

# July

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**CYCLE C  
YEAR II**

Friday, July 1, 2016  
(Lec. 381)

- 1) Amos 8:4-6, 9-12
- 2) Matthew 9:9-13

FRIDAY OF  
13<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem. Saint Junípero  
Serra, Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 581, 589, 2100

**FOCUS:** Jesus came to seek, call and save sinners.

Amos, the shepherd and seemingly unlikely prophet, lived under the rule of Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, during a time of great prosperity and great immorality. Many members of the people of Israel living there had once again gotten off the path set forth by God, and Amos was hoping to encourage their return to the “high moral and religious demands of the Lord’s revelation.” (Amos introduction, NABRE, 951)

Today’s Gospel tells of the call of Matthew, a tax collector, which is significant for several reasons. First, tax collectors were considered to be grave sinners who were to be avoided on account of their collecting taxes for Rome, and then collecting more above the amount prescribed by Rome to enrich themselves. Second, after Jesus called Matthew to follow him, he then had dinner at Matthew’s house in the company of many other tax collectors. These actions on the part of Jesus clearly affirmed his mission of being sent to save sinners; they also challenged the status quo, which naturally raised the ire of many of the Jewish religious leaders of his time.

One important lesson we can learn from this is that similar to the way Jesus called Matthew, and in the way Jesus reached out to all people, especially those looked down on and cast off by society, he also calls us to serve. Jesus calls us to evangelize by reaching out to all people with love and compassion.

Franciscan priest and missionary Saint Junipero Serra, whose feast day we celebrate today, left his home on Majorca, off the coast of Spain in the eighteenth century, and traveled to California, where he worked tirelessly to spread the Gospel. Before his death, he had founded nine missions along the coast of California. He was canonized in September 2015 by Pope Francis when the pontiff visited the United States.

These examples seem to uphold the message of evangelization we are all called to practice in as many ways as we can. We are called to treat all people with kindness, love and compassion, and to assist those who are in need. Our evangelizing should come not through violence or forceful language, but through the gentle words of Jesus and the testimony of our own lives.

How we live and how we treat others are as important to evangelizing as the words of the Gospel. A year ago, Pope Francis defined this kind of evangelization when he said, “Evangelization does not consist in proselytizing, for proselytizing is a caricature of evangelization, but rather evangelizing entails attracting by our witness those who are far off, it means humbly drawing near to those who feel distant from God in the Church, drawing near to those who feel judged and condemned outright by those who consider themselves to be perfect and pure.” (July 7, 2015)

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Saturday, July 2, 2016  
(Lec. 382)  
1) Amos 9:11-15  
2) Matthew 9:14-17

SATURDAY OF  
13<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Saturday in honor  
of BVM)

**FOCUS:** We are called to share the Gospel message with others, and help build up God's kingdom on earth.

The reading today from the Book of Amos brings hope to all who wait for the coming of the Father of mercy, but this passage comes after many verses in which Amos lays out the consequences for those who have turned away from God. Amos, a shepherd in Judah, called to be a prophet by God, speaks out of a vision – as many of the prophets did – that faithfulness to God is essential for those desiring to be saved. Today's reading speaks of replanting vineyards where once there was famine, and rebuilding and inhabiting cities that were ruined.

These words from the eighth century B.C. come with wisdom and hope for us today. The image of replanting vineyards reflects the new life to come for those who have lived desperately through difficult times. When we hear about the *fallen hut of David* being raised up, we are reminded of the coming of the kingdom which Jesus came to reveal. In today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus speaks of wineskins, saying that no one tries to put new wine in old skins because it will ruin the skins. Rather, he tells us, new wine should be put into new wineskins.

Jesus makes it clear by this reference to wineskins that the Good News he is proclaiming is not a patch on the Judaism to which so many adhered. Neither is the kingdom that he is announcing to replace the covenant between God and the people of Israel. Instead, the Gospel that Jesus brings fulfills God's promise to bring salvation to the people of Israel – and to the Gentiles as well. Jesus did this by establishing a new covenant through his sacrifice and death upon the cross. This act won forgiveness for our sins, and offers salvation to all who believe. This is the Good News that continues for each of us still today.

This Good News is what each of us, as disciples of Christ, is called to proclaim by giving witness to the reality that God is present to us today. It is helpful if we take the time to consider where, or how, we have encountered God. Can we speak personally of our relationship with Christ as it evolves through prayer, reception of the sacraments and a shared journeying with others? As we do, we are contributing to the "replanting of vineyards" – a mission each of us is called to take on.

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**SUNDAY, JULY 3, 2016**

(Lec. 102)

- 1) Isaiah 66:10-14c
- 2) Galatians 6:14-18
- 3) Luke 10:1-12, 17-20  
or 10:1-9

Gospel related: **CCC** 765, 787, 2122, 2611 **CSDC** 259, 492

**FOURTEENTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

**FOCUS:** The Lord chose ordinary people like us to share in his work of spreading the Good News to all the world.

Jesus' public ministry lasted only about a thousand days. He had so many places to be – so many people who wanted to experience his healing and hear his words. In today's Gospel, he chooses and commissions 72 disciples to help him spread the saving word of God to more distant lands, to more and more people. He sends them out in pairs. The harvest is plenty, the laborers are few. The numbers of people in need are overwhelming. Jesus instructed these chosen disciples to cure the sick in his name, and to announce the kingdom of God. They were not to concern themselves with whether they preached to sinners or saints, Jews or Gentiles – the message of salvation is intended for all to hear and heed.

Not everyone in Israel wanted this message shared with the world. For more than a thousand years, Israel prided itself on being God's chosen people. It was a foreign concept – this idea that Gentiles could be saved and enter into eternal life in heaven. Israel and its leaders often thought of themselves as a privileged race, superior to all those around them. This explains in part how shocking it was for Paul to tell the Galatians that even the uncircumcised were to be included in the promise of salvation. Israel could no longer boast of its exclusive relationship with God. The Creator of all intended to be the Redeemer of all as well. Saint Paul says we can truly boast of only one thing – Jesus and his death on the cross, a symbol of torture that quickly became a trophy, and a key with which Jesus unlocked the gates of heaven.

Paul the Apostle believes himself to be crucified to the world, suggesting that nothing mattered to him more than doing God's will, and teaching others to do the same. This is risky business. Not everyone wants to be told to repent of their sins and yield to a power superior to their own. Jesus and Paul were both rejected for the message they preached, and our Lord understood that the 72 would face persecutions also, like lambs sent out among wolves.

In order to make disciples for Jesus, we must first become true disciples of Jesus. By our baptism, we are sent out to all the world to proclaim the same message of forgiveness and hope first entrusted to the Apostles, and then to the 72. We carry the same risks, but may also share the promise of the same reward. We are empowered to do so inasmuch as we believe, as Isaiah prophesied, that God loves us with the tender care and protection of a doting parent. With the power of God to guide us, no harm can come to us – not even the bite of serpents or scorpions.

