

FEBRUARY

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YEAR B
WEEKDAYS II

Thursday, February 1, 2024
(Lec. 326)

1) 1 Kings 2:1-4, 10-12

2) Mark 6:7-13

Gospel related: **CCC** 765, 1506, 1511, 1673

THURSDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are called to share the Gospel with others.

In today's Gospel, Jesus calls his 12 closest followers and sends them out in pairs to do his holy work. He tells them to be fully present wherever they go. He instructs them to preach repentance and to drive out demons. They even anoint with oil those who are sick.

Anointing is something that we only directly experience in our sacramental faith life. But it is deeply significant for us, symbolizing prayers for healing, wisdom, and consecration.

The act of being anointed by holy oil draws us outside of the simple symbols it involves. For one, taking part in a ritual unites us in some way with all of those who have also experienced the ritual. The oil that is used is specially consecrated once a year by our local bishop, bringing a special significance to our Church. When the priest or deacon does the anointing ritual as part of baptism, he is anointing us as priest, prophet, and king. The grace of the sacrament is a powerful reminder of God's presence in our lives, and God's call for us.

Today, we follow in the example of the Twelve who were first sent forth by Jesus. Through our baptism, we have been anointed. And we, too, are sent out. May the Eucharist of which we partake today give us strength to push past our boundaries and preach the Gospel to those we encounter.

Friday, February 2, 2024
(Lec. 524)

- 1) Malachi 3:1-4
- 2) Hebrews 2:14-18
- 3) Luke 2:22-40
or 2:22-32

Gospel related: **CCC** 149, 529, 575, 583, 587, 618, 695, 711, 713

**THE PRESENTATION
OF THE LORD
- FEAST**

FOCUS: God is not safe. God is good!

In his series *The Chronicles of Narnia*, author C.S. Lewis offers an allegory of the Christian story. Early in this classic tale, the characters discuss the Christ-figure, a powerful lion named Aslan. The children, who have not yet met Aslan, ask if this lion is *safe*. Of course not, those who know him reply. He is not safe, he is *good*.

Lewis highlights that God is not a cuddly stuffed animal, magically working to keep us free from suffering. He generally promises precisely the opposite. But he is powerfully present, strengthening and leading us through all evil.

Today's readings also remind us that God is not "safe," as it were. He sends a messenger – whom we know to be the Son – who is *like the refiner's fire*, who purifies his sons and daughters *like gold or like silver*.

God sees the gold and the silver in us, and he works to draw us through fire to purity and glory. He does not settle for a temporary good for us, such as worldly comfort.

Today's feast draws our attention to the redemptive suffering found in Christ and in our own trials. We learn that this suffering, painful and at times cause for despair, can be withstood and overcome in hope. We do not suffer alone; what we suffer has meaning.

Mary and Joseph do not choose the "safety" of staying home with their new baby; they choose the goodness of following God's law by presenting him to the Lord in the temple. In so doing, they receive blessings from and provide encouragement to Simeon and Anna. Yet Mary is also told, *you yourself a sword will pierce*. Parenting the Messiah will not be safe. But salvation and light and glory will be poured out in this heart-piercing vocation.

Indeed, we are all promised the help of our *merciful and faithful high priest*, Jesus Christ. *Because he himself was tested through what he suffered*, the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, *he is able to help those who are being tested*. Jesus, the light of revelation, the salvation of God's people, promises to be with us.

Like Aslan, Christ is not safe, and he does not invite us to comfort. But he is good. We gather around this Eucharistic table to be strengthened for the fires through which we are called. Christ meets us here, offering us his strength in the intimacy of this sacrament. May Christ, in this Mass, lift all who seek to follow him, not to safety and comfort, but to everlasting goodness.

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Saturday, February 3, 2024
(Lec. 328)

- 1) 1 Kings 3:4-13
- 2) Mark 6:30-34

SATURDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.
Saint Blaise,
Bishop and Martyr;
Saint Ansgar,
Bishop;
Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: We all need guidance for the mission to which God entrusts us.

It's easy to see how Solomon could feel overwhelmed in the first reading. As a young man, he's entrusted with the leadership of *a people so vast that it cannot be numbered or counted*. He already shows great care and concern for this vast people by asking God for the wisdom and discernment he needs to lead them well. Similarly, the Apostles need the guidance of Jesus when they return from what was most likely an exhausting experience of mission work. Jesus knows they need rest and leads them to a deserted place.

Like Solomon and the Apostles, we need understanding hearts; we need guidance and discernment day after day as we live as God has called us. Whether we're parents, doctors, teachers, priests, or students, we will at times find ourselves in difficult and confusing situations as we strive to live our vocation. Often on our busiest days, when we can feel overwhelmed by our responsibilities, we need God's guidance most of all.

Jesus' guidance to his Apostles can help us in those situations: *Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while*. Perhaps we can't find a truly deserted place in our physical space, but we can spend some time in quiet prayer – even for a few minutes early in the day – to open our hearts to Jesus and ask for his help. Jesus is always ready to offer guidance on how to respond in a difficult situation if we take the time to listen.

Lord, grant us an understanding heart, and guide us in all we do.

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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2024

(Lec. 74)

1) Job 7:1-4, 6-7

2) 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

3) Mark 1:29-39

Gospel related: CCC 2602

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus offers us his healing grace.

Today's Gospel picks up from last Sunday's Gospel where Jesus went to the village of Capernaum, taught in the synagogue, and then commanded an unclean spirit to depart from a man. Now we hear that Jesus has gone to his friends' home, where he performs another extraordinary feat, namely, curing Simon's mother-in-law of her fever. After sharing a meal prepared by her, Jesus spends the night curing many other sick people, and driving out more demons. The next day, he can barely get a moment to pray in peace and silence before Simon arrives to warn him that everyone is looking for him. The word has gotten out that Jesus can do marvelous things.

In today's fast-paced world, perhaps we are able to empathize with Jesus' hectic schedule. As someone new to Capernaum, it would help to have a person like Simon to guide him around. We know, though, that it is Jesus who will guide Simon, and all of us, on the path to the heavenly kingdom. Despite the forks in the road we may encounter, or the many obstacles that might block our path, we know that when we put our lives in Jesus' hands, he will show us God's mercy and compassion.

