

JANUARY

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**YEAR B
WEEKDAYS II**

Monday, January 1, 2024

(Lec. 18)

- 1) Numbers 6:22-27
- 2) Galatians 4:4-7
- 3) Luke 2:16-21

**THE OCTAVE DAY
OF THE NATIVITY
OF THE LORD;
SOLEMNITY OF MARY,
THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD**
[not a Holyday of Obligation]

Gospel related: **CCC** 486, 525, 527, 2599

FOCUS: God gazes upon us with love, for we are his beloved children.

The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!

It is clear from this prayer of blessing given to Aaron and his sons that the Lord takes great delight in looking at us! Each day, God gazes upon us with love. His face is shining down upon us, just as the sun shines upon the earth.

Imagine a parent holding a baby, staring into his or her eyes. The meeting of their eyes reveals a longing for connection and an intimacy that surpasses a mere glance or superficial look. Their mutual regard allows them to delight in each other's presence. No words are needed at this moment, for the eyes speak "I love you" louder than any words can. This is the face shining on us, looking upon us, and beholding *our* countenance.

We live in an age of unprecedented distraction, however, where an "attention economy" vies for our gaze. We spend a large portion of each day staring at screens that purport to depict reality when, all around us, the reality of God is staring us in the face. How can we slow down and set aside our distractions, often our all-important to-do lists, to recognize the Lord in our midst? How do we behold the Lord's face in return of his contemplation of us?

Through the Incarnation, made possible by Mary's irrevocable "yes" to become the mother of God, the face of God was made visible on earth in a whole new way. No doubt, Mary held Jesus and locked eyes with her son; they peered with utmost wonder into each other's faces. Today, we still can see the face of Christ all around us – through the beauty of creation, our neighbor, and even our own selves.

As Mary held Jesus and contemplated all that he was, so the Father holds us. As a child lies in the arms of his or her mother or father and the two behold one another, so we remain in the arms of the Father who loves us without fail. God looks upon us with a love that casts out our inner darkness and insecurity, our anxiety and sin. In prayer we allow God to see us, love us, and give us peace. And as we return his gaze and witness the face of Love, we know we are God's beloved children.

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Tuesday, January 2, 2024
(Lec. 205)

- 1) 1 John 2:22-28
- 2) John 1:19-28

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY
(OBL MEM
Saints Basil the Great
and Gregory Nazianzen,
Bishops and Doctors of Church)

Gospel related: CCC 575, 613, 719

FOCUS: Be prepared to give testimony to your belief that Jesus is the Christ.

When we tell other people about a person or a cause we truly believe in, we reveal the importance of that person or cause in our life. Once we have made such an assertion, it is hard to take it back. It becomes the yardstick by which others measure our integrity and decide whether we are honorable or being hypocritical.

Today's readings focus on the importance of being honorable people, especially by testifying to what we believe in and being faithful to that belief. The Gospel begins with the words: *This is the testimony of John*. When John the Baptist answers the questions posed by the priests and Levites, he must make a choice. Out of pride he could affirm his own self-importance. Or out of fear he could refuse to answer at all. John does neither of these. He testifies to the truth that God put in his heart – that he has an important, but limited role in preparing people for the coming of Christ. Because of this, John is honored in the Scriptures for his courage, humility, and integrity.

The first reading focuses attention toward us. The author of the letter is essentially asking, "Are you willing to testify to the belief that *Jesus is the Christ*? That Jesus is your north star, your guiding light, the focus of your life? That through him you believe you will experience the fullness of life, both in this life and the next?" The author is kind but firm in challenging us to give voice to these truths. Let us receive Christ in the Eucharist today, then go forth and witness to our belief in him through our words and actions.

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Wednesday, January 3, 2024
(Lec. 206)

- 1) 1 John 2:29–3:6
- 2) John 1:29-34

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY
(Opt. Mem.
The Most Holy Name of Jesus)

Gospel related: **CCC** 408, 438, 486, 523, 536, 608, 713, 719, 1137, 1286, 1505

FOCUS: Christmas cannot be separated from Good Friday or Easter.

Merry Christmas! Perhaps it seems strange to say or hear those words now that we are past New Year's Day. Much of the secular world has already packed up the Christmas decorations and moved on. The Church, on the other hand, invites us to sit with the mystery of the Incarnation and ponder this core tenet of our faith.

Today's Gospel offers a specific moment that we are reminded of at each Mass: the moment when John the Baptist sees Jesus and declares, *Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*

This would have signaled to ancient Jews that Jesus, as the "Lamb," would be sacrificed as a sin offering to blot out the sins of God's people. This little baby whose birth we have just celebrated was born for one purpose – and it's an uncomfortable one, if we really think about it. Jesus was born to die. He was born to be the sacrificial Lamb whose complete and perfect gift of self would reconcile us to the Father. If the blood of a spotless lamb sacrificed on the Passover could save the firstborn son of each Hebrew family, how much more can the precious blood of Jesus save those who love him?

Christmas cannot be separated from the Paschal Triduum. Christmas cannot be separated from Good Friday, or from Easter. The Incarnation was the essential first step of Jesus' role in salvation history, and it was proclaimed by his cousin John the Baptist when Jesus himself was baptized in the Jordan River: *Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*

We could say those same words when we gaze upon the Child Jesus in the manger.

Merry Christmas, indeed!

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Thursday, January 4, 2024
(Lec. 207)

1) 1 John 3:7-10

2) John 1:35-42

Gospel related: **CCC** 608, 719

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(OBL MEM

USA: Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton,
Religious)

FOCUS: Discipleship must be practiced in close relationship with our Lord, Jesus.

Before there were trade schools and long before we were able to look up how to do anything on YouTube, when someone wanted to learn how to practice a trade or craft, they would appeal to a master tradesman or craftsman for a position as an apprentice. The apprentice would learn through observing and working closely with the master. Rather like Jesus would have learned carpentry from Joseph.

In today's Gospel, when Jesus saw two disciples following him, he initiated the conversation by asking them, *What are you looking for?* Almost as if they were not quite sure what they were seeking, but somehow knew that Jesus was at the heart of their quest, they respond with the question, *Teacher, where are you staying?* Jesus then invites them to begin their apprenticeship, so to speak, as his disciples when he says, *Come, and you will see.*

From this exchange, we can conclude that following Jesus requires us to encounter Christ in the context of a personal relationship. How do we cultivate our friendship with the Lord? If communication is the key to every healthy relationship, then prayer is a must. We can also know Christ through his disciples around us, through reading the Scriptures, through the sacraments, and through the stories of our Christian family heroes, the saints. Furthermore, Jesus has told us that we can encounter him through our service to the least among us – the poor, the stranger, the imprisoned.

