

# APRIL

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

8   9   10   11   12

13   14   15   16   17

18   19   20   21   22

23   24   25   26   27

28   29   30

**CYCLE C  
YEAR II**

Friday, April 1, 2016  
(Lec. 265)

- 1) Acts 4:1-12
- 2) John 21:1-14

Gospel related: CCC 448, 645, 659, 1166

FRIDAY  
WITHIN THE OCTAVE  
OF EASTER

**FOCUS:** Do we seize moments throughout the day to profess Christ as our Lord?

Today, many countries in Western culture celebrate April Fools' Day. It is a day dedicated to playing pranks on unsuspecting friends and family.

It seems rather appropriate that this day falls, this year, within the Octave of Easter. In 1 Corinthians (4:10), Saint Paul writes: *We are fools on Christ's account*. To modern society, we do indeed seem foolish. We place our trust and salvation in a Savior who defies conventional wisdom. Our Savior was born in a stable, lived among the working-class members of his day, spent time with tax collectors, adulterers and various other sinners, and died a brutal and humiliating death. In short, he was not very kingly or triumphant by worldly standards. He reigns with justice, mercy, peace and love – not one-upmanship or self-indulgence.

Some in our modern culture have chosen to place their trust in science or reason alone, material gain, political power or self-reliance that expresses itself as if they are masters of their own destiny. This approach to the twenty-first century is often considered enlightened – as if the world has outgrown its need for God, and believers need to cling to superstition. Herein lies the distinction between being fools and foolishness.

Peter and John, along with the other disciples, knew that the source of true power was Jesus Christ. Having witnessed the resurrection and becoming filled with the Holy Spirit, they were emboldened to proclaim, before Jewish religious leaders, that Jesus *is the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone*. Confronting the high priests in this manner, to many, appeared to be an act of foolishness. However, in doing so, they make it clear the folly is not theirs but that of the Jewish leadership.

Today is actually a good day to reflect on whether we are fools on Christ's account or prone to acts of foolishness by placing our trust in the sources of conventional wisdom.

We have been baptized in Christ and sealed in the Spirit. We are presented with ample opportunities throughout our day to profess Christ as Lord. Most of these opportunities do not require a public confrontation, but instead call us to love deeper, to forgive quicker and to extend mercy more generously. Do we seize these moments? Are we fools for Christ or just foolish?

\* \* \* \* \*

Saturday, April 2, 2016  
(Lec. 266)

- 1) Acts 4: 13-21
- 2) Mark 16:9-15

Gospel related: CCC 643, 645, 659, 888, 977, 1223

SATURDAY  
WITHIN THE OCTAVE  
OF EASTER

FOCUS: To believe without a doubt in the presence of the risen Lord in our lives.

The passage from the Gospel of Mark we heard today is known as the “longer ending” of Mark’s Gospel. This entry lists a summary of Jesus’ appearances to his disciples. The early Fathers of the Church have accepted this longer ending as inspired, but perhaps not written by Mark. Some of the content of this longer ending is also found in Luke 24 and John 20.

Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalen, and his appearance was so real that she could not contain the good news within her, but had to share it with Jesus’ followers who were *mourning and weeping*. Yet they refused to believe her news that Jesus had risen. Two other disciples who were walking on their way toward the country also encountered and saw the risen Lord Jesus. When they returned and told this to the other followers, they did not believe them either.

The eleven disciples were at table when the risen Lord Jesus appeared to them. He did not greet them with the usual greeting of *Peace be with you*, but instead took them to task for their *unbelief and hardness of heart*.

Why do you think the disciples did not believe the news that Jesus had risen shared with them by Mary Magdalene and the two disciples who encountered Jesus while walking? Perhaps the answer is as simple as the difficulty of accepting the seemingly impossible reality of someone rising from the dead?

In applying this to ourselves, the question becomes: Do we feel the Lord’s presence at times other than here at Mass, in our day-to-day lives? If we do not, then we have work to do – such as spending more time in prayer and reflecting upon Scripture. By doing so, we can more readily identify the way the risen Lord Jesus is working in our lives and perhaps wants to work in our lives. Then, we are challenged to cooperate with Jesus and the grace and action of the Holy Spirit, so that Jesus might work in and through us to touch the lives of others. As we experience the Lord’s presence in our daily lives, we will be raised up to a newer and fuller life in Jesus and come to experience the blessings of peace, joy and fulfillment in greater abundance.

\* \* \* \* \*

**SUNDAY, APRIL 3, 2016**

(Lec. 45)

- 1) Acts 5:12-16
- 2) Revelation 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19
- 3) John 20:19-31

Gospel related: CCC 442, 448, 514, 575, 643, 644, 645, 659, 730, 788, 858, 976, 1087, 1120, 1287, 1441, 1461, 1485, 2839  
CSDC 491

**SECOND SUNDAY  
OF EASTER or  
DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY  
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: Believe in the risen Lord.

In today's Gospel, an incredulous Thomas tells his fellow disciples that he will not believe their claims that Christ is alive *unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hands into his side*. After encountering the risen Lord, Thomas utters five words, "*My Lord and my God!*" According to the *Catechism*, these simple words convey Thomas' profound belief in Christ's victory over death and in Christ's divinity. (CCC 448)

Imagine how so many others have come to believe in Christ! The Apostles fearlessly preached the risen Lord and cured the sick, and *great numbers were added to them*. Five thousand heard Peter's speech on Pentecost (Acts 4:4) and came to believe. In the Book of Revelation, we learn that John saw visions on the Island of Patmos. Among them was an encounter with Jesus, *the first and the last, the one who lives*, who tells John to write down *what [he] has seen, and what is happening, and what will happen afterwards*.

Other passages in Scripture tell us that there were more than five hundred eyewitnesses to Christ's resurrection. (1 Cor. 15:4-8; Acts 1:22; CCC 643) Even though many had known Jesus in his public ministry, their faith was confirmed, with the help of divine grace, from their direct experience of the *reality* of the risen Christ. (CCC 645) He ate and drank with them; he breathed his Spirit upon them; he repeatedly offered them his mercy and his peace.

And how did *you* come to believe in the resurrected Christ? Perhaps your parents first shared the faith with you. Perhaps a coworker or friend told you about Christ. Perhaps you experienced the charity and joy of a Christian community. Perhaps you read about Christ in sacred Scripture, especially the word of God proclaimed each week in the liturgy. Your faith has been planted and has grown through the grace of the sacraments over the years – baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, reconciliation, perhaps marriage, and more.

Like the Apostles, as believers, each of us has the obligation and solemn duty to share the good news of salvation, and that Christ is alive in our midst. How can we have an impact on a culture that has become convinced that belief and religious expression should not affect laws and societal norms? Believers have always been moved by divine grace to become witnesses to the truth of the resurrection, to the forgiveness of sins, and to the promise of eternal salvation. Do you know someone who needs to hear about Jesus Christ? If you do, without hesitation or delay, go and tell them so they might come to know the joy we have found in Jesus.

\* \* \* \* \*

Monday, April 4, 2016  
(Lec. 545)

- 1) Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10
- 2) Hebrews 10:4-10
- 3) Luke 1:26-38

Gospel related: CCC 64, 148, 269, 273, 276, 332, 430, 437, 484, 486, 488, 490, 491, 494, 497, 505, 510, 559, 697, 706, 709, 723, 2571, 2617, 2677, 2812, 2827, 2856 CSDC 59

**THE ANNUNCIATION  
OF THE LORD  
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: *Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.*

In celebrating the Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, the Catholic Church takes time, in a particular way, to reflect on Mary and her role in salvation history. According to the *Catechism*, "What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ." (CCC 487) Mary is venerated for her unique role in salvation history, but always in light of Christ.

Those not familiar with a Catholic understanding of Mary can often confuse this veneration with worship. As Catholics, we do not worship Mary. We are inspired by her virtue and obedience in such a way that we implore her assistance and intercession to aid us in being faithful, obedient disciples of her son, Jesus Christ. Today's Gospel, in large part, reveals why we would do so.

