

# AUGUST

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Monday, August 1, 2016  
(Lec. 407)

- 1) Jeremiah 28:1-17
- 2) Matthew 14:13-21

MONDAY OF  
18<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM

Saint Alphonsus Liguori,  
Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Gospel related: CCC 1329, 1335

FOCUS: God's will be done on earth, as it is in heaven and as it is written in our hearts.

In this season of politics, we have been inundated with promises by many politicians. The popular thing is to tell us what they will do for us, but we aren't told how they will do it or what it will cost. Many of us, too, are armchair pundits, knowing what might fix the system, yet not really doing anything about it but boring family members with our viewpoint. The bottom line is that the problems in our country cannot be corrected with an easy fix. It will take hard work and commitment and sacrifice by all to make changes. This is not a popular thing to say.

We see this played out in both of our readings today. In the first reading, the false prophet Hananiah tells the people that God will break the yoke of oppression the king of Babylon has over the Israelites. They need only be patient. Hananiah was very popular among the people because he told them exactly what they wanted to hear, not what they needed to hear.

Jeremiah was not a popular prophet because he told the people the truth. The key experience would be grasping God's forgiveness and mercy in restoring the people to their land. The individual person would no longer be able to hide in the collectivity of the larger community. Each had to choose to follow God for themselves. This was a new covenant with the people that Jeremiah preached.

In a similar way, Jesus tells his Apostles, *There is no need for [the people] to go away; give them some food yourselves.* It was late, and perhaps the disciples were tired and hungry, too. Maybe they didn't want to have to deal with the situation. Jesus, though, challenges them to get involved; these people are their brothers and sisters and they are in need. It is what Jesus tells us, too, when we are confronted with the poor, the hungry, the lonely, the disenfranchised. Jesus tells us that we are to help them ourselves.

As Jesus' committed disciples, we are asked by God to personally make a commitment to get involved. Through personal prayer, the reading of Scripture, and reception of the sacraments, God calls us to action: one-on-one aiding those who need our help, and helping others fully develop their God-given potential. We do not do this work alone. As the disciples found out, Jesus is there to make things happen. God is with us and always giving us the grace and strength needed to do his will.

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Tuesday, August 2, 2016  
(Lec. 408)  
1) Jeremiah 30:1-2, 12-15,  
18-22  
2) Matthew 14:22-36 or  
15:1-2, 10-14

TUESDAY OF  
18<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Eusebius  
of Vercelli, Bishop;  
Saint Peter Julian Eymard, Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 448, 579 CSDC 453

FOCUS: The Lord saves his people.

Imagine what it must have been like on the boat in today's Gospel – the force of the wind, the sound of waves slapping against your wooden vessel. Then you see a ghostly figure walking toward you over the dark waters. It's easy to understand why the disciples were afraid!

Today's readings teach us that even in the most terrifying circumstances, the Lord is there to save us. Peter, the rock on which Jesus later builds his Church, sees Jesus walking across the water. At Jesus' invitation, Peter walks across the water, too. Then, he is frightened and starts to sink. Peter calls, *Lord, save me!* Jesus rescues him, then calms the storm.

Jesus' ability to walk across the water is so significant that it happens in three of the four Gospels (also Mark 6:45-52 and John 6:15-21). Jesus performed other miracles, but this one revealed his power over nature and his identity beyond that of a prophet. He didn't part the sea as Moses did. He walked over it! This experience prepared his disciples for belief in the resurrection – Christ's power over death.

Jeremiah offers another example of how the Lord saves his people. The passage describes the harsh punishment the Lord inflicted on his people – the people of Israel. He doesn't abandon them afterward. He offers them the promise of redemption and his presence as their God – the same promise he gives to us.

While these readings offer us hope, they don't suggest an easy, problem-free life. It was at Jesus' command that the disciples set out to sea. He didn't hurry to them the instant the waters grew choppy. They needed this experience to understand who he was.

Our reading from Jeremiah says, *I struck you as an enemy would strike, punishing you cruelly.* For generations, the Israelites endured severe punishment for their sins. While this was not unlike a parent who disciplines a child for his or her own good, it would have been difficult to endure, especially without understanding how it fit into the Lord's plan of salvation.

As the faithful, we are the Lord's people; we are children of God. While Jesus initially came to shepherd *the lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Mt 15:24), he eventually extended his mission to include anyone who comes to him in faith – as Peter did in the Gospel and as we do today.

Jesus is with us now; he's present in the Eucharist. He wants us to call out to him in prayer and trust in his presence. He wants to calm the troubled waters we encounter in our lives. Like Peter, we need only to cast our fears aside to discover what's possible when we walk by faith.

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Wednesday, August 3, 2016  
(Lec. 409)

- 1) Jeremiah 31:1-7
- 2) Matthew 15:21-28

Gospel related: CCC 439, 448, 2610

WEDNESDAY OF  
18<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus teaches us by word and example that God hears and answers all our prayers.

Have you ever prayed about something, only to be left puzzled by the Lord's response? Perhaps you felt put off by God, or questioned if he heard your prayers at all. Today's readings tell us that sometimes we simply need to patiently wait.

People often think of prayer as talking to God or Jesus. In this respect, the Canaanite woman's request to Jesus was prayer. She called out to him, *Lord, Son of David!*, revealing her trust and respect. Although she was a Gentile, she recognized who he was.

The woman faced several obstacles during her prayer. The disciples wanted to send her away for bothering them. Jesus even denied her request at first, saying he was sent only to help the lost sheep of Israel – the people referenced in our first reading to whom the Lord promised to bring salvation and restoration. Despite this, the woman persisted. She continued after Jesus' harsh comment comparing her people to dogs. She had a relentless faith. And it was her relentless faith that finally prompted Jesus to heal her daughter.

While the first reading from the prophet Jeremiah speaks of the love and mercy God showers on the people of Israel, today's Gospel reveals how Jesus extends the same love and mercy to people everywhere. Rather than send the Canaanite woman away because she was not Jewish, Jesus engaged her in dialogue. The Lord's promise of salvation is no longer a birthright through bloodlines; it is an inheritance and gift received through faith.

Through this exchange the disciples, who themselves had been accused of having *little faith* (Mt 14:31), learned that Jesus' mission wasn't confined only to the people of Israel; he was there to help anyone who turned to him and placed their faith and trust in him. This determined the direction that the Apostles would later take in leading the Church in carrying on the mission entrusted to it by Jesus.

Today's Gospel also is a testament to the power of prayer. Through the Canaanite woman, we learn filial boldness. This expression is explained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2610) as believing that you will receive what you ask for in prayer. This boldness helps us persist when we think no one hears our prayers, or something gets in the way of them being answered.

Our filial boldness also gives us patience to wait – as the Israelites waited for deliverance and the Canaanite woman waited for her daughter's healing. The Lord fulfills his promises. We must believe he hears us and will answer our prayers, just as he answers the prayers of all his people.

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Thursday, August 4, 2016  
(Lec. 410)

- 1) Jeremiah 31:31-34
- 2) Matthew 16:13-23

THURSDAY OF  
18TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM

Saint John Vianney, Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 153, 424, 440, 442, 540, 552, 553, 554, 586, 607, 869, 881, 1444, 1969

**FOCUS:** Saint John Vianney and Saint Peter show us how our lives can be changed by nurturing a relationship with Christ.

Today we remember Saint John Vianney. He grew up in a time when the Church was being persecuted. His family was devout, caring for the poor and attending Mass in secret. During Mass, the windows were covered so the candlelight could not be seen outside. His ability to see God in such a dark time in the Church contributed to a deep faith he would share with others. After serving in the military, he became a priest. He was assigned as pastor of a parish in a remote French town, named Ars. He became known as the "Heart of Ars." Devout and prayerful, he fasted most days and spent long hours in the confessional. Many people were converted after hearing him speak.

In the Gospel, we heard Saint Peter confess to knowing that Jesus is the Messiah. No one had to teach Peter this; he recognizes Jesus as the Son of God through divine revelation. This was possible because he had both a relationship with Jesus, and a heart open to the grace and action of the Holy Spirit within him.