As we prepare our hearts to encounter the Lord at the Eucharistic table, let us ponder our own progress as Christian disciples and how we might invite others to share in the joy that comes from our God.

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Friday, January 5, 2024
(Lec. 208)

1) 1 John 3:11-21

2) John 1:43-51

Gospel related: **CCC** 878

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY
(OBL MEM
USA: Saint John Neumann,
Bishop)

FOCUS: Discipleship requires love in word and action.

Follow me, Jesus called out to Philip. Philip responded to Jesus by running to get his friend, Nathanael, who he brings to Jesus. Despite his initial skepticism, Nathanael answers Jesus' call. Jesus' voice still calls out today, inviting those who hear to follow him. Today's readings teach us lessons about what it means to be a disciple.

After receiving his call, one of the first things Philip does is to share that Good News with his friend, Nathanael. We can imagine the enthusiasm and amazement of these friends as they meet the long-awaited Messiah. Their joy must have been infectious and drawn others to Jesus.

The reading from the First letter of John explains that sharing the Good News goes beyond mere words – it includes action and truth. We cannot simply say that we love our neighbors; we are called to demonstrate that love through action. Loving others is not simply an emotion, but rather it is a choice that requires an ongoing effort of the will.

This call to follow Jesus invites us to reflect on our own lives. In the first reading, John writes that, *if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God*. John seems to be referring to the human conscience – that by examining our conscience with humility and honesty we will know whether or not we have lived out the call to love others. This reading gives us the opportunity to reflect on our own words and actions – to be honest with ourselves and in our relationships.

When we obey God's commands and follow him, we can find confidence in our relationship with God. We pray that Philip and Nathanael will remind us of this important lesson so that we may share in the confidence of Christ.

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Saturday, January 6, 2024
(Lec. 209)

1) 1 John 5:5-13

2) Mark 1:7-11

or Luke 3:23-38 or 3:23, 31-34, 36, 38

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 422, 535 **CSDC** 378

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Opt. Mem.

USA: Saint André Bessette,
Religious)

FOCUS: Living our faith requires humility and courage.

In today's first reading, John defines victory *over the world* as having faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. It is only in and through Jesus that we can leave this world of sickness, sadness, sin, and death behind and enter into eternal happiness where we will truly be free.

Jesus is as powerful as he is merciful. In the first reading, we are told that Jesus testifies by water and blood, and in the power of the Spirit. These are the waters of our baptism and Jesus' precious blood in the Eucharist. Through these gifts, God gives us a share in Jesus' victory.

For John, the testimony of God is far greater than any other. The Spirit of God given to us helps to give witness to our faith when it is challenged or doubted by others.

To defend our faith, we need the courage and humility of John the Baptist, who made it very clear in Mark's Gospel that he was the messenger, not the message. John's baptism of repentance was preparing people to receive Jesus' baptism of forgiveness. In that moment when God spoke from the heavens and the dove of the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, there could be little doubt that a new era had dawned. Prayers were answered and prophecy was being fulfilled.

The same Spirit that descended upon Jesus has been given to us. May we listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as we set forth to be missionary disciples announcing the Gospel of the Lord.

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 7, 2024

(Lec. 20)

1) Isaiah 60:1-6

2) Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

3) Matthew 2:1-12

Gospel related: **CCC** 439, 486, 528, 724

**THE EPIPHANY
OF THE LORD
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: We are meant to reflect and shine the light of Christ to the world.

Today we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord – the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to the whole world. Isaiah had prophesied that nations would walk by God's light, gathering under his radiance. He spoke of caravans from Midian and Ephah and Sheba coming to praise God, bringing gold and frankincense.

We are the new Jerusalem of which Isaiah speaks – our light has come and the glory of the Lord shines upon us, manifested in the infant Jesus. There is great joy in these words: Our Redeemer has come. The long-awaited Messiah is revealed to us, bringing salvation and peace.

But there is also a challenge in Isaiah's words, and in the revelation of Jesus Christ. If *nations shall walk by your light*, as Isaiah says, that means we must be lit up. We must be strikingly different from the *darkness [that] covers the earth*. Our very lives should offer a contrast to the norms of our culture.

As members of the Church, we are called to bear light into the darkness of all the earth. To bring light to the widow across the street who is lonely. To bring light to our child's teacher who is bearing the weight of personal struggles on top of the work of education. To bring light to our brother who is struggling in his marriage. Whatever the darkness around us, we are called to *rise up in splendor!*

But how can we answer such a call, when we might be struggling with darkness of our own?

The Lord tells us: *Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you*. Jesus Christ has come to earth to dwell with us. The Light of the World was born in Bethlehem and has united himself with our humanity: *Upon you the Lord shines, and over you appears **his** glory*.

We do not have to produce this light. We must *receive* Jesus, the Light of the World. Jesus has come to give all the love we need, all the wisdom called for, all the virtue necessary to be a light to others.

Jesus our Light is speaking to us in this liturgy, giving himself to us in this Eucharistic feast. We are, like the moon, simply called to reflect the light that is poured out on us so lavishly. Let us offer this King of Light our treasures today, and prepare our hearts to receive all the gifts he pours out on us in this Blessed Sacrament.

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Monday, January 8, 2024
(Lec. 21)

**THE BAPTISM
OF THE LORD
- FEAST**

- 1) Isaiah 55:1-11
or 1 John 5:1-9
 - 2) Mark 1:7-11
- or
- 1) Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7
or Acts 10:34-38
 - 2) Mark 1:7-11
- Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 422

FOCUS: We are called and sent by the Lord.

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Lord's Baptism, where Jesus comes to John to be baptized. But it is not just an ordinary baptism. No, the heavens are torn open and the Spirit descends with a divine voice affirming Jesus as his Son.

These striking details are important. The divine has come to walk the earth. It is important to note that at this point, Jesus had not yet begun his formal public ministry. But his baptism points to a time of fulfillment. In Isaiah we hear: *Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations.*

Today's feast is an invitation for us to refresh in our hearts what we have been called to through our own baptism. Whether we were baptized as a child or an adult, our baptism has made us new and sends us out to follow the example Jesus has shown us through his ministry. Although our baptism happens only once, the grace of the sacrament continues to unfold before us each day. Being part of the Church, our one baptism shapes each day of our lives. It is the foundation of our faith life and impacts everything we do. We may have come to take it for granted, but if so, let us take today as an opportunity to re-center ourselves in this unfolding grace.