Gabriel greets Mary by saying: *Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.* He affirms for Mary that God has found favor with her. Mary ponders this greeting. She shows reverence and humility for being addressed this way – what we refer to as "holy fear." Gabriel assures her, *Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.*

Mary, while favored by God, was still human in every aspect except original sin. She had free will. Her decisions were hers to make. She experienced confusion and anxiety. She knew sorrow, grief and great joy. In other words, she experienced the spectrum of the human condition. Mary's life is, in many ways, the best example of humanity's relationship with God. Hers is a life offered in gratitude, surrender, dialogue, steadfast trust and sure faith.

Being told she will conceive and bear the Son of God, Mary maintains her disposition of humility. She continues to realize her need for God, even knowing that she is favored. She converses with the angel to deepen her understanding of what his glad tidings mean. Her questions are not to doubt or challenge, but to grow in understanding and wisdom.

Her fiat is the culmination of all that she is – mind, body and spirit. It surrenders all she is to God. The totality of her fiat models how we, as followers of Christ, need to surrender to God the totality of who we are – body, mind and spirit.

Our lives are to be offered to God in gratitude, surrender, steadfast trust and sure faith. Like Mary, we need to grow in understanding and wisdom of God's will in our lives. We do so by reading Scripture, receiving the sacraments, seeking the counsel of the Church, praying daily, and by turning to the Blessed Virgin Mary for her help and intercession.

Holy Mary, full of grace, pray for us that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tuesday, April 5, 2016  
(Lec. 268)

- 1) Acts 4:32-37
- 2) John 3:7b-15

Gospel related: CCC 423, 440, 505, 526, 591, 661, 691, 728, 1287, 2130 CSDC 50

TUESDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK OF EASTER  
(Opt. Mem. Saint Vincent Ferrer,  
Priest)

FOCUS: Belief in the resurrection leads to eternal life.

Like Nicodemus in our Gospel reading, we often turn to God's word to seek wisdom and truth, only to find ourselves asking even more questions. This may be frustrating at times, but it can lead to great wisdom.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee. While he recognized Jesus as a *teacher who has come from God*, he questioned his teachings. He asked Jesus how one could be born again after he was already grown.

In his response, Jesus clarifies that being *born from above* does not imply another physical birth. Jesus is talking about spiritual birth, being *born of the Spirit*, which he compares to the wind. We are born of the Spirit through the sacrament of baptism, and are sealed with the gifts of the Spirit at confirmation.

Then Jesus reminds Nicodemus of a story that he would have known to help him understand this unfamiliar truth. In the story, the Israelites angered God with their complaining and ungratefulness, so God sent serpents to kill them. They soon repented.

In his mercy, God instructed the Israelites to make a bronze serpent and mount it on a pole; anyone who had been bitten and looked at this serpent was healed. (Nm 21:4-9) Jesus tells Nicodemus, *as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.*

With these words, Jesus foreshadows his crucifixion and resurrection and gives us something even more important –the promise of eternal life. We need only believe.

While our faith is a personal act, it is not an isolated act. (CCC 166) Beliefs are passed on through generations and shared with others. In Acts, Luke describes life in the early Christian community – the early Church, living as one heart and mind. They worshipped together with great power, and shared their possessions and wealth to the extent that there was *no needy person among them*. Think how different the world would be if everyone who professed to be a Christian lived out their faith in such a fashion.

May we strive to give generously of our time, talent and treasure in service to others, so the kingdom may be built up more fully on earth and so that many others may have the opportunity to know of Christ's love for them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wednesday, April 6, 2016  
(Lec. 269)

WEDNESDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK OF EASTER

- 1) Acts 5:17-26
- 2) John 3:16-21

Gospel related: CCC 219, 444, 454, 458, 678, 679, 706 CSDC 3, 64

FOCUS: The depth of God's love is the source of our eternal life.

I once heard a paraphrase of John 3:16 that said, "For God so loved the world that he gave up his only begotten Son so that anyone who believes in him would have life so full only eternity could hold it."

Think about our first reading from Acts of the Apostles. The Apostles were arrested and, after appearing before the Sanhedrin, thrown in jail. A messenger from God, an angel, set them free and told them to go tell others about *this life*. Yes, this life, based on the Father's love, expressed in the sacrifice of the life of the Son of God. Let's think about it. What was the ransom God paid for our lives? It was the life of Jesus.

Are we hearing this? At what price were we bought? So what is *this life*?

Well, it was worth an angel springing the Apostles from jail. It was worth God sending all the prophets who foretold his coming. Three wise men and a group of shepherds came to his birth. And a choir of angels sang. Multitudes came to hear him. Volumes of songs and books have been written and sung about him. Movies have been made over and over. This is Jesus, Emmanuel, God is with us.

For God so loved the world that he gave us Jesus, that we might believe and have this life. In response to that love, maybe I need to believe more deeply, follow more closely, love him a lot more than I do. Because it is Jesus, the name above all names, the King of kings. For me, for you. So we can live forever.

We just have to drop to our knees and say "thank you." I adore you. I believe in you. For by your sacrifice and victory, you have given us all *this life*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thursday, April 7, 2016  
(Lec. 270)

- 1) Acts 5:27-33
- 2) John 3:31-36

Gospel related: CCC 161, 504, 690, 1286

THURSDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK OF EASTER  
(OBL. MEM. Saint John  
Baptist de la Salle, Priest)

FOCUS: Jesus, the son of God, reveals God to us in word and deed as merciful and loving.

You might have heard the story about the little girl working hard at the kitchen table. Her mother asks, "What are you doing?" "I'm drawing a picture of God," the child replies. The mother comments, "Honey, no one knows what God looks like." Undaunted, the girl says, "They will when I'm through."

God, a pure uncreated being, is the creator of the universe and us. We wish we knew exactly what God is like, but God is utterly other. Whatever we think God is like, he is always more. We can never fully comprehend God. Yet, like Nicodemus earlier in this chapter of John's Gospel, we seek answers about God and the meaning of life. If we're smart, we will imitate Nicodemus and go to Jesus.

Our gracious God revealed himself through Jesus. Incredibly, God let us know him by becoming one of us. Looking at Jesus, we see the face of God. When God spoke to Moses, he said that his name was I AM. Likewise, in the eighth chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus declares, *Before Abraham was, I am.* (8:58)

So what is God like? Jesus is our Savior. Even his God-given name means "God saves." In Jesus, we see that God is merciful – forgiving sinners, healing the sick, and then dying and rising so we might have eternal life.

The names Jesus gave himself reveal God: the way, the truth and the life. The way: Belief in God is the path to a good life on earth and eternal happiness in heaven. The truth: Questions about who we are, why we exist and our destiny are answered in him. The life: God offers us a share in his divine life. He is a loving Father.

For good reason, Jesus is called the alpha and omega, which are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. He is the beginning and the end – in other words, Jesus is our everything. If this is true, shouldn't we try to know more about Jesus? And shouldn't we try to know him better personally? We can hear Jesus speak to us when we read Scripture, and we can receive his very self in Communion. We can talk to him during the day, perhaps repeating the Jesus prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

When we realize who Jesus is, we are compelled to share him with others. That is why Saint John Baptist de la Salle, whose feast we celebrate today, became a priest and founded Catholic schools. He began the community known as the Christian Brothers. Perhaps we should think more like the Apostles in today's reading, who said, *We must obey God rather than man*, and then continued to teach. We, too, have the gift of faith, and the Holy Spirit is at work in us. We know Jesus. What can we do today to spread the good news of Jesus, to help others know God?

\* \* \* \* \*



Friday, April 8, 2016  
(Lec. 271)

- 1) Acts 5:34-42
- 2) John 6:1-15

Gospel related: CCC 439, 549, 559, 1338

FRIDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK OF EASTER

FOCUS: Prayer precedes action.

