptures? Should some cling just to the words themselves, they would eat the flesh of the Saviour raw and would merit death and not life, since the Apostle teaches us that the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life; but the Spirit is given us from God and our God is a devouring fire, so we must roast the Scriptures with this fire. The words are
changed by such a fire and we will see that they are sweet and nourishing.
Finally, just as these mysteries of the Passover which are celebrated in the Old Testament are superseded by the truth of the New Testament, so too will the mysteries of the New Testament, which we must now celebrate in the same way, not be necessary in the resurrection, a time which is signified by the morning in which nothing will he left, and what does remain of it will be burned by fire.

Origen, Treatise on the Passover 1, 3, 12-14, 26, 32; Ancient Christian Writers 54 (1992) tr. Daly.
Friday of the First Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM A TREATISE UPON THE PASSION
BY ST THOMAS MORE

The Lord commanded Moses that on the tenth day of the month they should take for every household a lamb without spot, and on the fourteenth day of the same month in the evening, offer it and eat it up entirely, head, entrails, and all, so that nothing thereof should be left. But if anything were left they should burn it up.
That innocent lamb without spot was a figure signifying our Saviour Christ, the true, innocent Lamb of whom Saint John the Baptist witnessed: Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. By whose immolation and sacrifice on the Cross, and by his holy body received into ours, as that lamb was into theirs, his faithful folk should
be delivered out of the thralldom of the devil’s dominion. And therefore we may to the benefit of our souls consider in the aforesaid figure of these Egyptians, that in Egypt (which by interpretation signifies darkness) do labour to keep in captivity the children of Israel, the people which God calls from their bondage into the liberty of his service – we may, I say, understand by the proud king Pharaoh and his chief captains, that great high, proud prince, the Sultan of Babylon, the devil. And the two special courtiers of that proud, base Sultan we may well consider to be the world and the flesh. And the whole people of the Egyptians under them may well betoken the devilish people, and the worldly people, and the fleshly people that follow them and are willingly governed by them. For truly, all these labour to draw into their service and to make their vassal servants, bondsmen, and slaves all those whom the goodness of God calls out of the dark devilish, worldly, and fleshly subjection into the lightsome liberty of his celestial service.

By the first-begotten children of the Egyptians we may well understand the first motions of sin, such as the subtle inward suggestions of the devil, and the inward incitement of the flesh, and the outward occasions and provocations of the world and evil people, by all which kind of motions good, well-disposed folk are in many ways drawn into sin. And surely these first-begotten children must be killed, not only of the Egyptian people, that is to say the first motions unto such vices as have their origin in the soul, but also the first-begotten of their animals too, that is to say the first
motions unto such vices as specially spring from the sensual animal body, or else it will be very hard for the children of Israel, the well-disposed people, to escape safely out of the bondage of these Egyptians.

St Thomas More, On the Passion, Ch.1, Sermon 1; from Word in Season II, 1st ed.
Saturday of the First Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE PASCHAL HOMILIES OF ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

In Egypt the Israelites sacrificed a lamb at the bidding of Moses, who told them to eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. For seven days, says Scripture, you shall eat unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Must we then continue to observe customs that are only types and symbols? Remember the words of Paul, for he was truly learned in the Law and very wise. He says: We know that the Law is spiritual. Can anyone doubt that he who had Christ within him spoke the plain truth and did not deceive? Moreover, Christ himself said clearly: Do not imagine that I have come to do away with the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to do away with them, but to fulfil them. I assure you that the Law will not lose a single dot or stroke until its
purpose is achieved. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. In what way then must we also fulfil the ancient law?

For us who have been called to live a life of holiness through faith the true lamb has been sacrificed, the lamb that takes away the sin of the world. To this sacrifice we must add a food that is spiritual, wholly good and truly sacred, a food typified in the Law by the unleavened bread, which we now understand in a spiritual way.

In the divinely inspired Scriptures yeast always signifies wickedness and sin. Our Lord Jesus Christ, warning his holy disciples to be on their guard, said: Beware of the yeast of the scribes and Pharisees. And Paul in his great wisdom wrote that those who have once been sanctified should put far from them the yeast of impurity that corrupts mind and heart. Purify yourselves of the old yeast, he urged, and become a fresh batch of bread, since you really are unleavened.

This urgent plea prompted by concern for our well-being shows that spiritual communion with Christ the Saviour of us all is not only a benefit to us but also a real need. It also shows how important it is for us to keep our minds pure by refraining from sin and washing away every stain. In a word, we must avoid everything that defiled us in the past, for it is then, when no fault of ours bars the way and we are wholly free from reproach, that we shall open the way to this communion with Christ.

But we also have to eat bitter herbs. These stand for the bitter sufferings we must undergo, and we should greatly
value the endurance they demand. It would indeed be quite absurd if those desiring to serve God imagined they could achieve great virtue, and glory in the supreme reward, without having first contended for it and given proof of the most steadfast courage. The approach to this goal is rugged and steep, and it is inaccessible to most people. It becomes easy only for those whose desire to arrive is so strong that they are dismayed by nothing and are ready to face hardship and toil. Christ's own words urge us to do this: Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road easy that leads to damnation, and those who enter by it are many. The gate is narrow and the road hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Paschal Homilies 19.2 (PG 77:824-825); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.
Sunday of the Second Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM A HOMILY ON EXODUS BY ORIGEN

Let us consider the path God pointed out to Moses. From Etham, he said, turn back and make your way between Pi-hahiroth and Migdol, which is opposite Baal-zephon. We might suppose a path pointed out by God would be a smooth and pleasant one, free of obstacles and requiring no effort from the traveller, but in fact God’s way is an ascent, a tortuous and rugged climb. There can be no downhill road to virtue – it is uphill all the way, and the path is
narrow and arduous. Listen also to the Lord's warning in the Gospel: The way that leads to life, he says, is narrow and hard. Notice how close the agreement is between the Gospel and the Law. In the Law the way of virtue is shown to be a tortuous climb; the Gospels speak of the way that leads to life as narrow and hard. Is it not obvious then, even to the blind, that the Law and the Gospels were both written by one and the same Spirit?

And so the road they followed was a winding ascent, an ascent surmounted by a beacon. The ascent refers to works and the beacon to faith, so that we can see the great difficulty and laborious effort involved in both faith and works. Many are the temptations we shall meet and many the obstacles to faith that lie in store for us in our desire to pursue the things of God.

Pharaoh said: ‘The Israelites are wandering in the wilderness.’ In his eyes anyone who obeyed God was wandering in the wilderness because the way of wisdom is a tortuous route, rugged and winding. Thus, when we profess our belief in one God and in the same confession assert that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, to unbelievers this seems difficult, incomprehensible, and involved. When we go on to say that the Lord of majesty is also the Son of Man who descended from heaven and was crucified, they find this baffling and cannot understand it. Whoever hears this and cannot respond to it with faith will say of believers: ‘They are wandering in the wilderness.’ But stand firm in your belief, cast aside all doubt, for we know that the way of faith has been laid down for us by
God. We cannot expect the road to life to be a smooth one, free from trials. As Saint Paul warns: All who wish to live a godly life in Christ will suffer persecution. Yet for anyone in search of the perfect life death on the road is preferable to failure even to set out on the quest.

Origen, Homilies on Exodus 5.3-4; from Word in Season II, 1st ed.
Monday of the Second Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE CATECHESSES OF ST CYRIL OF JERUSALEM

I long ago desired, true born and dearly beloved children of the Church, to speak to you concerning these spiritual and heavenly mysteries in which you came to participate. Knowing well that seeing is far more persuasive than hearing, I waited until now with the hope of finding you more open to the influence of my words from the actions you experience. Thus I might take and lead you to the brighter and more fragrant meadow of this present paradise, especially as you have been made fit to receive the more sacred mysteries and have been counted worthy
of divine and life-giving baptism. On that evening of your baptism you entered into the outer hall of the Baptistry, and there facing toward the west you heard the command to stretch forth your hand, and as in the presence of Satan, you renounced him. This figure is found in ancient history. For when Pharaoh, that most cruel and ruthless tyrant, oppressed the free and royal people of the Hebrews, God sent Moses to bring them out of the evil grip of the Egyptians. Then the doorposts were anointed with the blood of the lamb that the destroyer might flee from the houses which had the sign of the blood. And the Hebrew people were marvellously delivered. The enemy, however, after their rescue, pursued them, and saw the sea wondrously parted for them. Nevertheless he went on, following in their footsteps and was all at once overwhelmed and engulfed in the Red Sea.

Now turn from the ancient to the recent, from the figure to the reality. There, we have Moses sent from God to Egypt; here, Christ sent by his Father into the world. There, that Moses might lead forth an oppressed people out of Egypt; here, that Christ might rescue mankind who is overwhelmed with sins. There, the blood of a lamb was the spell against the destroyer; here, the blood of the unblemished Lamb Jesus Christ is made the charm to scare evil spirits. There, the tyrant pursued even to the sea that ancient people; and in like manner this daring and shameless spirit, the author of evil, followed you, even to the very streams of salvation. The tyrant of old was drowned in the sea; and this present one disappears in the
saving water. What then did each of you standing up say? ‘I renounce Satan’, meaning ‘I fear your power no longer, for Christ has overthrown it, having partaken with me of flesh and blood, that through these he might by death destroy death that I might not for ever be subject to bondage. I renounce you, you crafty and most subtle serpent. I renounce you, plotter as you are, who under the guise of friendship brought about disobedience and the apostasy of our first parents. I renounce you, Satan, the source of all wickedness.’

When you renounced Satan, utterly breaking all covenants with him, that ancient connection with hell, there is opened to you the paradise of God, which he planted toward the east, where for his transgression our first father was exiled. Symbolic of this was your turning from the west to the east, the place of light. Then you were told to say: I believe in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, and in one baptism of repentance.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechesis XIX, On the Mysteries 1:1-4.9; from Word in Season II, 2nd ed.
Tuesday of the Second Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON EXODUS BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

We shall think of the manna as a figure foreshadowing the teaching and the spiritual gifts of Christ. These also are
from heaven, and have nothing earthly about them. They produce no physical nausea, and are real food not only of men but of angels as well.

In his own person the Son has revealed the Father to us, and through the Son we have come to believe the teaching about the holy and consubstantial Trinity, and have been well and truly guided into all the paths of virtue. The orthodox and unadulterated knowledge of these things is the food of the spirit.