All of us are gathered here around this table to rekindle our commitment to our calling. May the grace we receive in this Eucharist strengthen our faithfulness to what God is calling us to in life. Let us go forth, remembering as we make the sign of the cross with holy water where we have come from and where we are going.

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Tuesday, January 9, 2024
(Lec. 306)

- 1) 1 Samuel 1:9-20
- 2) Mark 1:21-28

or

- 1) 1 Samuel 1:1-8 (305) and 1 Samuel 1:9-20 (306)
- 2) Mark 1:14-20 (305) and Mark 1:21-28 (306)

Gospel related: **CCC** 438, 541, 787, 1423, 1427, 1673, 2173 **CSDC** 49

TUESDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *The Lord puts to death and gives life.*

How should we respond to the presence and action of God in our lives today? The readings for today reveal some key responses.

In the first reading, Hannah approaches God with a heart-felt plea for a child – and immediately trusts that God has heard her. God blesses her with a son, and in the few verses after this passage Hannah praises God and surrenders Samuel to him. In the Gospel, members of the crowd respond to Jesus' teaching and to his authority over evil spirits with awe, recognizing Jesus' mastery over the teaching of God and the evil spirits.

While our world is very different than it was in the times of Hannah and Jesus, God's love for us and desire to answer our prayers has not changed – and neither has the power and authority of our risen Lord Jesus. If we take the time to pray and to observe the world around us, we can see that God is still very present in our world and in our lives, working through the people we love or through the movements and hearts of people who strive in various ways to make the world a better place.

Like Hannah and the crowd in the Gospel, we can trust God's power and love for us, and rely on Jesus' mastery over the demons and evils of our time – and the chaos that often envelops our daily lives. Let us stand in awe before our Lord, who is present to us daily and has authority over creation.

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Wednesday, January 10, 2024
(Lec. 307)

- 1) 1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20
- 2) Mark 1:29-39

Gospel related: **CCC** 2602

WEDNESDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Hear and listen to the voice of the Lord.

Samuel was a precocious devotee. He was so alert for the voice of the Lord he thought that what he heard was real. Finally, Eli realized that it *was* real. Samuel was not delusional; he was attentive. And Eli helps him to make sense of his experience.

In the Gospel, after spending much time healing the sick and driving out demons, Jesus tells his disciples it is time to move on. They need to *go on to the nearby villages ... for this purpose [has he] come*. The disciples are devoted to him; they are attentive to his desires and his teaching. They hear him, and obey.

Eli, Samuel, and the disciples all hear God's word, though in very different ways. In order to do so, each of them has to be open to it – to create a place in their hearts for the word of God to dwell. They have to be willing to say, *Here I am... speak, for your servant is listening*.

We, too, have to be willing and open. We, too, have to be attentive. And “attentive” is a great word. It's an adjective with two parallel meanings: concentrating and considerate. We might think of the first as dealing with the mind – the intellect – and the second with the heart – the will. These are both intrinsic aspects of what it means to be human: we have hearts and minds; we assent to God with our intellect and our will.

So we cultivate awareness of God in our lives – by being mindful, heedful, and vigilant. We grow in devotion, and with grace we become more accommodating and obliging to the promptings of the Spirit. We hear God's word. We listen to what it says. And we act on what we are called to do.

God is always and everywhere attentive to us. Let us heed the words of today's psalmist – *to do your will O my God, is my delight* – and delight in serving the Lord.

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Thursday, January 11, 2024
(Lec. 308)

1) 1 Samuel 4:1-11

2) Mark 1:40-45

Gospel related: **CCC** 1504, 2616

THURSDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God chooses to give his mercy abundantly.

In the first reading, desperate Israelites under attack from their Philistine enemies try to manipulate God to act in their favor by carrying the ark of the covenant into battle. The ark was a sacred relic of God's chosen people, housing the tablets on which God had inscribed his commandments and serving as representation of the presence of God among them. The strategy proves disastrous, as the Israelites are defeated, Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas are killed, and the ark of God is captured.

In the Gospel, the power of the Lord is approached far differently. The leper trusts that Jesus can heal him, but he also has the humility to know that the choice is up to Jesus. Jesus does heal the leper, with the result that the leper is now free to move about as he wishes in the community, a freedom that Jesus no longer has because of the crowds who wish to approach him. Jesus' love and mercy are given freely despite the pain that results for him, a foreshadowing of his loving sacrifice on the cross.

We must learn that when we feel desperate for a particular result, as if we always know best, that is a cue instead to trust not only that God wants to help us but that he will do so in the best way at the best time. Like the leper, we rejoice when he does so, just as we rejoice in coming to the altar to receive his greatest gift for us, the Eucharist.

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Friday, January 12, 2024
(Lec. 309)

- 1) 1 Samuel 8:4-7, 10-22a
- 2) Mark 2:1-12

Gospel related: **CCC** 430, 473, 574, 589, 1421, 1441, 1484, 1502, 1503, 2616

FRIDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.*

In today's Gospel, we hear of another miracle of healing. Often, in the accounts of these miracles, the individual who is receiving the healing has great faith that Jesus can heal them. Today, however, we hear that the four men who lowered the mat through the roof were the ones who had faith that Jesus could heal the paralytic.

Faith, while a virtue that we claim for ourselves, is also a virtue of a community. The faith of others on our behalf can have a huge impact on us. We see this when parents present their child for baptism. It is the faith of the parents that brings the child to the holy waters. It is that same faith that they wish for their child to have, even though the child cannot yet speak for himself or herself.

While the miracle we hear of today in the Gospel does not explicitly say that the paralytic was not able to speak for himself, Mark focuses on the four men who had faith enough that Jesus could heal him. What happens? Jesus heals him because of the faith of these four men.

This is the beauty of the body of Christ, the Church. Each of us will go through trials and hard times where our faith may be tested. However, the faith of our brothers and sisters in Christ can strengthen us to continue to move forward. Jesus can speak to us, even through others and their faith.

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Saturday, January 13, 2024
(Lec. 310)

- 1) 1 Samuel 9:1-4,
17-19; 10:1a
- 2) Mark 2:13-17

SATURDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Hilary,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 545, 574, 1484, 1503

FOCUS: Heed Jesus' call to follow him.