During this Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis' words inspire us to take action. In the papal bull for the Year of Mercy, he states: "It is my burning desire that, during this jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy... Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples. Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy ... and let us not forget the spiritual works of mercy... ."

Today's Gospel is the prototype plan, a design of sorts, for carrying out the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Let's take a closer look.

Jesus notices that the crowd has a need – to be fed. Carrying out the works of mercy requires that we look beyond ourselves to be attentive to the actual needs of others, not the perceived needs of others.

In the Gospel, Jesus invites Philip to address the crowd's need. We are called to respond to need. Philip's response – that two-hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough – demonstrates a somewhat self-reliant way of thinking, as if the power to satiate the need lies within our action alone. We must recognize that even our best efforts are not enough to respond to need.

Andrew recognizes that the community already possesses elements necessary for addressing the need – two fish and five loaves. In carrying out the works of mercy, the community already possesses precious resources necessary to address the need. We must be attentive to those resources.

And finally, before any distribution takes place, the resources – the fish and loaves – are presented to Jesus for prayers of gratitude and blessing. Once offered up in this manner, through Christ, the gifts are multiplied. It is only through and in cooperation with God's grace that we then give abundantly of ourselves and resources to accommodate the needs of the community. Prayer precedes action so that our works of mercy are God-centered, demonstrate our discipleship, and give God the glory.

This design becomes lived witness in this Eucharistic celebration. Our community brings its gifts of bread and wine. Through prayer, Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit, these simple gifts are abundantly blessed, multiplied, and then they satisfy the needs and longings of our heart. Our lives are strengthened so that we in turn offer that abundance of hope and joy through our actions of mercy – both corporal and spiritual.

\* \* \* \* \*

Saturday, April 9, 2016  
(Lec. 272)

- 1) Acts 6:1-7
- 2) John 6:16-21

Gospel related: **CSDC** 453

SATURDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK OF EASTER

FOCUS: Continued growth in the young Church brings challenges.

One of a pediatrician's responsibilities is to monitor the growth of a child. For example, a child's weight or height can become serious concerns if either does not keep pace with the prescribed norms. The Church, still in its infancy in today's reading from Acts, is experiencing a significant growth spurt.

After receiving complaints that parts of its ever-growing flock, namely the widows and orphans, are not receiving proper attention, the Twelve Apostles take time to discern, with the community, how to address the issue.

The result is the beginning of the diaconate. In this instance, seven holy men are presented to the Apostles, who pray over them and impose hands on them. These two important ritual gestures are key components to this very day for the ordination of deacons, priests and bishops.

The main responsibilities of a deacon remain Christian service and preaching the word. Three well-known saints of the church were deacons. Two of them, Stephen and Lawrence, were martyred.

The third deacon may surprise you. It was Saint Francis of Assisi, one of the most admired saints of the Church. His love and concern for the poor, and his understanding of what it meant to be a good preacher, convinced him to remain a deacon and not seek ordination to the priesthood.

As the Order of Presbyters emerged and grew over the first centuries of the Church, less and less emphasis was placed on the role and need for deacons, until the practice of ordaining deacons who were not eventually to be ordained priests was lost in the Western Church, or what we know as the Latin Rite.

One of the results of the Second Vatican Council was the restoration of the Order of Deacons as a legitimate calling and ministry within the Church. As a result, thousands of parishes and communities throughout the world benefit today from the ministry of deacons, who are preaching the word of God and looking out once again for the marginalized among us. Let us pray today that a Church no longer in its infancy continues to benefit from the ministry of all called to serve God's people, and the community far beyond these walls.

## SUNDAY, APRIL 10, 2016

(Lec. 48)

1) Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41

2) Revelation 5:11-14

3) John 21:1-19 or 21:1-14

Gospel related: CCC 448, 553, 618, 645, 659, 881, 1166, 1429, 1551

## THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

FOCUS: Seek to love others unconditionally, as God loves us.

In your imagination, go with me now into a situation in which you are about to face someone you have hurt, deeply hurt, or in which you are about to face someone who has deeply hurt you. Quite naturally, your emotions are powerful. If you've hurt that person, you feel remorse and guilt; if you are the one who has been hurt, you may have strong feelings of hostility and resentment. Like the prodigal son in Jesus' famous parable, we will likely rehearse ahead of time what we will say.

When faced with such situations, we may be tempted to give up on those relationships. We may employ avoidance techniques, or protect ourselves like a turtle with a hard shell of cold indifference, or we may, with feelings of righteous indignation, stubbornly refuse even the slightest move toward any reconciliation whatsoever. In all such situations, we have to deal with a powerful force within us called *criticism*. We can be either too critical of others, or we can be too critical of ourselves. In either case, simply giving up is the great temptation that looms in front of us, aided and abetted by a spirit of criticism.

Giving up is surrendering to weakness or even despair. Do we give up simply in order to take the easy way out? Do we give in to despair? The temptation to give up comes to us in many forms in a number of situations, often seeming like the wise thing to do.

Giving up, however, can be the work of the devil. Giving up was found in each one of the three temptations Satan presented to Christ when he was out in the desert preparing to embark upon his public ministry. Giving up was the last temptation Satan hurled at Jesus as he hung dying on his cross.

When do we give up on others? We all know examples of parents, spouses and others who have given up on their loved ones. We've known family and friends who have given up on the Church, on religion in general, or even given up on God.

God, however, never ever gives up on us, even when we've turned our backs on him or betrayed him. That's what today's Gospel account is all about.

Here we find Jesus encountering some of his disciples after his resurrection. The disciples were all gathered together on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. It was in that encounter that Jesus asked Peter those three famous questions, questions that obviously recognized the triple denial of Peter during Christ's suffering. Implicit in those questions, however, was the fact that Jesus had not given up on Peter. Jesus' love and commitment to him were still there, even after all that had occurred. But Peter's triple denial had to be acknowledged and faced. Jesus faces it with loving forgiveness, all of which allows Peter to forgive himself. There is a wonderful freedom that flows from forgiveness.

"Unconditional love" is something we've all heard about. Theologians tell us of God's unconditional love. This type of love is something we want to give to our children, our spouses and our family members. We all have our moments, though, when we abandon unconditional love and slap others with conditions on our love, telling them we'll love them or forgive them "if ... ."

This is why we need to seek God's forgiveness today, not simply to save our own skins, but so we might have the power to forgive others as he has forgiven us. Without God's power, unconditional love is most likely impossible. But with God's love and power, all things are possible – even loving others unconditionally, even not “giving up” on them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Monday, April 11, 2016  
(Lec. 273)

- 1) Acts 6:8-15
- 2) John 6:22-29

Gospel related: CCC 698, 728, 1296, 1338, 2835

MONDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK OF EASTER  
(OBL. MEM. Saint Stanislaus,  
Bishop and Martyr)

FOCUS: The martyrs found the love of Jesus Christ, which fulfilled the deepest yearnings of their heart.

It is rather interesting that today's first reading, which details the events and circumstances that immediately preceded the martyrdom of Saint Stephen, occurs on the feast of Saint Stanislaus, who was a bishop and martyr in Poland in the early eleventh century. According to historical details, Saint Stanislaus was martyred while celebrating Mass. Now Stephen could not have been celebrating Mass because he was a deacon in the Church, but his good works and his fearless preaching and teaching were enough to enrage members of the synagogue, who ultimately killed Stephen by stoning him.

You will hear the rest of the story in tomorrow's first reading. But in listening to the stories of Stephen and Stanislaus, we realize there are still Christians being martyred for their faith in Christ in today's world, in countries and cultures hostile to Christianity and Catholicism.

There have been martyrs in recent history. In 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero, like Saint Stanislaus, was killed while celebrating Mass in a hospital chapel in El Salvador. Why are these people willing to die for Christ? What made them realize that their lives on Earth were nothing compared to the life that lay ahead for them in the world to come?