To the people of old the manna was given at dawn, as the light began to shine, because the wealth of Christ’s teaching would be distributed so to speak by daylight. The day has dawned upon us who believe, as Scripture says; the morning star has risen in all our hearts, and the Sun of Righteousness, Christ, the giver of spiritual manna, has appeared.

From his own words to the Jews we can be certain that Christ himself is the true manna, and the material manna was but an image: Your ancestors ate manna in the desert and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that anyone who eats it may never die. I am the living bread come down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. The bread I shall give is my flesh which I shall give for the life of the world.

Our Lord Jesus Christ nourishes us for eternal life both by his commands, which teach us how to live holy lives, and by the Eucharist. In himself, therefore, he is truly the divine, life-giving manna. Anyone who eats it will be exempt from corruption and will escape death, unlike those
who ate the material manna. The type had no power to save, but was merely an imitation of the reality. God sent down manna like rain from above, and ordered everyone to gather as much as necessary, those who shared a tent gathering together if they wished. Gather it, each of you, he said, with those who share your tent. Let none of it be left over till the morning. That is to say, we must fill ourselves with the divine teaching of the Gospel.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Glaphyra in Exodum 2:3 (PG 69:456-457); from Word in Season II, 1st ed. Wednesday of the Second Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE SERMONS OF ST AELRED OF RIEVAULX

We read in the Old Testament that, after the people of Israel left Egypt with Moses at their head, the Amalekites, a savage race, came and did battle against them. Moses sent an army against them, while he himself went up on to a mountain to pray for them and raised his hands to the Lord. And it came to pass that while he kept his hands raised, the people of Israel were triumphant but whenever
he lowered his hands Amalek started to win. Why was it, do you think, that the raising of his hands possessed such grace? Without doubt God usually takes more account of the attachments of the mind than of the postures of the body.

Why was it then? Did his prayer have no effect before God unless he raised his hands? That lifting up of his hands had such an effect that their enemies could not withstand the Israelites. The reason why this lifting up of hands had such force was that it signified the raising of the hands of him who said in the psalm, The lifting up of my hands is like an evening sacrifice. For, when evening had already come upon the world, his sweetest hands were stretched out on the Cross and there was offered up that evening sacrifice that took away the sins of the whole world.

So that raising of Moses’ hands signified the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ who went up on to a mountain to pray because he ascended into heaven to plead our cause with the Father. There he lifts up his hands so that Amalek – that is, the devil – will not be able to vanquish us. For there he appears in God’s sight on our behalf and represents to him the Passion that he underwent for us. As for us, brothers, as long as we are in this wretched life which is a trial upon earth, as long as our fight is against the principalities and powers, against the rulers of the dark things of the world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens, we need to have our Lord lifting up his hands within us – that is to say, the remembrance of his Passion should be continually present in our minds. We can be
quite sure, my brothers, that as long as the memory of his Passion is in our heart, as long as our hope is directed to where Christ is pleading our cause at the right hand of the Father, the spiritual Amalek – that is, the devil – will not be able to vanquish us. And therefore, my brothers, let us see that this attachment, this remembrance, does not through some negligence on our part grow lukewarm in us. For then we shall immediately grow faint and our enemy will gain the upper hand and cause us distress.

Thursday of the Second Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE INSTITUTES OF ST JOHN CASSIAN

Whoever seeks to be received into the discipline of the cenobium is never admitted until, by lying outside for ten days or more, he has given an indication of his perseverance and desire, as well as of his humility and patience.
When a person has been admitted, has been tested in the perseverance about which we have spoken, and has put aside his own garments and been clothed in the monastic habit, he is not permitted to join the community of the
brothers immediately but is assigned to an elder who
dwells not very far from the entrance of the monastery and
is responsible for being hospitable to travellers and
strangers. And when he has served for a full year there and
has without any complaining waited upon travellers,
having in this way been exposed to his first training in
humility and patience, and he is about to be admitted from
this to the community of the brothers, he is given over to
another elder who is responsible for ten younger men, who
have been entrusted to him by the Abba. This elder both
teaches and rules them in accordance with what we read
in Exodus was established by Moses.
The chief concern and instruction of this man, whereby the
young man who was brought to him may be able to ascend
even to the loftiest heights of perfection, will be, first of
all, to teach him to conquer his desires. In order to exercise
him assiduously and diligently in this respect, he will
purposely see to it that he always demands of him things
that he would consider repulsive. For, taught by numerous
experiences, they declare that a monk, and especially the
younger men, cannot restrain their yearning for pleasure
unless they have first learned to mortify their desires
through obedience. And so they assert that someone who
has not first learned to overcome his desires can never
extinguish anger or sadness or the spirit of fornication,
nor can he maintain true humility of heart or unbroken
unity with his brothers or a solid and enduring peace, nor
can he even stay in the cenobium for any length of time.
With these institutes, then, as with the rudiments of the
alphabet, they initiate those whom they strive to direct toward perfection. In this way they discern clearly whether they are grounded in a humility that is deceptive and imaginary or in one that is real. In order to be able to arrive easily at this, they are then taught never, through a hurtful shame, to hide any of the wanton thoughts in their hearts but to reveal them to their elder as soon as they surface, nor to judge them in accordance with their own discretion but to credit them with badness or goodness as the elder's examination discloses and makes clear. Thus the clever foe is never able to get the better of a young man when he sees that he is protected not by his own but by his elder's discretion. Indeed, the devil in all his slyness will not be able to deceive or cast down a young man unless he induces him, either by haughtiness or by embarrassment, to cover up his thoughts. For they declare that it is an invariable and clear sign that a thought is from the devil if we are ashamed to disclose it to an elder.

Friday of the Second Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE LIFE OF MOSES BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

Moses entered into the darkness and there he saw God. What does this signify? This present account seems in a way to contradict that of the first theophany. Then God
appeared in light, but now he appears in darkness. Yet we must not imagine this to be at variance with our normal experience of spiritual contemplation. By this statement the text teaches us that religious knowledge is first experienced as light. All that is seen to be opposed to religion is darkness, and darkness vanishes when we receive the light. But the more the mind advances and by ever increasing and more perfect application attains an intellectual comprehension of realities and approaches contemplation, the more clearly it sees that the divine nature is invisible. Having left behind all appearances, not only those perceived by the senses but also those the intellect seems to see, it plunges ever deeper within itself, until by spiritual effort it penetrates to the invisible and the unknowable, and there it sees God.

This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness. This is why John the contemplative, who had penetrated this luminous darkness, said that no one had ever seen God, declaring by this negation that the divine essence is beyond the reach not only of men but of every rational nature as well.

And so, when Moses had advanced in knowledge he declared that he saw God in the darkness, or in other words that he recognized that the Divinity is essentially that which transcends all knowledge and which no mind can apprehend. The text says: Moses entered into the darkness
where God was. What God? He who has made the darkness his covering, as David declared, who had himself been initiated into the divine mysteries in that same sanctuary.

When Moses arrived there, he was taught by word what he had formerly learned from darkness, so that, I think, the doctrine on this matter may be made more firm for us by the witness of the divine voice. The divine word at the beginning forbade that the Divine be likened to any of the things known by men, since every concept which comes from some comprehensible image constitutes an idol of God and does not proclaim God.

St Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, 2.162-66 (SC 1, 80-82); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.  
Saturday of the Second Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Make it up with your adversary while he is with you on the road. This life is called a road, along which everybody travels. And this adversary does not go away. But who is
this adversary? This adversary is not the devil, for Scripture would never urge you to come to an agreement with the devil. So who is this adversary? It is the word of God. Why is it your adversary? Because it commands things against the grain which you do not do. It tells you: Your God is one; worship one God. What you want is to put away the one God who is like the lawful husband of your soul and go fornicating, and what is much more serious, not openly deserting and repudiating him as apostates do, but remaining in your husband’s house and letting in adulterers. That is, as if you were a Christian you do not leave the Church but you consult astrologers or sorcerers.

You are told, Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain and you are told to observe the Sabbath in a spiritual way, in hope of the future rest which the Lord has promised you. Whoever does whatever he can for the sake of that future rest, even though what he is doing seems toilsome, nonetheless he already has the Sabbath in hope, though he does not yet have it in fact. But as for you, the reason you want to rest is in order to work, whereas you ought to be working in order to rest. You are told, Honour your father and your mother. You heap insults on your parents, which you certainly do not want to endure from your children. You are told, You shall not kill. But you want to kill your enemy; and the only reason you do not do it is that you are afraid of the human judge. Do you not realize that God is the witness of your thoughts? The man you want dead is alive, but God holds you to be a murderer
in your heart.
You were singing earlier on: O God, I will sing you a new song, on a harp of ten strings I will play to you. Now I am strumming these ten strings. You see, the decalogue of the Law has ten commandments. These ten commandments are arranged in such a way that three refer to God and seven refer to men. Commandments on three strings refer to God. But to the other commandment, that is, the love of neighbour, seven strings refer to how people should live together. This series of seven, like seven strings, begins with the honouring of parents: Honour your father and your mother. God gave his servant Moses two tablets on the mountain, and on these two stone tablets were inscribed the ten commandments of the Law – the harp of ten strings – three referring to God on one tablet, and seven referring to our neighbour on the other tablet. Let us join these to those three that refer to love of God, if we wish to sing the new song to the harp of the ten strings.
The ten commandments are reducible to those two commandments, that we should love God and our neighbour, and these two to the one we are looking for: What you do not want done to you, do not do to another. There the ten are contained, and there also are contained the two. Sing to the harp of ten strings, sing a new song, and come to an agreement with the word of God, while it is with you on the road.

St Augustine, Sermon 9:1-3, 6-7, 14, 16; from Word in Season II, 2nd ed.
A READING FROM THE DEGREES OF HUMILITY AND PRIDE BY ST BERNARD

Knowledge of the truth comprises three degrees, which I will try to set out as briefly as possible. In the first place we seek truth in ourselves; then we seek it in our neighbour, and last of all we search for truth in its own essential nature. We discover truth in ourselves when we pass judgment on ourselves; we find it in our neighbour when we suffer in sympathy with others; we search out its own nature by contemplation in purity of heart.