There may be times in our own lives when we feel like Job, who in our first reading bemoaned that life is *a drudgery*. He makes his life sound like one that is without hope – full of misery and too many restless nights. If life is full of peaks and valleys, then Job is most certainly experiencing the depths of the valley. Poor Job, though, should take heart from the psalm that we sang, in which we *praise the Lord, who heals the brokenhearted*. God created each of us, knows each of us by name, and continues to bless each of our lives. That very same God would not allow any of us to remain in despair. As the psalmist proclaims, the Lord binds up the wounds of the brokenhearted, and sustains the lowly.

When we face valleys in our lives, we can take solace in the Lord who lifts us up. Jesus was sent to give witness that God does indeed care for each of us. As he ascended into heaven, Jesus promised that he would send his Spirit to be with us as a Comforter and a Sustainer. That Holy Spirit inspires our lives with God's goodness. As we come forward to the altar of the Lord in a few moments, let us take a moment to pause and give thanks to God for lifting us up out of whatever troubles us, and for offering us the Bread of Life that fills us with his grace.

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Monday, February 5, 2024
(Lec. 329)
1) 1 Kings 8:1-7, 9-13
2) Mark 6:53-56

MONDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Agatha,
Virgin and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 1504

FOCUS: The glory of the Lord abides forever.

It was quite a gathering and feast, a spectacle of pageantry and ceremony – the bringing of the ark of the Lord’s covenant from the city of David to Jerusalem. Sacrifices too numerous to count; beautiful artistry sheltering the ark. This place of majesty was soon filled with the majesty of God: The Lord’s glory filled the temple of the Lord, and Solomon professed that the Lord would abide there forever.

History tells us that the temple was destroyed (twice) and the ark of the covenant removed and never to be found. God’s “forever dwelling place” was not destroyed, however, because it did not reside in those earthly vessels, but in the body of his Son, and in the grace that surrounds and abides in us.

The Lord dwells with us not as something kept apart from us, as if untouchable, but as a Spirit within us and as one who has marked us as his own in our baptism. He is incarnational – meant to be seen, heard, held, and touched. In our Gospel reading, we see that Jesus’ ministry was filled with its own kind of public display, but instead of lavish material processions, we have processions of the sick coming to Jesus for healing. The power of God’s love was such that the sick had only to touch *the tassel on his cloak*, or better translated, the fringe on Jesus’ prayer shawl, to be healed.

God’s healing power is present in Jesus, and we receive his real and substantial presence in the Eucharist: We “touch his cloak and tassel” in our own way, just as those who surrounded him did. And since we are baptized into Jesus, his healing power is also present in us. Let us remember to bring the healing presence of God that we enjoy at this altar with us out into the world each day, in every encounter, and so heal the world, one encounter at a time.

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Tuesday, February 6, 2024
(Lec. 330)
1) 1 Kings 8:22-23, 27-30
2) Mark 7:1-13

TUESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Paul Miki and Companions,
Martyrs)

Gospel related: **CCC** 581, 2196, 2218, 2247

FOCUS: God gives us the grace to walk the talk, and to honor him in word and deed.

Today's interaction between the Pharisees and Jesus is a bit unusual in that the Pharisees' question is not explicitly a religious/legal one, but one of tradition. They ask not why Jesus and his disciples do not follow the law of God, but *the tradition of the elders*. The problem Jesus has with this question is the Pharisees' placing of "religious" rules above God's word.

Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, Jesus said to them. "... *In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.*" *You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition.*

The irony is not lost on the Gospel writer, Mark, and may it not be lost on us, that the Pharisees are accusing *the Son of God* of not keeping *human* traditions and precepts.

Quoting Isaiah, Jesus says, *This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me*. As with most of Jesus' exhortations regarding religious hypocrisy, it's a fundamental matter of "the walk not matching the talk."

Whatever blinds the Pharisees – pride, conceit, obstinacy, hard-heartedness ... the possibilities are endless! – is also capable of blinding us. We, too, can be tempted into thinking the Son of God should act as we wish him to.

We have a remedy in Christ himself, however. We have the great gift of having seen Jesus with the eyes of faith, and coming to understand he is our Lord and Savior. It's why we are here today, participating in this act of public, communal worship of the Son of God. He who took on human nature but did not concern himself with human traditions, has made his dwelling place among us. He alone gives us the grace to walk the talk, and to honor him in word and deed.

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Wednesday, February 7, 2024
(Lec. 331)

1) 1 Kings 10:1-10

2) Mark 7:14-23

Gospel related: CCC 574, 582, 1764

WEDNESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: When we experience the healing power of Jesus, we are more inclined to think and act as he would.

In today's Gospel, Jesus poses a challenge to the crowd and his disciples. In Jewish culture, there are certain foods that are deemed clean and unclean. It could be presumed that if someone ate an unclean food, they in fact would be unclean. Seems logical, right?

Jesus comes to shed new light on this Jewish custom. He says, *do you not realize that everything that goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters not the heart but the stomach...? But what comes out of the man, that is what defiles him. From within the man, from his heart, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery ...*

In other words, Jesus is saying: *From the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks* (Cf., Luke 6:45). When we speak, when we act, when we think, we are operating from what is in our hearts. The more distant our relationship with God, the more our thoughts, words, and actions are not of God. However, when we are more in communion with God, the more our thoughts, words, and actions speak of his mercy and love.

Often when we act, speak, and think contrary to the Gospel message, it is due to wounds we have in our hearts. Perhaps today we can reflect on what is going on in our hearts and invite Jesus to heal areas of hardness, bitterness, or unforgiveness. When light shines on these darkened areas of our hearts, it is an opening for Jesus to extend his healing upon them. Don't we all desire to be healed? For when we experience the healing power of Jesus, we are more inclined to think and act as he would.

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Thursday, February 8, 2024
(Lec. 332)

- 1) 1 Kings 11:4-13
- 2) Mark 7:24-30

THURSDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Jerome Emiliani;
Saint Josephine Bakhita,
Virgin)

Gospel related: CCC 2616

FOCUS: Seeking the Lord, finding him, and abiding with him are gifts of faith.