What do Saint John Vianney and Saint Peter have in common? They didn't have faith in some abstract idea or notion of God. In their hearts, they knew the tangible, loving presence of Christ. When someone has a relationship with Christ – one that is nurtured with prayer – it will be evident to those around them.

My friends, we are all called to have this intimate relationship with Christ. We can nurture our friendship with Christ through prayer, and by taking time to know Jesus.

If Christ asked us today, "Who do you say that I am?" What would our answer be? Would the way we live our lives, especially our prayer lives, be consistent with who we think Christ is? If we believe that Christ is the Son of God, do we order our lives around him? Do we strive to pray daily, do we seek to love God with all our hearts, and do we seek to serve others?

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Friday, August 5, 2016  
(Lec. 411)  
1) Nahum 2:1, 3; 3:1-3, 6-7  
2) Matthew 16:24-28

FRIDAY OF  
18TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
The Dedication of  
the Basilica of Saint Mary Major)

Gospel related: CCC 226, 363, 618, 736, 1021, 1969, 2029, 2232

FOCUS: God continually works in and amongst us to bring about our salvation.

Despite the sensibilities of today's modern world, we are not saved by a glorified superhero, enhanced by Hollywood special-effects and complex computer graphic imaging. No, from the beginning, our relationship with God and our ultimate salvation have arisen from the dusty struggles of the desert to the bloody stains on the cross. Full of sights, sounds, smells, touch and taste, our relationship with and redemption by God honor the nature of our humanity, and all of creation.

God's interaction with us is tangible, and we are reminded of that in today's passage from the prophet Nahum. We are told how the Lord *will restore the vine of Jacob* – how our salvation will come about – with vivid images of the world around us. The descriptive language appeals to our senses: bloody cities, full of chaos and noise; cracking whips; rumbling wheels; galloping horses; and bounding chariots. Sights describe distress and disorientation: flaming swords, flashing spears, slain, heaping corpses – the stench of which would be unbearable, and an endless obstacle to those seeking to escape the chaos.

These descriptions are not just for shock value – they are central to the story. God is not above the clanging, crashing and pungent world. Amid the chaos and death, in which our very senses and humanity are assaulted, the Lord enters and says, LOOK! SEE! For, *upon the mountains, there advances the bearer of good news, announcing peace!*

So we look. And we see. Indeed, this messenger came in the most vulnerable human way possible: through the beauty and messiness of human childbirth. This messenger came, and brought the good news of salvation, even through the terror and torture of the cross. Jesus the Christ became one of us, to win our salvation and to teach us how to live that we might be one with God.

While we must still cope with the distractions and commotions presented by daily life, today's Gospel offers us a way to make sense of it. This can be found in making the choice to follow Christ. This choice is not one of mere intellectual thought or statement of belief in Christ. Rather, it involves taking up our cross, and embracing all that it entails – such as bearing our daily burdens and making sacrifices for the good of others. It means bearing effective witness to the Gospel and helping to build up God's kingdom on earth.

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Saturday, August 6, 2016  
(Lec. 614)

- 1) Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14
- 2) 2 Peter 1:16-19
- 3) Luke 9:28b-36

Gospel related: CCC 516, 554, 556, 659, 697, 1151, 2583, 2600

THE TRANSFIGURATION  
OF THE LORD  
– FEAST

FOCUS: Prayer opens our hearts to the life-changing power of the risen and glorified Lord.

One of the chief characteristics of the life of Jesus is his faithful commitment to daily prayer. For Jesus, prayer is more than just a pious practice; indeed, it lies at the very heart of his relationship with the Father. At every key moment of his earthly life and ministry, Jesus turns to prayer. As his disciples, we, too, are called to be people of prayer.

Like any relationship, our relationship with God takes time and effort. We need to take time to talk, to share our lives and to get to know God in all his glory and his life-changing power. Just as God wants us to bring our needs before him, he also demands that we stop and listen to what he has to say to us. Throughout the generations, God has sought to speak to his people in myriad ways: first through the splendor of creation; then through the words of his prophets; and finally and supremely, through his only son, Jesus Christ. Each time God has spoken, he has reminded us of his faithfulness and mercy, and the promise of eternal life.

With this in mind, the Church invites us to celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration. Jesus leads three disciples up the mountain to pray. Suddenly, they witness a different perspective on their teacher as God's glory shines through his humanity, and the prophets Moses and Elijah appear in conversation with him. As the Old Testament tells us, Moses and Elijah, too, were men who in times of struggle and suffering sought solace and comfort in the high peaks of Mount Sinai and Mount Horeb. They, too, encountered God and were strengthened in their own missions.

In the presence of the transfigured Jesus, Peter begins to panic. As so often happens when we are faced with what is new and even unsettling, Peter falls back on the familiar. His suggestion that they make three tents and capture this moment forever shows how little he has understood the true identity of Jesus. Peter cannot yet understand that Jesus is really and truly the Son of God become flesh to bring about the world's salvation. That understanding will only come in the time after the resurrection, as Peter recounts in our second reading today.

From the cloud comes the voice of the Father: *This is my chosen Son; listen to him.* The Transfiguration reveals to the disciples that Jesus was more than just a great teacher and prophet – that he was the anointed of God, his beloved and unique son. Every generation, every assembly that hears this Gospel, must listen anew to the words of the eternal Father, and the life-changing truth that in Christ we, too, are transformed.

In the darkness of our sometimes inhumane and selfish world, we need to hear these words again. We, too, must be willing to climb the mountain of the Lord in prayer to witness and experience the glory of God. We need to hear again the words of the Father, revealing that Jesus is his unique and chosen voice in the world, the one who speaks on his behalf. He is worthy of our total and complete attention and obedience. This feast day ought to signal a transfiguration in our own hearts and communities. As Peter said to Jesus, *Master it is good that we are here today.* Only when we are present to the Lord can we be truly open to his word and the gift of his glory he wishes to share with us.

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**SUNDAY, AUGUST 7, 2016**

(Lec. 117)

- 1) Wisdom 18:6-9
  - 2) Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19 or  
11:1-2, 8-12
  - 3) Luke 12:32-48 or 12:35-40
- Gospel related: **CCC** 764, 2849

**NINETEENTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

**FOCUS:** There is no time to waste; the kingdom of God is at hand.

It is reported that when Pope Saint John the XXIII was asked, "What should we be doing when Jesus comes again?" he replied, "Look busy."

While we may find this anecdote humorous, we should not miss the importance of good Pope John's message. Perhaps the pope had in mind today's parable about the good and faithful servant versus the foolish one. Jesus is telling us to be attentive and ever-watchful for the Lord's return.

When the Lord comes again, we do not want to be caught being idle – that is, not living a faith-filled life. Christian procrastinator groups, if they ever get around to forming, will be in big trouble.

Self-indulgence is much easier and a whole lot more fun than self-discipline. Perhaps you have seen the commercial where the person eats one piece of kale or does one push-up, or grills one asparagus spear or buys one strawberry. It is a not-so-subtle message that self-discipline requires much more of us.

So does living a *faith*-disciplined life. It is easy to slip and slide off the trail that ultimately leads us to the kingdom of heaven. We cannot get by with a quick word or two from Scripture, an absent-minded prayer tossed toward the heavens, or a minimalist approach to stewardship.

If we take living a life pleasing to God seriously, then we know in our hearts that we must immerse ourselves in God's words, be consistent in our conversations with Jesus, and offer ourselves as models of good and faithful stewards.

Let us make no mistake. Much has been entrusted to us; much is demanded of us. The task of helping to build up the kingdom of God on earth has been entrusted to us by our Savior. It is an awesome and, yes, overwhelming responsibility.

We are to break open and share the great mystery of God's love with all who will listen. We are to break open the mystery of God's love found in the exodus experience described in our first reading. We are to break open the mystery of God's love found in Abraham's journey of faith in our second reading. We are to break open the mystery of God's love witnessed in the prudent servant "found busy," as Pope Saint John the XXIII would say. The world cannot afford for us to be idle as we await the Lord's return. There is no time to waste. Let's get busy.