Notice not only the number of these degrees, but also their order. Before we inquire into the nature of truth, Truth itself must first teach us to seek it in our neighbour. Then we shall understand why, before we find it in our neighbour, we must seek it in ourselves. The sequence of beatitudes given in the Sermon on the Mount places the merciful before the pure in heart. The merciful are those who are quick to see truth in their neighbour; they reach out to others in compassion and identify with them in love, responding to the joys and sorrows in the lives of others as if they were their own. They make themselves weak with the weak, and burn with indignation when others are led astray. They are always ready to share the joys of those who rejoice and the sorrows of those who mourn.

Men whose inner vision has thus been cleansed by the exercise of charity toward their neighbour can delight in
the contemplation of truth in itself, for it is love of truth which makes them take upon themselves the misfortunes of others. But can people find the truth in their neighbour if they refuse to support their brothers in this way – if on the contrary they either scoff at their tears or disparage their joys, being insensitive to all feelings but their own? There is a popular saying which well suits them: A healthy person cannot feel the pains of sickness, nor can one who is well-fed feel the pangs of hunger. The more familiar we are with sickness or hunger, the greater will be our compassion for others who are sick or hungry.

Just as pure truth can only be seen by the pure in heart, so the sufferings of our fellow men and women are more truly felt by hearts that know suffering themselves. However, we cannot sympathize with the wretchedness of others until we first recognize our own. Then we shall understand the feelings of others by what we personally feel, and know how to come to their help. Such was the example shown by our Saviour, who desired to suffer himself in order that he might learn to feel compassion, and to be afflicted in order that he might learn how to show mercy. Scripture says of him that he learned the meaning of obedience through what he suffered. In the same way he learned the meaning of mercy. Not that the Lord whose mercy is from age to age was ignorant of mercy’s meaning until then; he knew its nature from all eternity, but he learned it by personal experience during his days on earth.
In the twenty-fourth chapter of Exodus it is related that Moses, in confirmation of the old Law, put half the blood of the sacrifice into a cup, and the other half he shed upon the altar. And, after the book of the Law had been read, he sprinkled the blood upon the people and said unto them: This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in all these words. And so was the Old Testament ratified and confirmed with blood. And in like manner was the New Testament confirmed with blood, saving that, in order to declare the greater excellence of the New Testament brought by the Son of God, above the Old Testament brought by the prophet Moses, whereas the Old Testament was ratified with the blood of a brute beast, the New Testament was ratified with the blood of a rational man, and of that man who was also God, that is to say, with the blessed blood of our holy Saviour himself. And that self-same blood did our Lord here give unto his apostles in this blessed sacrament, as he plainly declared himself, saying: This is my blood of the New Testament, or: This is the chalice of the New Testament in my blood which shall be shed for you and for many for the remission of sins. When our Lord said this, he declared therein the efficacy of
the New Testament above the old, in that the old Law in
the blood of beasts could only promise the remission of sin
that was to come later. For as Saint Paul says: It was
impossible that sin should be taken away by the blood of
brute beasts. But the new Law with the blood of Christ
does perform the thing that the old Law promised, that is,
the remission of sin And therefore our Saviour said: This is
the chalice of the New Testament in my blood – that is, to
be confirmed in my blood – which shall be shed for the
remission of sins.
His words also declared the wonderful excellence of this
new blessed sacrament above the sacrifice of the paschal
lamb, in these words: For you and for many. For in these
words our Saviour spoke, says Saint Chrysostom, as
though he meant to say: The blood of the paschal Lamb
was shed only for the first-born among the children of
Israel, but this blood of mine shall be shed for the
remission of the sin of all the whole world.
A READING FROM ON THE DIVINE IMAGES BY ST JOHN OF DAMASCUS

God, the best physician of souls, prohibits from making images those who are still infants and ill with a diseased inclination to idolatry, those who are apt to venerate idols as gods. For it is impossible to make an image of God who is incorporeal, invisible, and with neither shape nor circumscription; how can what cannot be seen be depicted? That they did venerate idols as gods, listen to what Scripture says in Exodus, when Moses went up on to Mount Sinai and was there for some time, waiting to receive the Law from God. The senseless people rose up against the servant of God, Aaron, saying, Make us gods to go before us; as for this man, Moses, we do not know what has become of him.

I know what the One who cannot lie said: The Lord your God is one Lord, and you shall not make any carved likeness, of anything in heaven or on the earth, and all who venerate carved images shall be put to shame. I venerate one God, one divinity but also I worship a trinity of persons, God the Father and God the Son incarnate and God the Holy Spirit. I do not offer three venerations, but one, not to each of the persons separately, but I offer one veneration to the three persons together as one God. I do not venerate the creation instead of the creator, but I venerate the Creator, created for my sake, who came down to his creation that he might glorify my nature and bring
about communion with the divine nature. I venerate together with the King and God the purple robe of his body, not as a garment, nor as a fourth person (God forbid!), but as unchangeably equal to God and the source of anointing. For the nature of the flesh did not become divinity, but as the Word became flesh immutably, remaining what it was, so also the flesh became the Word without losing what it was, being rather made equal to the Word hypostatically. Therefore I am emboldened to depict the invisible God, not as invisible, but as he became visible for our sake, by participation in flesh and blood. I do not depict the invisible divinity, I depict God made visible in the flesh.

It was, therefore, for the Jews, on account of their sliding into idolatry, that these things were ordained by the Law. To speak theologically, however, we, who, passing beyond childhood to reach maturity, are no longer under a custodian, have received the habit of discrimination from God and know what can be depicted and what cannot be delineated in an image. For it is now clear that you cannot depict the invisible God. When you see the bodiless become human for your sake, then you may accomplish the figure of a human form; then you may depict him on a board and set up to view the One who has accepted to be seen. Depict his ineffable descent, his birth from the Virgin, his being baptized in the Jordan, his transfiguration on Tabor, what he endured to secure our freedom from passion, the miracles which are symbols of his divine nature and activity accomplished through the activity of the
flesh, the saving tomb of the Saviour, the resurrection, the ascent into heaven. Depict all these in words and in colours, in books and on tablets.

St John of Damascus, On the Divine Images III. 4, 6, 8; (1996) tr. Andrew Louth
Wednesday of the Third Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 118
BY ST AMBROSE

Let your face shine on your servant, and teach me your precepts. The Lord enlightens his saints and makes his light shine in the hearts of the just. This means that when you see wisdom in anyone you can be sure that the glory of God has come down and flooded that person’s mind with the light of understanding and knowledge of divine truth. With Moses, however, it was different: God’s glory affected his body also, causing his face to shine. Indeed, his countenance was so transfigured that the Jews were afraid to look at him, and he was obliged to cover his face with a veil so that the children of Israel should not be alarmed at the sight of it.

Now the face of Moses represents the splendour of the Law; yet this splendour is not to be found in the written letter but in the Law’s spiritual interpretation. As long as Moses lived, he wore a veil over his face whenever he spoke to the Jewish people. But after his death Jesus, or Joshua, the son of Nun, spoke to the elders and the people
without a veil. When he did so no one was afraid, even though God had spoken to Joshua as well as to Moses, assuring him that he would be with him just as he had been with Moses and would make him resplendent also. Joshua's glory, however, would be seen in his deeds rather than in his face. By this the Holy Spirit signified that when Jesus, the true Joshua, came, he would lift the veil from the heart of anyone who turned to him in willingness to listen, and that person would then see his true Saviour with unveiled face.

So it was that, through the coming of his Son, God the almighty Father made his light shine into the hearts of the Gentiles, bringing them to see his glory in the face of Christ Jesus. This is clearly stated in the Apostle’s letter, where we find the following written: The God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has made his light shine in our hearts, to enlighten us with the knowledge of God’s glory shining in the face of Christ Jesus.

And so when David says to the Lord Jesus: Let your face shine upon your servant, he is expressing his longing to see the face of Christ, so that his mind may be capable of enlightenment. These words can be taken as referring to the incarnation, for as the Lord himself declared: Many prophets and righteous men have desired to have this vision. David was not asking for what had been denied to Moses, namely that he might see the face of the incorporeal God with his bodily eyes. (And yet if Moses, who was such a wise and learned man, could ask for this direct,
unmediated vision, it was because it is inherent in our human nature for our desire to reach out beyond us.) There was nothing wrong, therefore, in David’s desire to see the face of the Virgin’s Son who was to come; he desired it in order that God’s light might shine in his heart, as it shone in the hearts of the disciples who said: Were not our hearts burning within us when he opened up the Scriptures to us? St Ambrose, On Psalm 118 17:26-29 (CSEL 62:390-392); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.
Thursday of the Third Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE TREATISE ON PRAYER BY TERTULLIAN

Prayer is the spiritual offering that has replaced the ancient sacrifices. What good do I receive from the multiplicity of your sacrifices? asks God. I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams, and I do not want the fat of lambs and the blood of bulls and goats. Who has asked for these from your hands? What God has asked for, we learn from the Gospel: The hour will come, it says, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. God is spirit, and so he looks for worshipers who are like himself. We are the true worshipers and the true priests. Praying in spirit we offer prayer to God as a sacrifice. Prayer is an appropriate and an acceptable sacrifice to God. It is the offering he has asked for and the offering he expects. We must make this offering with our whole heart. We must fatten it on faith, prepare it by truth, keep it unblemished
by innocence, spotless by chastity, and we must crown it
with love. We must escort it to the altar of God in a
procession of good works to the sound of psalms and
hymns. Then it will gain for us all that we ask of God.
What can God refuse to prayer offered in spirit and in
truth, when he himself asks for such prayer? How many
proofs of its efficacy we read about, hear of, and believe!
Of old prayer brought deliverance from fire and beasts and
hunger even before it received its pattern from Christ. How
much greater then is the power of Christian prayer! It does
not bring an angel of comfort to the heart of a fiery
furnace, or shut the mouths of lions, or transport to the
hungry food from the fields. The grace it wins does not
remove all sense of pain, but it does endow those who
suffer with the capacity to endure and the faith to know
what the Lord will give those who suffer for the name of
God.
In the past prayer caused plagues, routed armies, withheld
the blessing of rain. Now the prayer of good people turns
aside the anger of God, keeps vigil for their enemies,
pleads for their persecutors. If prayer once had the power
to call down fire from heaven, is it any wonder that it can
call down from heaven the waters of grace? Prayer is the
one thing that can conquer God. But Christ has willed that
it should work no evil: all the power he has given it is for
good.
All the angels pray. Every creature prays. Cattle and wild
beasts pray and bend the knee. As they come from their
barns and caves they look up to heaven and call out, lifting
up their spirit in their own fashion. The birds too rise and lift themselves up to heaven: they open out their wings, instead of hands, in the form of a cross, and give voice to what seems to be a prayer.