Jesus' disciples were told to travel lightly, and so must we. They were instructed to trust completely, and so should we. In taking no provisions for the journey, the barometer with which the disciples would measure the success of their mission would be the hospitality or the hostility that met them in every town they visited. Where the word of God was welcomed, they would be well cared for. Where it was rejected, they would know to move on to the next town. The message was simple – *the kingdom of God is at hand for you*. Jesus did not come to preach himself, but to announce the kingdom, and to prepare us to enter into it. The kingdom of God is mentioned 120 times in the four Gospels. It is the central theme and focus of all Jesus' words and actions. Because of the Son of Man and his saving message, all can rejoice *because your names are written in heaven*.

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Monday, July 4, 2016  
(Lec. 383)

- 1) Hosea 2:16, 17b-18,  
21-22
- 2) Matthew 9:18-26

MONDAY OF  
14<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Independence Day  
In United States of America)

NOTE: for Independence Day, any readings from the *Lectionary for Ritual Masses* (vol. IV), the Mass "For the Country or a City," nos. 882-886, or "For Peace and Justice," nos. 887-891

FOCUS: God's truth is marching on.

Most of us are familiar with the song, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Outside of the United States, it is known as "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory." The lyrics were written by Julia Ward Howe in November of 1861. It has since become a well-known American patriotic song. It is not uncommon to hear it sung as a recessional hymn for today's celebration of Independence Day in the United States.

There is a line of the song which reads: "Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer him! Be jubilant, my feet! Our God is marching on." In her crafting of the song, Julia Ward Howe brings to crescendo our greatest hope, glory and victory: Glory, glory, halleluiah, God's truth is marching on.

"Oh be swift my soul to answer him! Be jubilant, my feet!" We can imagine that a sentiment similar to this was pounding in the heart of the woman in today's Gospel, who suffered a hemorrhage for twelve years. She understood the truth of God, so much so that she risked public humiliation and shunning just to touch the tassel on Jesus' cloak. In the culture of the day, a woman hemorrhaging was considered unclean. She was not to be seen in public. It was forbidden for her to touch anyone or be touched by anyone. Knowing all of this, she still chose to touch Jesus' cloak. To do so seems to have taken a deep, sure faith in his power to set her free from not only her physical affliction, but also her social isolation. After all, her faith did not require her to seek Jesus' attention. She states, *If only I can touch his cloak, I shall be cured.* And it is so. Jesus tells her: *Your faith has saved you.* Her faith saved her, and Jesus' public acknowledgement of her restores her to the community.

This unnamed Jewish woman challenges us today. Just how deep is our faith in God's truth? What are we willing to risk so that we are set free to lay down our lives more fully in love and service to God and our neighbor?

In a short while, we will come forward to receive holy Communion, and be nourished and strengthened by Jesus himself. As we do so, let us come with open hearts so that as we receive Jesus, we have the grace and strength needed to march out of this place. God's truth marches on in the witness of our lives.

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Tuesday, July 5, 2016  
(Lec. 384)  
1) Hosea 8:4-7, 11-13  
2) Matthew 9:32-38

TUESDAY OF  
14<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Anthony Zaccaria, Priest;  
USA: Saint Elizabeth  
of Portugal)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2611 **CSDC** 259

FOCUS: God will never leave his people.

The Book of Hosea is a beautiful reflection on the love of God for his people. In the passage we heard today, we are given a description of Israel's infidelity. They made kings, but without God's authority; they looked to calf idols as gods, and they put their efforts into work that will not bring about any return. Today's passage paints a very dismal picture, but if we were to read on to chapter 11, we would find the description of God's fidelity to Israel almost poetic as it reflects on how he stays beside his people. In fact, we hear these words from God: *How could I give you up, O Ephraim, or deliver you, up O Israel?* (11:8)

The answer, of course, is that he could not. The clear message is that no matter how much we flounder, God is always with us. We can see this again in the passage from the Gospel of Matthew, where we hear that Jesus is going around curing people *because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd*. These are people, like Israel, who are discovering that God will never leave them in their time of need, even if they were to turn away from him. Even the mute person possessed by the demon is not out of the reach of Jesus.

Knowing that God is with us, even when we reject him, however, is not a reason to be nonchalant about our relationship with God. Knowing he is pure mercy and love does not give us a free ticket to do whatever we want. For the grace of God in the sacraments to be fully realized in us, we must cooperate with God. We must imitate the people in the Gospel who were obviously positioning themselves for help by coming near Jesus. Although we do not know about the people who were not present that day, we do know that Jesus was *moved with pity* for those who came to him, and that he is the true Shepherd on whom we must depend.

Some cultures are built on an attitude of fierce independence, but Christianity requires faithful obedience and dependence on God. These two are not in opposition to one another, though, and it is not difficult to reconcile them. It is through a Christian's dependence on God that they are able to act, often alone and with conviction, on the truth of the Gospel. Do not hesitate to lean on the knowledge that God will never leave you as you set about courageously speaking the Gospel.

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Wednesday, July 6, 2016  
(Lec. 385)  
1) Hosea 10:1-3, 7-8, 12  
2) Matthew 10:1-7

WEDNESDAY OF  
14<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Maria Goretti,  
Virgin and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC 543**

**FOCUS:** When we seek God, we become people who live the values of compassion, justice and mercy toward others.

When Jeroboam II was king, Israel prospered and had economic security. However, this prosperity began to be expressed in an extremely wealthy and luxurious life. It was accompanied by an unprecedented collapse of moral principles, and idolatry and corruption spread throughout the land. Great prophets spoke about the wickedness of the people, and cried out for a return to the moral principles expressed in the Torah. They predicted that idolatrous shrines and idols would be destroyed. Terrible days would cause the people to weep so loudly they would cry out to the hills to provide them with safe refuge.

At the same time, however, the people had it in their power to change – to reverse their situation. The prophet Hosea states that this could only happen if the people begin to sow justice – a justice in which everyone shares equitably in the available resources. It is a justice that comes from hearts that have been moved by compassion. It centers itself on the search to discover what God desires for his people. This justice produces fruit that lasts, and is something to be enjoyed and shared with others.

Clearly, the prophets of the Old Testament were called to a specific task – to keep the people of Israel faithful to their covenant with the Lord. In today's Gospel, we hear of the group of Twelve who were also called to a special mission. They are summoned by Jesus, and each one is named. The word Apostle means "one who is sent," and so the Twelve are sent out by Jesus to spread his teachings in a particular way. Peter was their leader. Eventually, they would become the foundation on which the Church was built, and they would hand on their unique roles to their successors – the pope and the bishops.

The Gospel passage indicates that initially, the Apostles are asked to confine their ministry to the Jews. As God's own people who are heirs to the covenant, the Jews were the first ones to be invited to follow Christ, the Messiah. He fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. The Apostles were instructed to proclaim to the people that the *kingdom of heaven is at hand*. This message meant they were called to sow seeds of justice.