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Monday, August 8, 2016

(Lec. 413)

1) Ezekiel 1:2-5, 24-28c

2) Matthew 17:22-27

MONDAY OF  
19TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Dominic, Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 554, 586

FOCUS: Jesus avoids giving scandal, providing a lesson for all of us.

If you visit a restaurant near the Sea of Galilee, on the menu you most likely will find Saint Peter's fish, which we know as tilapia. That item stems from the strange story in today's Gospel. You might wonder why Jesus told Peter to find the Temple tax in the mouth of a fish. He could just as well have taken a coin from the common purse. Here are a few theories. Jesus had just revealed that he was going to die. This was depressing news for his disciples. To lift their spirits, Jesus resorted to a comical task for Peter. The carpenter sent the fisherman to fish for tax money. This event shows that Jesus has a sense of humor. In a fish's mouth, Peter found the exact coin for paying the tax for Jesus and himself. Certain fish pick up objects from the lake floor and carry them in their mouths. But how did Jesus know that Peter would catch one that carried the coin? This event served to strengthen the disciples' faith in Jesus.

Because Jesus is God's son, he was not obliged to pay the Temple tax. He paid it anyway, to avoid scandalizing people. Later, Saint Paul followed his example. He urged the Corinthian Christians not to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Now idols were nothing, and so eating meat offered to them would not be wrong. Still, Paul advised people not to eat it so as not to scandalize others.

The life of Saint Dominic, whose feast we celebrate today, teaches the same lesson. In his time, many church preachers were arrogant, wealthy and worldly. They scandalized people instead of drawing them to Jesus. Dominic began a religious community whose members lived simply, were humble and practiced penance. Their preaching was fruitful.

As Christians, we are to model ourselves on Jesus. Therefore, we are to take pains not to give scandal. We are to refrain from using bad language, dressing immodestly, losing our temper, or doing anything immoral in public that would negatively influence other people. In particular, we want to set a good example for children. Jesus once forcefully warned against giving scandal. He said, *If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.* (Mt 18:6)

As Christians, we should strive to act in a way that inspires others to do good and seek the truth, that they might know the joy, peace and salvation we have found in Jesus.

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Tuesday, August 9, 2016  
(Lec. 414)

- 1) Ezekiel 2:8—3:4
- 2) Matthew 18:1-5, 10, 12-14

TUESDAY OF  
19TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Teresa Benedicta  
of the Cross,  
Virgin and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 329, 336, 605, 2822

FOCUS: Jesus calls us to live with a childlike faith and trust in God.

Our consumer culture lauds the supersized. Louder, extreme and expensive are powerful and effective marketing gimmicks that lull us into believing that bigger is indeed better. These enticements play on our human nature to strive for improvement and satisfy our basic human needs. In contrast to the bigger-is-better mindset comes the message from today's Gospel: Become like the least among us, like little children. The least among us will become the greatest in the kingdom of God, Jesus tells us.

The disciples had asked Jesus: *Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?* His answer may have surprised the disciples. He did not say that the religious leaders would be greatest. Nor did he pick those with the most wealth or powerful Roman rulers. Jesus went against the thinking of the times in which he lived. Children, widows and lepers of this age held no prestige. They had no status. They were totally dependent on others. This is exactly why Jesus chose the children as his example of those who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Like a child dependent on a parent, Jesus calls us to have a childlike faith and trust in God, whereby we place our lives into God's hands and trust him to provide for what we truly need.

Throughout this week, our first reading has been from the prophet Ezekiel, who was an obedient servant willing to do God's will. Not unlike a child who follows the directions of his parent, Ezekiel follows God's commands. Today's reading describes part of a vision of God that Ezekiel experienced. In this vision, God commanded Ezekiel to take and eat the scroll on which God's words were written. Seeing the words *lamentation, wailing, woe* on the scroll, Ezekiel may have expected the scroll to taste bitter. Yet, it was as sweet as honey. With that, God sent him to the house of Israel to speak his words.

As for us, both readings remind us to strive to be childlike in our dependence upon God, always seeking to know and follow his will for us.

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Wednesday, August 10, 2016  
(Lec. 618)

1) 2 Corinthians 9:6-10

2) John 12:24-26

Gospel related: **CCC** 2731 **CSDC** 570

**SAINT LAWRENCE,  
DEACON AND MARTYR  
– FEAST**

**FOCUS:** When we are cheerful givers and sacrificial followers of Jesus, our heavenly Father will honor us.

*God loves a cheerful giver.* This often-quoted Bible passage is part of Saint Paul's second letter to the Church in Corinth. Hearing these words today reminds us that a generous spirit is aligned with the will of our loving Father in heaven.

Jesus, in today's Gospel, goes so far as to say, ... *unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.* Sometimes sacrifices are required of those who would serve Jesus.

A distorted version of the Gospel is sometimes proclaimed in our times. This over-emphasis on God's worldly rewards to his faithful people is commonly known as the prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel mistakenly says that faithful followers of Jesus can expect financial well-being, assured of whatever resources we think we need to live the life we want for ourselves and our families.

Notice that in today's Gospel, Jesus refers to preserving our life for eternity, not necessarily according to worldly standards. Saint Paul speaks to the Corinthians of abundant grace, not abundant gold. He writes of abundance for every good work, reminding us that God will increase the harvest of your righteousness. God's righteousness endures forever.

Shortly before we encounter Jesus in the Eucharist today, we will pray the words, "Give us this day our daily bread." Can we expect that, as followers of Jesus, our true needs will be met more often than not, even if just barely? Certainly.

Another reality to be aware of is that as a result of sin and evil in the world, each of us in varying ways will experience trials and hardships. It is never God's will that any of his dearly beloved children should suffer. However, God is so powerful that if we cooperate with his grace he will bring good out of our trials and hardships. This will allow us to grow stronger in our faith, and we also can be more compassionate to the sufferings of others having experienced suffering ourselves. Finally, we can grow closer to Jesus by joining our sufferings to his for the sake of the salvation of the world.

Whether in prosperity or times of hardship, Jesus asks us to be faithful, generous and yes – even cheerful. May we show love for our heavenly Father amid trials and joys, confident in the honor he promises to faithful disciples of his son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

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Thursday, August 11, 2016

(Lec. 416)

1) Ezekiel 12:1-12

2) Matthew 18:21—19:1

THURSDAY OF  
19<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Clare, Virgin)

Gospel related: CCC 982, 2227, 2364, 2843, 2845

FOCUS: Jesus calls us to love and forgive others without limits.

In today's Gospel, we hear Peter ask Jesus a very important question about forgiveness: *Lord, if my brother wrongs me how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?* To Peter, this seemed like enough effort in his relationships with people. To Jesus, his statement was only the beginning for a life of limitless forgiveness. Jesus answered, *Not seven times, but seventy-seven times.* In other words, always – and without limit.

Jesus followed this statement with the parable of the unforgiving servant. The king in the beginning of the story wanted only to settle accounts with his debtors. He did not set out to let the debt go. But moved with compassion, the king cancelled the whole debt. He would never again think of it.

The ending of the parable describes what happened to the unforgiving servant who had his whole debt forgiven. Because he failed to forgive the debt of another servant who owed him a much smaller amount, the unforgiving servant was handed over to the torturers until he would pay back his whole debt. Jesus then offers this solemn statement, *So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart.*

If we truly and sincerely desire to have God's love and forgiveness bear good fruit in our lives so we may one day be judged worthy, we must turn to God and ask for forgiveness. And then, as we experience being loved and forgiven by God, we must strive to love and forgive others without limit as God loves and forgives us.

Doing this is not easy. It requires that we continually ask God in prayer to grant us a forgiving heart. Let us ask him for the strength and grace to forgive others as Jesus taught us to do, and help build his kingdom on earth.

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Friday, August 12, 2016  
(Lec. 417)

- 1) Ezekiel 16:1-15, 60, 63 or  
16:59-63
- 2) Matthew 19:3-12

FRIDAY OF  
19TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Jane Frances  
de Chantal, Religious)

Gospel related: **CCC** 796, 922, 1579, 1605, 1610, 1614, 1615, 1618, 1620, 1644, 1652, 2053, 2336, 2364, 2380, 2382 **CSDC** 209, 210, 217, 219

FOCUS: What God has joined, let no one separate.