What more need be said about the duty of prayer? Even the Lord himself prayed. To him be honour and power for ever and ever. Amen.

Tertullian, De oratione 28-29 (CCL 1:273-274); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.
Friday of the Third Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE LIFE OF MOSES BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

What then is that tabernacle not made with hands which was shown to Moses on the mountain and to which he was commanded to look as to an archetype so that he might reproduce it in a handmade structure? God said, See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain. Of what things not made with hands are these an imitation? And what benefit does the material imitation of those things Moses saw there convey to those who look at it?

Taking a hint from what has been said by Paul, who partially uncovered the mystery of these things, we say that Moses was earlier instructed by a type in the in mystery of the tabernacle which encompasses the universe. This
tabernacle would be Christ who is the power and the 
wisdom of God, who in his own nature was not made with 
hands, yet capable of being made when it became 
necessary for this tabernacle to be erected among us. Thus, 
the same tabernacle is in a way both unfashioned and 
fashioned, uncreated in pre-existence but created in having 
received this material composition. This one is the Only 
Begotten God, who encompasses everything in himself but 
who also pitched his own tabernacle among us. 
Whenever the prophet looks to the tabernacle above, he 
sees the heavenly realities through these symbols. But if 
one should look at the tabernacle below, since in many 
places the Church also is called Christ by Paul, he would 
see the Church. In this tabernacle both the sacrifice of 
praise and the incense of prayer are seen offered 
continually at morning and evening. The great David 
allows us to perceive these things when he directs the 
incense of his prayer in an odour of sweetness to God, 
performing his sacrifice through the lifting up of his hands. 
The skin dyed red and the coverings made of hair, which 
add to the decoration of the tabernacle, are per¬ceived 
respectively as the mortification of the sinful flesh and the 
ascetic way of life. By these the tabernacle of the church is 
especially beautified. By nature these skins do not have in 
themselves a vital power, but they become bright red 
because of the red dye. This teaches that grace, which 
flourishes through the Spirit, is not found in men unless 
they first make themselves dead to sin. Whether or not 
Scripture signifies by the red dye chaste modesty, I leave
for whoever wishes to decide. The woven hair, which produced a fabric rough and hard to the touch, foreshadows the self-control which is rough and consumes the habitual passions. The life of virginity demonstrates in itself all such things, as it chastises the flesh of all those who live this way.

If the interior, which is called the Holy of Holies, is not accessible to the multitude, let us not think that this is at variance with the sequence of what has been perceived. For the truth of reality is truly a holy thing, a holy of holies, and is incomprehensible and inaccessible to the multitude. Since it is set in the secret and ineffable areas of the tabernacle of mystery, the apprehension of the realities above comprehension should not be meddled with; one should rather believe that they do exist and that they remain in the secret and ineffable areas of the intelligence.

St Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses 170, 173-175, 184-188; CWS (1978) tr. Malherbe & Ferguson
Saturday of the Third Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Emmanuel, God-with-us, is presented in figure and image when Scripture says: And you will place the ark of the testimony in the tabernacle and cover it with the veil. For in the preceding account the Word was described to us as in the whole tabernacle; for it was the house in which God
dwelt, namely, the holy body of Christ. But despite that, the ark gives us the same meaning in detail. For it was made of acacia wood, for you to perceive his incorruptibility. It was entirely overlaid with pure gold, as it is written, both inside and outside. For everything in him, both divine and human, is precious and splendid; and in everything he is pre-eminent, as Paul says. Gold, then, stands for honour and pre-eminence in general. So the ark was made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold, and had the divine Law put into it as a symbol of the indwelling Word of God united to a holy body. For the Word of God was also the Law, even, if not in human form, as the Son is. But it is covered with the veil.

It was much the same with God the Word made man, the covering of his own body obscured to the many. He, too, was hidden by his holy flesh as by a veil. Some of the Jews, therefore, failing to recognize his divine majesty, sometimes tried to stone him to death, accusing him of claiming to be God, when he was a man. Others again did not hesitate to say: Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How, then, can he say: ‘I have come down from heaven.’ So the laying of a veil on the ark tells us symbolically that Jesus would not be recognized by the many. Then even the ark itself was a symbol of him. So it was even he who went before the Israelites in the desert, taking the place of God at that time; for it was he who led the people. The psalmist is also a witness to this, saying: When you went before your people, O God, when you crossed the desert, the earth shook and
the heavens, too, poured down rain. For the ark being always in front clearly means that God leads the way. For Christ is one, but is understood in many and various ways: he is the tabernacle, because of the veil of flesh; he is the ark, containing the divine Law, as he is the Word of God the Father; again he is the table, as life and nourishment; the lampstand, as intellectual and spiritual light; he is the altar of sacrifice, as the fragrant odour in sanctity; and the altar of offerings, as an offering for the life of the world. Thus all things in life are sanctified, for Christ is entirely holy, in whatever way he is understood.

St Cyril of Alexandria, On John IV.4 (PG 73:620-621, 625); from Word in Season II, 2nd ed.
Sunday of the Fourth Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ST JOHN’S GOSPEL BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

As a man the Mediator between God and man intercedes on our behalf, and because he is our very great and most holy High Priest who offers himself as a sacrifice for us, his prayers appease the anger of his Father. Christ is himself both sacrifice and priest, both mediator and victim without blemish, the true lamb who takes away the sin of
the world.
The mediation of Moses in ancient times was a clear type and symbol of the mediation of Christ as manifested in the last days, and the high priest of the Law was a figure of the High Priest who is above the Law. Indeed, all that relates to the Law is a fore-shadowing of the truth. The saintly Moses, and with him the celebrated Aaron, always stood between God and the people of Israel. They placated God’s anger at the people’s sins, calling on heaven to be merciful to their weakness; they invoked blessings on them and offered the sacrifice and gifts ordained by the Law for sins, or as thank-offerings for the blessings God had given them. But Christ, who appeared in the last days to supersede the types and symbols of the Law, is both High Priest and Mediator. As a man he intercedes for us, but as God he is one with God the Father in bestowing blessings upon those who are worthy of them. Paul’s saying, Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, teaches us this quite clearly. Christ prays for us as a man, but as God he also gives. For being a High Priest who is holy, innocent, and undefiled, he did not offer himself in sacrifice for his own frailty as did those to whom it fell to offer sacrifice according to the Law. No, it was for the salvation of our souls and on account of our sin that he made this offering, and made it once for all. He undertook to plead on our behalf and he is himself the sacrifice for our sins, and not for our sins only but also for the sins of the whole world, for the sins of every nation and race that is called to attain righteousness and holiness through faith.
Monday of the Fourth Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF BARNABAS

Bear in mind, O children of joy, that there is not a single thing which the Lord in his goodness has not made clear to us beforehand, so that we may know to whom all our thanks and praises are due. Though the Son of God was the divine Lord, and the future Judge of living and dead alike, yet nevertheless he suffered, in order that his affliction might win life for us.

Notice the directions he gave. Take a couple of goats, unblemished and well-matched; bring them for an offering, and let the priest take one of them for a burnt offering. And what are they to do with the other? The other, he declares, is accursed. (Now see how plainly the type of Jesus appears.) Spit on it, all of you; thrust your goads into
it, wreathe its head with scarlet wool, and so let it be driven out into the desert. This is done, and the servant leads the animal into the desert, where he takes off the wool and leaves it there, on the bush we call a bramble (the plant we usually eat the berries of, if we come across it in the countryside; nothing has such tasty fruit as a bramble).

Now what does that signify? Notice that the first goat is for the altar, and the other is accursed; and that it is the accursed one that wears the wreath. That is because they shall see him on That Day clad to the ankles in his red woollen robe, and will say, ‘Is not this he whom we once crucified, and mocked and pierced and spat upon? Yes, this is the man who told us that he was the son of God.’ But how will he resemble the goat? The point of there being two similar goats, both of them fair and alike, is that when they see him coming on the Day, they are going to be struck with terror at the manifest parallel between him and the goat. In this ordinance, then, you are to see typified the future sufferings of Jesus.

But why should they put the wool on the thorns? This too is a type of Jesus, meant for the Church’s instruction. For if one wanted to take the scarlet wool for himself, it would cost him much suffering, since the thorns were fearsome and could only be mastered with anguish. Similarly, says he, those who would behold me and possess my kingdom must go through affliction and suffering before they can reach me.

What now, do you suppose, is the significance of his next direction to the Jews? Men whose sins had come to a head
were to bring a heifer for an offering, and slay it and burn it. Then, after gathering up the ashes and putting them into basins of water, young children were to tie scarlet wool on branches of wood (here again, you see, we have the scarlet wool and the type of the Cross), together with sprigs of hyssop; and with these the people were to be sprinkled, man by man, by the youngsters, to cleanse them from their sins. See how clearly he is speaking to you here! The calf is Jesus, and the sinners who offer it are those who dragged him to the slaughter. Why was the wool put on living wood? Because the royal realm of Jesus is founded on a Tree, and they who hope in him shall have eternal life. To ourselves it is plain enough that these were the true reasons for doing things in this way; but to them it was all dark, because their ears were deaf to the voice of the Lord.