In today's world, these same messages – of the kingdom of heaven, of sowing justice – are proclaimed to us. In a society of seemingly unchecked consumerism and selfishness, we must be people who respond to the needs of the most vulnerable, and sow justice where it is lacking. Let us consider how we might *plough a new field* in our own lives, as we heard in Hosea, in order to live more productive lives that bear good fruit for God.

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Thursday, July 7, 2016  
(Lec. 386)

- 1) Hosea 11:1-4, 8c-9
- 2) Matthew 10:7-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 543, 1509, 2121, 2122, 2443 **CSDC** 184

THURSDAY OF  
14<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God lovingly watches over us and protects us.

The relationship of a parent and a child is truly universal. And no matter how strained or attenuated a relationship between a parent and a child might be, that relationship has a deep and lasting effect on both people throughout their lives.

And so it should not surprise us as people of faith that God, who revealed himself throughout the Scriptures as overflowing with love for his chosen people and all humanity, should present himself to us as a loving Father, and help us to understand ourselves as his children.

This is how God inspired the prophet Hosea, whose writings we hear in today's first reading, to reveal him and his relationship with his people.

In this passage from the prophet Hosea, it is made clear that God's relationship with us is not a casual one, but rather relationship in its most intense form – it is like that of a parent who loves a child deeply and experiences great sadness when that child goes astray, and yet continues to love the child nonetheless.

This is how God loved Israel – drawing it out of slavery from Egypt with great love, only to be met with ingratitude and infidelity. A human parent in such a case might be tempted to forsake a child in great anger. But not God. He is *God and not man*. He loves Israel despite its sins of betrayal.

This portrayal of the relationship between God and Israel can help us appreciate more fully the depths of God's love for us, and help us grow in our faith and love for God. For no matter how many times we have sinned or turned away from God, our heavenly Father continues to show great love for his children, and continually works to draw us back to himself with cords of love.

So, in short, no matter how scarlet our sins might be, God is ever-willing to forgive us. All we need to do is turn to him with humble and contrite hearts, and forgiveness will be granted. Similarly, God will never leave or forsake us; he walks with us on every step of our life's journey. He provides for the things we most truly need, and grants us the grace and strength needed to live in the way he calls to live. Understanding this, let us walk in trust and confidence as we strive to share God's light and love generously with others.

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Friday, July 8, 2016

(Lec. 387)

1) Hosea 14:2-10

2) Matthew 10:16-23

Gospel related: CCC 161, 728, 764, 1821

FRIDAY OF  
14<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *Be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves.*

Imagine your favorite athletic team. Often before the first game of the season, or before meeting a big rival on the field, coaches give a rousing speech. A good coach might acknowledge that his team is about to face adversity. Perhaps he mentions the all-star player on the opposing team, or overcoming injuries or mid-season fatigue. The coach may then reassure the team by reminding them of their training – how every person knows their position and is prepared to take the field.

Along these lines, we can liken chapter 10 of the Gospel of Matthew to being Jesus' pre-game speech to the Apostles. In the section right before today's Gospel, he tells them the game plan. They are to travel through Israel to proclaim the kingdom of God, cure the sick, raise the dead and drive out demons. Today's reading is the real-talk. Like a good coach, Jesus acknowledges the adversity that his disciples are about to face. Tomorrow's Gospel reading will be the pep-talk, where Jesus offers assurances that the disciples need not be afraid.

While Jesus speaks to the Apostles in preparation for their first preaching tour, he also speaks to their future sufferings after his passion and death. Jesus' words are also meant to guide us as we strive to live as his faithful disciples.

Jesus offers two pieces of advice: the first is to be shrewd as a serpent. This seems odd – the serpent in the Garden of Eden was shrewd, and was the cause of great sin. But Jesus wants his disciples to be shrewd so they can “discover deception in order to escape it.” (Elena Bosetti, *Matthew: The Journey Toward Hope*, 187)

The second piece of advice is to be simple as doves. To be simple is not to be careless, but to be confident as a baby in her mother's arms. (Bosetti) Despite evil, we can be confident in God's provision. As Jesus says today, the *Spirit of your Father* will provide the words to respond to our accusers.

We should not be shocked when our experience of Christian discipleship becomes difficult. Jesus and the Apostles faced adversity to the point of crucifixion and martyrdom. Christians still face government persecution in many countries today. When we face adversity, let us hope to be shrewd enough to escape with a clean conscience, but simple enough to trust that God accompanies us in our suffering when we cannot escape.

Saturday, July 9, 2016  
(Lec. 388)  
1) Isaiah 6:1-8  
2) Matthew 10:24-33

SATURDAY OF  
14<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Augustine  
Zhao Rong, Priest and  
Companions, Martyrs;  
Saturday in honor of BVM)

Gospel related: CCC 14, 305, 363, 765, 1034, 1816, 2145

**FOCUS:** Jesus nourishes us in word and sacrament so we can lead a life which is holy and pleasing to God.

Christ's words in today's Gospel call us to trust with "childlike abandonment to the providence of our Heavenly Father to take care of (our) every need." (CCC #305) He tells us to *not be afraid*, reminding us of the Father's great love and concern for us – for all the hairs of our head.

We can see God's providence in action in our first reading. Isaiah is overwhelmed as he gazes on the glory of almighty God and the heavenly angels. However, the glorious sight brings the reality that because of the sin in his life, he may be *doomed* from ever being part of it. The movement of the Seraphim angel to bring forgiveness to Isaiah with the ember from the altar is almost simultaneous with Isaiah's words of remorse. Yes, the Lord can read our heart.

What occurs next should be uplifting to us all, for by the *purging* of sins, Isaiah is open to the grace that enables him to hear the voice of God and the invitation to go and do his work. Many of us in that position might want a minute to think it over, but because Isaiah is liberated from the sins that kept him from recognizing God's love and presence in his life, and because he is blessed with the grace of courage, he answers *send me*, without fear or hesitation.

Jesus teaches that "service and witness to the faith are necessary for our salvation." (CCC #1816) Christ is at work here and now. We are surrounded by the power of God which imbues us with all we need to serve him. The sacrament of reconciliation helps to purge us from all that separates us from the Lord, and allows us to grow more aware of his presence and become more open to the graces he wants to give us.

At the altar, the real presence of Jesus waits to embrace each of us and "touch" our lips with the Holy Bread that nourishes us. The transforming power of God's word is like the unseen benefits of the sun in the sky. There is more to the sun than light and warmth – it is nourishing. So today, when we leave Mass, having been nourished by Jesus in word and sacrament, let us strive to give of ourselves generously in service to others, and conduct ourselves in a way which gives glory to God.

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**SUNDAY, JULY 10, 2016**

(Lec. 105)

1) Deuteronomy 30:10-14

2) Colossians 1:15-20

3) Luke 10:25-37

Gospel related: **CCC** 1293, 1825, 2083, 2822 **CSDC** 112

**FIFTEENTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: God's law is written in our hearts; we need *only to carry it out*.