What an amazing contrast we have in our readings today. Solomon was a wise and powerful king. He had received such blessings from God, especially through his father David. He would be remembered as one of the greatest kings in all of history. Unfortunately, he is also remembered as one of the greatest examples of a man who squandered away many of the gifts he had been given. Through his many marriages to non-believers, he had been compromised and led away from the wisdom that so defined his younger life. Solomon began with such promise but ended in disgrace and sacrilege.

The Syrophenician woman in the Gospel had a very different story, indeed. She was not from the lineage of Abraham, but was a pagan raised with false gods. She would have been considered unclean and an enemy to the Jewish people. Somehow, she comes to hear about Jesus and has faith that he can save her demon-possessed daughter. When Jesus says to her, *Let the children be fed first. For it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs*, he is signifying that he has come to preach the kingdom to the Jews first. She, in turn, humbly asks for the “scraps” that the children are not eating. Moved by her humility and faith, Jesus heals her daughter.

It's truly amazing how someone walking so close to God can end up so far away, and another who seems so lost can find her way to salvation. This is a good reminder that we need to be careful about forming judgments about those who may have dark beginnings to their story. They may just find their way to the light. It is also a warning to not assume that if we were faithful at one time that we will be faithful always. In both cases, we need the Lord. Seeking him, finding him, and abiding with him are gifts of faith. Pray in thanksgiving for these gifts, and for the grace to grow in them for all time.

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Friday, February 9, 2024
(Lec. 333)

1) 1 Kings 11:29-32; 12:19

2) Mark 7:31-37

Gospel related: CCC 1151, 1504

FRIDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God is the source of both division and healing.

It is easy to think of God as the source of unity and healing. But what about division, destruction, and chaos? We often see these things as bad and painful. How could God be their source? Yet today's readings remind us that God can be the source of division as well as the source of healing. In the first reading, Ahijah prophesies that God is going to divide the united Kingdom of Israel into two kingdoms. God is doing this because he wants to disrupt the idolatry and injustice that has developed during Solomon's reign as king. The division will be painful, but Israel's sinful ways must be interrupted so that something new and better can emerge.

In a similar way, true peace – whether between individuals or nations – cannot exist if we ignore injustice and sin. Sin must be confronted and corrected even if this causes conflict and chaos. It is not easy to confront sin, but it becomes more possible when we know this is a necessary step in God's healing process.

The Gospel reminds us that God is indeed a healer. God desires that we and our community be healthy and whole. Jesus' healing of the deaf man with the speech impediment is a sign of this truth. As we approach Jesus in the Eucharist today, let us ask him to show us where we need to be healed. And let us also ask him to give us the courage to confront whatever gets in the way of that healing.

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Saturday, February 10, 2024
(Lec. 334)

- 1) 1 Kings 12:26-32;
13:33-34
- 2) Mark 8:1-10

SATURDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Scholastica,
Virgin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 1329

FOCUS: God is the Great Giver.

Generosity is one of the hallmarks of God. Think of examples of beauty in this world: the Northern Lights, a super bloom of flowers on a mountainside; holding a new baby in our arms. Think of unmerited and immensely welcome gifts: a call for a job, just when we were struggling to make ends meet, or an affirmation from someone we admire that we are living our vocation well.

God will not intervene to solve every problem in our lives, but there will always be something for which to be grateful if we look for it. God is the Great Giver.

Today's Gospel, where the Lord multiplies the loaves and fishes to feed 4,000 people, illustrates the lavishness with which God gives to us. There is nothing we can do to deserve such graciousness, but there are a number of things we can do to respond to the gifts God gives.

One appropriate response is gratitude. When we acknowledge what God does for us, it is a way of honoring the gift and the giver. Thanking God is a simple way of honoring him.

Another good response is to imitate him and give generously to others. We learn how to give by imitating others. Since there is no one who gives more, why not imitate the best?

And finally, a proper response to God's generosity is to take good care of what he has given us. That includes taking care of our health, protecting our earthly home, and looking out for others. These are all ways we show our gratitude.

Our response will not affect whether or not God continues to be our greatest benefactor. It is part of his nature, so he will never stop giving. Nevertheless, our positive response helps *us* to be better, since it makes us more like him. This is not a bad ambition for anyone.

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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2024

(Lec. 77)

- 1) Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46
- 2) 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1
- 3) Mark 1:40-45

Gospel related: CCC 1504, 2616

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: In healing the leper, Jesus went to the periphery, as we are called to do.

Each year on Holy Thursday, Pope Francis has opted to wash feet not necessarily within the confines of Saint Peter's Basilica, but in prisons, care facilities, or refugee centers. It is here, at the "peripheries," where Pope Francis follows Jesus' lead.

The first reading provides context to help us understand Jesus' interaction with the leper in today's Gospel. In addition to declaring himself "unclean," the leper, according to the Levitical law, *shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp*. While this law protected others from contracting the disease, it also stigmatized and ostracized the sick for something that they had little or no control over. Lepers were outsiders in every sense of the word.

Amid this context, Jesus went to the peripheries, both literally and figuratively. At this point in Mark's Gospel, Jesus has been traveling around Galilee, proclaiming the message of the kingdom of God. It is a harsh environment; the land around is vast and dry; the sun shines hot and bright. It can be uncomfortable for even the healthiest of people. It is no wonder, then, that Jesus is moved with compassion upon seeing the leper. The leper thirsts for physical health but, even more so, for companionship and love.

While we commonly see the miracle of this story as Jesus healing leprosy, just as extraordinary is the man's willingness to approach Jesus, to risk even more censure, punishment, or even his life, to receive the love and healing touch of the Lord. This was possible, of course, because Jesus made himself available.

We may not have the ability to heal in a physical way as Jesus did, but we can allow our hearts to be overcome with compassion for others. We can follow Jesus to the people on the outskirts of society and make ourselves available to those experiencing poverty; those who are sick, mentally ill, or disabled; those who are homebound or in nursing homes. With the aid of God's grace, we can love them and perhaps even offer a gentle touch or embrace. These acts are mini-miracles, healing the hearts of those who, like the leper, may have been stigmatized or ostracized.