Perhaps we can find that answer in the end of the Gospel passage for today. The crowd asked Jesus, *What can we do to accomplish the works of God?* Jesus gave them this answer: *This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent.* I think it is safe to assume that our Christian martyrs believed in this passage – they believed in the one whom God sent to Earth to proclaim the Good News.

As we continue to celebrate this Easter season, let us be attentive to the Scripture readings for each day. We hear from the Acts of the Apostles each day during this season, and we get a kind of "Church history" class as we go through this book. We see the development of the early Church from the teaching of Peter and some of the Apostles, to the time of Paul's conversion and his journeys, where he brings the Gospel message in a way not seen before.

This is the faith that has been handed down to us – by the martyrdom of Stephen and the Apostles, to the other martyrs of the early Church, to the martyrdom of bishops such as Stanislaus. They found something worth dying for, something which, unlike the things of this world that are transitory, fulfilled the deepest hungers and yearnings of their heart. They found the love of Jesus Christ and his promise of redemption for us.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tuesday, April 12, 2016  
(Lec. 274)

1) Acts 7:51—8:1a

2) John 6:30-35

Gospel related: CCC 423, 1094

TUESDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK OF EASTER

FOCUS: God made us to share his life with us.

The Gospel readings during this time of the year are taken from John. The sixth chapter of John's Gospel contains many essential teachings of Jesus. They center around the theme of life, our lives joined into the life of God. They give us the reason for celebrating Mass and receiving holy Communion – the flesh and blood of the risen Christ. If you read nothing else today, you might want to take out your Bible and read John's sixth chapter.

In the 51<sup>st</sup> verse of this chapter, we find Jesus declaring: *I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.*

Here is the reason for Jesus being sent by the Father into our world. Here is the reason for the Church, for the Mass and for our purpose in living. The rationale for everything we hold dear in our faith is for the life of the world. Why were we made? To receive God's life. He made us to share his life with us.

We all have a need to receive God's life. Our lives are not for us alone. We did not give ourselves life. Our lives were given to us. We did not create life, much less our own lives. We were created to receive life – God's life, his life given to us out of sheer love, and then to share his love with others.

In the creation account in the Book of Genesis, we read:

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. (1:27-31)*

We should note that this passage is contained in the sixth day of creation. The next day, the seventh day, God rests while reflecting on the beauty of his work. We also should reflect on the fact that God expects us to carry on his work. We are charged with bringing the grandeur of God into an incomplete world, something that is not easy these days. But we are not expected to carry on that work all by ourselves. God's life-giving and creating Spirit works through, with and in us.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wednesday, April 13, 2016  
(Lec. 275)

- 1) Acts 8:1b-8
- 2) John 6:35-40

Gospel related: CCC 161, 606, 989, 994, 1001, 2824

WEDNESDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK OF EASTER  
(Opt. Mem. Saint Martin I,  
Pope and Martyr)

FOCUS: From the Father comes the fruit of faith – eternal life.

We may speak about people *coming to faith* when we describe someone's awareness of personal faith, discernment about faith or the awakening of a relationship with Jesus. Yet we believe that faith is a gift from God. Does faith come out of the blue – totally unexpected, not unlike the sudden appearance of Jesus to Saul on the road to Damascus? Is faith infused without input from the individual? Is it a gift received from a generous God without restrictions or obligations?

Although faith has elements of mystery about it, let us turn to the *Catechism* to help us better understand how faith works in our lives. Our *Catechism* describes faith as a "gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him." (CCC 153) It also teaches that "Faith comes from what is heard." (CCC 875)

People came to Jesus, listened to his promise of eternal life, saw the miracles he performed and *came to believe* that he was someone special. Believing in Jesus led to deeper knowledge of the Father who sent him, and of the Holy Spirit who revealed who Jesus was. (CCC 151-152) What is the sign of this belief? It is the sign of baptism – a willingness to reject sin and be reborn in faith. We celebrate the wonder of those who *come to faith* as adults at the Easter Vigil. Their witness strengthens the faith of the whole Church throughout the world.

We can believe because of the authority of God himself. We can see the external miracles of Christ and the saints, the witness of the Apostles and the early disciples, witness so strong that many were willing to die rather than deny their belief in Christ. The early Church was nourished by the blood of the martyrs, and that sad but heroic witness continues to this day. In too many parts of the world, Christians continue to give their lives as witness to their faith rather than deny it.

Jesus accepted all who came to him: the sinful woman who washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair; Matthew and Zacchaeus, tax collectors; the Canaanite woman who begged for the health of her daughter; and even a Roman centurion who came to faith beneath the cross. Jesus had followers even among the Pharisees and members of the Sanhedrin – Joseph who gave his burial site, and Nicodemus who came to Jesus in the night. Some came but found the teachings of Jesus too difficult to follow. Did they not have faith? Or rather, did they not accept the faith that was extended to them?

Turning to the sign of our faith, our baptism, what can we say about being baptized as infants? We believe infants are accepted into the family of God and given the gift of faith, even if they are not aware of it. It is the mature faith of the parents that moves them to request baptism for their child. The faith that nurtures the parent will nurture the child with a solid foundation in Church tradition, practice and education.

Faith grows and flowers when it is fed liberally with prayer, sacraments and service to others. These are gifts we can return to God for the gift of faith we have received. Blessed, indeed, are we who believe in Jesus, because we have the Father's promise of resurrection and eternal life.

Thursday, April 14, 2016  
(Lec.) 276

- 1) Acts 8:26-40
- 2) John 6:44-51

Gospel related: CCC 151, 259, 591, 728, 1001, 1355, 1406, 1428, 2837

THURSDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK OF EASTER

**FOCUS:** We are called to imitate Jesus by offering ourselves and our lives as bread for the life of the world.

Everyone likes getting good news – whether it is a letter or email from a loved one, a raise in pay or word that someone has survived a crisis. We need to hear this sort of news. It lifts our spirits and nurtures our very being. The liturgies of the Easter season are filled with the Good News of the most important sort. Today, we hear Jesus tell us that he is the Bread of Life. What does this mean that Jesus – his very self – will nurture and sustain us? In our world today, fast food often replaces the meals that bring families or friends together. Good news is drowned out by the plethora of shocking news. Good news and good meals, on the other hand, feed our very being.

Today's passage from the Acts of the Apostles takes place following the martyrdom of Stephen, the deacon. The persecutions that followed his death caused many Christians to take flight from Jerusalem. Today, we find Philip, the deacon, carrying out his mission to share the Gospel message. Prodded by the angel and inspired by the Holy Spirit, Philip encounters the Ethiopian eunuch as he is leaving Jerusalem.

What unfolds is Philip preaching the good news of salvation to the Ethiopian. Philip's powerful witness and proclamation of Jesus lead the eunuch to ask for baptism. After the eunuch is baptized and given new life in Christ, Phillip is led onward by the Spirit to continue his mission of preaching and teaching the Gospel message. Our mission is similar to that of Philip: to witness to the Good News so that others may come to place their faith in Jesus and be saved.

One natural question that flows from this passage is this: What source can we use to receive the grace and strength needed to give a faithful and effective witness to the Gospel? The answer is the Eucharist. Every time we come forward to receive holy Communion, we are nourished by Jesus himself. This allows us to draw closer to him and be given the grace and strength we need to pattern our lives upon his. Just as Jesus, the Bread of Life, gave of himself for the salvation of the world, we may offer our lives as bread for the life of the world by following his commands.

\* \* \* \* \*



Friday, April 15, 2016  
(Lec. 277)

- 1) Acts 9:1-20
- 2) John 6:52-59

Gospel related: CCC 787, 994, 1001, 1384, 1391, 1406, 1509, 1524, 2837

FRIDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus sends us to bring his presence into the world.

One way of considering today's Gospel account is to see it as Jesus' last will and testament. He passed along these thoughts to his Twelve Apostles before he was to die on the cross for our salvation, and for the life of the world. He wanted to share his life within us so that his presence might remain in our world.