Today's Gospel narrative highlights the tension between the faithful Jewish people and the Roman tax collectors. Levi is a Jewish man who must have a talent with numbers and so he works for the Romans as a tax collector. Such a career provided one with money and security, but often at the expense of relationships within the Jewish community, including friends and perhaps even one's family. They were rejected, as were lepers and prostitutes. Many believed tax collectors did not follow the law of Moses.

The depiction of the relationship between tax collectors and Jews is not hard to imagine. Even modern Christians can think of analogous examples of personal activities or public careers that mimic these conflicts. Anything that does not act in or toward the service of love is a failure of the great commandment *to* love. Jesus, the embodiment of the law of Moses, helps us see the full intent of God's commandments as that which is directed toward right relationship with him, and love.

In the final verse of today's Gospel, Jesus succinctly quiets the Pharisees and illuminates the true issues at hand. Following the law is good and proper. They have had the law to guide them. They attend synagogue. They believe and follow the law. However, there are many more, such as tax collectors and sinners, who do not. God sends his Son to speak to everyone. God invites all people into right relationship with him and one another. Jesus speaks to those rejected by the Pharisees, those seen as unworthy, and persuades them they have a place if they choose to do as Jesus asks: *Follow me*.

We have heard the call, and we have chosen a place at the table. May our own lives reflect the goodness with which we have been blessed.

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 14, 2024

(Lec. 65)

- 1) 1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19
- 2) 1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20
- 3) John 1:35-42

Gospel related: CCC 608, 719

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.*

In today's first reading, we learn of the prophet Samuel's first encounter with the Lord God. As we heard, Samuel slept in *the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was*. You'd think that spending time in the place where the Lord God abided among his people would mean Samuel might be somewhat familiar with God. But that was not the case, *because the Lord had not revealed anything to him as yet*.

Everything in God's time, right? Some of us might have this in common with Samuel: either we do not quite understand what God is saying to us, or the Lord has not yet revealed to us what he intends to reveal. Like Samuel, the Lord is calling us but we struggle to discern what, if anything, God is saying to us. We're just regular people with jobs and families, just trying to live a good life. What could the Lord God possibly call ordinary people like us to do?

Today's Gospel story reveals at least one thing God is inviting all of us to do, something that is within the reach of any of us: to point the way to Christ, and to invite others to join us on the journey. In the Gospel, John the Baptist points his disciples to Jesus. They seek him and, after spending time with him, have been convinced that they have found not just a teacher as they initially thought, but, rather, something greater, the Messiah. Having arrived at this significant realization, how did Andrew respond? He went and brought his brother to Jesus.

How many of us have someone in our lives who doesn't know Jesus? Someone who doesn't know the joy of knowing him, of trusting in him, of receiving his love, his forgiveness, his healing and mercy? We probably all do. And so this is our encouragement to not shy away from inviting these loved ones to meet Christ.

In his Letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds us that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. The next time we find ourselves in conversation with a family member and feel that stirring sense that we should invite them to give Jesus a chance, let us ask the Holy Spirit for help. The Holy Spirit can fill us with the courage to speak, and can give us the words to lovingly extend an invitation to an encounter with Christ, the Lord.

Maybe it is true that God is not calling us to be another Samuel. But perhaps God is calling us to be one of the means through which he extends his offer of salvation to others. Let us ask for the grace to respond as Samuel did: *Speak, for your servant is listening*, and to trust that God will take it from there.

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Monday, January 15, 2024
(Lec. 311)
1) 1 Samuel 15:16-23
2) Mark 2:18-22
Gospel related: **CCC** 796

MONDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *The word of God is living and effective.*

New wine in old wineskins and patching old cloaks with shiny new material. Old things and new ones often do not mesh. There is something incompatible about them. A floppy disk will not work in a new computer. And an old engine will not run a new car.

But we still have wine and we still fix holes in our clothes. We still use technology and drive cars. The old things are necessary and desirable, but they may have to be handled differently. That is what Jesus was talking about. The new covenant required a departure from old ways. This is another way of saying an understatement of truth: Jesus changes things.

In taking on our humanity, Jesus raised us to a new level. We became participants in our own salvation; we are expected to be spiritually more mature, more conscious of the consequences of our actions.

That means we are to be more thoughtful in determining what God is asking of us – what boundaries we should set for ourselves in order to remain true to God. He trusts us to learn from his Son and follow his example in our lives. As we approach the Eucharistic table today, let us thank God for trusting us to be the sons and daughters he knows we can be. Let us take the old, fundamental structure of our faith and see where we need to embrace new understandings of how we are to make them work in today's age. God is putting great trust in us. Let's not disappoint him.

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Tuesday, January 16, 2024
(Lec. 312)

- 1) 1 Samuel 16:1-13
- 2) Mark 2:23-28

Gospel related: **CCC** 544, 581, 582, 2167, 2173 **CSDC** 261

TUESDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus Christ, as the bearer of God's love, is indeed Lord of the sabbath.

We are all used to interpretations of rules, whether they be at the hands of Olympic judges, trial juries, or work supervisors. Interpretation of rules is at the heart of our Gospel from Mark today.

Jesus and his Apostles were constantly on the road, sometimes going long periods without eating or resting. Sometimes, there were great crowds following Jesus who also went without eating for long stretches – as witnessed by the stories of the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand. Today's Gospel, however, is simply about Jesus and his hungry Apostles.

The problem was that the Pharisees who witnessed them *picking the heads of grain* interpreted their actions as a violation of Jewish laws banning work on the sabbath as described in the Book of Exodus (34:21). Jesus then cited the highly revered King David, who had to use holy bread from the high priests one sabbath to feed his men. Jesus and his disciples were on an even greater mission and thus should be allowed the same sabbath dispensation as David and his troops. It was all a matter of interpretation.

Except, it's actually more than that. The events that occur just prior to those of today's Gospel included Jesus talking about old and new things, and the necessity of new wine being poured into new, not old, wineskins. Jesus is himself the new wine – the new covenant. Therefore, what has been – the old – must be replaced. Whereas the laws for the sabbath were kept as a matter of righteousness, God has already made us righteous in his Son and his Son's life, death, and resurrection.

The sabbath, then, is not something for which we were made – to legislate into holiness – but is something holy that was made for us. God's love, his goodness and peace – his rest, or sabbath – was made for us. And Jesus Christ, as the bearer of that love, is indeed Lord of the sabbath. God has dismissed interpretation and revealed the only Truth: His Son is the Savior of the world. In him we have our hope; in him we find peace; in him we find rest.