Grace and prayer certainly are needed for this work, for it is natural to fear such journeys to the periphery. Only through union with Christ do we desire to help shoulder the burdens of others – trading our safety, health, or comfort for compassion and sacrificial love of others.

As we turn to the sacrament to come, we remember Pope Francis' teaching that the Eucharist does not end with our reception of holy Communion. The Eucharist must be brought outside the doors of the church through our very lives – the body of Christ in action. If we are going to embody Jesus in our world today, we must go where he went, to the peripheries.

Monday, February 12, 2024
(Lec. 335)

- 1) James 1:1-11
- 2) Mark 8:11-13

MONDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Thanks be to God for the gift, and joy, of faith.

The scene in today's Gospel really grabs the imagination. We can picture a group of men, loud, argumentative, almost bullying in their demands for a sign from heaven. Crowding Jesus, getting in his space, and metaphorically poking, poking, poking! And Jesus, physically weary from all his travels, seemingly frustrated by the constant barrage. *He sighed from the depth of his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign?"* We don't know if he looked to the heavens and threw his hands in the air, and uttered these words with an exasperated tone, but it would be right and just if he did!

If this story does nothing else, it shows that we humans can be a perseverant sort. And while James' letter to his community describes how perseverance can be deployed badly, stemming from doubt, it is also a great gift: *Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, James says, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.*

Joy in relation to trials and perseverance. What a lovely thought, actually. To have such faith worthy of testing, and to be entrusted with the knowledge gained from trials overcome and refining fires tamped down. And to know that, if we lack wisdom in the midst of it, we can *ask God who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly*, and we will be given it.

The Pharisees were not seeking wisdom. Nor did they have faith. There was no joy in their perseverance, only annoyance, and – in the end – being left behind on the shore. And so Jesus would give no sign to that generation. Why bother? They couldn't understand everything they had already seen; they couldn't see him at all.

We *do* seek wisdom, we desire joy, we grow in perseverance, and we need no further sign. Christ himself is all in all, the eternal Word of God dwelling among us and opening wide the doors to the kingdom. We see him, we receive him, we proclaim him. He does not leave us behind on the shore.

Thanks be to God for the gift, and joy, of faith.

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Tuesday, February 13, 2024
(Lec. 336)

- 1) James 1:12-18
- 2) Mark 8:14-21

Gospel related: **CCC** 1329

TUESDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus challenges us to rely on him in times of need.

Imagine showing up at a potluck and having forgotten the dish we promised to bring. A panicked thought may come to mind: Will there be enough to eat? Of course there is. There is usually more than enough and everyone goes away satisfied.

The disciples in today's Gospel probably felt something akin to that feeling of panic when it appears there is not enough. Out in the middle of the sea, there's no place to pick up additional bread. What are they to do?

Jesus is in the boat with them. He reminds them that after feeding the 5,000, there were 12 baskets of leftovers. After feeding the 4,000, there were seven. The disciples think it is about food; Jesus is reinforcing that it is about what God is providing for them, which is far more than bread.

In the first reading, James writes that the Father, in his infinite generosity, desires to give his people good gifts, to provide for them in their time of need. Jesus, his Son, is the manifestation of God's greatest gift.

Jesus' desire to give us what we need extends far beyond a physical meal. He desires to feed our spiritual hunger as well. To receive that good gift requires us to turn away from our own personal desires and turn toward him.

Tomorrow is Ash Wednesday and a good opportunity to pay special attention to how and when we turn to Jesus. As we approach the table of the Lord, let us ask Jesus for the grace to set aside what we desire and seek the good gift he and the Father desire to give us.

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Wednesday, February 14, 2024
(Lec. 219)

ASH WEDNESDAY

- 1) Joel 2:12-18
- 2) 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2
- 3) Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Gospel related: **CCC** 575, 764, 1063, 1430, 1434, 1693, 1753, 1969, 2447, 2608, 2655, 2691, 2763, 2792

FOCUS: Lent provides an opportunity to imitate Christ by turning our lives and hearts back toward God, our Creator.

For many in our world, the very idea of fasting can seem irrational and valueless – why go without that which you like or require? And yet together with prayer and almsgiving, fasting has been an integral part of the Church’s Lenten experience from the earliest days.

In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI described fasting as “therapy for the soul to heal all that prevents us from conformity to the will of God, a way to mortify our egoism, to grow in intimacy with the Lord and to open our hearts to love of God and neighbor” (Message for Lent). For the person of faith fasting is therefore a fulfillment of the first and greatest commandment – a compendium of the entire Gospel.

Pope Benedict went on to say that by denying ourselves material food we nurture an interior disposition to listen to Christ and be fed by his saving word. Through fasting and praying, we allow Christ to satisfy the deepest human hunger – the hunger and thirst for God.

But fasting also has a communal aspect to it that is helpful to reflect on as we begin the Lenten season. By opening our eyes to the needs of others, fasting enables us to grow in the spirit of the Good Samaritan who comes to the help of his suffering brother. By freely embracing an act of self-denial for the sake of another, we make a statement that one in need is not a stranger, but a neighbor, entitled to our help and generosity.

Today, as we begin 40 days of purification, prayer, and sharing, we seek to strip away that which is superfluous to our lives, to make room for something better – a deeper relationship with Christ, one that is meant to flow into all the nooks and crannies of our daily lives, not just during Lent but for all our days. Saint Paul says, *Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

Today, as we are marked with ashes, we join Christ in the desert to do battle against all that might separate us from God’s mercy. Today we reach out for that mercy as we begin again.

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Thursday, February 15, 2024
(Lec. 220)

- 1) Deuteronomy 30:15-20
- 2) Luke 9:22-25

Gospel related: **CCC** 1435

THURSDAY AFTER
ASH WEDNESDAY

FOCUS: The cross is the way to eternal life.

During their time in the desert, Moses sets before the people a choice between life and death. To follow the Lord's commandments means an abundance of life in the land promised to their ancestors. To go astray means brutal death in the desert. Life with God is a life of prosperity, while life without God is no life at all.