Holy Communion is a common union we all share together. It is Christ's supreme gift of himself for the life of the world, not simply for our own personal salvation. How else was God's personal presence in our world – his presence, power and love – to remain here with us until the end of time?

*As Jesus says in today's Gospel, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.*

Holy Communion is deeply personal and intimate. Jesus could hardly be more close to us than in those moments when we receive him into our own bodies and souls. At the same time, it is also communal, something we all share as we become members of his body, and together constitute his mystical body in our world, both personally and collectively. Holy Communion likewise commissions us to bring his presence into our surrounding world. We become Jesus' eyes, we become his feet, we become his hands for the life of the world, not just for our own lives.

Certainly, all parts of the Mass are important, particularly the consecration of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, but we need to pay special attention to the ending of the Mass. Why? Because it really is not an ending, it is a beginning. We are here because Jesus is sending us. He is sending us to bring his presence to the world around us. We are here not just for ourselves, but for the life of the world.

\* \* \* \* \*

Saturday, April 16, 2016  
(Lec. 278)

- 1) Acts 9:31-42
- 2) John 6:60-69

Gospel related: CCC 438, 440, 473, 728, 1336, 2766

SATURDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK OF EASTER

**FOCUS:** God offers us grace to strengthen our faith, but we must continually say “yes” in order for our faith to flourish.

Today’s readings pose an important question. Will we remain with Jesus? Will we remain faithful? In our first reading, we see the young Church being built up, and *increasing in numbers*. But in our Gospel, we see men and women come face to face with Jesus and still they *returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him*. How can we understand these two very different responses to the revelation of God?

Faith is a gift – a grace. It is a grace in the sense that God gives us the strength to believe, but also in the sense that God gives us the motivation or the inspiration to believe. We see both these aspects very clearly in the early Church, as we hear that the community had the *consolation of the Holy Spirit*, helping them to remain faithful. They also heard the testimony of the Apostles and first disciples, while witnessing the mighty deeds of God, giving them additional graces and blessings to strengthen their faith and help them continue to grow in holiness of life.

Yet those graces do not take root in hearts that are not open, hearts that do not seek the Lord – that do not want to believe. Perhaps it seems shocking, but it is the reality of life. In those early days, many encountered Jesus in the same way, and yet some believed while others did not. Indeed, some believed and followed Jesus for a time but then departed from the Lord – *returning to their former way of life*. We see today that even though so much about life has changed, the invitation of faith and the frailty of our humanity remain the same.

We must remember that we are not immune to letting weeds grow up in our hearts, choking the life of faith within us. We are never finished saying “yes” to Jesus. Indeed, as we follow the lives of the Apostles, from their callings to their deaths, we see that their “yes” was necessary every step of the way.

Saint Peter, who rises to the occasion in today’s Gospel, boldly demonstrates his own “yes.” Jesus, when so many disciples departed from him, turned to those who remained and asked, *Do you also want to leave?* Then Peter, in his simplicity and honesty, makes one of the most profound acts of faith ever recorded when he says, *Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.*

As we pray today in the presence of the Lord Jesus and come to receive him, let us make Peter’s prayer our own. Let’s make today another “yes” in our journey of faith.

\* \* \* \* \*

**SUNDAY, APRIL 17, 2016**

(Lec. 51)

- 1) Acts 13:14, 43-52
- 2) Revelation 7:9, 14b-17
- 3) John 10:27-30

Gospel related: CCC 590

**FOURTH SUNDAY  
OF EASTER**

FOCUS: *My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*

On the first day of kindergarten, parents are usually more nervous than the children. Parents tell their children how much fun they will have, how they will make new friends and do art projects and learn to read. The children usually have new crayons, backpacks and lunch boxes and can't wait to see what comes next. Parents, on the other hand, are often nervous about letting go. What if my little girl gets sick? What if my son gets teased? What if she doesn't do well in reading or math?

These parents are not overprotective, they are simply living out their innate role as good shepherds. Parents shelter their children. They make sure their child does not hunger or thirst. They keep their children out of danger, and *wipe away every tear from their eyes*.

This fourth Sunday of the Easter season is often called "Good Shepherd Sunday," from the comforting imagery of Jesus as the shepherd who will lead his sheep to eternal life. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, protects and provides for his flock, even to the point of laying down his life so we may live more abundantly. By his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ "opened" heaven to us. (CCC 1026) Throughout the Gospels, Jesus teaches what we must do to be saved, to join him in the kingdom of heaven.

This Easter season, inspired by the efforts of the New Evangelization, I challenge us to respond in three ways to Jesus as the Good Shepherd:

First, get to know the voice of Jesus by getting into the discipline of reading from the Gospels every day. The peace and comfort you will experience from the words of the Good Shepherd will surprise you!

Second, pray for those who shepherd the Church. Pray for our priests, bishops, religious and lay ministers who are responsible for the pastoral care of the people of God. We need to be sustained in our ministries by grace.

Finally, do not forget your responsibility to shepherd others into the kingdom of God. Parents, you love your children and shepherd their health, behavior, education and advancement in maturity. Make sure you provide for their formation and education as Catholic Christians as well. Every one of us can make an effort to speak more freely about the person of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and how he has been a comfort and a guide to us. As we speak about our faith, we offer others the opportunity to join that great multitude in the kingdom of heaven.

\* \* \* \* \*

Monday, April 18, 2016  
(Lec. 279)

MONDAY OF  
FOURTH WEEK OF EASTER

- 1) Acts 11:1-18
- 2) John 10:1-10

Gospel related: CCC 754, 764, 2158 CSDC 1

FOCUS: Let us seek moments of stillness to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd.

In reflecting on today's Gospel account, what stood out is hearing the voice of the shepherd, hearing the Word of God, hearing the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Many of us face a daily struggle to do that. So many voices come to us, many of them urgent and demanding. The voices come through our electronic devices, our televisions, our jobs and our schoolwork. Urgent demands, mingled among a host of other demands, clamor for our attention and demand action. Worries and concerns crowd our minds, all of them calling for our attention.

Setting all of that aside, we find ourselves coping with a secular society that for the most part is unwilling to listen to the words and teachings of Jesus, a society that can be hostile toward those people who are trying to do what the Good Shepherd would have them do. That reality takes my thoughts back to the whisperings of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, whisperings that told Adam and Eve they didn't need God and that they could make their decisions without listening to God.

In writing to the Ephesians, Saint Paul warns: *For our struggle is not with flesh and blood, but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.* (Eph 6:12)

How important it is that, with determination and strength of will, we take moments to be still and listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd speaking within us. How important it is that we not allow all of the demands that come at us to act as excuses to pass by those moments of stillness in our busy days.

It may seem as if those moments are stolen. But if we do not have these moments of stillness, we allow the forces of this world to steal our souls and hold them captive. Let's remember the words of Jesus today, and keep them in our heart:

*Jesus said: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."*

\* \* \* \* \*

Tuesday, April 19, 2016  
(Lec. 280)

- 1) Acts 11:19-26
- 2) John 10:22-30

Gospel related: CCC 548, 582, 583, 590

TUESDAY OF  
FOURTH WEEK OF EASTER

FOCUS: We all are called to follow in the footsteps of the early Christians and bring others to Christ.

Antioch was an important Roman military, commercial and cultural center. At one point, Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire, and it was an early center of Christianity. Peter and Paul preached there, as did others – it was of great importance.

It was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians approximately twenty years after Jesus' death. Paul used Antioch as a base from which to carry out his missionary efforts, particularly among the Gentile Greeks and Romans, and people who did not live under the Jewish religious authorities.

It was from Antioch that Christianity swept through the Greek and Roman worlds. It spread among people who were willing to listen to, and delve into, the teachings of Jesus' Apostles and missionaries. The people in this area were not biased against them, and evidently had open minds.