The Letter of Barnabas 7-8; Ancient Christian Writers 6 (1948) tr. Kleist.
Tuesday of the Fourth Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE WRITINGS OF ST DOROTHEUS OF GAZA

When God created man, he implanted in us something of his own divinity, in the way of a more ardent disposition, with a shining spark of reason to illuminate our minds and teach us the difference between good and evil. This is called conscience, which is the natural law. It was by submitting to this law, that is, to the conscience, that the
patriarchs and all the faithful in the days before the written Law were well-pleasing to God. But since conscience was clogged and trampled on by humanity in general through successive sins, we needed the written Law, we needed the holy Prophets, and we needed the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to uncover and awaken it, and to bring the buried spark back to life through the observance of his holy commands. So it is now up to us either to keep it buried, or to allow it to shine in us and illuminate us if we obey it. For when our conscience tells us to do something and we ignore it, and it speaks again and we still do nothing but trample on it, we finally bury it, and it can no longer speak clearly to us because of the weight pressing on it. Let us take the greatest care, then, brothers, to guard our conscience as long as we live in this world, and not allow it to convict us of any wrongdoing, nor despise it even in the smallest matters for any reason at all. For, as you know, from scorning such small and supposedly unimportant things we are led to despise even great things. Both living a good life and living a life of sin grow from small beginnings, to end in either great good or great evil. Then we must guard our conscience in relation to God, in relation to our neighbour and in relation to material things. In relation to God, so as not to despise his commands, even if no one sees us or expects anything of us. We guard our conscience for God in secret, for instance, when we do not neglect prayers and, when our mind is inflamed with passion, we agree to calm down and relax; and, when we see our neighbour talking or doing anything, we refrain
from suspecting and condemning him for appearing to be up to no good. Guarding our conscience in relation to our neighbour means to do nothing at all which we know will distress or frighten our neighbour, either by deed, word, gesture or look. For, as I have often told you before, even a gesture can upset a neighbour, and so can a look. Guarding our conscience in relation to material things means not to misuse anything, nor let anything be wasted or left lying about, but if we see anything lying about not to ignore it, even if it is something quite unimportant, but pick it up and return it to its right place; it also means not to neglect our clothes. Equally with food: you can satisfy your needs with a small amount of vegetables or lentils, or a few olives; but to refuse to do so, and to insist on having either pleasanter or more expensive food – all such things are against conscience.

St Dorotheus of Gaza, On Conscience, 40-45 (SC 92:209-216); from Word in Season II, 2nd ed. Wednesday of the Fourth Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON LEVITICUS BY ORIGEN

The omnipotent God, who lays down for men the contest of observing his Law in this world, lists what ought to be done and not done, announces suitably at the end of the book of Leviticus where each individual observance is
established, what reward he who fulfils them bears and what punishment he who does not observe them undergoes. But if the Law, according to what the Jews maintain, is not spiritual but carnal, there is no doubt that he grants carnally observed blessings also to those who observe them carnally. But if, as it seems to the Apostle Paul, the Law is spiritual then it must be observed spiritually and there is a spiritual reward of the blessings for which they hope. For it is by a perfect logic that the spiritual Law gives spiritual blessings and by a no less perfect logic that the curses and condemnations of the spiritual Law are not physical. So that what we say may not be doubted, let us hear the voice of the Apostle Paul himself writing about spiritual blessings to the Ephesians: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in heaven.

And you will eat your bread in abundance. I do not take that to be a physical blessing, as if he who keeps the Law of God obtains this ordinary bread in abundance. Why? Do not the impious and wicked eat bread not only in abundance but even in delight? Therefore, if we turn our attention more to him who said, I am the living bread which descended from heaven, and whoever eats this bread will live forever, and if we consider that he who said this was the Word by which souls are nourished, then we will understand about which bread it was said, And you will eat your bread in abundance. In Proverbs, Solomon also proclaims similar things about the just man when he says, When the just man eats, he will fill his soul; but the souls
of the impious will be in extreme poverty. If you take it according to the literal sense, it appears false. For the souls of the impious take food with eagerness and strive after satiety; but the just meanwhile are hungry. Paul was just and he said, Up to this hour we are hungry, and thirsty, and naked, and we are beaten with fists. But if you consider how the just man always and without interruption eats from the living bread and fills his soul with the heavenly food which is the Word of God and his Wisdom, you will find how the just man eats his bread in abundance from the blessing of God.

And you will dwell secure upon your land. The unjust man is never secure but is always moved and wavers and is carried about by every wind of doctrine. But the just man who keeps the Law of God dwells secure upon his land. For his understanding is made firm by saying to God, Confirm me, O Lord, in your words. Therefore, he lives upon his land grounded in the faith because his building is not placed upon sand, and his root is not ‘upon a rock’, but indeed his house was founded upon the earth, but his plant took root in the depth of the earth, that is, in the interior of his soul. Therefore, it is rightly said to a soul of this kind in the blessings, You will dwell secure upon your land; and I will give peace upon your land.

Origen, In Lev. 16:1-3, 4-5; Fathers of the Church 83 (1990) tr. G.W. Buckley.

Thursday of the Fourth Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM AGAINST THE HERESIES BY ST
From the beginning God formed man in view of his gifts. He chose the Patriarchs in order to save them. He began to prepare a people, teaching it, obstinate as it was, to follow him. He provided Prophets, to make men accustomed to having God’s Spirit within them and to having communion with God. God indeed needed no one’s company, but he shared his company with those who needed him. For those who pleased him he set down, like an architect, his plan of salvation. In his own person he gave guidance to his people in Egypt, though they did not see him. To those in the desert, who were restless, he gave an appropriate Law. To those who entered the good land he gave a fitting inheritance. For those who returned to the Father he killed the fatted calf, and put on them the best robe in these many ways he blended the human race to a harmony of salvation. For this reason John said in the Apocalypse, His voice was like the sound of many waters. The Spirit of God is indeed like many waters, because the Father is both rich and great. And the Word passing through all those men, without grudging gave help to all who were obedient by drawing up in writing a Law adapted and applicable to every class among them. By this Law he prescribed how they were to make the Tabernacle, build the Temple, choose Levites, offer sacrifices and oblations, carry out rites of purification, and fulfil all the rest of their service. He himself has no need of these things. Even before the time of Moses, every good was to be found in him, and the
origin of every fragrance and all the smoke of pleasant incense. The people were quick to turn back to idols, but God instructed them. Many times he freed them, urging them to persevere in his service. He called them to things of supreme importance by means of things of less importance, that is, he called them by shadows to those things which are real; he called them by temporal things to eternal things, by the carnal to the spiritual, by the earthly to the heavenly.

God told Moses, See that you make them all after the pattern which you have seen on the mountain. For forty days Moses was learning to remember God’s words, the heavenly patterns, the spiritual images, the foreshadowing of things to come. Paul, too, says this, For they drank from that spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Paul, again, listed the things which were in the Law, and concluded, All these things happened to them but they were written down as a warning to us upon whom the end of the ages has come.

By means of shadows they began to learn the fear of God and perseverance in his service. So the Law was both instruction for them and the foretelling of things to come.

St Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 4.14.2-3; 15, 1; from The Divine Office II.

Friday of the Fourth Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE ADORATION AND WORSHIP
The glory of Christ filled the true Tabernacle, which is the Church, from the very moment it was set up on earth. This, surely, is what is signified by the cloud that covered the first Tabernacle. Christ has filled the Church with his glory, and now like a fire, he shines forth to give light to those who live in the darkness of ignorance and error. He shades and protects those already enlightened by the dawn of his day in their hearts. He refreshes them with the heavenly dew of his consolations sent down from above through the Spirit. This is what we should understand by the saying that by night he appeared in the form of fire, and by day in the form of cloud. Those who were as yet uninstructed in the teaching of Christ required spiritual enlightenment to bring them to a knowledge of God; but the more advanced, whose minds had been illumined by faith, were in need of protection from the scorching heat of the day, and of courage to bear the burdens of this present life. For all who desire to live a godly life in Christ will suffer persecution. Whenever the cloud moved forward, the Tabernacle went with it; when the cloud settled, the Tabernacle came to rest with it and the Israelites broke their journey. Now the meaning of this for us is that wherever Christ leads, the Church, the holy multitude of believers, follows him. The faithful are never separated from the Saviour who calls them to himself. We may not be able to find any special meaning in the constant halts and new departures
throughout our spiritual journey under Christ's guidance. It is the whole journey, following the cloud whether it moves forward or settles, that symbolizes our desire to be with God.

Nevertheless, if we would have a more subtle interpretation, we could perhaps say that our first departure is from unbelief to faith, from ignorance to knowledge, and from having no perception of the true God to clear recognition of the Creator and Lord of the universe. The second stage, and an essential one, is conversion from sin and licentiousness to a desire for amendment both in thought and deed. But the best and most glorious is the third part of the journey, because in it we leave behind what is deficient and move onward toward what is perfect both in our actions and in our belief.

So, little by little, we advance toward the ideal we see in Christ, to become the perfect man, sharing in the perfection of Christ himself. This surely is what Saint Paul means by saying: Forgetting what lies behind me and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the goal, the heavenly reward to which God calls me in Christ Jesus.

Saturday of the Fourth Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE CONFERENCES OF ST JOHN CASSIAN
Now something must be said about the renunciations which the tradition of the Fathers and the authority of Holy Scripture show to be three and which each one of us ought to pursue with all our zeal. The first is that by which in bodily fashion we despise all the wealth and resources of the world. The second is that by which we reject the former behaviour, vices, and affections of soul and body. The third is that by which we call our mind away from everything that is present and visible and contemplate only what is to come and desire those things that are invisible. We read that the Lord commanded Abraham to do these three things all at once when he said to him, Leave your country and your kinsfolk and your father’s house. First he spoke of your country – namely, of the resources of this world and of earthly wealth; secondly, of your kinsfolk – namely, of the former way of life and behaviour and vices that have been related to us from our birth by a connection as it were of a certain affinity or consanguinity; thirdly, of your father’s house – namely, of every vestige of this world which the eyes gaze upon. Therefore, if we desire to achieve true perfection we ought to strive so that, just as with our body we have disdained parents, homeland, wealth, and the pleasures of the world, we may also in our heart abandon all these things and not turn back again in our desires to what we have left behind, like those who were led out by Moses. Although, to be sure, they did not return in body, nonetheless they are said to have turned back to Egypt in their heart, for they
abandoned the God who had led them out with such powerful signs and they venerated the idols of Egypt that they had once disdained. Scripture recalls it thus: In their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron: Make for us gods who will go before us. We would be censured along with those who dwelled in the desert and who desired the disgusting food of vice and filthiness after having eaten the heavenly manna, and we would seem to complain like them: It was well with us in Egypt, when we sat over pots of flesh and ate onions and garlic and cucumbers and melons. Although this manner of speaking first referred to that people, nonetheless we see it now daily fulfilled in our life and profession. For everyone who has first renounced this world and then returns to his former pursuits and his erstwhile desires proclaims that in deed and in intention he is the same as they were, and he says: ‘It was well with me in Egypt’. I fear that there will be found as many such people as we read there were multitudes of sinners in the time of Moses. For although six hundred and three thousand armed men were said to have left Egypt, no more than two of these entered the promised land. Hence we must strive to take our models of virtue from the few and far between, since, according to that figure of speech in the Gospel, many are said to be called but few are said to be chosen. Bodily renunciation and removal from Egypt, as it were, will be of no value to us, therefore, if we have been unable to obtain at the same time the renunciation of heart which is more sublime and more beneficial.
According to St Paul, everything that happened to the Israelites was symbolic, and was recorded as a warning to us. If this is so we should try to learn what we can from the story of Aaron and Miriam, who were rebuked by God for speaking against their brother Moses. Miriam received the additional punishment of leprosy. The chosen people took this chastisement so much to heart that they discontinued their journey to the promised land, and the Tent of the Presence stood still, until Miriam had completed her seven days’ exclusion from the camp. What we are given here, in the first place, is a useful and necessary lesson not to speak ill of our neighbours, and not to make derogatory remarks about good and holy people, or indeed about anyone at all, when we see the anger and vengeance of God that result. Those who do so may be said to speak against Moses. Because of this they become spiritual lepers; their unclean hearts exclude them from the camp which is the Church of God. Now whether speaking against Moses means that these
people are heretics, or whether they are members of the Church who slander their brothers and sisters and speak ill of their neighbours, there is no doubt that all who practise this vice are lepers at heart. In the case of Miriam, this leprosy was healed on the seventh day, thanks to the intervention of Aaron the High Priest; but as for us, if we allow ourselves to indulge our cruel habit of speaking ill of people and our souls are punished with leprosy, we shall continue in our spiritual uncleanness until the last day of all, that is until the day of resurrection, unless we change our ways while there is still time for us to repent and turn to the Lord Jesus, asking him to help us to do penance and be purified.