Jesus' message to his disciples has a similar, serious tone. After telling them that he must suffer, be rejected, die, and be raised, Jesus turns to everyone else and lays out conditions for following him. They must deny themselves and take up their own crosses daily. He tells them that those who wish to save their own lives will lose them, but those who lose their lives for his sake will be saved.

If the land across the Jordan is an image of heaven, then while we live on earth, we are in the desert with the Israelites. If we follow God's laws and remain close to him, we will enter eternal life. If we turn away our hearts, and fail to listen, we will perish.

Lent is a time to examine what distracts us from our call to pick up our crosses each day and follow Jesus. It reminds us that the way of Jesus is the way of suffering, death, and rejection by the world. But at the end of the journey is resurrection. We are faced with a life-or-death decision. Will we choose ways that lead to death? Or will we die to ourselves so that we might have abundant life with God?

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Friday, February 16, 2024
(Lec. 221)

- 1) Isaiah 58:1-9a
- 2) Matthew 9:14-15

FRIDAY AFTER
ASH WEDNESDAY

FOCUS: *A heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn.*

The obvious theme of our readings today is fasting. It is one of the disciplines we embrace during this holy season of Lent. Why do we fast? How does going hungry, going without, help us in our spiritual lives?

It is a principle of humanity that if we deprive ourselves of some physical pleasures, it helps us to focus on greater spiritual realities. Fasting at its most basic level is a way to turn our attention to our souls instead of our bodies.

In today's Gospel, Jesus reveals another reason why we fast: because we long to be in the presence of the One whom we were created to love. There will be no fasting in heaven since we will be united fully with Jesus. The Apostles did not fast as long as Jesus was dwelling among them. Once the Lord returned to heaven, the Church has fasted, longing for his return.

The prophet Isaiah explains how to fast well: to use the resources and energy we gain through our fast to do good works and to help the poor. If our fasting makes us grumpy and irritable, that is not the fasting that pleases the Lord. Our fasting should lead us to love those difficult to love. It should inspire us to justice and works of mercy. Fasting is not only about spiritual growth; it is also about the way we treat others.

May our Lenten fasting lead us to greater love of God and love of neighbor. That is the fasting Jesus expects.

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Saturday, February 17, 2024
(Lec. 222)

- 1) Isaiah 58:9b-14
- 2) Luke 5:27-32

SATURDAY AFTER
ASH WEDNESDAY
(Opt. Mem.
The Seven Holy Founders
of the Servite Order)

Gospel related: **CCC** 588

FOCUS: The Lord will honor a just and compassionate people.

The words of the Lord in this last section of the book of the prophet Isaiah return to a common theme: a prophetic call for Israel to be aware of its sin, and to recognize that pious and mindless attention to ritual does not satisfy the Lord.

The Lord is telling them that if they would just pay attention to what he says, taking care of each other, seeing to one another's needs, and freeing them from all forms of oppression, their obedience will naturally and necessarily result in divine favor upon them. They will be the *repairer of the breach* [between God and his people] and *restorer of ruined homesteads* [as their ruins will be rebuilt and the city of Jerusalem reestablished].

This prophetic call to the people of Judah, and to all of us, is one that has no "return to sender" date. Even today we are called to corporal and spiritual works of mercy so that the kingdom of God may come to fulfillment.

Lent is a particular time to pay heed to this call, and to consider the disorder – what is not rightly aligned according to God's divine plan – in our lives and the world. We spend this Lenten season walking with Jesus through his mission of restoration: giving sight to the blind, healing the sick, making the lame walk, and, as in today's Gospel, calling not the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. He is our Divine Physician, attending to the spiritual sickness of sin, and empowering us to have faith and follow him.

To do as Jesus did, to restore and repair – to bring "order" into what is "dis-ordered" – means that we need to go into those places that are not basking in God's light. Perhaps this means to venture into those parts of our world that are outside of our comfort zones. When we go out to the world, however, we do not do so alone. Remember that in Advent, we name Jesus as Emmanuel, "God with us." God is always with us. And he says to us as he said to Levi, *follow me*.

Strengthened by the Eucharist that we soon will receive, may our outreach to those who need God's love and mercy help them find delight in the Lord.

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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2024

(Lec. 23)

1) Genesis 9:8-15

2) 1 Peter 3:18-22

3) Mark 1:12-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 538, 541, 1423, 1427 **CSDC** 49, 175

**FIRST SUNDAY
OF LENT**

FOCUS: *The kingdom of God is at hand.*

The readings for this First Sunday of Lent are full of contrasts and paradoxes. God makes a covenant with Noah, establishing the rainbow as a sign of his fidelity to a promise of blessing – just on the heels of a horrific flood. The contrast of life and death is complemented by the paradox that the rainbow can appear precisely, and only, because there first was rain.

Peter discusses the obedient suffering of Jesus which brings life, where Adam's disobedience brought death. This is a paradox of "dying to self" and "mortal death" actually leading to new and eternal life. In the Gospel the Holy Spirit, the breath of life, drives Jesus into the barren desert to face temptation.

Finally, Jesus begins his preaching, telling people to repent and believe in the Gospel. To repent means to feel regret and sorrow; to change, and "turn away from." "Gospel" is a word meaning "good news." To "repent and believe in the Gospel," then, contrasts the feeling of sorrow and turning from with believing in and turning toward the Good News. The paradox here, as above, is that one must experience a sort of death in order to receive life.

As the Lenten season begins, these contrasts and paradoxes point to the inflection points in our own lives. We have been saved by the waters of baptism: washed free from sin and death and promised the eternal reward of life in the kingdom with our Savior. Yet we remain sinners. When we search our own hearts and examine our lives we know we have given way in the face of temptation, choosing disobedience and bringing pain and suffering to ourselves and our communities. As Christians, this is precisely the contrast of the Lenten season. There is indeed cause for joy and hope! There is indeed cause for regret and sorrow. And the paradox is that one must embrace the suffering in order to experience the joy.

For 40 days – a number harkening to the time of rain which caused the flood, the years Israel spent wandering in the wilderness, and the days Jesus faces the temptations of Satan – we, too, journey into the desert. We take up fasting, prayer, and almsgiving with humble hearts that recognize our sinfulness. We simplify our liturgy and refrain from certain celebrations, songs, and acclamations of praise. We take stock of our sins and we seek forgiveness.