There are similarities to our world today. Speaking and teaching about Christianity is not popular in this time of secularism. But we are all called to follow in the footsteps of those early Christians in Antioch. As our Holy Father, Pope Francis, said at a canonization Mass for four women religious: "Like the Apostles, each one of Christ's followers is called to become a witness to his resurrection, above all in those human settings where forgetfulness of God and human disorientation are most evident." (May 17, 2015)

The early Christians were successful in bringing others to Christ. Following their example, we can be successful, too, if we are open, as they were, to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Your example may be more important than you think. Often, recent converts tell us that it was the example, the character and the values of Catholic friends and acquaintances that attracted them to the Catholic faith, and which ultimately brought them to the Church. You are important evangelizers.

"Go and proclaim the Gospel by your lives."

\* \* \* \* \*

Wednesday, April 20, 2016  
(Lec. 281)

- 1) Acts 12:24—13:5a
- 2) John 12:44-50

Gospel related: CCC 679, 1039, 2466

WEDNESDAY OF  
FOURTH WEEK OF EASTER

**FOCUS:** The light of Christ is to shine forth through us to dispel darkness and help bring healing to the world.

Jesus reminds us in today's Gospel that *I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness*. Indeed, this Easter season helps us to affirm how the light of God's presence is manifested in the risen Lord. Yet, even though Jesus has come as light for the world, all too many of God's children remain in painful darkness.

Just a cursory viewing of your favorite newspaper or news website will show how moral darkness shadows our world. Where, then, is this light that Jesus came to bring?

It is in you! Each of us who aspire to be today's disciples of Jesus are called to bring his light to our world. So, the question now becomes, how will you shine?

There are so many ways that your light can diminish the darkness. Perhaps the place to start is with those in our own home. Sometimes, being the light in the midst of those closest to us is quite a challenge. Their habits or problems wear on us, and we are tempted to lose patience. At other times, we are hurt by their choices or actions. So how are we to be the light of Jesus? For starters, we can try to be more forgiving, we can pause to genuinely listen to our loved ones' needs, and we can respond generously. If we do so, the light of Jesus will be made brighter in our household.

But what about our hurting world, so beset by problems? The light we bring begins with compassion. We can refuse to judge people, and we can try to love all of God's children. And since it is such a big challenge to beam forth the light of Jesus, we need to return to our source of light on a daily basis, through prayer. Jesus has promised that he is always with us. He is the Light, and he will show us the way.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thursday, April 21, 2016  
(Lec. 282)

- 1) Acts 13:13-25
- 2) John 13:16-20

Gospel related: CCC 447, 520, 858, 1269, 1337, 1694

THURSDAY OF  
FOURTH WEEK OF EASTER  
(Opt. Mem. Saint Anselm,  
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

FOCUS: Jesus invites us to be his humble servants in the world.

Today's Gospel account is taken from John's Gospel. John is commonly thought to be the youngest of the Apostles, and the one who was closest to Jesus. The words of Jesus we hear today were part of his final teachings to his Apostles at the Last Supper before he was to suffer and die. Obviously, they were of great importance and Jesus was anxious to share them.

In the verses just before those we heard today, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. In performing that act, Jesus is telling us that humble service is the principal characteristic of the followers of Jesus. He tells them in words, and shows them in his actions, that they are not to consider themselves as lords and masters over others. Rather, they are to be humble foot-washers, doing as slaves do. They were to live their lives as humble servants, and help others clean up their often messy lives.

The other important point Jesus is making in today's Gospel account is identifying himself as his Father's son. And to prove the truth of his identification, Jesus will shortly go out, suffer terribly, be crowned with thorns, die an agonizing death on the cross and then rise again on the third day of his passion. He declares, *Knowing these things, you will be blessed if you put them into practice.* Undoubtedly, Jesus has in mind the fact that many will reject him in spite of all he is about to do following the Last Supper. And Jesus warns in the Gospel of Luke that if someone rejects him, they likewise reject the One who sent him, namely God our Father in heaven. (Lk 10:16)

And so, dear friends, it is one thing to give nominal assent to the teachings and actions of Jesus, it's quite another thing to actually put them into practice in our lives. Jesus knows how difficult it is, and so he gives us the Eucharist as our daily bread in order to nourish, sustain and strengthen us.

So now let us once again celebrate the Lord's Supper, receive his body and blood, and go into our world as his humble, yet life-giving servants. Let us be people who care, people who serve, people who love.

Friday, April 22, 2016  
(Lec. 283)

- 1) Acts 13:26-33
- 2) John 14:1-6

Gospel related: CCC 74, 151, 459, 661, 1025, 1698, 2466, 2614, 2795 CSDC 1, 555

FRIDAY OF  
FOURTH WEEK OF EASTER

**FOCUS:** Jesus has shown us the way to the Father, revealed to us the truth of our salvation, and given us new life so that we may be with him for eternity.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is preparing the Apostles for his death. He tells them that where he is going, they cannot yet go. But Jesus tries to bring them comfort when he reminds them that he is going to prepare a place for them with his Father. Nevertheless, the Apostles are confused. Thomas asks, *Master, we do not know where you're going; how can we know the way?* Jesus patiently explains that he himself is the way to the Father. Because the Apostles know Jesus, they also know the way to his Father. Only through Christ can any of us go to the Father.

In order to know the way to the Father, we must first know his Son. But how can we come to know Jesus? We can know him through Scripture, the sacraments and a rich "conversation" of prayer with him. Through the Bible, we come to know Jesus as he revealed himself to us. We hear his words, learn of his deeds and witness his love. In the sacraments, particularly in the Eucharist, as Jesus nourishes us with the gift of himself (body, blood, soul and divinity), we are drawn into deeper unity and love with him. In prayer, we come to live in greater love and unity with the Lord by taking the time to listen to Jesus and by being faithful to doing those things he asks us to do.

With all of these opportunities, how can we fail to know Jesus? Unfortunately, it's all too easy to remain distant from our Lord unless we seek him out. The distractions of a busy life, and the barriers of fear, pain or anger can keep us from opening ourselves up to come to know him. However, Jesus is always there, patiently waiting for us to come to him so that we may know him and be with him for eternity.

\* \* \* \* \*



Saturday, April 23, 2016  
(Lec. 284)

- 1) Acts 13:44-52
- 2) John 14:7-14

Gospel related: CCC 470, 516, 2614, 2633, 2815 CSDC 28

SATURDAY OF  
FOURTH WEEK OF EASTER  
(Opt. Mem. Saint George, Martyr;  
Saint Adalbert, Bishop and Martyr)

FOCUS: Open yourself to the word of God.

Have you ever been in the middle of a discussion with someone and realized that, frankly, you might as well be talking to the wall? What is that like? Perhaps you can see the other person poised on the edge of their seat, their mouth already half open, ready to make their own points as soon as you take a breath. Or perhaps they are sitting with legs crossed and arms folded, mouth tightly set, like a rock that cannot be moved. In an extreme case, they may be like the Jews we heard about in our first reading – violent, angry and ready to cause physical harm to Paul and Barnabas.

How would you have reacted in such a situation? We are told that, even after Paul and Barnabas were persecuted and expelled, they and the other disciples who were with them were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. Would you have felt that way, or would you have been angry in return and exchanged insult for insult, violence for violence?

Perhaps even more disturbing is the thought that perhaps we might act and behave like the Jews in today's first reading. They refused and rejected the Gospel message, and God's gracious offer of salvation to all those who placed their faith in Jesus. Beyond this, the fact that the Gospel message was being preached to all people, both Jew and Gentile alike, made them indignant. After all, they were God's chosen and special people, unlike the Gentiles whom they considered to be unholy and unclean.

Let's be honest with ourselves. How open are we to hearing God's word in our own lives? Haven't each of us, in some respects, already made up our minds about God? Aren't we already certain that we know what he wants, and what path our lives should take? Considering all of this, the challenge is obviously to do our best to be ready for God to reveal himself to us, sometimes even through those "others" with whom we might not approve of or even associate.