What is the fundamental difference between the Good Samaritan and the two religious leaders who passed the man left half-dead by the robbers? Some might say that the two leaders put the law above the needs of the victim, while the Samaritan responded with mercy and compassion. But treating others with compassion is also a part of the law of God.

Perhaps, more fundamentally, the two religious leaders deliberately kept their eyes and hearts closed to the man in need by walking on the other side of the road – maybe out of fear that they would have to do something and be inconvenienced from their own plans to take part in rituals. Perhaps, if they had dared to walk directly past the man, they, too, would have been moved with compassion and thus fulfilled the law of love of neighbor.

God reveals himself and his laws in many ways, as we can see from the readings of today. Moses points out that God has made it relatively easy for people to know and understand his laws because he planted them in our own hearts and minds, rather than at a great distance. Because his command is so close to us, we *have only to carry it out*.

God also revealed himself to us through Jesus, the very word of God, as Paul tells us in today's second reading. Jesus, the very *image of the invisible God*, came down to Earth and spent more than 30 years with us to put a human face on the mysterious God. He did this so that we can know both the incredible love and forgiveness of God, and also the ways that we, as God's human sons and daughters, can please the Father.

But revelation is a two-way street: God gives us the message through these various ways, but we have to receive the message – not just hear it but truly listen, take it into our hearts and act on it. The Good Samaritan in Jesus' parable is a wonderful example of that. He saw the robbers' victim – as the other two did – and dared to get close enough to him to see his needs and to realize he needed to respond.

We can easily become overwhelmed by the many needs of people in the world. In many cases, God is not asking us to go to the ends of the Earth to respond to those needs. Often, a brother or sister living nearby has special needs that we can meet. Do we have the courage of the Good Samaritan to approach our nearby brother and sister in need, look into his or her face, and respond out of mercy and compassion? If we can do that, then we are truly neighbor to the one in need – and we are fulfilling the law of God.

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Monday, July 11, 2016  
(Lec. 389)  
1) Isaiah 1:10-17  
2) Matthew 10:34—11:1

MONDAY OF  
15<sup>th</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Benedict, Abbot)

Gospel related: CCC 858, 1506, 2232 CSDC 193

FOCUS: Our commitment to loving God above all else will show us the path to loving others.

God speaks very clearly through these words written by the prophet Isaiah. Listen to them again: *What care I for the number of your sacrifices? ... When you come in to visit me, who asks these things of you? ... Put away your misdeeds ... cease doing evil; learn to do good. Make justice your aim.* We have our own ideas about what we should be doing as Christians, but are they actually what God wants from us, or what we *think* God wants? Well, he does not leave us guessing here, he tells us very plainly.

Have you reconciled with your brother over that argument you had? Have you treated others fairly, even if you have determined they do not deserve kindness? Are you trying to turn away from evil? Unfortunately, we cooperate with evil in a variety of ways in our lives, and do not even realize it. In the next verse from Isaiah, God says, *Set things right.* This can be one of the hardest things for us to do, especially if our pride and judgment get in the way. The important thing here is that we really listen to what God is asking of us today – right now – and then ask the Holy Spirit for help in doing it.

When Jesus says, in the Gospel of Matthew, that he did not come to bring peace, he knows that in order for us to love radically, it will require total commitment to him because of the unity we share with him: *Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.* There can be no separation between us and Christ. The reflection of our love of God can be seen in our following his way of love – which has less to do with material sacrifice and more to do with loving sacrifice.

When Jesus speaks about division such as *a man against his father and a daughter against her mother*, he is speaking about the reality that it is from our faithful love of God only, that we can know what it is to love each other. These verses should not be isolated from other Gospel passages that speak of this right ordering in our relationship with God and others. Look at the Gospel of Mark, chapter 12, verse 28. The scribes ask Jesus, *Which is the first of all the commandments?* He responds by saying we should love God and then secondly, love our neighbor. Indeed, again, we can only know about how to love our neighbor by loving God first, and most.

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Tuesday, July 12, 2016

(Lec. 390)

1) Isaiah 7:1-9

2) Matthew 11:20-24

Gospel related: CCC 678

TUESDAY OF  
15TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Christ seeks our conversion of heart.

In today's Gospel, Jesus reveals the dreadful fate of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. You may remember that Jesus performed several miracles in Capernaum – healing the sick, casting out demons and raising a young girl back to life. Why would he devote so much of his ministry to people in these cities only to condemn them later?

The people living in Tyre, Sidon and Sodom (those towns Jesus said would receive a lighter sentence) were known in the Old Testament for their pride, corruption and sinfulness. While they would have had knowledge of the Lord, they did not have the words of Jesus to lead them. The people living in Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum did, yet they still didn't change. Luke 12:48 reads: *Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.* More was demanded of them.

In addition to helping people, Jesus performed miracles so the world may see and believe that what he says is truth. Once we realize who Christ is, he wants us to follow him, which involves a conversion of heart – living by the word. The people in these towns knew who Christ was. They listened to him teach. They saw him perform miracles! But they failed to do what he asked, which was to repent.

In the Old Testament, people showed repentance through outward signs of "sackcloth and ashes," fasting and self-discipline. Jesus seeks our interior conversion. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, "Without this, such penances remain sterile and false." (1430) It involves a "radical reorientation of our whole life." (1431) We turn our hearts away from evil, regretting past sins, with the desire to change our lives. To do this, we must hope for God's mercy and trust in his grace.

Celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation is one way that we can offer the repentance Christ seeks from us. Sadly, many are not taking advantage of this healing sacrament.

Since his papacy began, Pope Francis has encouraged a return to the confessional as a way of returning to God. In February of 2014 on Vatican Radio, Pope Francis said, "This Sacrament is a great treasure ... [It] calls us back to God, and embraces us with his infinite mercy and joy." All we need to do is take a few moments to put aside our busy schedules and feelings of shame long enough to confess. As Christ tells us in today's Gospel, the rewards are eternal.

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Wednesday, July 13, 2016  
(Lec. 391)

- 1) Isaiah 10:5-7, 13b-16
- 2) Matthew 11:25-27

WEDNESDAY OF  
15TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Henry)

Gospel related: CCC 151, 153, 240, 443, 473,544, 603, 2701, 2779, 2785

FOCUS: God's plan of salvation is revealed to those who are humble.

"It's all part of God's plan." Many of us have heard these words, or maybe spoken them during moments when life's circumstances seem out of our control. We tend to accept this statement when the outcome is good, yet question it when the situation doesn't go our way. These words can comfort us, and they can instill fear.

Today's readings put God's plan into perspective. In Isaiah, we hear about the king of the pagan nation Assyria, who boasts about defeating Israel. He attributes victory to his own power and wisdom; however, Isaiah reveals that the Lord was using Assyria to discipline Israel, which had become an impious nation. The king is merely an instrument. His pride causes him to go beyond what the Lord had intended; rather than punish, he seeks to destroy. This angers God.