And now let us hear the account of what happened afterward, and how the Holy Spirit paid tribute to Moses. Scripture tells us that the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the door of the Tent of the Presence. Aaron and Miriam were summoned, and they both came forward. The Lord said to them: Listen to my words. If any one of you is a prophet, I make myself known to him in visions, and speak to him in dreams. It is not so, however, with my servant Moses; he alone is faithful of all my household. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not by means of symbols or parables, and he has seen the glory of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? Scripture goes on to say that the Lord’s anger struck them, and he dismissed them from his presence. When the cloud departed from the tent, there stood Miriam, white as snow with leprosy.
You see what punishment those envious tongues brought on themselves, and in contrast what honours they earned for the brother they had abused. He was honoured, they were disgraced; he was covered with glory, they were covered with leprosy; he was praised, they were blamed.

Origen, In Num. 7.1-2 (SC 29:133-136); Word in Season II, 1st ed.
Monday of the Fifth Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM A LETTER BY ST AUGUSTINE

When the time came for the grace of the New Testament to be revealed through the man Christ Jesus, there was no question of his attracting us to himself with the promise of earthly happiness. This explains our Lord’s willingness to undergo suffering, to be scourged, spat upon, mocked, nailed to the Cross, and to accept death itself like one conquered and humiliated. All this he endured so that those who believed in him might learn what recompense for their dutiful service they could ask for and expect from God who had made them his children. They had to learn to serve him without any eye to earthly prosperity, for to value their faith at so low a price would be tantamount to rejecting it and trampling it underfoot. By his great human compassion and by appearing among us in the form of a servant, Christ, who is both God and man, meant to teach us what we should spurn in this life
and what we should hope for in the next It was accordingly at the very height of his Passion, when his enemies thought they had won such a mighty victory, that he gave voice to our human weakness which was being crucified together with our former selves to set our sinful bodies free; and his cry was My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? In taking up this expression of our frailty our Head is praying the psalm: My God, my God, look upon me: why have you forsaken me? Here the suppliant feels abandoned; his prayer seems to be of no avail. Jesus made these words his own; they are the words of his Body, that is, of the Church which must endure the travail of conversion from unregenerate human nature into the new creation. His is the voice of our human weakness, which has to be weaned from the good things of the Old Testament and taught to long after and hope for those of the New.
The Lord marked out for us the fullness of love we ought to have for each other when he told us: There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one’s friends. Taking into account his previous words, namely: This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you, the conclusion we must draw is the same as that of the evangelist John who recorded these statements. In his first letter John tells us that we ought to lay down our lives for our brethren in the same way as Christ laid down his life for us, loving one another after the example of Christ who loved us and made the supreme sacrifice for us. Surely this is what we read in the Proverbs of Solomon: When you sit down to eat at the table of a ruler, consider carefully what is set before you, then stretch out your hand and take your portion knowing that you in your turn will have to provide the same kind of meal. What is this ruler’s table, if not the altar at which we receive the body and blood of him who laid down his life for us? And what does it mean to sit at this table, if not to approach it with humility? What does it mean to stretch out your hand and take your portion knowing that you will have to provide the same kind of meal yourself, if not what I have already
told you, namely that just as Christ laid down his life for us so we too ought to lay down our lives for our brethren? This is what the apostle Peter said: Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we might follow in his footsteps.

This is what it means to provide the same kind of meal, and what their burning love enabled the blessed martyrs to do. If we are to give true meaning to our celebration of their memorials, approaching the Lord’s table at the very feast at which they were fed, we must, like them, provide the same kind of meal. At this table we do not commemorate the martyrs in the same way as we commemorate others who now rest in peace, so as to include them in our prayers, but rather in order that they should pray for us and help us to follow in their footsteps. They practiced that perfect love which Christ said could not be surpassed, offering their brethren the same kind of meal as they themselves had received from the table of the Lord.

This must not be understood as implying that we can be the Lord’s equals by bearing witness to him to the extent of shedding our blood. Christ had the power to lay down his life and to take it up again; but we cannot choose how long we shall live, and death comes to us even against our will. Finally, even if martyrs die for their brethren, none of them by shedding his blood brings forgiveness for the sins of his brothers, as Christ brought forgiveness to us. In this he gave us not so much an example to imitate as a reason for rejoicing. Insofar, then, as they shed their blood for their brethren, the martyrs provided the same kind of meal as
they themselves had received from the table of the Lord. Let us therefore love one another as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

St Augustine, In Joh. 84.1-2 (CCL 36:536-538); Word in Season II, 1st ed.
Wednesday of the Fifth Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM THE TREATISE ON THE TRINITY
BY DIDYMUS THE BLIND

The font in which they are baptized in the name of the Trinity is the source of salvation for all believers, and those washed in it escape the jaws of the serpent. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the font becomes a universal mother while remaining a virgin. In that font we receive every grace. In it we are given a pledge of the blessings of paradise; in it he who created our soul takes it for his bride, according to the words of Paul: I have betrothed you to Christ, so as to present you as a pure bride to this one husband. But how shall I tell briefly of the most wonderful grace of all? He whom the angels in heaven do not dare to call Father, we on earth learn to call by that name without fear. In psalm twenty-six we sing: My father and mother have forsaken me (because Adam and Eve lost their immortality), but the Lord has taken me into his care. It is the same as saying: ‘The Lord has given me baptism as a mother, the Most High as a father, and the
Saviour who was baptized for us as a brother. Now I know that I have really been born again and have been saved, since I no longer hear it said, Weep for the dead man who lies in darkness, but the invitation I longed for, Come, all you that labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. I will anoint each one of you, I will wash you and clothe you with myself, completely and for ever, and I will feed you with my body and blood.’

Now it is time to enumerate the passages I have found, some even in the Old Testament, that refer to the Holy Spirit and to the baptism by which we are born to eternal life. The undivided and transcendent Trinity, foreseeing from all eternity the frailty of human nature, created water out of nothing for our healing. It is clear, therefore, that when the Holy Spirit moved over the waters, they were sanctified for ever and endowed with life-giving power. The Holy Spirit appeared above the waters of the Jordan when our Lord was baptized and rested upon him. The Spirit appeared this time in the form of a dove because the dove is a symbol of innocence and the Lord said: You must be innocent as doves.

The flood too, which purified the world from its primeval wickedness, prefigures our purification from sin by holy baptism. And the ark itself, which saved those who entered it, was an image of holy Church and of the good hope she holds out to us. The dove that carried an olive branch to the ark as a sign that the waters had subsided symbolized the coming of the Holy Spirit and our reconciliation with God, the olive being a symbol of peace. The Red Sea received
the Israelites whose faith did not waver and delivered them from the perils they faced in Egypt from Pharaoh and his army. The whole history of their journey from Egypt was therefore a foreshadowing of our salvation through baptism.

Thursday of the Fifth Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON GALATIANS BY ST AUGUSTINE

If our natural, sinful life had not been symbolically hanging on the Cross when the Lord died, the unregenerate instincts that were once ours would not have been crucified with him. But the apostle Paul assures us that our former selves were put to death with Christ on the Cross. The Lord died to free our bodies from the tyranny of sin. He intended us to be slaves of sin no longer.

Christ’s death and our sin were foreshadowed long ago in the desert, when Moses fastened a serpent to a wooden stake and held it on high. We must remember that it was through heeding the voice of a serpent that the human race had incurred the penalty of death, and so it was appropriate that a serpent, fastened to a wooden standard and raised aloft, should prefigure the death of Christ. In that symbol we have an image of the Lord's death by hanging.
Now if Scripture were to say: Cursed be all that hang from a tree, we should scarcely feel disturbed. Yet that serpent hanging from a tree represents our Lord’s physical death. He himself confirmed this interpretation by saying: Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up above the earth. No one therefore will be likely to accuse Moses of intending to insult the Lord by this action, when he understands the power the Cross contains for the healing of the human race. Only because the serpent was a symbol of our Lord’s Cross did Moses command it to be erected, so that the people who were dying from snakebite might find instant cure through fixing their gaze upon it.

The serpent was fashioned from bronze as a symbol of faith in the enduring effects of the Lord’s Passion (A number of ancient artefacts, commonly called bronzes, are actually in existence today.) The fact is that if people were to forget that Christ died for them and every record of the time of his Passion were to be destroyed, the human race would indeed be in the grip of death. But faith in Christ’s Cross abides for ever; it is as enduring as bronze. Despite the constant cycle of birth and death the Cross continues to be held high above the earth for the healing of all who gaze upon it.

There need be no surprise, then, at the way in which Christ dealt with the curse on the human race. He overcame that curse by taking it upon his own person. He vanquished death by undergoing death himself, sin by identifying himself with sin, and the ancient serpent by means of
another serpent. Death, sin and the serpent were all included in God’s curse, but the Cross has triumphed over each of them. And so there is profound truth in that word of Scripture: Cursed be all that hang on a tree. Christ grants justification to those who believe in him, simply because they have faith and not because they observe the Law. This means that any fear of falling under the curse attached to the Cross has been taken away, while love endures. The blessing granted to Abraham for his exemplary faith is extended to the Gentiles, so that we may receive the promised Spirit through faith. In other words, the promised gift to believers is not a spirit of outward observance based on fear, but one of inward devotion inspired by love.