But we do not walk without hope. We repent, yes, but we also believe in the Gospel! We are fundamentally a people of hope – a people chosen by God and redeemed by the resurrection of our Savior. We are an Easter people who walk in the first light of dawn with the sure knowledge that death has lost its sting and hell has no victory.

And still we know that the light of day has not yet cast out all darkness. The kingdom of God is already at hand, but it is not yet fulfilled. Let us pray for its coming. Repent, and believe in the Gospel.

Monday, February 19, 2024
(Lec. 224)

MONDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
OF LENT

- 1) Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18
- 2) Matthew 25:31-46

Gospel related: **CCC** 331, 544, 598, 671, 678, 679, 1033, 1034, 1038, 1373, 1397, 1503, 1825, 1932, 2443, 2447, 2449, 2463, 2831 **CSDC** 57, 58, 183, 265, 403

FOCUS: Seek the Lord hidden in the lowly.

Sometimes Jesus' words sound very nice until we really sit with them for a while. Then they begin to feel ... uncomfortable.

Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Are those words we will hear one day? Will the Son of Man gather us to himself when he comes in his glory?

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me. Will these words be said of us? Can these words be said of us, now?

It's amazing how specific these examples are. Consistent with God's design for the world, they echo all the prophets, kings, and judges sent by God to call his people to create and live in a just and compassionate society. A society that cares for widows and orphans, and the poor. One that sees the divine image in every human being – and follows the commandments prescribing how to love God and one another.

Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz has a powerful series of religious art that beautifully complements today's Scriptures. One sculpture, entitled "Homeless Jesus," is one of several depicting our Lord hidden as a stranger, a beggar, a prisoner, a sick man. Only the wounds visible in his hands and feet reveal his identity – and you have to get close enough to the sculpture to see them.

And therein lies the rub: We have to get close (enough) to people to see them and serve them. Let's ask the Lord to place these people in our path. How easy it is to walk past someone without noticing them. But there are hungry who need to be fed, thirsty who need drink, strangers who need welcoming, and so much more. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to help us see Jesus in everyone. God will surely hear this prayer and answer. As our hearts are conformed ever more to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we will be able to see others the way God sees them – as beloved children of the Father.

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Tuesday, February 20, 2024
(Lec. 225)

- 1) Isaiah 55:10-11
- 2) Matthew 6:7-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 268, 443, 764, 1165, 1434, 1969, 2608, 2632, 2659, 2668, 2736, 2759, 2763, 2776, 2792, 2841, 2845 **CSDC** 492

TUESDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: Trust in God and God's timing.

Today's readings invite us to trust in God and God's timing. This may sound obvious in theory, but it can be difficult in real life. We live in a culture of immediacy, and whatever we think we want, we want it right now! This is especially true in a society with high-speed internet connections, overnight shipping, and streaming media. Why can't God deliver what we want in the timeframe in which we want it?

Thankfully, God is God. God promises true peace and happiness, and these spiritual realities take time to grow and mature within us. That is why God's word is compared to the rain and snow nurturing growing plants. It doesn't rain once and then – poof! – fully grown plants magically appear. Nature has a rhythm, a cycle that must be respected. The spiritual growth and change nurtured by God's word also have rhythms and cycles. No one becomes a saint overnight.

Of course, we must ask for the right things. If we ask for the wrong things, what does it matter whether we get them overnight or 10 years from now? In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us what the right things are. Notice that he doesn't teach the disciples to pray for intelligence, wealth, or success. Instead, he teaches them to ask for God's kingdom to be present on earth – a kingdom where all people are loved and their dignity respected. He teaches them to ask only for what they need today – daily bread – trusting he will provide for the future. And he teaches them to ask for healthy relationships – relationships marked by humility and forgiveness. When we pray the Lord's Prayer today, let it be a prayer of trust in God, and of trust in God's timing.

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Wednesday, February 21, 2024
(Lec. 226)

- 1) Jonah 3:1-10
- 2) Luke 11:29-32

WEDNESDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
OF LENT
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Peter Damian,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

FOCUS: Jonah was a credible sign because of his repentance, having received God's mercy first-hand.

In today's first reading we meet Jonah, fresh out of the whale and setting foot in Nineveh for the first time. In the two chapters prior, Jonah had run away from the Lord and his call to deliver a message of repentance to Nineveh. In fact, Jonah headed in the opposite direction of Nineveh, boarding a boat for Tarshish.

Jonah's rebellion resulted in him being flung from the boat and swallowed by a whale. And there, in the belly of the fish, Jonah could not keep running. He stopped and prayed, re-tuning his heart – a forgiven heart – to the Lord.

With the smell of fish on his clothes and, more importantly, his own repentance and forgiveness fresh on his mind, Jonah delivers the Lord's message to Nineveh. Jonah is a credible sign to the Ninevites not because he is the perfect prophet, but because he has experienced the Lord's mercy first-hand. Jonah trusts that forgiveness is possible, and that second chances are real with his God. True repentance – evident in the Ninevites' prayer, fasting, and turning from evil – always results in new life.

This is the point we find Jesus making in the Gospel. He is God's love incarnate – the sign of our redemption. *There is something greater than Jonah here*, manifested in his presence. Repenting and turning to him results not only in new life, but also in eternal life.

This Lenten season is our chance to evaluate our sin and re-tune our hearts to God. As Jesus says, we need no sign other than Jonah, who sets the example of repentance and calls us to do the same. As Jonah demonstrated, running from God and hiding in our sin leads only to darkness, symbolized by the belly of a whale. The light of Christ has come to the world, eager to shatter all darkness and bring second chances, even to sinners such as us. Then, like Jonah, we, too, can be credible witnesses – illuminated signs of God's mercy and love for the world.

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Thursday, February 22, 2024

(Lec. 535)

1) 1 Peter 5:1-4

2) Matthew 16:13-19

Gospel related: **CCC** 153, 424, 440, 442, 552, 553, 586, 869, 881, 1444, 1969

**THE CHAIR OF
SAINT PETER THE APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: The Church is how we build God's kingdom on earth.

