

**Fifth Sunday in Lent**  
**Cycle B**  
**Revised**

**Jeremiah 31:31-34**

The difference between the old covenant and the new covenant, which God promises to make (Hebrew “cut”) with Israel, is not one of content but of mode. God will write the new covenant “on their hearts” (31:33), unlike the first covenant, written on stone, that had to be passed down and explained from generation to generation. In the Bible, the heart is the organ of reason, memory, and will. To have the covenant written upon the heart means that Israelites in the new age will know God’s covenant by memory and will not require others to explain it to them.

**Psalm 51**

This is a *lament of guilt*. The psalmist makes it clear, however, that he committed his offense against God only and not against his neighbors (51:4), lest God be made a party to offenses against the neighbor by forgiving them without restitution. The Hebrews believed that God kept a record of human actions by recording them in a great book. Consequently, the request to “blot out my offenses” (51:1) is none other than a request that God erase the sin from God’s book of memory. Although 51:6 has been taken traditionally in the west to refer to original sin, most commentators now agree that the psalmist here is actually pleading his own particular circumstances. If God should choose to save the psalmist, the promise is that the psalmist will tell others of God’s deliverance and thereby enhance God’s public reputation or “name.” The last two verses of the psalm (omitted in this lection) were added during the Babylonian Exile.

OR

**Psalm 119:9-16**

This unusually long psalm (176 verses) is an *acrostic* psalm. The other acrostic psalms in the Bible begin each verse with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, but in Psalm 119 each strophe has each line begin with the same Hebrew letter and then the following strophe has each line begin with the next Hebrew letter, *etc.* Our reading is the second strophe of Psalm 119 whose verses all begin with words commencing with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *bet*. Wisdom psalms did not function for purposes of worship in the temple. Instead, they came from wisdom teachers who instructed young men in the court schools and during the Exile.

**Hebrews 5:5-10**

This passage introduces the idea that Christ, like the Judean kings before him, has inherited the priesthood of Melchizedek, and to that end, the unknown writer of Hebrews cites Psalm 110:4, a *hymn* used when the Judean king was crowned (5:6). The importance of this is that Jesus, who came from the tribe of Judah and the house of David, could not be a priest in the Jerusalem temple because the law reserved this function to the sons of Zadok in the tribe of Levi. The author, however, has discovered that the Davidic king held another priesthood, the priesthood of Melchizedek, and so Jesus, as the last and greatest Davidic king, will exercise that priesthood forever. Jesus was unlike the priests of Aaron in another way. He was also without sin, so he could offer his sacrifice for the sins of others and uncomplicated by sins of his own (5:1-4).

**John 12:20-33**

The discovery of non-Jews (Greeks) in Jesus’ entourage on the way up to Jerusalem is the occasion for Jesus to recognize that his *hour*—the time of his crucifixion and exaltation—has arrived. What tells him this is the Jewish belief that the last age will see Gentiles as well as Jews come to Jerusalem and become a part of the Kingdom of God. This leads to a discourse on the meaning of his death and what may in fact be a parody on the story of the agony in the Garden told in the first three Gospels where Jesus does in fact ask that God spare him this suffering (12:27. See Mark 14:36, Matthew 26:39, and Luke 22:42.) In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus never draws back from his suffering because it is also the moment of his glorification.