St Augustine, In Gal. 22 (PL 35:2120-2121); Word in Season II, 1st ed.
Friday of the Fifth Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS BY ORIGEN

While we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. Few people would die for a righteous man, though perhaps for a good man one might have the courage to die.
Saint Paul has just told us that the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Now in his desire to demonstrate the power of that love more fully, he gives us the convincing proof that it was not for good men but
for sinners that Christ died. It is indeed true that we were sinners before we turned to God, and that our Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life for us before we believed in him. This he surely could not have done without an immense love for us, either the love he himself showed by dying for sinners, or the love God the Father showed by giving his only Son for our redemption.

Few people would give their lives even for a righteous man, and all of us face death with reluctance, even in a just cause. How great a Saviour we have then, and how deeply we ought to ponder his love for us! It is a clear proof of his divine goodness that when the appointed time came, he did not hesitate to suffer and die for the ungodly and the unjust. In the Gospel it is said that no one is good but God the Father; and so unless our Saviour had been his Son, sharing in the Father's very substance, he could not have shown such great goodness toward us. By this proof, therefore, we can recognize in him that good man for whom someone might have the courage to die.

Once people have understood the extent of Christ’s goodness toward them and his love has been poured into their hearts, they will long not only to die for this good man Christ, but to die voluntarily. In fact we often see this happen, when Christians whose hearts are overflowing with the love of Christ present themselves before their persecutors of their own free will and with the utmost courage, confessing the name of Christ in the presence of angels and men for the whole world to hear. Not only do they have the courage to suffer injustice for the name of
this good man, but for his sake they are even ready to give their lives. Few would do this even for a righteous man, since our love of this mortal life is so great that even in a just cause hardly anyone can bear to die. Only for God’s sake will people have the courage to submit to death of their own free will. For any other reason they can scarcely endure it, even in the cause of justice and in obedience to the laws of nature.

Origen, In Rom. 4.10-11 (PG 14:997-999); Word in Season II, 1st ed.
Saturday of the Fifth Week in Lent Year II

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY ST GREGORY NAZIANZEN

We are soon going to share in the Passover, and although we still do so only in a symbolic way, the symbolism already has more clarity than it possessed in former times, because under the Law the Passover was, if I may dare to say so, only a symbol of a symbol. Before long, however, when the Word drinks the new wine with us in the kingdom of his Father, we shall be keeping the Passover in a yet more perfect way, and with deeper understanding: he will then reveal to us and make clear what he has so far only partially disclosed. For this wine, so familiar to us
now, is eternally new.
It is for us to learn what this drinking is, and for him to teach us. He has to communicate this knowledge to his disciples, because teaching is food, even for the teacher. So let us take our part in the Passover prescribed by the Law, not in a literal way, but according to the teaching of the Gospel; not in an imperfect way, but perfectly; not only for a time, but eternally. Let us regard as our home the heavenly Jerusalem, not the earthly one; the city glorified by angels, not the one laid waste by armies. We are not required to sacrifice young bulls or rams, beasts with horns and hoofs that are more dead than alive and devoid of feeling; but instead, let us join the choirs of angels in offering God upon his heavenly altar a sacrifice of praise. We must now pass through the first veil and approach the second, turning our eyes toward the Holy of Holies. I will say more: we must sacrifice ourselves to God, each day and in everything we do, accepting all that happens to us for the sake of the Word, imitating his Passion by our sufferings, and honouring his blood by shedding our own. We must be ready to be crucified.
If you are a Simon of Cyrene, take up your Cross and follow Christ. If you are crucified beside him like one of the thieves, now like the good thief acknowledge your God. For your sake, and because of your sin, Christ himself was regarded as a sinner; for his sake, therefore, you must cease to sin. Worship him who was hung on the Cross because of you, even if you are hanging there yourself. Derive some benefit from the very shame; pur—chase
salvation with your death. Enter paradise with Jesus, and discover how far you have fallen. Contemplate the glories there, and leave the other scoffing thief to die outside in his blasphemy.

If you are a Joseph of Arimathea, go to the one who ordered his crucifixion, and ask for Christ's body: make your own the expiation for the sins of the whole world. If you are a Nicodemus, like the man who worshiped God by night, bring spices and prepare Christ's body for burial. If you are one of the Marys, or Salome, or Joanna, weep in the early morning. Be the first to see the stone rolled back, and even the angels perhaps, and Jesus himself.

St Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 45:23-24 (PG 36:653-656); Word in Season II, 1st ed.
Palm (Passion) Sunday Year II

Our Lord Jesus Christ worked our salvation not in one way only, but undoubtedly in many ways. Since it was in mercy that he had planned our redemption, he wrought this redemption in such a way that he might serve as an example for us. My brothers, in this season you are recalling this redemption of ours. Be careful, then, to reflect not only on the fact of this redemption but also on two other points: the manner in which this redemption was wrought, and the place in which it was wrought. The
manner of redemption is the suffering of the Cross; the place, outside the city.
Let us then learn from the Cross of Jesus our proper way of living. Should I say ‘living’ or, instead, ‘dying’? Rather, both living and dying. Dying to the world, living for God. Dying to vices and living by the virtues. Dying to the flesh, but living in the spirit. Thus in the Cross of Christ there is death and in the Cross of Christ there is life. The death of death is there, and the life of life. The death of sins is there and the life of the virtues. The death of the flesh is there, and the life of the spirit. But why did God choose this manner of death? He chose it as both a mystery and an example. In addition, he chose it because our sickness was such as to make such a remedy appropriate.
It was fitting that we who had fallen because of a tree might rise up because of a tree. Fitting that the one who had conquered by means of a tree might also be conquered by means of a tree. Fitting that we who had eaten the fruit of death from a tree might be given the fruit of life from a tree. And because we had fallen from the security of that most blessed place on earth into this great, expansive sea, it was fitting that wood should be made ready to carry us across it. For no one crosses the sea except on wood, or this world except on the Cross.
Let me say something now about the mystery contained in the manner of our redemption. Death on a Cross is endured not on the earth but above the earth; and the victim’s limbs are not cut off but stretched. They are stretched horizontally and perpendicularly, so that the crucified man
is stretched out in the four directions and seems to embrace the four quarters of the world, taking possession of both heaven and earth. For when a Cross is set upright, the head is directed to heaven and the feet to earth, and the outstretched arms to what is located between heaven and earth. Moreover, if you lay a crucified man on the ground, one part of him will occupy the east, another the west, another the south, and another the north.

Do you see, now, the mystery in the kind of death Christ chose? The Apostle sets forth this point with clarity, when he says: He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross. And, revealing the mystery, he says: Therefore God exalted him and gave him the name that is above all names, so that at the name of Jesus every knee might bend of those who are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. Since, then, he was to take possession of heaven and earth through the Cross, on the Cross he embraced heaven and earth.

St Aelred, In Hebd. Sancta, sermon 36.1-2.4 (CCM 2A:294-295); Word in Season II, 2nd ed.
Monday in Holy Week Year II

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST LEO THE GREAT

I think that the instructions I have given you about our share in Christ’s Cross have sufficiently shown how the
Paschal Mystery should enter into the very life of the faithful, and how our daily conduct should be a proclamation of what we honour at the Easter festival. You yourselves have experienced the value of this participation, and you have learned by your Lenten exercises how much both soul and body have to gain from extended fasting, prolonged prayers, and increased generosity in almsgiving. There is scarcely anyone who has not been enriched by these practices, and who has not preserved in the depths of his memory something in which he may justifiably rejoice. Since, then, the aim of our forty days’ observance has been to know something about the Cross in this season of our Lord’s Passion, we must also strive to be found companions of Christ’s resurrection, and to pass from death to life while we are yet in this mortal body. The result of our undergoing a conversion from one state to another is that we cease to be what we were and begin to be something more. But the end of our dying or living is of the utmost importance, for there is a death that brings life, and a life that brings death. It is only in this fleeting world that both are sought together, so that the difference in our future rewards depends upon the quality of our present actions. We must therefore be dead to Satan and alive to God; we must abandon sin in order to rise to holiness. And since Truth himself says: No one can serve two masters, let our master be the Lord who has raised up the fallen to glory, not the one who has brought the upright to ruin. The Apostle tells us: The first man came from the earth, a man of dust: the second man is from heaven. As the man of
dust was, so are those who are of the dust; and as the man of heaven is, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have been fashioned after the man of dust, so we shall also be fashioned after the man of heaven. There is therefore every reason for us to rejoice at this exchange, which translates us from earthly disrepute to heavenly honour through the untold mercy of him who descended to our level in order to lift us up to his, by assuming not only the reality of our human nature but also its sinful condition, and allowing his divine impassibility to be assailed by all the sufferings which are our mortal lot.

St Leo the Great, Sermon 71.1-2 – Easter Vigil 443 (PL 54:386-387); Word in Season II, 1st ed.
Tuesday in Holy Week Year II

A READING FROM ON THE VIRTUE OF PATIENCE
BY ST CYPRIAN

Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, said that he had come down to earth to do his Father’s will. Among the virtues that revealed his divine majesty was the endurance that mirrored his Father’s patience. Every act of his, from the moment of his first appearing, bore the stamp of the
patience with which it was carried out. He was no sinner, but the Son of God; yet when he descended to earth from the heights of heaven, he did not disdain to assume human nature and bear the sins of men. Laying aside his immortality for a while, he suffered himself to be made mortal, in order that the innocent could die to save the guilty. He, the Lord, was baptized by a servant, and though he had come to grant forgiveness of sins he did not think it beneath him to wash in the life-giving waters. He fasted for forty days, yet it is through him that others are filled with good things. If he hungered and thirsted, it was to enable those who were faint for want of the word and grace of God to be filled with bread from heaven He engaged in combat with the devil who tempted him, but was content to defeat his enemy by words alone.