At times we, too, can be like the king. Pride allows us to believe that we enjoy success because of our own intelligence, strength, character or appearance. But there are more factors in this equation. We are certainly part of our success, as are other people and circumstances, but ultimate glory and praise must be given to God.

Jesus demonstrates this for us in our Gospel reading. The intent of this passage is to explain the unique relationship Jesus has with the Father, and the reasons followers should accept his teachings as revelation from the Lord. Rather than beginning his message with what makes him special, Jesus opens by praising God. This shows his humility, which is an important aspect of prayer. Do we approach our Lord with the same humbleness of heart?

We also learn that God's plan isn't always obvious. In fact, Jesus says it is hidden from *the wise and learned* and revealed to *the childlike*. What does this mean? Most likely, Jesus was referring to the scribes and Pharisees as *the wise and learned* – those who rejected his teachings due to their self-righteousness and pride, much like the king of Assyria. The *childlike* are those with the humility to accept what our Lord has revealed.

This is a difficult truth. It implies uncertainty and requires trust. Saint Catherine of Siena once said, "Everything comes from love, all is ordained for the salvation of man, God does nothing without this goal in mind." We see this most clearly in Christ's passion and resurrection. God loves us, and his ultimate plan for us is salvation. As we celebrate the Eucharist, let us welcome our Lord with praise and humility – ready to accept his word.

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Thursday, July 14, 2016  
(Lec. 392)

- 1) Isaiah 26:7-9,  
12, 16-19
- 2) Matthew 11:28-30

Gospel related: CCC 459, 1615, 1658

THURSDAY OF  
15TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
USA: Saint Kateri  
Tekakwitha, Virgin)

FOCUS: Jesus is the perfect embodiment of God's love and mercy.

In different ways and from different times, two figures in today's liturgy point us toward the person of Jesus, who is the perfect embodiment of God's love and mercy. The prophet Isaiah throughout his writings consistently told of God's promise to bring healing and salvation to Israel and to the world. Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, whom we honor today in the calendar of saints, accepted Jesus' invitation to enter into the Christian way of life. The prophet and the saint offer us lessons in living a just and merciful life.

Saint Kateri is a model of perseverance in spite of her personal sufferings. Smallpox left her disfigured and partially blind. Her Christian faith made her an outcast among her own people. Nonetheless, she held fast to her newfound faith in Jesus. Fleeing to Montreal in 1677, she lived her final days practicing the merciful love of the Father through a life of charity. Her sufferings did not deter her from loving others as Jesus had loved her.

Isaiah the prophet's writings are important because we can learn invaluable lessons from them that help us to share God's merciful love with others. Isaiah's writing today takes the form of a psalm. The psalm begins by praising God for all he has done, and ends with words of trust and hope. It tells us that despite the sinfulness of the people of Israel and of humankind, God was at work in the world to bring healing and salvation. The psalm also demonstrates that part of Isaiah's work was to speak of the tender mercies of God, so as to help lead others to a deeper relationship with God and a more intense experience of his love.

Today's Gospel passage provides us with a gentle invitation to learn love and mercy from Jesus, who was divine mercy and compassion made flesh. Jesus taught about and revealed the depths of God's merciful love by sharing his love with those in need. Love and mercy were verbs. His acts of kindness were his classroom. Jesus suffered with others, healed their illnesses, and so made manifest God's merciful love in both word and deed. Jesus invites each of us to let him help carry our burdens, and be refreshed and learn from him how to be a loving person. Let us accept his gentle invitation, take up his yoke and find rest and mercy.

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Friday, July 15, 2016  
(Lec. 393)

- 1) Isaiah 38:1-6, 21-22  
7-8
- 2) Matthew 12:1-8

FRIDAY OF  
15TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
OBL MEM  
Saint Bonaventure,  
Bishop and Doctor  
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 581, 582, 586, 590, 2100, 2173

**FOCUS:** God gives us the example of good and holy people to guide us in the way of holiness.

Have you ever attended the vigil service of a holy person whom you did not know all that well? Sometimes, I hear people share memories of their beloved family member or friend and think, "I wish I could have known this faithful servant. What a wonderful thing it would have been to know this person."

In our first reading today, we hear about King Hezekiah, a man about to die who had been faithful to God in his life. Fortunately for the people of the kingdom of Judah, an amazing blessing happens. Because of Hezekiah's faithfulness, God grants him fifteen more years of life. This was truly good news for those who lived in the kingdom of Judah, for it meant that they had a good and faithful king to lead them in walking in the ways of the Lord. It would also result in the Lord continuing to watch over them and deliver them from the hands of their enemies.

In short, today's reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah challenges us to be faithful to God like King Hezekiah, and the many other faithful and holy people who have lived throughout the ages. For isn't this our call? To live each day as God's good and holy servants?

In today's Gospel, Jesus and his disciples are walking through a field. Hungry, his disciples pick the grain and eat it. The Pharisees are outraged, claiming the disciples broke the law of the Sabbath by working.

Jesus admonishes the Pharisees. He tells them of David, who fed his troops bread that was intended to be offered at the altar. He tells them that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. He also teaches that the law was not meant to be an end in itself, but rather a means to guide us in loving God and others. What God desires most is not a strict adherence to the letter of the law, but that one live by the Spirit, which is love.

As we gather at the altar to celebrate the sacrifice of the Mass, we must ask ourselves: What do we bring to this moment? Do we bring our prayers, our daily lives, our acts of mercy and our realization of our need for mercy? We started our liturgy asking for God's mercy. I hope we did so with sincere hearts. He does forgive us. Receive that mercy.

Then come forward with humble and grateful hearts to receive holy Communion so that we can continue to be Christ's body in the world by sharing his light and love. In other words, we can continue to be his good and faithful servants. The more we grow in our love for Jesus and share his love with others, the more we will come to know the riches of God's kingdom, and lead lives which invite others to know the salvation, joy and peace we have found in Jesus.

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Saturday, July 16, 2016

(Lec. 394)

1) Micah 2:1-5

2) Matthew 12:14-21

SATURDAY OF  
15TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Our Lady of Mount Carmel;  
Saturday in honor of BVM)

Gospel related: CCC 713 CSDC 261

FOCUS: Jesus is the Lord's chosen servant.

Pre-meditated murder, extra-marital affairs, white-collar crime – our world is teeming with stories about evil acts that require deliberate planning. Often romanticized by the popular media, these scandals have the potential to destroy the lives (and the families) of both victims and offenders.

In today's readings, we are thrust in the midst of two plots unfolding around us. The prophet Micah describes the practice of land monopoly, common in Judah during his time. The wealthy cheated families of land legally theirs through their birthright. These land monopolizers violated two of the Lord's commandments: thou shall not covet thy neighbor's goods, and thou shall not steal. Victims suffered lower social status and lost out on economic opportunities.