Who do you say that I am? Jesus asks of his disciples. Peter speaks up and proclaims, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Jesus responds to this declaration in a way that affirms just how important, and powerful, Peter's words are. He calls him blessed and appoints him as the shepherd of his people, his body on earth, the Church: *And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

Because Peter recognized Jesus as the Messiah and dared to proclaim it, he is the foundation of the Church. He was the very first Vicar of Christ. In other words, Peter was the first one with the claim to stand in the place of Jesus Christ and possess his authority in, and as head of, the Church.

The Church of which we are a part traces its roots back to this very moment in the Gospel. On this Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, we acknowledge Peter's acceptance of the gift Jesus gave him, and his laying down of the building blocks of a Church that has had 263 different successors to Peter sit in that chair, in the stead of (*vicarius/vicar*) Christ. Under their leadership and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Church has grown and multiplied and worked on building the kingdom of God. The Church is where our faith begins and where it can grow. The Church is how we build God's kingdom on earth.

As we continue with our Mass, let us remember that what we celebrate here today traces its roots back to a very pivotal moment in the Gospel. May our sharing of the body and blood of Christ strengthen our Church for continued service in the mission of Christ.

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Friday, February 23, 2024
(Lec. 228)

- 1) Ezekiel 18:21-28
- 2) Matthew 5:20-26

FRIDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
OF LENT
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Polycarp,
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 678, 764, 1034, 1424, 2054, 2257, 2262, 2302, 2608, 2763, 2792, 2841, 2845

FOCUS: May God have mercy on us and give us the grace to live justly.

Ours is a God of mercy. Ours is a God of justice. We hold in tension these attributes of God – both are essential to who God is. The readings today are Good News insofar as they emphasize these important aspects of God’s relationship to us. To lose one of them at the expense of the other would be to miss the Good News of our salvation.

Justice can be defined simply as “right relationship.” If this were a world with a god who was merciful but not just, we would find it to be one without consequences: actions lose their meaning and relationships ultimately don’t matter. The orphan, widow, disenfranchised, and refugee would all have been forcibly removed from relationships proper to a community. Their plights would demand restoration. Instead of this dystopia, Jesus comes to proclaim the Good News of the kingdom precisely to them. In his mercy, God turns in love to those who have been forgotten and demands justice on their behalf.

On the other hand, If this were a world that had a god who was just without being merciful, despair would reign in the hearts of those hopelessly indebted and irredeemable in the face of their past. The Christian life is a demanding one that requires us to strive always for virtue. The bar Jesus calls his disciples (and so each of us) to meet is high! He says to not even remain angry with your brother, and that if anyone has anything against you, be reconciled or risk being thrown into prison. God does not ask us to do this on our own, however, because his grace makes this possible. Our God is merciful.

This is Good News! God does not turn a blind eye to sin, but in his mercy he demands our repentance. He does so for our own sake and for the sake of the whole world. May God have mercy on us and give us the grace to live justly.

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Saturday, February 24, 2024
(Lec. 229)

SATURDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
OF LENT

- 1) Deuteronomy 26:16-19
- 2) Matthew 5:43-48

Gospel related: **CCC** 443, 764, 1693, 1825, 1933, 1968, 2013, 2054, 2262, 2303, 2608, 2763, 2828, 2842, 2844 **CSDC** 40

FOCUS: Love your neighbor, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you.

When trying to get one from one point to another, physically or spiritually, it's helpful to have a map, or a set of directions. In addition, one must identify the priorities of decision-making: go here, then there; do this, then that.

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us a series of ascending steps to holiness. Each step is a little harder, a little more radical, and ultimately more fulfilling. "Love your neighbor." Then, "love your enemy." Finally, *pray for those who persecute you*.

Here and in all the Gospel messages, love is not a feeling or "simply" an emotion. It is an act of the will. It is to consistently will and choose the good of the other. This includes even those we do not like, or perhaps rightfully need to avoid because they are a threat. And the highest good is salvation, and eternal life in Christ.

That human injustice and violence exist, and that emotions can color our viewpoint and understanding, makes the command to love an enemy seem impossible for us. It is! But it is not impossible for God, and with his help, we can do as he commands.

To love an enemy is not necessarily to like him, nor is it to enable him, or condone his actions. It is simply to choose the good for him, and pray for his salvation. Praying for one we have hated – or greatly disliked – is an incredibly freeing experience. It relieves us of the obligation to continue expending energy toward hate, rather than love. It provides intercession for that person, who may in fact have no one else to pray for him or her. What an incredible act of mercy that is.

Let's reflect on the concept of mercy, not just for our enemy, but for ourselves. In praying for another, we reflect the mercy that has been granted us, when we (human beings), too, have been an enemy of God (Cf. Rom 5:10-21). How can we expect to receive it if we cannot give it away?

Love your neighbor, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. The Lord is simply asking us to be like him. And that's a very good thing.

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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2024

(Lec. 26)

- 1) Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18
- 2) Romans 8:31b-34
- 3) Mark 9:2-10

Gospel related: CCC 151, 459, 552, 649

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

FOCUS: God invites us to listen more closely to his beloved Son.

This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.

We all know we should listen to Christ. We have all been told we should do as God commands. There is a prayer that begins, "Father, I abandon myself into your hands. Do with me what you will ..." While most of us would affirm this sentiment on some level, if we take a moment to really sit with the idea of abandoning ourselves into God's hands, of letting go of what we want and asking God to do what only he wills... well, some of us might begin to squirm.

And then we have the story of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham didn't squirm. God wanted Abraham to see how he would provide for him – God wanted Abraham to know that he could trust every command given by him, because he would always act, would always provide, would always love him.

Abraham trusts in God's goodness. This goodness is highlighted in our second reading from the Letter to the Romans. We are reminded that God, *who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all*, will give us everything we need along with his Son. This is the depth of God's love for us. God, who gave us his beloved Son, commands us: *This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.*

Our God did not hold back anything, not even his beloved Son, to lead us to the goodness he desires for us. In the Transfiguration, he shows us the glory that awaits us when we live and love in service of him.