Commitments make life worthwhile. Yet, so many times, commitments are difficult to keep. When we take a look at society, we notice how many commitments are made, and how many are broken. We see it in friendships and marriage. We see it in industry and institutions.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is being questioned about commitments. The Pharisees ask him about the commitment of marriage, as well as how to loosen that commitment through divorce. Jesus, knowing they are trying to trip him up, cuts right through to the quick. He states that the only reason Moses allowed for divorce was because of past stubbornness. Yet, he reminds them that this was not God's intention since male and female are created in God's image, and that marriage is intended to be a lifelong commitment.

More specifically, Jesus teaches that Christian marriage is meant to be a *covenant*. Each partner freely makes a binding commitment to love and honor the other. Such things as treating one another with respect, expressing affection, encouraging honest communication, having a willingness to compromise, and spending quality time together, are essential for any successful marriage. A marriage in which husband and wife are truly committed to the covenant they make, by definition, is a success.

Jesus spells out clearly that man and woman become one flesh; he tells us *what God has joined together, humankind must not separate*. This understanding of marriage as *covenant* is a beautiful one. It reminds husband and wife to live in a oneness of love, and to see that God is meant to be part of their marital relationship. It is God who has brought them together, and it is God who will give them the strength and guidance to stay together.

In this Gospel, Jesus helps us to see that we must choose our commitments wisely, and then honor them. Let us pray today for all married couples in our parish and around the world, that they may honor their commitments to each other, and be signs of his love to the world.

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Saturday, August 13, 2016  
(Lec. 418)

- 1) Ezekiel 18:1-10, 13b, 30-32
- 2) Matthew 19:13-15

SATURDAY OF  
19TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saints Pontian, Pope,  
and Hippolytus, Priest, Martyrs;  
Saturday in honor of BVM)

**FOCUS:** Jesus teaches that to enter into the kingdom of heaven, one must have a childlike faith and trust in God.

Cute videos of children are all over social media. One making the rounds recently showed two babies, maybe twins, in highchairs. One started hitting the other. He was not being mean, just slapping his brother. The second baby allowed the hitting and gave no reaction. Finally, he had had enough, and he slapped back. The first one began crying pitifully, as if he had no idea his actions would bring this kind of reaction. The second baby just sat and gave a contented smile, successful in getting the hitting to stop.

Today, our Gospel teaches that the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. Really?

If you are starting to question how this could be the case, that is good. Jesus loves it when his words make us stop and think. What might it be in this story that helps us see how we need to live that we might come to have eternal life in heaven?

One thing is that there is no malice in these babies' actions. Neither intentionally hurt the other. They were curious, and unpleasant things happened, but neither one set out to hurt the other.

Another thing is that they both learned something. They were teachable. The first one learned that slapping his brother would result in him getting slapped. He also learned that slapping does not feel good. The second brother learned he can take control of a situation he does not like. They both learned there are consequences for their actions; some are good and some are not.

All of these things are applicable to our lives, no matter how old we are. We must try, like these children, to keep our hearts free of malice, remain curious, learn from our mistakes, take responsibility for our own well-being, and recognize there are consequences for our actions. Let's try to maintain the proper disposition for keeping our feet planted on the path of life – on the path of Jesus.

One other thing the video of the babies shows us is that someone is always watching and taking note of what we are doing. Happily for us, it is God who holds the camera, and he always loves us. He may not always think we are cute, but he loves us, nonetheless.

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**SUNDAY, AUGUST 14, 2016**

(Lec. 120)

1) Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10

2) Hebrews 12:1-4

3) Luke 12:49-53

Gospel related: CCC 536, 607, 696, 1225, 2804

**TWENTIETH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

**FOCUS:** Following Jesus requires the willingness to bear the cost of rejection and opposition from others.

A friend of mine works as a consultant, helping companies that are going through major changes, such as mergers or re-organizations. Employees in these companies are usually comfortable with the way things are, and experience high levels of stress and anxiety when forced to change. My friend explains this reaction in terms of predictability: We are comfortable when our lives have basic patterns that help us predict what will happen to us.

This is true in relationships as well. We get to know a spouse or friend so well that we can predict how that person will behave, or what he or she will say. When they act “out of character,” we find it uncomfortable because it calls into question our expectations of who this person is. Do we really know them as well as we thought?

The words of Jesus in today’s Gospel may make us uncomfortable for the same reason. They don’t seem to fit with our expectations of Jesus as the Prince of Peace, the teacher who said *Blessed are the peacemakers* (Mt.5:9) – the gentle and kind Jesus who healed the sick and gathered the little children to him.

But perhaps it is healthy to have our expectations of Jesus challenged. We can become too comfortable in thinking that we know all there is to know about him, and so we put Jesus into a well-defined box as if our human minds could fully understand the Son of God.

So what is Jesus telling us today? His words are meant to shake us up, to challenge any notion we might have that following him is comfortable and predictable. Instead, we may find ourselves at odds with those who are closest to us. The life Jesus calls us to live – to believe in him and to love one another – leads us along a narrow path.

In the letter to the Hebrews, we are reminded that Christ himself had to suffer, enduring even the shame of the cross. We are urged to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus as we run our own race, and to let go of sin which weighs us down. Jesus endured opposition from those who did not believe in him. We can expect the same.

But why does belief in Jesus cause us to be divided from the world? Because the difference between a life in the world and a life in Christ strikes at the heart of who we are. The world tells us that we should be the center of our own lives. Faith tells us that Christ is the center of all things, and calls us to center our lives in him.

How will we answer this call to be one of those who *might no longer live for themselves but for him?* (2Cor:5:15) There is no comfortable compromise. We must choose to be on one side of the divide or the other. Our response will determine whether we lock ourselves in a cold, little world of our own making, or stand with Jesus to *set the earth on fire*.

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Monday, August 15, 2016  
(Lec. 622)

- 1) Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab
- 2) 1 Corinthians 15:20-27
- 3) Luke 1:39-56

Gospel related: **CCC** 148, 273, 422, 448, 495, 523, 706, 717, 722, 971, 2097, 2465, 2599, 2619, 2675, 2676, 2677, 2807, 2827 **CSDC** 59

**THE ASSUMPTION  
OF THE BLESSED  
VIRGIN MARY  
- SOLEMNITY**

(not a Holyday of Obligation)

FOCUS: Mary's humility and devotion are rewarded in heaven and on earth.

The issues of death and dying make many people afraid or uncomfortable. However, if we truly believe that the resurrection of Jesus applies also to us, then we have nothing to fear, and much to look forward to. Thanks to Jesus, we anticipate a new life beginning when this one ends, taking us to a world far superior to our own – one where there is no more sadness, sickness, disappointment or death.

Belief in new and eternal life is what the Assumption of the Blessed Mother is all about. Before Mary sets out on her journey through the hill country to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, Gabriel referred to her as being *full of grace*. (Lk 1:28) Those three words bolster the Church's defense both of Mary's Immaculate Conception and her glorious Assumption. Mary was privileged to live her entire life wholly devoted to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. She held the baby Jesus in her arms when he was born, and took him in her arms again when he was taken down from the cross. Through it all, she trusted in God's plan and his goodness, though her heart was pierced by a sword.

According to sacred Tradition, Mary lived another 20 years after Jesus' ascension into heaven. When her earthly life ended, it is believed she simply went to sleep rather than die. She, who was sinless, would not be subject to the decay that awaits the mortal bodies of sinners. We believe instead that she was received body and soul into heaven.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul refers to Jesus' resurrection as *the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*. (15:20) A "first" implies a "second." In actuality, neither Jesus nor Mary were the first or second to ascend body and soul into heaven. Enoch preceded them in just this same fashion in Genesis (5:24), and Elijah would follow (2 Kings 2:11), riding in a chariot, carried on a whirlwind. The Old Testament is always giving us glimpses of greater coming attractions.