He did not govern his disciples as a master rules his slaves. He was kind and gentle, loving them as brothers, even washing the feet of the apostles, showing by his example how a servant should bear himself toward his equals when his master dealt in such a way with his servants. No wonder he could show such goodness to the disciples who obeyed him, if he was able to bear so long and so patiently with Judas, eating and drinking with his enemy, recognizing the foe in his own household yet neither exposing him publicly nor refusing his treacherous kiss. At the time of his Passion and Cross, even before it had gone as far as the inhuman crucifixion and the shedding of his blood, how patiently he bore reviling and reproach, insult and mockery! A little while before, he had cured the
eyes of a blind man with his spittle, yet now he allowed his tormentors to spit in his face. His servants today scourge the devil and his angels in the name of Christ, but at the time of his Passion Christ himself submitted to being scourged. He crowns the martyrs with never-fading flowers, though he himself was crowned with thorns. Others he clothes in the garment of immortality, yet he himself was stripped of his earthly garments. He had fed them with bread from heaven, yet he himself was fed with gall; and he who had poured out the saving cup was offered vinegar to drink.

He the innocent, he the just, he rather who is the embodiment of innocence and justice, is counted among evil-doers. Truth is confuted by false evidence. The future judge is subjected to judgment; the Word of God is led to the Cross in silence. At the Lord's crucifixion the stars are thrown into confusion, the elements are disturbed, earth trembles, and night swallows up day. But he himself is silent, unmoved, hiding every sign of his godhead throughout the whole duration of his Passion. Enduring all things, he perseveres to the end, so that in him patience may be brought to its full measure of perfection.

St Cyprian, On the Virtue of Patience 6-7 (CSEL 3:401-402); Word in Season II, 1st ed.
Wednesday in Holy Week Year II
When God, whose absolute being is immune from suffering, assumed our fragile humanity in Christ, he strengthened it beyond measure. Henceforth it was no longer to remain under death’s dominion; through a nature immortal in itself, mortal man would be raised to life. We must strive, dearly beloved, with great effort of soul and body to join ourselves inseparably to this mystery. While failure to observe the Paschal Solemnity would be a very grave offence, it would be still more dangerous to be united with congregations at Church but have no sharing in our Lord’s Passion. The apostle’s saying is true: If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him. No one can truly worship the suffering, dead and risen Christ unless he himself suffers, dies, and rises again with him. For all the Church’s children this sharing in Christ’s death and resurrection begins at the mystery of regeneration, when sin is destroyed and we are born to new life. There the Lord’s three-day sojourn in the grave is represented by a three-fold immersion. The stone is, as it were, rolled away from the tomb, and those who enter the font in their old, sin-stained condition are brought forth new by the baptismal waters. What has been effected in mystery, however, must still be carried out in their daily lives. As long as they are in this mortal body, those who are born of the Spirit must take up their cross.

Christ has lifted us up with himself on the Cross: there let the Christian take his stand. He knows it is the place where
his human nature was redeemed, and all his steps should be directed toward it – for the Lord’s Passion is prolonged until the end of the world. Just as it is he whom we honour and love in the saints, he whom we feed and clothe in the poor, so too it is he who suffers in all who endure adversity for the sake of what is right, unless, indeed, we are to imagine that, with the spread of the faith, all persecution has come to an end together with every conflict which ever raged against the blessed martyrs – as if the bearing of the Cross were reserved only for those who have to suffer atrocious torments for the love of Christ.

Wise souls who have learned to fear and love the one and only Lord and to hope in him alone, mortify their passions and crucify their bodily senses. They prefer the will of God to their own lives, and insofar as they renounce love of self for love of God, they love themselves all the more truly. In such members of Christ’s body, beloved brethren, the Holy Passover is celebrated properly and they shall lack none of those victories which our Saviour’s Passion has won.

St Leo the Great, Sermon 70.3-5 – Good Friday 443 (PL 54,:382-384); Word in Season II, 2nd ed. 
Maundy Thursday Year II

A READING FROM THE WRITINGS OF ST EPHREM
The evening before our Lord gave himself up to death he shared his own body with his Apostles and offered them his blood, with the command that they were to do what he had done in order to keep the memory of his Passion alive. Then a strange thing happened. Earlier Jesus had charged his disciples not to fear death. Do not be afraid of those who have power to kill your body, he had said. But now he himself showed fear, and begged to be spared the cup of suffering. Father, he prayed if it be possible, let this cup pass me by. How are we to explain this?

The answer is that our Lord’s petition was wrung from the human weakness he had made his own. There was no pretence about his incarnation; it was absolutely real. And since the donning of our poor humanity had made him puny and defenceless, it was only natural that he should experience fear and alarm. Eating to alleviate hunger, showing weariness after exertion, and revealing human weakness by the need for sleep were all the effects of his taking our flesh and clothing himself with our infirmity. Consequently when the moment of death drew near, he necessarily experienced the ultimate frailty of our human condition; he was gripped by a dreadful horror of dying. It was then that Jesus said to his disciples: Stay awake and pray that you may be spared the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. And in answer to our question he might well say: ‘When you are afraid, it is not your spirit that trembles but your human weakness. Remember then
that I myself tasted the fear of death in my desire to convince you that I truly shared your flesh and blood.'

A further answer to our question is that Jesus wished to teach his disciples how to commit themselves to God both in life and in death. His own divine knowledge made him supremely wise, yet he prayed for what his Father judged to be expedient. How much more ought we ignorant men to surrender our wills to God’s omniscience!

We may also tell ourselves that we too were in our Lord’s mind as he prayed. In time of temptation our minds become confused and our imagination runs riot. By persevering in prayer Jesus was showing us how much we ourselves need to pray if we are to escape the wiles and snares of the devil. It is only by constant prayer that we gain control of our distracted thoughts.

Finally, there is our Lord’s desire to strengthen all who are afraid of death. By letting them see that he himself had experienced fear he would show them that fear does not necessarily lead to sin, provided one continues to resist it. This is the force of our Lord’s concluding prayer: Not my will, Father, but yours be done. He is saying: ‘Yes, Father, I am ready to die in order to bring life to many.’

St Ephrem of Syria, Diatessaron 20.3-4, 6-7 (CSCO 145:201-204); Word in Season II, 2nd ed.
Good Friday Year II

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST LEO THE GREAT
When our Lord was handed over to the will of his cruel foes, they ordered him, in mockery of his royal dignity, to carry the instrument of his own torture. This was done to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah: A child is born for us, a son is given to us; sovereignty is laid upon his shoulders. To the wicked, the sight of the Lord carrying his own Cross was indeed an object of derision; but to the faithful a great mystery was revealed, for the Cross was destined to become the sceptre of his power. Here was the majestic spectacle of a glorious conqueror mightily overthrowing the hostile forces of the devil and nobly bearing the trophy of his victory.

As the crowd accompanied Jesus to the place of execution, the soldiers found a man called Simon of Cyrene, onto whose shoulders they transferred the weight of the Lord’s Cross. This action prefigured the faith of the Gentiles, to whom the Cross of Christ would mean glory rather than shame. By this substitution the atonement of the unblemished lamb and the fulfilment of all the rites of the old Law passed from the people of the circumcision to the Gentiles, from the children born of the flesh to those born of the spirit.

In the words of the Apostle: Christ our Passover is sacrificed. As the new and authentic sacrifice of reconciliation, it was not in the Temple, whose cult was now at an end, that he offered himself to the Father; nor was it within the walls of the city doomed to destruction for its crimes. It was beyond the city gates, outside the
camp, that he was crucified, in order that when the ancient sacrificial dispensation came to an end a new victim might be laid on a new altar, and the Cross of Christ become the altar not of the Temple, but of the world.

You drew all things to yourself, Lord, when all the elements combined to pronounce judgment in execration of that crime. Figures gave way to reality, prophecy to manifestation, Law to Gospel. You drew all things to yourself in order that the worship of the whole human race could be celebrated everywhere in a sacramental form which would openly fulfil what had been enacted by means of veiled symbols in that single Jewish Temple.

St Leo the Great, Sermon 59.4-6 – Weds in HWK 444 (PL 54:339-341); Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Holy Saturday in the Easter Triduum Year II

A READING FROM A BYZANTINE CANON FOR HOLY SATURDAY

O Lord my God, I will sing to you a funeral hymn, a song
at your burial: for by your burial you have opened for me the gates of life, and by your death you have slain death and hell. All things above and all beneath the earth quaked with fear at your death, as they beheld you, my Saviour, upon your throne on high and in the tomb below. For you lie before our eyes in a way beyond our understanding: a corpse and yet the very source of life. Today you keep holy the seventh day, which you blessed of old by resting from your works. You bring all things into being and make all things new, observing the sabbath rest, my Saviour, and restoring your strength. You have gained the victory by your greater strength: your soul was parted from your body yet by your power, O Word, you have burst asunder the bonds of death and hell. Hell was filled with bitterness when it met you, O Word, for it saw a man deified, marked by wounds yet all-powerful; and it shrank back in terror at this sight. You were torn but not separated, O Word, from the flesh you had taken. For though your temple was destroyed at the time of your Passion, the person of your Godhead and of your flesh is one: in both you are one Son, the Word of God, both God and man. The fall of Adam brought death to man but not to God. Hell is king over mortal men, but not for ever. Laid in the tomb, mighty Lord, with your mighty hand you burst asunder the bars of death. To those from every age who slept in the tombs, you have proclaimed true deliverance, O Saviour, who have become the firstborn from the dead.

Be astounded, O heavens, and let the foundations of the
earth be shaken. He who dwells on high is numbered among the dead and dwells as a stranger in a narrow tomb. The second Adam, he who dwells on high, has come down to the first Adam in the depths of hell. The disciples’ courage failed, but Joseph of Arimathea was more bold; for seeing the God of all a naked corpse, he asked for the body and buried him.

Coming forth from a birth without travail and wounded in your side with a spear, O My Maker, you have brought to pass the re-creation of Eve. Becoming Adam, you have in a way surpassing nature slept a life-giving sleep, awakening life from sleep and from corruption by your almighty power.

‘Do not weep for me O Mother, beholding in the tomb the Son whom you conceived in your womb without seed. For I shall rise and be glorified, and as God I shall exalt in everlasting glory those who magnify you with faith and love.’

‘O Son without beginning, I was blessed by your strange birth in ways surpassing nature, for I was spared all travail. But now looking upon you, my God, as a lifeless corpse, I am pierced by the sword of bitter sorrow. But arise, that I may be truly magnified.’

From Mattins of Holy Saturday in The Lenten Triodion (1978)