The Gospel opens with Jesus' realization that the Pharisees were plotting to put him to death. He didn't try to fight the Pharisees or speak out against them; instead, he left quietly and continued to heal those who followed. Matthew then reveals how Jesus' actions fulfill Isaiah's prophecy as the *chosen servant*.

While these readings begin rather ominously, their endings fill us with hope that justice will be served. In Micah, the Lord says those who steal land will have their land taken from them by enemies. What humans do, God can just as quickly reverse.

This truth can be applied more broadly to all the ways those with more exploit those with less. Think about the unequal distribution of nutritious food, clean water, wealth, material goods, natural resources, dignity and even the right to life! Like Micah, we need to recognize and challenge the injustices we witness occurring in our world.

The prophecy of Isaiah, restated in the Gospel, promises that despite the opposition Jesus receives, he will proclaim *justice to the Gentiles* and bring *justice to victory*. As Christians, we also place our hope in Christ.

So often the world tries to rob us of our inheritance – not to a particular place on earth, but to the kingdom of heaven promised to us through the cross and resurrection. Count the ways sin creeps into our homes, tempting us to abandon our path to holiness for temporary gratification; this, too, is opposition to Christ.

As we read today, Jesus has mercy on those who follow him. Let us turn away from sin, from devious plots and ways of this world. Instead, let us turn toward Christ – toward communion with him and his Church. He will restore justice and triumph over whatever threatens our inheritance to the kingdom. He is the Lord's chosen servant.

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**SUNDAY, JULY 17, 2016**

(Lec. 108)

- 1) Genesis 18:1-10a
- 2) Colossians 1:24-28
- 3) Luke 10:38-42

Gospel related: CSDC 260

**SIXTEENTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Service to others must be rooted in listening to God's word.

It seems terribly unfair, doesn't it? Even a child can see that it is not right to sit making pleasant conversation with a guest while your sister works all alone in the kitchen. How can we make sense of the story?

We can never make sense of it if we read it as a lesson in the duties of hospitality. It immediately follows Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, which we heard last Sunday. In that story, Jesus contrasts the behavior of two members of the Jewish clergy, a priest and a Levite, with the behavior of a despised outsider, the Samaritan. Though he lacked the knowledge of God's law available to the priest and the Levite, the Samaritan fulfilled the law's spirit better than the legal experts. The parable shows the futility of a religion which has no application to daily life.

Today's story of Mary and Martha turns that lesson around. It shows the futility of active service which, because it is not based on attentive listening to God's word and nourished by such listening, becomes mere busyness. When Jesus says to Martha, *You are anxious and worried about many things*, he is not criticizing her for performing the duties of hospitality, but for doing so without first attending to his word. Martha, we might say, is the kind of person who likes to go about doing good, especially the kind of good that requires a lot of going about.

The story in today's Gospel does not ask us to choose between being a Mary or a Martha. The true disciple of Jesus must be both. Mark's Gospel tells us that when Jesus called his Twelve Apostles, he called them for a dual purpose: to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message. (3:14) Which is more important: to be with Jesus, or to proclaim his message to others? Our relationship with the Lord must come first. Being with the Lord and listening to his word must be the basis of all we do for him.

When we act without listening, we are guilty of a subtle kind of pride. We are assuming that we already know what must be done, and need no guidance. Acting without first attending to God's word can mean doing what we want to do, not what God, or the situation, requires of us. The remedy is to sit at the Lord's feet, like Mary of Bethany in today's Gospel, and listen to his word.

How can we do this? We can spend time praying and reflecting upon sacred Scripture. We can set aside a part of our daily prayer time for listening to the Lord, who speaks in the silence of our hearts. And we can listen attentively to the word of God preached and proclaimed here at Mass. When we do these things, we are like Mary of Bethany choosing *the better part*, as Jesus calls it in today's Gospel, which will not be taken from us.

In short, opening our hearts and minds to Jesus and his words leads us to choose *the better part*, and helps us in the fruitful work of sharing the Gospel message with others and helping to build up God's kingdom on earth. It is also one of the primary ways to grow in our faith and love for Jesus, and come to experience the blessings of peace, joy and fulfillment that God wishes to give us.

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Monday, July 18, 2016  
(Lec. 395)  
1) Micah 6:1-4, 6-8  
2) Matthew 12:38-42

MONDAY OF  
16TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem. USA  
Saint Camillus de Lellis  
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 590, 627, 635, 678, 994

FOCUS: Christ's resurrection is the foundation of our faith and hope for salvation.

At some point, we've all experienced disappointment, a sadness that results from unfulfilled hopes or expectations. Maybe it was a person we loved who wasn't living to their potential, something we bought that didn't measure up to the hype or a place we visited that looked nothing like the travel brochure. In any case, we anticipated something great only to be let down.

The language in today's readings conveys the Lord's disappointment in his people. The prophet Micah puts this into the context of a court proceeding with the mountains and hills serving as witness. As the Lord *enters into trial with Israel*, he reminds his people how he freed them from slavery and brought them out of Egypt. The Israelites, however, failed to do what was required of them.

In our Gospel, Jesus is let down by *an evil and unfaithful generation*. The scribes and Pharisees demand a sign from Jesus to prove he is from God, rather than an agent of Satan. At this point, Jesus had already performed exorcisms and several healings. What more did they need? Jesus reminds them how the people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, and how the queen of the south traveled from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. What Jesus proclaims is even greater than that of Jonah and Solomon, yet they sought another sign rather than trust his word.

While most of us at different times throughout our lives turn away from the Lord, he never gives up on us. And, in his mercy and compassion, he gives us another chance. Micah tells us that God doesn't want empty gestures of piety. Rather, he wants us to do right, love goodness and walk humbly with him. He gives us the words in this reading, and his Word, Christ, to eternally remind us of this.

Although Jesus doesn't give in to the Pharisees' demands, he doesn't disappoint them. He leaves them with something to anticipate – the most incredible miracle of all time, his resurrection. Like Jonah in the belly of the whale, Jesus would spend three days in the abode of the dead, and then re-emerge. This revealed his power over nature, and that he was truly the Son of God who opened the way to eternal life for all who believe in him.

Like the Pharisees, there are times that we seek signs or miracles to strengthen our faith. What greater sign do we need than the resurrection? It wasn't only a sign for the generation present during the time of Jesus; it's a sign for us, too. It's the foundation of our faith and hope for salvation of one day coming to share eternal life in heaven. No other sign can possibly compare.

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Tuesday, July 19, 2016  
(Lec. 396)

1) Micah 7:14-15, 18-20

2) Matthew 12:46-50

Gospel related: CCC 764, 2233

TUESDAY OF  
16TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Doing the will of our heavenly Father draws us closer to Jesus.

In today's Gospel, Jesus clearly states: *Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother.*

In today's first reading, we hear the prophet Micah say to our God, *Shepherd your people with your staff.* God does indeed shepherd us. He guides us. He shows us which paths to follow and which paths to avoid.

In sacred Scripture, the will of our heavenly Father is communicated to us over and over again. Through the teachings of the Church, our loving God shepherds us, helping us avoid harm to our body, mind, heart and soul.