These figures were not raised to heaven of their own accord, but rather by the power and grace of God. Mary knew she could not have made any of this happen on her own merit, as she understood herself to be a *lowly servant*, one for whom the Lord has *done great things*. Just as Mary's cousin Elizabeth and her unborn son John the Baptist leap for joy in the presence of Mary and the unborn King, so, too, this day the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth rejoices as Mary receives a heavenly homecoming. There she is crowned Queen of Heaven and Earth, a fitting title for one whom Elizabeth refers to as *the mother of my Lord*.

Mary's Assumption increases our own hope for new and eternal life. While it is doubtful we will be taken to heaven body and soul in an instant, we do believe that both body and soul will be reunited in the resurrection at the end of time when Christ comes again in glory. This is why the Church is so insistent that our mortal bodies be treated with great dignity and respect upon burial – as this earthly temple of the Holy Spirit that sustained us in this life will one day be glorified and risen up in the world to come.

Mary's triumph was foretold in the Book of Revelation. The pregnant woman is protected and taken up to the stars. She is the New Eve, who is greatly rewarded for giving birth to the New



Adam, who is Jesus Christ. To correct the sin that began at the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden, Jesus uses the tree of the cross to destroy our last and greatest enemy – death. With Mary, Elizabeth, John the Baptist, and the whole communion of saints, we rejoice, because *now have salvation and power come and the kingdom of our God.* (Rev 12:10)

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Tuesday, August 16, 2016  
(Lec. 420)

- 1) Ezekiel 28:1-10
- 2) Matthew 19:23-30

TUESDAY OF  
20TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Stephen of Hungary)

Gospel related: CCC 226, 276, 308, 765, 1058, 2053 CSDC 181

FOCUS: When people work for the good of others, everyone benefits.

Tyre was a Phoenician city on the coast of the Mediterranean in what is now Lebanon. In ancient times, the people of that city were well known as traders and seafarers. They had become powerful and rich, and they thought that such wealth meant they had great wisdom. In today's reading Ezekiel, the prophet, speaks to the people about their lifestyle.

Ezekiel proclaims a message they did not want to hear. He tells them that instead of wisdom, their wealth and influence has brought pride and arrogance. Things are so bad that they think they are equal to God, and thus invincible. Ezekiel predicts that this false sense of security will soon end. Their city will be attacked by foreigners who are more powerful, and then they will realize they are men, and not gods.

Today's Gospel also addresses the issue of wealth. Jesus says *it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God*. The disciples were shocked at Jesus' words. Why? They were thinking along the lines of their culture. In their time, riches were a sign of God's blessings. Poverty and sickness were signs of God's punishment. Jesus is turning their understanding upside down. He tells them they must see life as God sees it.

An optimistic Peter sees another side to this situation. He wonders about those who have followed Jesus by leaving everything behind. Jesus responds that anyone who leaves family and possessions for his sake will be rewarded many times over. In other words, when people work for the good of others, everyone benefits. Everyone receives because everyone gives.

In our own world, there are still people who believe that wealth is the source of power. Although many wealthy people, by God's grace, live good and faithful lives and give generously to those less fortunate, we, as Christians, must always be attentive to an unhealthy attachment to material goods. Such attachments can be an obstacle to leading holy, faith-filled lives. As Christians, we are called to live a different lifestyle, and to take the narrower path – the path of Jesus.

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Wednesday, August 17, 2016

(Lec. 421)

1) Ezekiel 34:1-11

2) Matthew 20:1-16

Gospel related: **CSDC** 541

WEDNESDAY OF  
20TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are called to look after our brothers and sisters.

In today's first reading, the prophet Ezekiel is focused on Jewish religious leaders as he lays out their responsibility, and warns of God's response to those leaders who do not lead in truth, but have concern only for themselves. God will come against them, he says, if they have allowed the sheep to scatter.

Ezekiel warned these religious leaders of the danger of their actions, because they were living off those they were supposed to be caring for, without regard for the needs of the people. In strong language, he says, *You did not strengthen the weak nor heal the sick nor bind up the injured. You did not bring back the strayed nor seek the lost, but you lorded it over them harshly and brutally.*

What if this warning were extended to all of us, not just leaders in the Church? If you reverse the statement, you can find in it a mission each of us is called to do: Strengthen the weak; heal the sick; help the injured; seek those who are lost. Think about it. Who among us is weak? This can be physically, or spiritually weak. Who among us is sick? Do we take the time to sit with them and bring them some joy? Who among us is lost? Many are living in isolated, lonely circumstances today. It would be dangerously easy to dismiss the words of Ezekiel as applying only to leaders many centuries ago, but to do so would be to miss the call we have each been given.

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Thursday, August 18, 2016

(Lec. 422)

1) Ezekiel 36:23-28

2) Matthew 22:1-14

Gospel related: CCC 546, 796

THURSDAY OF  
20TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Prepare yourself for the great wedding feast.

If you've ever planned a wedding, you know it can take months of preparation and become quite costly. Yet, we go through the trouble so that our guests can share in the celebration of love and eternal union.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us about a king who carefully selected guests to attend his son's wedding. They all refused. Imagine turning down an invitation to a royal wedding! Some were busy and ignored the invitation; others mistreated and killed the messengers. This angered the king so much that he destroyed the murderers and burned the city. Then he tried again, calling everyone to the celebration; however, only those properly attired were chosen to share in the feast.

As Jesus tells us, the king in our parable is God. He has already sent out his first round of invitations. In fact, many biblical historians believe the burning of the city corresponds to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. Right now, we are among those being called through this second round of invitations. What is our response? Do we ignore the invitation? Are we too busy?

The Gospel points out that *Many are invited, but few are chosen*. We might wonder why the king would ask someone to the feast, only to remove him for not having the appropriate wedding garment. Why invite him, only to throw him out into the darkness? What does this mean for us?

We can think of the appropriate wedding garment as a repentant heart and a renewed spirit lived through a life of charity (or love). This is the garment we need to enter into the kingdom. In our first reading, Ezekiel outlines God's plan to make his people holy – like a loom we can use to weave our garment. With the sprinkling of water, he cleanses offenses, then places a new heart and spirit within us. This gives us power to live by his statutes and conquer sin.

The sacraments help us to grow in the holiness spoken of in Ezekiel, and required by our Gospel. Through baptism, original sin is washed away. We repent and offer contrition through reconciliation. At confirmation, the Holy Spirit rewards us with wisdom, understanding, judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, and wonder and awe. These gifts strengthen our spirit and help us to make moral choices.

More than any other sacrament, the Holy Eucharist prepares us most for our Lord's great wedding feast. We won't grow in holiness alone. We rely on others, and we rely on Jesus. This sacrament brings us into communion with the Body of Christ, the Church – our Lord's kingdom here on earth. Let us now celebrate.

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Friday, August 19, 2016  
(Lec. 423)

- 1) Ezekiel 37:1-14
- 2) Matthew 22:34-40

FRIDAY OF  
20TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint John Eudes, Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 581, 2055, 2083, 1824 CSDC 112, 580

FOCUS: Two great commandments, one command – to love.

The prophet Ezekiel saw the dry bones on the plain, but at the Lord's command, he prophesied with the word of God; the bones then joined together and were covered with sinew and flesh. When the spirit of life came upon them, they came alive and stood upright. These bones stood for the whole house of Israel, whom God would raise up from the grave of exile and oppression and, with his word and spirit, they would be brought back to their homeland, just as he promised. Imagine – from bones to living beings because Ezekiel followed the Lord's commands!

In the Gospel of Matthew, when the Pharisee asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment, he responded, *You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.* The second was like it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* In both, Jesus is commanding us to love, with all the obedience, self-sacrifice and attentiveness which that demands.

In this age of excessive egalitarianism, where tolerance becomes "everything is okay" and freedom becomes "you can do anything you want," the idea of a commandment seems old-fashioned. Have the Ten Commandments become the "ten suggestions"? Have we rationalized God's commandments in order to accommodate our lifestyles?

With divine authority (CCC 581), Jesus points out to us what we cannot escape: In order to live in right relationship with God, we are to love – freely, generously, wholly, daily, completely. We cannot focus solely on ourselves, on our own aspirations, needs and pursuits. How can we accomplish this? If we allow ourselves to be guided by the word of God and fed by the grace of the Spirit, we can see more clearly how we can love God with all our hearts, souls, minds. And it will naturally follow that we will love our neighbors, too – friend or enemy, family or stranger. God has commanded us to do no less.