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Wednesday, January 17, 2024
(Lec. 313)

- 1) 1 Samuel 17:32, 33,
37, 40-51
- 2) Mark 3:1-6

WEDNESDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Anthony,
Abbot)

Gospel related: **CCC** 574, 591, 1859, 2173 **CSDC** 261

FOCUS: Christian discipleship requires courage.

The story of David bringing down the mighty Philistine is a favorite of many. (We don't hear his name in today's reading, but he has been identified in an earlier verse as Goliath.) Who does not like to see the "little guy" triumph over the powerful, overcoming seemingly impossible odds? Despite Saul's reservations, we all like to identify with the underdog, even more so when we know that God is on his side.

So, what does this story and our Gospel passage teach us about the life of Christian discipleship? Perhaps it is best summed up in one word: courage. David, the shepherd-poet, confidently and courageously steps forward and volunteers to fight the Philistines, despite their military superiority. Yet even the king is unconvinced, for all he can see before him is a young man, untrained in war with more bravado than experience.

The scene is more reminiscent of a Hollywood movie than a moment of faith; even the powerful Goliath is dismissive of the young David. But despite his age and lack of military training, David has one great gift – total confidence in God and the courage to trust in his strength. He does not hesitate, nor does he show fear.

Jesus embodies this same confidence as he enters the synagogue and heals the man with the withered hand. He doesn't just trust in the Father, he and the Father are one. He does the Father's will. Jesus knows the Pharisees are watching his every move and that a healing would be seen as a breach of the sabbath, but he heals him anyway. Like David, he won't be dissuaded or deterred – truth cannot be hidden.

Do we have that same confidence and courage in living out our lives, or do we allow ourselves to be limited by our fears and the opinions of others? One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is courage: the courage we need to be faithful in our daily lives, to stand up for the Lord and his Gospel. Let us use that gift to live faithfully in Christ.

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Thursday, January 18, 2024

(Lec. 314)

1) 1 Samuel 18:6-9; 19:1-7

2) Mark 3:7-12

Gospel related: CCC 1504

THURSDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *I know that God is with me.*

In Psalm 56, the psalmist proclaims *I know that God is with me*. Do we believe this? How can we know God is with us today?

Today's Gospel provides us with some clues. We see people pressing in on Jesus, seeking to touch him. They likely had heard stories of Jesus healing others and sought his healing touch as well. Jesus responds, healing some physically and some spiritually.

How can we draw near to Jesus today, and experience his healing power? One way is the sacraments. In particular, we can come to Jesus in the sacraments of healing: anointing of the sick and reconciliation. In the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, Jesus offers his presence which can heal, strengthen, and console the sick and suffering.

Through the sacrament of reconciliation, Jesus forgives our sins and heals our soul. The effect of this healing is to restore our relationship with God. With the obstacles of sin removed, we can come closer to God and the Church. But the healing presence of Jesus is not limited to these two sacraments of healing. It is also found in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, Jesus offers grace to those ready to receive him, which strengthens and heals their souls. The same Jesus who healed the crowds in the Gospel story is fully and personally present in the Eucharist: body, blood, soul, and divinity. We can talk with him, gaze upon him, and ask him for his help and his healing.

As we approach the altar and Jesus is present to us in holy Communion, let us ask him to show us his presence and give us the healing grace we need today.

* * * *

Friday, January 19, 2024
(Lec. 315)

- 1) 1 Samuel 24:3-21
- 2) Mark 3:13-19

Gospel related: **CCC** 551, 552, 765, 787, 858, 1577, 1673

FRIDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Strive for holiness and to live as the Lord's anointed ones.

Early in his ministry, Jesus chose 12 of his followers to be Apostles, entrusting them with a mission to preach and heal in his name. Many would abandon him, one would deny him, one would betray him. Another would come later, to take his place in lieu of the betrayer. Paul would call himself an apostle, though he wasn't one of the original Twelve. Each of them had a role, a mission, and a vocation to embrace.

We, too, have a role, a mission, and a vocation to embrace. We are anointed in baptism – twice! – first with the Oil of Catechumens, signifying the strengthening and healing that Christ brings in the sacrament. Then we are anointed with the Oil of Chrism, signifying that we as baptized are set apart to live the life of Christ.

We see the significance of anointing in today's first reading about David and Saul. Even though David has already been anointed as Saul's replacement, he will not raise a hand against Saul. He regrets even cutting the end from Saul's mantle, because Saul is the Lord's anointed one. Though Saul had seen David as a rival and sought to kill him, David's generosity softens him. Saul acknowledges that David has acted righteously by not killing him when given the chance.

Even as God's anointed ones, David and Saul remained human, as did the Apostles. Those in apostolic succession – bishops and priests – are human, too, as are all the baptized. None of us is perfect.

Therefore, as we are sent out to be a Eucharistic people, may we remember to pray for the clergy and for each other. Pray that we may be an image of Christ to the world, striving for holiness and living as the Lord's anointed ones.

* * *

Saturday, January 20, 2024
(Lec. 316)

- 1) 2 Samuel 1:1-4,
11-12, 19, 23-27
- 2) Mark 3:20-21

SATURDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Fabian,
Pope and Martyr;
Saint Sebastian,
Martyr;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

FOCUS: Step outside of yourself, and give yourself to the Lord.

The Gospel passage today is only two verses, and yet it tells us so much in those few words. In this early part of Mark's Gospel (chapters 1-3), Jesus has moved between open areas, mountainsides, synagogues, and homes. He has been immersed in crowds, and removed himself from them.

Today we hear there is a crowd present that makes it impossible *for them even to eat*. (Previously, in chapter 2, the crowd prevented men from bringing a friend to Jesus and they had to lower him through the roof.) There is something visceral in this portrayal of crowds having a physical, deleterious effect on Jesus' actions. It's discordant, like a note that is played flat.

Certainly, in some passages, the crowds turn on Jesus, but that does not seem to be the case here. Just a few verses earlier, Jesus had cured many and, as a result, people were *pressing upon him to touch him* (3:10). In this passage, the crowds are again converging on Jesus because they want to be near him and feel his healing touch.

Mark says that Jesus' relatives *heard of [the gathered crowd] and they set out to seize him*, saying "*He is out of his mind*". The irony here is that Jesus came so that we – and they, the crowd, and all people – might eat of the bread of life. Yet even his relatives missed the point. Had they managed to seize him, far more was at stake than his ability to eat his meal.

Jesus was accomplishing the Father's work, and it was like nothing the crowds or his relatives had ever seen or understood. We can forgive them for thinking this was all incomprehensible. They had yet to learn that we all must have the heart and mind of Christ to advance the kingdom. To conform ourselves to him in this way literally means we need to "step outside of ourselves" and abandon ourselves to him.