And this God is present here today. In this sacred season, God is inviting us to listen more closely to his beloved Son who invites us to take and eat, to receive the gift of his body, poured out for us in this Eucharist. This is the love that leads us through our Lenten journey and through our lives. May we, in this sacrament, grow in trust and learn to follow Christ's voice in all we do.

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Monday, February 26, 2024
(Lec. 230)

- 1) Daniel 9:4b-10
- 2) Luke 6:36-38

Gospel related: **CCC** 1458, 2842

MONDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: Our merciful God enables us to be merciful.

Daniel's prayer of both praise and lament is surely one of the most emotionally moving ones in the Bible. It has a twin emphasis: the steadfast love of God and the constant rebellion by his people in the face of that love. He begins his prayer by praising his *great and awesome God* – one who has kept his covenant and shown mercy even though the people did not deserve it. Daniel confesses the sins of his people and says they are *shamefaced*.

Repentance is always a necessary first step. With this in mind, let us turn to Jesus' instructions in today's Gospel: We are to do more than recognize God's love, accept it, and repent of our lack of love. We are to seek to emulate God in his mercy, generosity of spirit, and forgiveness, and then we will be truly in a place to receive the overflowing gifts God is always trying to send us.

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. But how is that possible? Is that not arrogant? No, it is rather the ultimate humility, because in it we recognize that it is the way God made us, in his image and likeness, and because we must first recognize that it is God himself through our partaking in Christ's very body who enables us to be so. We must only desire it, ask for it, and humbly approach Christ always, as we do now at this holy altar.

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Tuesday, February 27, 2024
(Lec. 231)

- 1) Isaiah 1:10, 16-20
- 2) Matthew 23:1-12

TUESDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF LENT
(Opt. Mem.

Saint Gregory of Narek,
Abbot and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 526, 2367

FOCUS: Joy comes from following the Lord with our whole heart, mind, and soul.

Today's Gospel reminds us of the importance of words and actions. We can often tell a person's character by how they behave – by what deeds they do or refrain from doing. We know that people may say one thing, but act in an opposite manner. Or we may do various actions just for the recognition that comes with it. How we are meant to live as Christians is at the very heart of Jesus' message today.

Jesus is speaking to the crowds and his disciples encouraging them to follow all that their religious leaders and elders say, in that they teach fully and fairly the Scriptures and law. But they are not to follow their example. Jesus encourages the crowd and his disciples to follow *his* word and example instead – to truly live according to the Word that he speaks. Jesus practices what he preaches and preaches what he practices. This is the very standard by which he calls each of us to live.

The world may try to convince us that we are our own master, but Jesus reminds us that he is our true master. We are to follow his words and examples with humility and love.

Perhaps today, we can all reflect on whether or not our words and actions are properly and rightly synchronized. Let us pay attention to whether we practice what we preach and preach what we practice in light of Jesus Christ. Do we live in the light of our master who is the truth and life? Or do we act and speak in a manner that makes us our own master? Jesus desires our full happiness and joy, and that comes from following him with our whole heart, mind, and soul.

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Wednesday, February 28, 2024
(Lec. 232)

WEDNESDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF LENT

- 1) Jeremiah 18:18-20
- 2) Matthew 20:17-28

Gospel related: **CCC** 440, 572, 601, 605, 622, 786, 2235 **CSDC** 193, 379

FOCUS: Serving others is one of the best ways to serve the Lord and grow closer to him.

Sometimes we get so caught up in our current concerns and thoughts that we miss something even more important for our future. We miss the proverbial forest for the trees.

Today's Gospel lesson is one that marches us right into the depths of the forest when we are reminded that we are not the center of the universe. In fact, we may not even be the most important people in the room. As imperfect human beings, the Apostles were guilty of that prideful thinking. As such, they missed what Jesus was telling them about his coming suffering, death, and resurrection.

Similar to many times in the Gospels, the Apostles' shortcomings opened the door for Jesus to teach them – and us – an important lesson. In this instance, he had more than one lesson to teach, but the big one was that all who follow him must be servants to others.

The glory Jesus' followers receive is mostly heavenly glory, not earthly accolades. If this works for us, Jesus wants us in his camp. If this sounds too much like a losing proposition, then perhaps we need to examine it again, because we will never receive a better offer than this. As we grow in our ability to serve, we also grow in our closeness to God.

What a great message for these early days of the Lenten season. Let us look humbly and honestly into our own hearts and see where we could be serving others better – where we could put more of our energy into the work of God's kingdom. No one needs to do this alone. We serve one another, and, in the process, grow in our closeness to the Lord.

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Thursday, February 29, 2024
(Lec. 233)

- 1) Jeremiah 17:5-10
- 2) Luke 16:19-31

Gospel related: **CCC** 336, 633, 1021, 1859, 2831

THURSDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: Jesus challenges us to be faithfully consistent in how we pray and live.

In the midst of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we pray together the Lord's Prayer. One of the petitions within it is for the Lord to give *us* this day *our* daily bread. Even when we pray on our own, we pray for *us* and for *our*. Thus, we pray that *all* will have what they need, not merely that *we* receive what *we* need.

In today's Gospel we hear the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the poor man. In his earthly life, the rich man ignored Lazarus and his needs, not once sharing his leftovers with his brother lying outside the door to his house.

In death, Lazarus rests in the bosom of Abraham and the rich man is in torment. Yet, even from his place of torment, he implores the Lord to send Lazarus to him to *serve him*. Even in death, the rich man cannot see beyond his own immediate needs to the needs of Lazarus.

The Lord has harsh words for this man of great wealth and calls him out for not living in accordance with the command to love God and neighbor.

In this season of Lent, there is a lesson for us. We talk often about the practices of Lent, such as prayer and almsgiving, as if they are unrelated to one another. However, in telling this parable, Jesus is reminding us that these practices go hand-in-hand. As the *catechism* states, "We pray as we live, because we live as we pray. If we do not want to act habitually according to the Spirit of Christ, neither can we pray habitually in his name" (CCC 2725). Two good questions to ask ourselves in this season are: Do I remember to pray for those whom I help through almsgiving or works of mercy? Do I extend some concrete help in addition to remembering those in need in my prayers?

As we prepare to come to Jesus in the Eucharist, let us ask him to show us how to better live as we pray, and pray as we live.

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