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Saturday, August 20, 2016  
(Lec. 424)

- 1) Ezekiel 43:1-7a
- 2) Matthew 23:1-12

SATURDAY OF  
20TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Bernard, Abbot  
and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 526, 2367

FOCUS: God is the source of all good and holiness.

Sometimes, when we hear about humility, we think we are supposed to pretend our accomplishments are worthless. But that is not what we are called to do. True humility consists in recognizing that our talents are gifts from God – and are no more due to our own efforts than the color of our eyes. We are called to use our talents to the glory of the Lord and understand that what we do is possible because of what he has first given us.

In the very well-known Prayer of St. Francis, the beloved saint asks God, even begs God, to make him an instrument of God's peace. Saint Francis – like all saints, each in their own way – acknowledges that without God, without his grace and his help, he can do nothing, at least nothing good. It's a great lesson for us – a reminder that our capacity for good, indeed our very lives and existence, are gifts from the Lord. Today's Gospel reading, like the Prayer of St. Francis, points us to God as the source of all good and holiness. It focuses our minds and our souls on God as the object of all our love and attention – with our love and care for our families, friends, and neighbors stemming from and centered on love of God.

In today's Gospel Jesus tells those listening to him to follow the Pharisees' words, but not any un-Godlike behavior that they may exhibit. Likewise, we shouldn't let the failings of individual Catholics, or anyone else within the Church, become an excuse for us to reject God or the teachings of his Church. Nothing should lead us away from the Eucharist, from the other sacraments, or from the Church that Christ established. If anything, our failings and the faults of others should rally us to strive to live with greater faith and holiness of life.

Now living this out is not easy. It requires that we take time to pray each day, and receive the graces the sacraments offer. It also requires Christian humility, which calls us to set our own will, thoughts and desires aside so we can prioritize God. By doing these things, we open ourselves more fully to God so he can use us as instruments of his love and peace in the world.

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**SUNDAY, AUGUST 21, 2016**

(Lec. 123)

- 1) Isaiah 66:18-21
- 2) Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13
- 3) Luke 13:22-30

**TWENTY-FIRST  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Strive to enter through the narrow gate.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is asked how many people will be saved. He warns that a place in the kingdom of God is not a given for those who hear him preach, or a birthright of the Jewish people. Jesus tells the people, *strive to enter through the narrow gate*, adding that many will not be strong enough. He then tells them that outsiders from other nations will enter the kingdom of God before them.

In this Year of Mercy, we celebrate that God gives us opportunity after opportunity to repent and strive again for holiness. We encourage people to go to confession and reclaim their Christian faith. We also acknowledge that our lives are not endless. If we do not strive for holiness in the time we are given, the door will eventually close.

Parents know this is true. Good parents encourage their children to study, ask their teacher questions, and do their homework diligently. Eventually, the test comes, and students who have prepared well are rewarded.

We hear of this kind of discipline in today's second reading from Hebrews. We know that while we are being disciplined, it seems more like pain than joy. We also know that good parents discipline their children out of love. God loves us as sons and daughters, and therefore disciplines us so that we can be trained to live in peace and righteousness.

We have an opportunity here and now to get to know Jesus, to discipline ourselves and our children and *strive to enter through the narrow gate*. How do we respond?

The finest measure of how well we know Jesus is to examine how well we follow his example and his commands. In this Year of Mercy, we are invited to focus in a special way on the seven corporal works of mercy: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and imprisoned, and bury the dead.

This week, reject the temptation toward selfishness by acting on the corporal works of mercy. Decide by yourself or with your family whether you might donate to a food bank, give away gently used clothing, or find a way to visit someone who is lonely or ill. Take the opportunity to serve the kingdom of God now, before it is too late.

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Monday, August 22, 2016  
(Lec. 425)

- 1) 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5,  
11-12
- 2) Matthew 23:13-22

Gospel related: CCC 586, 2111

MONDAY OF  
21<sup>ST</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
The Queenship of the  
Blessed Virgin Mary)

**FOCUS:** True faith reveals itself through love, and not superficial religious observance.

In today's Gospel, Jesus criticized the scribes and Pharisees, whose scrupulous religious observance didn't match their inner motives. In making vows, they valued the gold offered in the temple more than the holiness of the altar or the temple itself. In other words, they placed more importance on money than on the sacredness of God's presence. With warped priorities, these religious experts had the externals of worship down pat, but had lost sight of its substance.

It's easy for us to get caught up in externals, too. When we just go through the motions, religious practice becomes empty ritual. We miss out on its true power. Relying on religious formula for its own sake borders on superstition or even idolatry. The danger is that we can begin to worship external actions rather than the movement of the Holy Spirit those actions reflect.

If we rely on scrupulous performance, we might think our own efforts earn us a place in God's kingdom. We can become proud of our achievement if we seem to perform well, or guilt-ridden if we fail. Either way, there's no room for God's unconditional love. In a merit system, we're too busy focusing on ourselves and how we're doing.

What a contrast to the believers in today's first reading. Saint Paul didn't mention the Thessalonian believers' religious practices. Instead, he thanked God for their example of faith in the face of persecution, and their love for one another. Through faith, the Thessalonians kept the heart of the law by loving God in spite of the challenges they faced. They loved their neighbor as they helped each other cope with the suffering they endured as a result of their faith. Loving God and loving our neighbor – what Jesus said were the two greatest commandments – are practices we can all understand and do our best to follow, whether or not we know every detail of canon law.

Today, we celebrate the Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is a shining example of love that doesn't concern itself with external appearances. After all, Mary was willing to risk shame when – as an unmarried virgin – she agreed to become the mother of our Lord. She was willing to stand at the cross out of love for her Son when most others turned away. Not concerned with how things might look, Mary said "yes" to God and acted in love. May her example and intercession on our behalf empower us to do likewise.

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Tuesday, August 23, 2016  
(Lec. 426)  
1) 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3a,  
14-17  
2) Matthew 23:23-26

TUESDAY OF  
21<sup>ST</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Rose of Lima,  
Virgin)

FOCUS: Jesus is our guide to knowing what is truly important in life.

Jesus had a way with words. *Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel!* What a great way to tell someone they are off base in what they see as important. Jesus made it abundantly clear there would be serious consequences to ignoring his words. *Woe to you*, he said repeatedly. The phrase is a little old-fashioned, but there is no misunderstanding his meaning.

In this reading, the warning first given to the religious leaders of Jesus' time is applicable to religious leaders of every day and age. Especially within the Church. Meaning, as a priest, I have to pay special attention to this teaching of Jesus. Especially as it is easy to get caught up in the details of church life and lose sight of the bigger picture. That is why it is so important for you to pray for me and for all priests, deacons and religious brothers and sisters – that we may never get sidetracked by the details and come up short in doing our job of helping ourselves and others reach eternal life in heaven.

Beyond Church leaders, this message is applicable to each of us here today as well. We all need to look deeply into our lives and see that our priorities are in the right place, and that the values we portray outwardly are the same ones we hold in our hearts. Jesus has a real problem with hypocrites.

To help us on this path to heaven, we have a "heritage of faith." (CCC 84) This heritage has been passed to us by the earliest followers of Christ – the Apostles and disciples – and safeguarded by the Holy Spirit. Today's first reading alludes to this important concept of a repository of faith; the Thessalonians are reminded to hold fast to what Paul taught them, and not be fooled by others. The Church has the authentic teachings and traditions that can help us reach everlasting life. Despite the imperfect people who make up the Church, we can have confidence that it is through the Church that we come to know the true teachings of Jesus and their meaning.

With the lessons from both the Gospel and the letter to the Thessalonians in mind, let us all resolve to look closely at our lives to see if we are chasing after the gnat while ignoring the camel, so to speak. Let us use Jesus and his Church as our guides in seeing what the Lord regards as important, and how he wants us to live. If there are adjustments we need to make, let us do so soon, before we get too caught up in other things – again.