Perhaps being considered "out of one's mind" isn't necessarily a bad thing after all.

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 21, 2024

(Lec. 68)

- 1) Jonah 3:1-5, 10
- 2) 1 Corinthians 7:29-31
- 3) Mark 1:14-20

Gospel related: **CCC** 541, 787, 1423, 1427, **CSDC** 49

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *Repent and believe in the gospel.*

Time is a profoundly precious resource. When we think about the resources available to us, we often focus on material things. While we may be able to increase the amount of money in our bank account or affect the outcome of a given project, we can never manufacture more time.

Today's readings invite us to recognize the precious nature of time. We often focus either on what will happen in the future or on what happened in the past. But the present moment is where we can act, for good or for bad. We cannot change what has already happened. What might be in the future is still only in our mind, only in our imagination. But this moment, right now, we can make a choice. It is precious and unrepeatable.

Today's readings call us to listen to God's voice in every moment of our day, and to act, with the help of his grace. They call us to keep our eyes focused on Christ, here and now, but also to keep a view toward the eternal. As we say *yes* to Jesus today, Christ shapes our hearts for the eternal *yes* to heaven that will be offered at the end of our earthly lives.

In our first reading, the people of Nineveh listen to God's call and respond actively. Jonah had only gone a single day's journey through the city when the people answered the call to conversion. They acted, they turned away from evil, and they were saved from destruction. The Letter to the Corinthians also reminds us of the urgency to act now, to make the choice to participate in the transformative work God is doing in our world. And our Gospel contains the striking image of Simon, Andrew, James, and John abandoning their nets and following Jesus.

Jesus is calling *us* today. Maybe he is calling us to drop something that we have been clinging to so we can follow him more fully. Maybe he is calling us to lay down our weeping or our rejoicing, to move into a new phase accompanied by his presence and love. Maybe he is calling us to turn away from a particular habit, or seek his healing in the sacrament of reconciliation. Maybe he is simply calling us to listen to his voice more closely, to make time to read Scripture, to pray, to reflect, to talk with a spiritual mentor or a friend.

Today Jesus is calling us near, calling us to the profound intimacy of the Eucharist. In this precious and sacred time, he wants to nourish us and give us all we need to answer his call, big or small. May we be given the grace to open our hearts as we receive this Eucharist – to act in this moment given to us and receive the boundless love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTE: For the Day of Prayer, any readings from the *Lectionary for Mass Supplement*, the Mass “For Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life,” nos. 947A-947E, or the *Lectionary for Mass* (vol. IV), the Mass “For Peace and Justice,” nos. 887-891

Monday, January 22, 2024

(Lec. 317)

1) 2 Samuel 5:1-7, 10

2) Mark 3:22-30

MONDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(USA: Day of Prayer
for the Legal Protection
of Unborn Children)

Gospel related: **CCC** 539, 548, 574, 1864

FOCUS: Be prophets who proclaim God’s truth, so that the world may embrace the sanctity of all life.

At our baptism, we were baptized into Christ’s ministry as priest, prophet, and king. Each of these roles offers us a special connection to God and to God’s people. The priesthood of the baptized gifts each of us with the grace to be able to pray to God, for ourselves and for the world. The role of king is one of leadership, calling to mind that as sisters and brothers in Christ, we lead one another to a closer communion with each other and with God. The third role, that of prophet, does not mean that we predict the future. Rather, prophets are those people who share God’s truth with the world so that the kingdom of God may flourish.

Today’s Gospel illustrates clearly how Jesus exemplifies the role of prophet. In his interaction with the scribes, he teaches them using parables, so they may understand how their misguided words offend God. In most matters, Jesus offers the gift of forgiveness. But here he concludes that whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness. This is a sin against the person of God who moves among us, sustaining our lives, and imparting his gifts so we may grow closer to him.

As modern-day prophets, we look to Jesus as an example of how to right the wrongs of this world, including those sins that threaten the sanctity of life. That starts with bringing the people closest to us closer to God. As a quote often mistakenly attributed to Saint Francis says, we do this through our actions and, if necessary, we then use words. Today, let us call upon the Holy Spirit to inspire us to be prophets who bring God’s light into the darkness of the world. Nourished by the Eucharist, may we boldly go into the world to be prophets for the Lord.

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Tuesday, January 23, 2024

(Lec. 318)

1) 2 Samuel 6:12b-15, 17-19

2) Mark 3:31-35

TUESDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

USA: Saint Vincent, Deacon and Martyr;

USA: Saint Marianne Cope, Virgin;

Gospel related: **CCC** 500

FOCUS: Come dance before the Lord with abandon.

In today's first reading, King David goes to the house of Obed-edom to get the ark of the covenant. Just before the verses we heard today, the Scriptures recount that David had seen the blessings that were bestowed on the household of Obed-edom because of the presence of the ark of the Lord. He decides to bring the ark back to the City of David, that is, Jerusalem.

David and all the people are ecstatic at what they have witnessed, and David comes *dancing before the Lord with abandon*. He makes a great feast. He rejoices.

In this moment, David and his people epitomize what it means to be in relationship with the Lord: feeling the joy, freedom, blessing, and love that is inherent in such a relationship. God is nothing but goodness – a constant outpouring of love, grace, and mercy. Yet how often do we truly abandon ourselves before him – letting go of all cares and worries – and simply bask in the perfect truth, beauty, and goodness that surrounds him?

Too often as adults we are not able to abandon ourselves to the Lord because we may be self-conscious and/or self-centered. It's hard to dance when our own thoughts crowd out the sacred music that surrounds us!

When we deepen our relationship to God, we may lose something of ourselves, but we will gain something far richer. We can find the freedom to dance, to sing, and to rejoice in the Lord.

Jesus tells his disciples that his family includes anyone who follows the will of his Father. This family may know heartache, difficulty, and even suffering (as all saints suffered difficulties) – but yet they have such joy. They have the joy David felt as he danced with abandon, and the joy that is waiting for each of us in the Eucharist.

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Wednesday, January 24, 2024
(Lec. 319)

- 1) 2 Samuel 7:4-17
- 2) Mark 4:1-20

WEDNESDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Francis de Sales,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 546, 2707

FOCUS: *The seed is the word of God, Christ is the sower.*

It's humorous, in a way, that one of the easiest parables to understand is the one the disciples ask Jesus to explain. Jesus basically says, "if you don't understand this, how will you understand anything else?" In other words, you have to understand *these* words, in order to understand *his* word.