Notice how the prophet Micah speaks of compassion, faithfulness and grace. God has compassion for us, showing us faithfulness and grace as he has *sworn to our fathers from days of old.* Throughout all of human history, even when we have known God's will, at times we have struggled to fulfill it. We have fallen short. We have sinned.

Yet, as long as we are honest with ourselves and with God about our sin, he is eager to remove our guilt and pardon our offenses.

At times, acknowledging our Shepherd and allowing ourselves to be guided by his teaching will require us to live differently than some of our neighbors. Every human culture, while blessed with seeds of the Gospel, also contains voices that can lead us astray. We pray that all of our neighbors will do the will of our heavenly Father, as Jesus commands, all the while working on our own conversion from sin toward the salvation our loving God offers us. Ultimately, though, when the prophet Micah describes God's people as dwelling apart, he anticipates the hard decisions we will sometimes have to make between heeding our Shepherd's voice, and listening to those who seek to lead us down paths of sin and ruin.

In the Gospel, Jesus says that whoever does the will of his Father is his brother or sister. In the blood of his cross, as well as his body and blood that we share today in the Eucharist, Jesus offers us a closeness to him that far surpasses that of a neighbor or cousin. The Holy Spirit makes us daughters and sons of our heavenly Father, sisters and brothers of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. May we always seek to do the will of our heavenly Father, living as sisters and brothers to the risen Lord and to one another.

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Wednesday, July 20, 2016  
(Lec. 397)

- 1) Jeremiah 1:1, 4-10
- 2) Matthew 13:1-9

WEDNESDAY OF  
16TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Apollinaris,  
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 546, 1724

**FOCUS:** Let us lift our hearts and souls to the Lord and proclaim the Good News to the world.

In our first reading, we learn that God provided Jeremiah with the words he needed for his ministry. The earlier part of the passage echoes Isaiah – the Lord called Jeremiah and says: *Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.* (Is 49) The Lord had important work for Jeremiah, and so he gave Jeremiah the tools to do this work. In the same way, the Lord gives us all we need to accomplish the work he calls us to do today. Whenever we feel powerless, we can depend on the Lord to be our rock and refuge.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the sower and the seed. The Lord calls us to sow the seeds of God's word through the witness of our life and efforts to share the Gospel with others. When it seems daunting to reach out and bring the good news of God's love to others, all we need to do is recall our first reading today. Listen again to the words from Jeremiah in which the Lord says: *Have no fear before them, because I am with you to deliver you.*

In this complicated world, it may seem that sharing God's love and the Gospel message with others is difficult. Yet, our greatest happiness, both now and for eternity, lies in being faithful to God and what he asks of us. Our prayer could be for the Lord to touch our mouths, as well as our hearts. Then we can reach out to those who are hungry and searching for the truth and perhaps offer them not only love, but the opportunity to know the healing, peace and joy that comes from placing one's faith in Jesus and accepting the Gospel message.

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Thursday, July 21, 2016  
(Lec. 398)

- 1) Jeremiah 2:1-3, 7-8,  
12-13
- 2) Matthew 13:10-17

Gospel related: CCC 546, 787

THURSDAY OF  
16<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Lawrence of Brindisi,  
Priest and Doctor of the Church)

**FOCUS:** Jesus tells us to cherish and hold fast to the faith we are privileged to know.

We know things that our ancestors never imagined. We know how to prevent polio, and transplant hearts and faces. We know how to land on Mars and explore Pluto. We also know how to contact people anywhere in the world in a few seconds through the Internet. How fortunate we are to live in this century.

In today's Gospel, Jesus points out to the Apostles that he has revealed the mysteries of God's kingdom to them. The Israelites of the past were not as blessed. But some contemporaries of Jesus closed their eyes and blocked their ears to his message. They were as stubborn and foolish as the Israelites we heard about in the first reading, who worshipped idols instead of the true God.

Like the Apostles, we have received the gift of faith. We have been taught that God sent his son, Jesus, as our Savior. We know that Jesus died and rose from the dead and so we, too, can rise from the dead someday and live with God. We inherited Scripture, God's word, and are able to read it and learn about God's love for us. We belong to the worldwide Catholic Church, and are guided by its leaders. We celebrate the Eucharist where we are in communion with Jesus and all other members of his Church. The good people who lived before Jesus was born – Abraham and Sarah, Jeremiah and King David – did not have these advantages. Neither do the thousands of people today who have never heard of Jesus or who have closed their hearts to him.

So what do we do with our great gift of faith? As with anything valuable, we protect it. This implies that we strive to deepen our faith by learning more about it. We can do this through the grace of the sacraments, through daily prayer and by living by God's laws, to name but a few. Also, if we have great faith in and love for God, we will want to share it with other people. What can you do to let others see what you have seen, and hear what you have heard?

When one Chinese woman experienced the Good News of Jesus, she walked from village to village to tell others about him. In one year, she wore out nine pairs of shoes, which a Christian organization had bronzed and now proudly displays. You might not want to wear out your shoes or go door-to-door in order to evangelize. But maybe you can invite someone to come to church with you this weekend. Let Jesus use you to open the eyes of others.

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Friday, July 22, 2016

(Lec. 399)

1) Jeremiah 3:14-17

(Lec. 603)

2) John 20:1-2, 11-18

Gospel related: CCC 443, 640, 641, 645, 654, 659, 660, 2174, 2795

FRIDAY OF  
16TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Mary Magdalene)

FOCUS: We must be tireless in searching for the Lord.

One might think that today's Gospel account is all about Peter and John (who modestly refers to himself as *the other disciple*). But I think this Gospel is really about Mary of Magdala. The account begins with Mary Magdalene going to the tomb while it was still dark, and while there she has a personal encounter with the risen Lord. The account ends with Mary going to the disciples to inform them of her meeting the risen Lord, and relating to the disciples all that had happened to her.

In the middle of this passage, we learn of Peter and John's entrance into the empty tomb, with John giving deference to Peter's prominence as the chief of the Apostles. They found the burial cloths all neatly laid out, but they did not encounter the risen Christ.

What is important to note is that Peter and John, having seen the evidence that Christ's body was not in the tomb, went home. But in her love for Jesus, Mary Magdalene stayed at the tomb. For her loving devotion, she saw and talked to the Lord. As for the disciples, Jesus would appear to them later.

The fact that Mary kept looking and searching for the Lord is the key to understanding this Gospel account. Love never gives up. We know that Mary loved the Lord, and that her loyalty was rewarded. She was the first evangelizer, the first to announce the Good News. In spite of this world's darkness, Mary personally encountered the Light of the World just as the Magi, guided by Bethlehem's mysterious star, encountered the newborn Light of the World in this world's midnight darkness.

We might ask ourselves about our own searchings for the Lord. What sort of time and effort do we put into our own quests for Jesus? Our relationship with Jesus Christ ought to be more than simply being open to his coming to us. It should be about our own efforts to find him and encounter him.