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Wednesday, August 24, 2016  
(Lec. 629)

- 1) Revelation 21:9b-14
- 2) John 1:45-51

**SAINT BARTHOLOMEW,  
APOSTLE  
– FEAST**

FOCUS: A good thing must be shared.

The other day, walking past a religious education class full of ten-year-olds, I noticed two boys sitting toward the back of the room. The first boy pulled something out of his pocket that clearly he could not wait to show the other boy. Beaming with pride, he opened his hand to show the item, and immediately the other boy's grin spread from ear to ear. I don't know what the item was, but it must have been great, because not even the teacher telling them to be quiet seemed to diminish their delight.

This scene comes to mind as we listen to today's readings. Both the angel in the first reading and Philip in the Gospel had something of great value they wanted to share with someone else.

We can all conjure up a time when we felt we had to share our excitement with others. When we find something of great value, we can't keep it to ourselves. It has to be shared. It's not the *thing*, so to speak, that we are sharing; we are inviting others into delight, joy and excitement. Philip demonstrated this with his invitation to Nathanael to come and see *the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth*. Not even Nathanael's somewhat skeptical response diminishes Philip's conviction. There must have been something compelling about Philip's invitation that motivated Nathanael. We are told in the Gospel, *Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him*.

This feast of Saint Bartholomew, also known as the Nathanael of today's Gospel, is a good time to reflect on our sharing of the Good News. Do we share stories about Christ working in our lives with coworkers as much as we do the highlights of sporting events? In other words, we must ask ourselves, is our relationship with Jesus a source of great joy, delight and excitement, so much so that we are bursting at the seams to share it?

Our being here at Mass is evidence that we are in relationship with Christ. In fact, partaking in the sacrament demonstrates a desire to grow in Christ. But do we keep it to ourselves? Or do we carry it into every moment of our lives? Do we find Nathanaels and invite them to come and see?

Let us, in honor of Saint Bartholomew, whose evangelizing efforts were cause for martyrdom, make a special effort to invite at least one person today to walk toward Jesus. Take a moment now and think about who you will share your delight, joy and excitement with today.

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Thursday, August 25, 2016  
(Lec. 428)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 1:1-9
- 2) Matthew 24:42-51

THURSDAY OF  
21<sup>ST</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Louis;  
Saint Joseph Calasanz, Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC 673 CSDC 259**

**FOCUS:** We are to stay awake and live each day fully for the Lord, that we might be judged worthy of eternal life.

Perhaps you have seen the T-shirts and bumper stickers that proclaim: “Jesus is coming. Look busy.”

While this light-hearted message may make us smile or chuckle, it should also give us pause. In fact, a better maxim might be: “Jesus is coming. *Get busy.*”

In today’s Gospel, Christ gives a clear warning to his disciples to *Stay awake!* because they do not know when he will return for the final judgment, which no one will escape.

Many Christians have responded to Christ’s warning with fear. Afraid that the end of the world could come at any time, they have been motivated more by fear of punishment than love of God. Such an attitude has done little to attract new followers of Christ in the past, and probably would do even less today.

For the perspective on life that today’s Gospel should inspire, we can look to Saint Paul. His letter to the Corinthians overflows with gratitude, and a keen awareness of God’s blessings.

He gives thanks that God has showered his grace on the Corinthians, and takes joy that these new believers *are not lacking in any spiritual gift*. The best news of all that Paul shares is that God will keep the Corinthians *firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Paul invites the Corinthians of two thousand years ago, as well as all of us today, to view the Final Judgment – which could happen today or some other unknown date in the future – as something to be yearned for, not feared, as long as we are properly prepared. On this day of judgment, we will stand before Christ that he might judge us worthy of eternal life in heaven.

In the meantime, may we share Christ’s love joyfully with others, just as Saint Paul did with the Christians of Corinth. So when our time comes to stand before the Lord, we will be ready and judged worthy of seeing God face-to-face in heaven.

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Friday, August 26, 2016  
(Lec. 429)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 1:17-25
- 2) Matthew 25:1-13

Gospel related: CCC 672, 796, 1618

FRIDAY OF  
21ST WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are to seek to lead our lives guided by true wisdom, which comes from God.

Both readings today ask us to consider what it means to be wise. The longer we live, and the more we face life's challenges and our own mistakes, the less likely we will think of ourselves as wise. Indeed, for most of us, life presents an ongoing lesson in humility.

Today's readings teach us about the meaning of true wisdom. Both the parable about the women who need to keep their oil lamps lit, and Saint Paul's letter, refer to wisdom. And what is this wisdom? It is the courage to commit oneself to live as Jesus lived.

Such wisdom is not based on accomplishment, social status, the size of one's bank account or any other earthly measure. Rather, real wisdom depends on how much the light of God shines in our hearts toward others.

So, how does this wisdom manifest itself, and how can it guide our lives? Surely, there are many answers to these questions. Yet for today, let us look to the example of Jesus for discerning two possible responses.

Wisdom begins with how we use each day of our lives. Wise use of time includes doing what Jesus did, that is, spending time in prayer with the Father. How can we possibly live with insight and wisdom without time each day in prayer? In order to grow in wisdom, we must be ever mindful of the presence of God, and allow the gift of his Spirit to infuse our life and our decisions.

Next, living wisely is found in striving to live in the present moment, and being attentive to the people God brings before us. It is easy to get so caught up with the demands of our own lives that we lose sight of how others around us might be suffering. To live with wisdom does not mean understanding how to "fix" the painful situations of others, for life's challenges are not easily resolved. Instead, we can act more like Jesus did. He lived fully in the present moment, cared about others, took the time to understand their circumstances and gave them his heartfelt encouragement. In short, living wisely entails living in the present moment so that we are better able to recognize the needs of others, and respond to others with love.

Time with our God, and living in the present moment – is this what the world considers wise? Probably not, but the same might be said for the cross of Jesus and the wisdom it represents. So let us lead our lives guided by true wisdom, which we gain by seeking to live like he did.

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Saturday, August 27, 2016

(Lec. 430)

1) 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

2) Matthew 25:14-30

SATURDAY OF  
21ST WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Monica)

Gospel related: **CCC** 546, 1029, 1720, 1936, 2683 **CSDC** 259, 326

**FOCUS:** Like the early Christians and Saint Monica, we are to persevere in our faith and use our gifts to serve our brothers and sisters.

When Saint Paul wrote to the Christian community in Corinth, Greece, around the year 57, he was most likely writing from Ephesus, another Christian community he had founded. The Church in Corinth was having problems, including dissension in the community. Paul wanted to remind them of their particular gift of being called to be Christians. He writes that not many of the people were wise by human standards, powerful or of noble birth. But, he told them: *Consider your own calling*. God chose them, and as a result, they were in Christ Jesus.

We will hear more of Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthians in the next few weeks. He will speak of the disunity in the Church there, reiterating that Jesus is the center of their lives. He'll remind us that it is Jesus who is the most important member of the community, and the link they all need. He will remind us in a couple of weeks that *through [the Gospel] you are also being saved*. (15:2)

Fast forward, if you will, several centuries, to the fourth century. Today, we celebrate the calling of a woman born around 332, Monica, from Northern Africa. From an early age she "considered her own calling" to be a faithful Christian, wife and mother.

Her husband, Patricius, was not a Christian, and tradition holds he had a bad temper. She continued to pray for him. He accepted the faith and was baptized on his deathbed. Her sons, however, had not accepted the faith, and her son Augustine was living a rather dissolute life. But she did not give up on him. When she discovered he had gone to Milan to be a teacher, she followed after him. In all of her travels and in all of her difficulties, she "considered her own calling" as a wife and mother, and sought salvation for her family.

In Milan, Monica contacted the bishop, Ambrose. Bishop Ambrose was instrumental in bringing Augustine to conversion – and convert he did! He became a priest, a bishop, a renowned preacher and one of the great Western fathers of the Church.

The readings from Saint Paul and the Gospel of Matthew have relevance for us as we seek to live in a way that is faithful to the calling we have received. God has given us many talents, as the Gospel reminds us. Today, let's remember the faithfulness of Saint Monica to her call, and reflect on how we can use our talents for the betterment of our families, our parish and the community we live in.