The parable of the sower makes us pay attention to how we receive and respond to the word of God. To honestly examine whether we have an open heart to receive it. To ensure that it is rooted in who we are and what we do. To check whether it grows and bears fruit.

We know there are challenges and obstacles that can affect the growth of our faith, or its failure to grow. This was certainly true for Saint Francis de Sales, whom the Church honors today. His faith was in danger of being choked out by his father, who wanted him to have a career in law and politics. He faced discouragement when his evangelistic efforts were met with slammed doors and thrown rocks. He even faced resistance from within the Church when he preached that holiness was just as attainable for lay people as it was for priests and religious. But Saint Francis de Sales kept his eyes on Jesus and eventually became the seed that produced a hundredfold.

The transformative power of the Word is infinite. God sent it forth in his Son, and it came back to him having fulfilled its mission: We ourselves have been planted in the kingdom. We are meant to grow and bear fruit. Nothing is beyond God's generosity or capability, and yet he gives us free will to embrace the gift or take another path.

In the parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus shows that he truly understands the human condition. He knows that sometimes we are so busy with life that it is hard to care about one more thing. But the message in this parable is that God's word is the first thing we should care about – for nothing else makes sense otherwise.

* * *

Thursday, January 25, 2024
(Lec. 519)

**THE CONVERSION
OF SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE
- FEAST**

1) Acts 22:3-16
or Acts 9:1-22

2) Mark 16:15-18

Gospel related: **CCC** 161, 183, 434, 670, 699, 888, 977, 1223, 1253, 1256, 1257, 1507, 1673

FOCUS: *Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.*

One of the greatest moments in history is recounted in today's first reading: Jesus intervenes in Saul's misguided crusade. A blinding light knocks Saul to the ground as a voice challenges him: *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* Saul – humbled and helpless – asks Jesus, *What shall I do, sir?*

Jesus sends Saul to his disciples in Damascus. The man the disciples once feared is led by hand into their care, to be healed, baptized, and given his mission. His story will continue throughout the New Testament, where the Greek version of his name, Paul, will supplant the Hebrew version of Saul.

Jesus redeems Saul's passion and zeal, reorienting it toward good and the Gospel. Paul is another example, like Peter, of Jesus' selection of unlikely heroes: These two are revered as the great Apostles of the Church. Peter denied and abandoned Jesus at the cross; Paul *persecuted this Way to death*. If faults were all Jesus saw in Peter and Paul, we would not have the Church we have today. The Good News is that Jesus is more merciful than that. He redeems and reorients us all, despite our faults.

In his mercy, Jesus redeems those of us who, like Peter, lack consistency in zeal for our faith, or who, like Paul, become overzealous about our own righteousness to the point of persecuting others. Jesus knows our faults and redeems us anyway. He sends us forth to glorify the Lord with our lives and to announce the Gospel of the Lord.

As we come to the table of the Eucharist, we may ask Jesus for what we need, or trust that he knows. In his mercy we receive what we need. Jesus desires every creature to know and share in the joy of this Good News. Through this liturgy he commissions us as his witnesses. He sends us forth as bright lights shining and voices calling out, reorienting the world to his mercy and love.

* * *

Friday, January 26, 2024
(Lec. 520)

1) 2 Timothy 1:1-8
or Titus 1:1-5

(Lec. 321)

2) Mark 4:26-34

Gospel related: **CCC** 546

FRIDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM

Saints Timothy and Titus,
Bishops)

FOCUS: In the kingdom of God, power is associated not with dominance but with love and self-control.

In today's first reading, Paul reminds Timothy of the strength available to him because of his sincere faith. Paul writes, *For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.*

Seldom in our modern culture do we associate power with love or self-control. More often, we see power connected to dominance or control of others, for power allows us to exert ourselves over and above others.

Not so in the kingdom of God. In today's Gospel, Jesus likens the kingdom to the mustard seed – a seemingly tiny, powerless kernel that gets buried in the ground, where it becomes even more invisible. Yet over time, by the steady grace of God, the seed springs forth and becomes the largest of plants, with branches so vast that *the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade*. This is a counter-cultural power, a power that builds up others with selflessness instead of dominance. Indeed, power in the kingdom of God requires self-control and breeds love.

With this power – God's power – inside of us, we can cast out all cowardice and shame. Paul tells Timothy to *stir into flame* the gifts God has given him. It's no wonder that fire is one of the most common images of the Holy Spirit. Are we on fire with the Spirit, using God's strength to love instead of to control or dominate others?

As we turn now to the Eucharistic feast, we are reminded of the source of our strength and our home in God's kingdom. With power, love, and self-control, may we build up this kingdom so that all may dwell in its shade.

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Saturday, January 27, 2024

(Lec. 322)

1) 2 Samuel 12:1-7a, 10-17

2) Mark 4:35-41

SATURDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Angela Merici,
Virgin;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

FOCUS: The Lord will see us through the storms of our lives.

In today's Gospel, Jesus calms the storm that threatened the lives of his disciples. Maybe we won't ever find ourselves aboard a sinking boat, but we all experience storms in our lives, ones that threaten to upend a relationship, our livelihood, or many other things. When such storms arise, particularly when they come upon us suddenly, we can try to stave off the impending disaster. Or we can turn to the Lord. The disciples turned to the Lord in desperation, saying, *Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?*

Jesus cares about what is happening in our lives. He came into the world to show us that he loves us enough to die on the cross for us, and he loves us so much that he remains with us in the Eucharist. Therefore, whether in peaceful or stressful times, call on the Lord each day and thank him for his steadfast presence. And, as the Gospel reveals, Jesus is the one who has the power to bring forth peace out of the chaos that any storms in our lives might cause.

If this is who Jesus is, and if we truly believe this, then when storms arise in our life, we are left with the question Jesus asked his disciples: *Why are you terrified?* Of course, this is easier said than done. A debilitating illness, a job loss, a dwindling bank account, a son or daughter heading down a troubling path, a marriage that seems to be coming apart – all are scary prospects to face. The good news is that we don't have to face these challenges alone and, even better, the Lord will see us through them.

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 28, 2024

(Lec. 71)

1) Deuteronomy 18:15-20

2) 1 Corinthians 7:32-35

3) Mark 1:21-28

Gospel related: CCC 438, 1673, 2173

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus teaches with *authority*.