Even those closest to Jesus were not always open to his word. At best, they were confused, as was Philip in today's Gospel. We are not told what his response is, but let us hope that he accepted what Jesus said, even though it was difficult to grasp. Maybe that is the lesson for each of us. Being a disciple of Jesus does not mean that we are always comfortable; it does not mean that God's word is always clear and easy to understand. Often, we may find ourselves feeling like we are groping in the dark, but we live in faith that Jesus is with us always to take us by the hand, and guide us out of darkness to walk more fully in the light of his love and truth.

\* \* \* \* \*

## SUNDAY, APRIL 24, 2016

(Lec. 54)

- 1) Acts 14:21-27
- 2) Revelation 21:1-5a
- 3) John 13:31-33a, 34-35

Gospel related: CCC 782, 1823, 1970, 2195, 2822, 2842 CSDC 32, 196, 580

## FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

FOCUS: God ushers in a new creation. How are we responding?

There are times when we tell ourselves that nothing's new, that human nature doesn't change, and that history simply repeats itself. The Book of Ecclesiastes tells us: *What has been, that will be; what has been done, that will be done. Nothing is new under the sun.* (1:9)

Yet we also find ourselves seeking what is new. We greet each other with the question "What's new?" We are always looking for new gadgets, new software, new movies. We seem to be obsessed with what's new.

Jesus used the word "new" many times in his discourses and teachings, all the time trying to get us to see the new creation, the new covenant his Father is bringing about. The Gospel account we just heard was the beginning of Jesus' last discourse at the Last Supper, a discourse filled with promise, hope and a vision of the future. The second reading is taken from the Book of Revelation, and the passage ends with the statement, *Behold, I make all things new.*

What is this new thing God invites us to see?

The spectacles of this world's offerings hold our attention. Being thus captured, we tend to sell ourselves short. It takes artists, poets and great writers to give us deeper vision and enable us to see deeper things as well as to see ourselves on a deeper level.

What we need to see now is that God is ushering in a new creation. He is sculpting us and fashioning us as his new sons and daughters. We need to stand back and look at the big picture. We need to see the way things were between God and us *before* Christ and the way things are now *after* Christ. Because of Christ Jesus, we have a new status in our relationship with God.

We live in the time that is *already but not yet*. In his anointed one, in Christ, God has ushered in his kingdom here on earth. It is a kingdom that has been established and is now in the process of unfolding among us. Our status with God has been fundamentally and radically changed. Christ has given us his salvation. What we do with it remains to be seen. We live in God's time, the time that is *already but not yet*. What is yet to be and what can be for us individually is revealed in the Book of Revelation, which is a book of hope, of promise and of glory. Whether that hope, promise and glory will be ours personally depends on our response to what God has done and is doing now for us.

All of this points to the fact that we must have *eyes to see and ears to hear*. We cannot be passive, thinking that God will give it all to us anyway, even if we don't respond to him. There's nothing passive about being a follower of Christ. No! We must actively listen; we must actively respond; we must put into action, in our daily lives, the gifts God has given us and is giving us in his Christ.

Whether or not we will be ultimately saved and spend eternity in the New Jerusalem depends on us. How will we respond? Will we, with Peter, seek and accept the hope, promise and glory that Jesus Christ offers us all? Or will we sink in this world's despair? Do you think there's nothing new in our world? Will

we settle for only the glitz and glitter of this world, its thirty pieces of silver and thereby sell our souls for nothing more?

The answer to these questions, along with our salvation, depends on us. God offers, we respond. When we do, something marvelously new happens within us.

\* \* \* \* \*

Monday, April 25, 2016  
(Lec. 555)

**SAINT MARK,  
EVANGELIST – FEAST**

- 1) 1 Peter 5:5b-14
- 2) Mark 16:15-20

Gospel related: CCC 2, 156, 161, 183, 434, 659, 670, 699, 888, 977, 1223, 1253, 1256, 1257, 1507, 1673

**FOCUS:** We are called to use all means at our disposal to give witness to and share the good news of salvation.

Now, more than ever, there are a variety of ways by which to get news out into the world. Traditional ways of communicating the news have given way to new means of social media, whereby a greater volume of news is more rapidly sent out and received.

This is important to understand as the Church and her members strive to reach out and share the Gospel with others. We must share the Gospel with the countless souls around the world who are in need of God's gift of salvation, who long to know the value of their lives, the truths of God and the path to eternal life. We, like the disciples of long ago, have been entrusted by Jesus with doing our part to advance the work of the Church in its mission of evangelization. The parting words of Jesus were a command to *proclaim the Gospel to every creature*. It is a command the first disciples took seriously, using every means available to them to fulfill their mission.

Through sacred Scripture and tradition, we are clearly aware of the bold proclamations that were made in public and in private by numerous disciples. We are aware of their travels to distant lands to proclaim the Gospel, and to establish communities of faith to carry on the mission of evangelization. We are aware of their written words in letters and writings. We are especially blessed to have the four canonical Gospels written by the Evangelists Mark (whom the Church honors this day), Matthew, Luke and John. Each of the Evangelists, inspired by the Spirit, used their unique gifts and talents to compose their Gospels so that people in their time, and every age to come, might know of Jesus and the Gospel message, place their faith in Jesus and be saved.

Now, the task of evangelization lies before us. Like the disciples of the early Church, our challenge is to use the means at our disposal to proclaim the Gospel today. We must know and share websites and apps that proclaim the Gospel and promote worship of God. Our emails, Tweets, and Facebook postings can be used to share the Gospel message. For those who are not tech-savvy, we can still share the Good News in our conversations, phone calls and letter writing. Occasions to send greeting cards are opportunities to share faith and extend prayers to others. And we can never forget that our deeds proclaim the Gospel the loudest to the people who see us.

We live in an unprecedented age of communication, which gives us a wonderful opportunity to fulfill the mission given to us by Christ. Like the Apostles and four Evangelists, may we make every effort to use of all the means at our disposal to share the Good News with those around us.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tuesday, April 26, 2016  
(Lec. 286)

- 1) Acts 14:19-28
- 2) John 14:27-31a

Gospel related: **CCC** 606, 1851, 2853 **CSDC** 491, 516

TUESDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus' peace gives us strength in our labors and hardship.

When you think of your own peaceful heart, what comes to mind? Do you imagine a period of calm and tranquility, when you are not faced with any troubles or challenges? Do you picture yourself completely secure, with all of your needs met? Or do you imagine a world in which every human being is at peace and has all of their needs met?

As beautiful as these images are, they do not depict the peace that Jesus gives us in today's Gospel. In fact, Jesus is not facing that kind of peace at this moment, either. As he presides over the Last Supper – the Passover meal – he knows he is facing a day in which he will have to undergo brutal hardships. His own peace gives him the strength, courage and faith to face this imminent suffering calmly, with absolute trust in the God whose will he is obeying. This inner peace reminds Jesus that he is following the commands of his Father – and that the *ruler of the world*, Satan, has no power over him.

Saint Paul is another good example of one who carries the peace of Jesus within his heart. In today's reading, he is certainly not floating on a sea of peace and calm. Rather, he undergoes many hardships – including, in today's reading, stoning and near death. Paul works with great energy, sailing throughout the world, proclaiming the Gospel so that many might be saved, and planting seeds that would help the Church to steadily grow and flourish. The peace of Jesus allows him to continue with the work of the Lord in spite of opposition – with courage, energy and zeal, knowing that this work will allow him *to enter the kingdom of God*.

As you face the rest of this day, ask Jesus for the gift of his peace in your heart. Jesus will not take away your daily struggles in your work or family life. He will not take away the illness that you or a family member face, or remove the challenges from your life. But Jesus, the Prince of Peace, will remain in your heart and give you whatever strength and courage you might need to face the challenges and heart-aches of this day. With the peace of Jesus in your heart, you, too, will be able to do whatever Jesus commands you as you work daily to make a difference in the lives of those around you.

*Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart.* (Col. 3:15)

\* \* \* \* \*

Wednesday, April 27, 2016  
(Lec. 287)

WEDNESDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER

- 1) Acts 15:1-6
- 2) John 15:1-8

Gospel related: CCC 308, 517, 737, 755, 787, 859, 864, 1108, 1694, 1988, 2074, 2615, 2732 CSDC 39

FOCUS: Jesus suffered and died in order to give us life.

The words of Jesus we just heard in today's Gospel account are taken from his final teachings to his Apostles during the Last Supper, just before he was to suffer and die. Saint John the Evangelist presents us with these final and therefore extremely important teachings of Jesus.

The allegory of the vine and the branches plays a large role in the Old Testament. The image of the vine was a rich one for the Jews since the land of Israel was covered with numerous vineyards. Isaiah and Jeremiah used the allegory as a central theme in their teachings. They used it as a source of comfort, as well as to chastise the Israelites when they were unfaithful. It was a symbol of God sharing his life with his people, as well as a symbol of God chastising them when he cut away their sour and bitter grapes.

When Jesus calls himself the true vine, he makes clear that no one can claim their spiritual lives by attachment to anyone else. Rather, it is only through Jesus Christ that one can become grafted into the true "vineyard of the Lord." Jesus offers true life – the abundant life which comes from God and which results in great fruitfulness. How does the vine become fruitful? The vinedresser must carefully prune the vine before it can bear good fruit.

Because of sin, we must be pruned. The process of being pruned means we suffer pain and loss. Pruning focuses our energies, and leads us to deeper and greater life, just as a vine bears better fruit after it is pruned. Pruning makes us more vital, more filled with life.

All of this gives us insight into why Jesus suffered and died. He suffered and died in order to give us life, life that is greater, richer and stronger because we share Jesus' resurrected and Spirit-filled life within us.

This is why you and I are here today to receive the bread of life, to receive the body and blood of Jesus. This will allow us to be filled with the life of the true vine, the life that is true and everlasting.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thursday, April 28, 2016  
(Lec. 288)

- 1) Acts 15:7-21
- 2) John 15:9-11

THURSDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER  
(Opt. Mem. Saint Peter Chanel,  
Priest and Martyr;  
Saint Louis Grignion de Montfort,  
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 1108, 1823, 1824 CSDC 39

FOCUS: All those who place their faith and trust in Jesus, and practice his teachings, can be saved.

We know that the Church's earliest members were almost all observant Jews. We hear in an earlier chapter of Acts, chapter 10, that after the Lord's return to heaven at the Ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, these early Christians continued to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, and to observe the Jewish dietary laws.

Things began to change when a Roman military officer named Cornelius, described as *religious and God-fearing [as was] his whole household*, had a vision telling him to *send for a certain Simon, known as Peter*. About the same time, Peter also had a vision in which God commanded him to eat food that the Jewish dietary laws labeled as "unclean," and not to be eaten. This prepared Peter for the visit of messengers from Cornelius inviting him to come with them to their master.

When Peter arrived, he found that Cornelius had invited a large crowd of relatives and friends, all presumably Gentiles. Peter told them about Jesus' life, death and resurrection. At this point, the Holy Spirit descended on the whole company, as he had descended on Peter and his friends at Pentecost. Peter then asks, *What can stop these people who have received the Holy Spirit, even as we have, from being baptized?* Following their baptism, Peter stayed with them several days, despite the Jewish law forbidding house and table fellowship with Gentiles.

When news of all this reached Jerusalem, it caused consternation among many members of the early Church. In time, a meeting was held under the leadership of the Apostles to settle the question of what Jewish laws should be required of Gentiles who wished to receive baptism. Our first reading tells us what happened at that meeting.

This meeting, now referred to as the Council of Jerusalem, settled the matter by deciding that Gentile Christians need not observe the whole Jewish law, only certain essential provisions. This decision was momentous – and for the future, crucial. It enabled the Church to emerge from its Jewish origins and primarily Jewish membership to what it has become today. The Church is truly universal in its scope, made up of people from all nations the world who place their faith and trust in Jesus.

\* \* \* \* \*

Friday, April 29, 2016  
(Lec. 289)

- 1) Acts 15:22-31
- 2) John 15:12-17

FRIDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER  
(OBL. MEM. Saint Catherine  
of Siena, Virgin and  
Doctor of the Church

Gospel related: CCC 363, 434, 459, 609, 614, 737, 1108, 1823, 1970, 1972, 2074, 2347, 2615, 2745, 2815 CSDC 13, 29, 39, 580

FOCUS: Merciful love bears a lasting fruit.

In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear about a letter to the Gentile Christian communities. In the Gospel, we hear Jesus talking about love and mercy, which is a connecting thread between the readings.

In paragraphs that immediately precede today's first reading from Acts, we hear about the Council of Jerusalem at which the Church worked through a major disagreement regarding Gentile Christians. The Gentile Christians were non-Jews who had become believers in Jesus. The question at the council was whether the converts ought to follow Jewish dietary laws and be circumcised in order to be Christian.

Led by Peter, Paul, Barnabas and James, and guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church arrived at a decision that resolved the dispute. This resolution is what is recounted in our first reading today. Paul and Barnabas, along with Judas and Silas, are sent to deliver the message to the Gentile Christians.

Paul and Barnabas were already known by the community, and so acted as guarantors of the authority of the Church, and the authority of Judas and Silas. The latter two read the letter that explained to the Gentile Christians that they didn't have to follow the dietary laws or be circumcised. We can imagine the relief this brought to Gentile believers in Jesus.

But we can also imagine that it must have been difficult to come to this decision, for it was not an insignificant number of early Christians who thought that the Gentiles should become Jewish first. In the face of this pressure the Church, under the leadership of the Apostles, chose mercy over rules that most likely would have placed an undue burden on Gentile believers in Jesus.

In this way, the Church's leadership lived what Jesus demands of the Apostles in the Gospel reading today. Jesus tells them to love one another, to pray to the Father and *to bear fruit that will remain*. Ultimately, mercy is the measure of the Christian, and it is a mercy which comes from Jesus. During this Jubilee Year of Mercy, these readings are a good reminder that the love with which Christ loves us is a merciful love. His is a love that is not a burden on those seeking holiness.

Yes, the Christian life is a commitment. The Gentiles didn't have to give up bacon, but they did have to reject their old lives of idolatry and excess. In so doing, they were able to experience the merciful love of Jesus, and experience that mercy through the Church, through the sacrament of penance and through the Eucharist. That merciful love of the early Christians was a fulfillment of Christ's commandment to love, and it has indeed borne lasting fruit ever since.

\* \* \* \* \*



Saturday, April 30, 2016  
(Lec. 290)

- 1) Acts 16:1-10
- 2) John 15:18-21

Gospel related: CCC 530, 675, 765

SATURDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER  
(Opt. Mem. Saint Pius V, Pope)

FOCUS: We must be willing to endure trial, persecution and hardship for the sake of our faith in Jesus.

It is undeniable that many in our world despise us for being both Catholics and Christian. There are those whose goal is to eliminate Christianity from the world.

In our own country, in social and broadcast media, we feel pressure from many quarters that seek to reduce Christianity in general, and the expression of our Catholic faith in particular, to privately held opinions. What we believe and do is OK as long as those expressions are inside church walls – but what we believe and do is not to be out in the open, in the public square.

Why is this happening? The answers are not simple. They are hard to fathom unless we stand back and look at the big picture. If we do, we see the serpent at work in the Garden of Eden. Satan is the supreme egoist, and he tempts humanity to take unto itself the prerogatives of God, and decide what is good and evil, what is right and wrong.

What it boils down to is the war between our own imperial selves and God. Sin is the declaration that I don't need God – that I can take care of myself all by myself.

Jesus came to us from his Father in heaven. He was sent by our Father and came among us to do the Father's will, not his own. Jesus, therefore, is a threat to Satan and a contradiction to the human imperial self.

In writing to the Ephesians, who were a very well-off and sophisticated people, Saint Paul admonished them in clear words: *Draw on your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the Devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.* (6:10-12)

\* \* \* \* \*