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**SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 2016**

(Lec. 126)

- 1) Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29
- 2) Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a
- 3) Luke 14:1, 7-14

Gospel related: **CCC** 575, 588 **CSDC** 261

**TWENTY-SECOND  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

**FOCUS:** God calls us to take our rightful place among our brothers and sisters – not to place ourselves above them.

At first glance, today's Gospel reading might seem like a list of tips on how to act at a dinner party – and, at worst, a cynical guide to how to make ourselves look good. Just act like you think you should sit in the back, knowing you will be invited to move up – and look good in front of everybody else at the party.

Jesus is really more concerned about how we see ourselves, however. Do we feel that we deserve the place of honor? If so, we risk the humiliation of being put in our rightful place – further back in the banquet hall. As human beings, we can easily fall into the trap of comparing ourselves with others. We decide either that we're better than they are, or they are better than us. Either way, comparing ourselves with others is a mistake. Only God, who can read the human heart, can make true and wise comparisons.

The words of Sirach in today's first reading are a wonderful antidote to this human tendency to compare. *Conduct your affairs with humility ... What is too sublime for you, seek not, into things beyond your strength search not.* This does not mean, of course, that we should not try to be better Christians, or to improve our professional skills in order to have a more responsible and challenging job. However, we need discernment and prayer to help us determine what is right for us in God's eyes – and a realistic knowledge of our strengths and weaknesses. A person with no musical talent, for example, would find no success – or peace of mind – in striving to be an opera star!

Today's reading from Hebrews gives us a sense of what we can expect in our life after death: citizenship in heaven, with the angels *in festal gathering*. Here on earth, we can prepare for that wonderful day by staying close to God and listening to the way he leads us in our daily lives.

Today, as we prepare for another week in service of God and neighbor, let us pray for the gifts of wisdom and discernment from the Holy Spirit – that we might be led in the direction that is best for us, where we can best make a difference in the lives of others by using our talents and skills to the utmost. And let us pray for the humility we need to know our place in God's kingdom. Then, we will truly be humble, not comparing ourselves with others or seeking places of honor, but conducting our affairs with humility.

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Monday, August 29, 2016

(Lec. 431)

1) 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

(Lec. 634)

2) Mark 6:17-29

MONDAY OF  
22ND WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
The Passion of  
Saint John the Baptist)

Gospel related: **CCC** 523

FOCUS: Today we are reminded of the great price some pay to witness Christ.

Saint Thomas More, like John the Baptist, was beheaded for disagreeing with a king on the sanctity of marriage.

One of the key witnesses against Saint Thomas was a former protégé, Richard Rich. Rich perjures himself to help convict Thomas. After the perjury, Thomas asks for an explanation of the symbol of authority that Rich is wearing. He is informed that Rich is now the attorney general for Wales. Looking at the medallion, he asks Richard, "What does it profit a man if he sells his soul but gains the whole world ... but for Wales?"

Neither John the Baptist nor Thomas More was confused by what was at stake. They sacrificed everything to be true to God's message, and to be true to their faith. John proclaimed God's law and cried out, "Repent." Thomas tried to avoid speaking out against the illegal divorce and marriage of Henry VIII to protect himself, but he refused to lie or take a false oath. He gently reminded his former protégé of the true cost of seeking worldly power.

In today's Gospel, Herod makes a rash promise to his niece that he would regret. John the Baptist had rebuked Herod for marrying Herodias, his brother's wife. Overcome by spite toward Saint John, Herodias used her daughter to exact revenge.

Life is filled with choices. Sometimes we do well; sometimes we act poorly. Herod, Herodias and Richard Rich made choices motivated by greed and power. It worked for awhile, by earthly standards.

John was a herald calling people to repent. He came to make straight the way for the Lord. We think that the "way of the Lord" is a road. But in fact it is the path to our hearts. John called on Herod to repent; but because Herod was overcome by passion for his brother's wife and his niece, his heart was hardened.

Herod would later take part in Christ's trial. He was curious about Christ and his message, just as he had been curious about John. Herod could hear Christ's words, but not receive them in his heart. He was more interested in maintaining his power than in the salvation of his soul.

After Christ's death, Herod would become friends with Pilate. Herod's schemes and plotting eventually led to his losing the favor of the Roman emperor. He and Herodias would die in exile in Gaul. One might ask, "What does it profit a man if he sells his soul for the whole world ... but for Palestine?"

Each of us is offered our own Wales, our own Palestine. Our passions, our greed and our pride can become ends in themselves. But are they worth the price of our souls and the prospect of eternal separation from God?

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Tuesday, August 30, 2016  
(Lec. 432)  
1) 1 Corinthians 2:10b-16  
2) Luke 4:31-37

TUESDAY OF  
22ND WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are never to hesitate in turning to Jesus who saves us, heals us and sets us free.

Throughout Jesus' public ministry, his authority was always being questioned – sometimes out of curiosity, other times out of defiance – by the political leaders, religious leaders, and even many who might have followed him.

This scenario plays out in today's Gospel. As Jesus is teaching at a synagogue in Galilee, there is the usual wondering about who he is and where he gets his authority. The crowd includes a man with an unclean spirit. Unlike the others, the man – or, rather, the unclean spirit possessing him – knows exactly who Jesus is, and knows Jesus has the power to drive him out. The demon cries out to Jesus, not to question his authority but to know his intentions: *Have you come to destroy us?*

Jesus simply orders him to *Be quiet!* and to *Come out of him!* And the demon departs, leaving the man unharmed.

Notice there is no bolt of lightning; no cloud of thunder or dramatic movie-scene destruction. The man in whom the demon resided is left no worse for the wear. All it takes to remove the demon is a spoken word – a command. Just as God spoke and the world came to be, here Jesus with the power and authority he has as the Son of God speaks and it is done.

The people were all amazed. We, too, should be amazed – for these actions on the part of Jesus make clear that he was the Son of God who had power and authority over sin and evil. He was the one who would, through his death and resurrection, defeat the power of sin and evil, win forgiveness for our sins and open the way to eternal life.

The action on the part of Jesus to save, heal and deliver the man from the demon is also a powerful reminder of our need for Jesus. It is a reminder we should turn to him each day to deliver us from those things which hold us bound. This will allow us to live more fully and faithfully as children of God and disciples of Jesus, helping to build up God's kingdom on earth.

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Wednesday, August 31, 2016  
(Lec. 433)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 3:1-9
- 2) Luke 4:38-44

WEDNESDAY OF  
22ND WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: When we sacrifice for others, we are following in the footsteps of Jesus.

When we think of the sufferings of Jesus, it is common to focus on the end of his life – the scourging and the crucifixion. But Jesus began suffering for us long before that point. For the whole of his life, Jesus freely poured himself out in a sacrifice of self-giving love for the healing and salvation of all humankind.

We see an example of Christ's sacrifice for us in today's Gospel, where the people search for Jesus and try to make him stay. Peter's mother-in-law was happy to cook for him and serve him. It must have been difficult for Jesus to tear himself away from these comforts and take up a journey that would eventually lead to his ultimate sacrifice. We know that before he left the village, he went off to a deserted place, likely to pray. This time in prayer would strengthen him to continue on with the saving work and mission his Father had sent him to accomplish. This involved him leaving the town in which he was comfortable, and going to other towns and villages to preach, teach and heal so that many might be saved – and also to reveal the Father's love and plan of salvation.

We can take two significant lessons away from today's Gospel reading. First, there is no end to the gratitude we owe Jesus. Because he was human, as well as divine, these sacrifices surely made him uncomfortable, and perhaps lonely at times. But he continued to give of himself because it was the Father's will. Second, we are to follow his example. As Saint Thérèse of Lisieux suggested in a letter to her sister, "Let us seize with jealous care every least opportunity of self-sacrifice." In other words, let's follow in the footsteps of Jesus as best we can.

Self-sacrifice may not be especially popular these days, but as Jesus shows us, it is the way to eternal life. As we give of ourselves, let us remember to make our sacrifices in the spirit of gratitude for all that Jesus did for us. Let us do it without fanfare or expectation of return. We want our reward to be in heaven, so only God needs to know.

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