When Jesus and the disciples come to Capernaum in today's Gospel, the people in the synagogue are astonished. His teaching is different from that of the scribes: Jesus taught as one having *authority*. The word *authority* comes from roots implying self-doing or even self-being. One acting with authority acts with his own power.

The rabbis, Pharisees, and scribes would have carefully and consistently explained that their teaching stood on the foundation of the word of God in the prophets. Their teaching had power only to exhort, and only because it pointed beyond themselves back to the very power of God. They had no authority themselves; they were not authors, only teachers pointing back to what God had already said.

But Jesus taught as one having authority – having power of his own. Not only is this different from the teaching of the scribes, but this is also different from the teaching of the prophets themselves. Moses, speaking for God, tells the people in the first reading: *I will raise up for them a prophet ... and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him*. The prophets speak the words of God, not their own. Even to prophesy in this way was a great risk. Anyone who dared to speak in the name of the Lord something that God did not command risked death for blasphemy – a penalty imposed by God himself through Moses in today's first reading.

And so, Jesus teaching with authority is astonishing indeed! Everything changes with Jesus' entry into human history. When Jesus speaks, God acts. This is a reversal of the action from the era of the prophets. With the prophets, it was God who spoke first, and the prophet then acted on God's command – often speaking God's words to the people. But, in Jesus, we have God's word present in human flesh. And when he teaches, his words themselves have power to act. The command of Jesus to the unclean spirit is no mere exhortation, it is not a request or an appeal to some higher authority. The words of Jesus, *Quiet! Come out of him!* actually cause the spirit to come out.

This is true of all the words of Jesus. In other Gospel passages Jesus says, *I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be* (Jn 14:3); and *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest* (Mt 11:28). These are not empty promises; they have authority. Let us then put our trust in him – in the God who so loves us that he sent his only Son to speak and act on our behalf, on behalf of our salvation. We can then be free of anxieties about things of this world because when Jesus speaks, God acts. This is astonishing indeed.

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Monday, January 29, 2024
(Lec. 323)

- 1) 2 Samuel 15:13-14
30; 16:5-13
- 2) Mark 5:1-20

MONDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God desires our healing and freedom in him.

How long had the Gerasene man in the Gospel been inflicted with the unclean spirit? It was a sad and tortuous way of life. His crushing infliction is complicated by his being socially isolated. There was no hope for him ... until Jesus comes.

Jesus' mission was to restore communion within fallen creation – to reconcile humanity to the Father and with one another. Today's story demonstrates the all-encompassing reach of Christ and his power. The unclean spirit recognizes him and is subject to him. The end result is that the man who had been possessed was set free.

Sickness and unclean spirits were certainly prevalent in the ancient world, and to the people of that time, they also symbolized the effects of sin: For example, people believed that a son or daughter who was sick was so because of the sins of the parents. Christ cured people of their physical ailments, but in many ways "what he healed" is not as important as that he had, and has, *the power to heal* – and does so. He came to heal us in our relationships with one another and with the Father – to free us from the death of sin.

Healing comes in many forms, and certainly modern medicine can work wonders for physical, mental, and psychological health. But some wounds are spiritual in nature – who we are in communion with God and the body of Christ. This means we must turn to Jesus, the Divine Physician, for healing. Through the sacrament of reconciliation, Jesus can truly heal us and set us free.

The more we come to know ourselves and our sin – recognizing what is "unclean" within us – and the more we strive for perfect contrition and repentance, the better we are disposed to Christ's mercy. The more we avail ourselves of that mercy, the more free we become, making room for Christ to act in us rather than being subject to our own sinful nature. Filled with his love, made new in his mercy, and empowered by grace, we will come to be like the healed Gerasene man – one who proclaims the Good News of Jesus' redeeming love at work in the world.

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Tuesday, January 30, 2024
(Lec. 324)

1) 2 Samuel 18:9-10, 14b,
24-25a, 30-19:3

2) Mark 5:21-43

Gospel related: CCC 548, 994, 1504, 2616

TUESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *Do not be afraid; just have faith.*

There are some painful scenes in today's readings. In the first reading, a father mourns the tragic loss of his son. In the Gospel, a father struggles as his young daughter faces death. A woman who has suffered for 12 years without answers comes forward to be healed.

Jesus' response in the face of these difficult circumstances is powerful. The woman with the years-long hemorrhage does not even talk to Jesus, at first. She just pushes through the crowd to touch his cloak. And despite the crowd, Jesus feels it. She is healed, and after she tells him her story, Jesus tells her it is because of her faith. Moving on from there, he continues to go to the synagogue official's daughter. Even when everyone tells him it is useless and too late, Jesus tells them to just have faith. And he heals her.

Jesus tells those around them to not be afraid and to just have faith. We all face suffering, and we know how easy it is to succumb to fear in these situations. When things feel overwhelming and we struggle to see a way forward, our vulnerability makes us feel like fear is the only option. It can feel like the unknown is all there is. But Jesus urges us to not get stuck here. Jesus meets us in our pain and tells us to just have faith.

Jesus is here in this Mass – meeting us where we are, and with whatever burdens we carry, in word and sacrament. We have listened to God's word, and in just a few moments, we will receive him in the Eucharist. May this glorious mystery increase our faith, and help us to endure whatever suffering we might face in our lives.

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Wednesday, January 31, 2024
(Lec. 325)

- 1) 2 Samuel 24:2, 9-17
- 2) Mark 6:1-6

WEDNESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint John Bosco,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 500, 699, 2610 **CSDC** 259

FOCUS: We don't have to be worthy; Jesus is.

A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house.

One would think the son of such a mighty and merciful God would receive a warmer reception than the one given to him in Mark's Gospel. It is Jesus' first trip home since the beginning of his ministry. The people of Nazareth preferred the idea that Jesus was a poor man who worked with his hands rather than a Son of God who could do all things.

Mark says that they took offense at him. Perhaps they thought, "Who was this local carpenter's son who thinks he knows more than we do?" We hear in the reading, though, that their lack of faith is not rewarded. Few miracles happen that day. Presumably, Jesus does just as he would later instruct his Apostles: He shakes the dust from his feet and goes on to the next town, where there are others who are more willing to believe that, indeed, something good can come from Nazareth.

Something great came from Nazareth. He performed mighty deeds and spoke with authority and wisdom. He is *our* carpenter; *our* Savior; *our* Lord. And if we ever feel that God can't or won't help us or that we are too sinful and therefore unworthy of his love and mercy, we can remember this moment. We don't have to be worthy. Jesus is. We don't have to be perfect. God is. We just have to trust and believe.

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