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Saturday, July 23, 2016  
(Lec. 400)  
1) Jeremiah 7:1-11  
2) Matthew 13:24-30

SATURDAY OF  
16TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Bridget, Religious;  
Saturday in honor of BVM)

Gospel related: CCC 827

FOCUS: We must be attentive to our spiritual life in order to bear good fruit and build up God's kingdom on earth.

So many times, Jesus taught using images taken from common everyday experiences such as fishing, running households and other common human interactions. Today, we hear Jesus using images from farming, planting, weeding and harvesting.

Weeds can not only ruin gardens, they can also choke off good plants and entire harvests. Uprooting weeds too early can destroy good plants in the process. Nature teaches us patience. God's patience with us teaches us to guard and protect what he has planted within us, and always be alert to forces that can destroy the goodness of the gifts he has given us. Sin and evil exist – poisonous evils that choke off the goodness within. We need to pay attention to them.

So it is within our own hearts and souls. People who are careless and don't tend to their spiritual life are easy prey for Satan – the great murderer of souls. He will be sure to rob us of God's word and love if we are not attentive.

We must remember that Christ does not say that the good ground has no stones in it, or no thorns. If we place our care and trust in him, he will eventually do the weeding. In his care for our hearts and souls, nothing can destroy our fruitfulness. We are all different, and we each contribute to God's garden in our own way. We each must do our very best so as to bring forth the most fruit, and be all that God dreamed we could be when he planted us in this world of his.

God wants to bring forth goodness from us, not just for ourselves, but for the life of the world.

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**SUNDAY, JULY 24, 2016**

(Lec. 111)

- 1) Genesis 18:20-32
- 2) Colossians 2:12-14
- 3) Luke 11:1-13

Gospel related: CCC 443, 520, 728, 1425, 2601, 2613, 2623, 2632, 2759, 2761, 2773, 2845  
CSDC 453

**SEVENTEENTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: God's mercy is abundant.

In calling for the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis said: "At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we become a more effective sign of the Father's action in our lives." The pope has remarked over and over again how critical mercy is to the Church. Each of us exists as an act of God's mercy, which is pure unmerited gift.

The pope's words express hope and expectation that by gazing attentively on mercy, we will in turn be merciful like our Father. Today's readings offer us a glimpse into how our Father is merciful, and show his mercy in intimate and personal ways.

In the first reading, God, having received claims against Sodom and Gomorrah, is in the process of verifying these allegations. Abraham entreats him to consider the innocent as well as the guilty. With each number proposed by Abraham, God demonstrates his mercy by agreeing to save the wicked for the sake of as few as ten innocent people. In today's Gospel Jesus, when asked how to pray, tells us to call God Father, or Abba. He goes on to say: *And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

What more can we possibly need than to know and receive the Father's mercy? According to Pope Francis, "God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy." God's mercy is freely and abundantly given.

Like those in the first reading, God has saved us. No claim of our unworthiness, rendered by ourselves or others, can have the final say in our lives. God extends his mercy. All we need do is accept it. We acknowledge this in the last response we make together at Mass before receiving the Eucharist: "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."

This prepares us to receive the perfect and living embodiment of God's love and mercy – Jesus. Jesus, who freely chose to die upon the cross to win our salvation. Jesus, who gives himself to us in the Eucharist so we might continue to grow in our love for him, and have the grace and strength needed to be founts of his love and mercy in the world.

This eucharistic celebration resounds with God's mercy, and so we fittingly end with great gratitude by saying, "Thanks be to God."

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Monday, July 25, 2016

(Lec. 605)

1) 2 Corinthians 4:7-15

2) Matthew 20:20-28

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

**SAINT JAMES,  
APOSTLE  
– FEAST**

**FOCUS:** God takes us as we are, and by the power of his grace, works in and through us to accomplish marvelous things.

Today we celebrate the feast of Saint James, Apostle and martyr. All of the Apostles were martyred except John, who was exiled. In Greek, the word *martyr* means witness. But to what did James and the other Apostles give witness? Paul tells us in today's first reading.

He recounts the many hardships that he and other believers endure in following Jesus. By their imitation of Jesus, they give witness to him, *so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh*, Paul writes. In short, the way of God makes tangible the gifts of his grace and his presence through all those who believe in him and cooperate with his grace.

Applying this to ourselves when we strive to imitate Jesus, and share God's light and love with others, Jesus will work in and through us to draw others to himself and help build up God's kingdom of love and peace in the world.

Now how do we go about imitating the example of our Lord? Jesus tells us in today's Gospel. When the mother of the sons of Zebedee comes to Jesus and asks that her sons sit at his right and at his left, Jesus responds by asking, *Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?* Recall when Jesus was in the garden before being arrested, he refers to his suffering as a cup or chalice. The mission into which Jesus is inviting his Apostles does not begin with glory and honor. It involves suffering and service. It is marked by the cross.

Paul talks about this suffering in our first reading, and Jesus alludes to it in the Gospel when he says, *My cup you will indeed drink*. Our imitation of Christ involves service. As Jesus exhorts us: *Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant*. Jesus tells us that servanthood is at the very heart of his mission.

This may seem like a daunting task. How can we, with our faults and failings, do our part to help advance Jesus' saving mission? We must persevere in our faith, and remember that the road is not an easy one. James, like the other Apostles, gave witness to Jesus through great suffering and tremendous acts of service. But he was not always so selfless. After all, James was the son of Zebedee, and his mother asked that her sons receive glory and honor. And remember that Peter denied Jesus, Matthew was a despised tax collector, and Paul persecuted Christians.

As we celebrate this Eucharist together, let us take confidence in the power of God. He gives us the grace to help in Jesus' saving mission so that one day we may live in his presence forever.

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Tuesday, July 26, 2016

(Lec. 402)

1) Jeremiah 14:17-22

2) Matthew 13:36-43

TUESDAY OF

17TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

Saints Joachim and Anne,

Parents of the Blessed

Virgin Mary)

Gospel related: CCC 333, 1034

FOCUS: God stays patient with us in spite of our faults.

Today's Gospel account continues on from the Gospel we heard this past Saturday. The two together present Jesus teaching his disciples about the wheat, the weeds and the patience of God in caring for goodness within us in spite of the presence of evils that the Evil One tries to plant in us. The disciples are essentially asking Jesus, "Where did the weeds come from?" when they ask him to explain the parable. It's a question we ask from time to time, and often we come up with wrong answers. Jesus' answer as the master in the parable is both clear and instructive: *An enemy has done this.*

We are surrounded by voices that claim that Satan does not exist, that evil is caused by psychological maladjustments, and that Jesus was simply a nice man akin to other great men who started various religions. For them, heaven and hell are myths simple folks have invented. When we die, they claim, we simply disappear into nothingness.

Jesus confronts us with the truth that Satan is real. He knows that the Evil One's greatest victory is to convince us that he doesn't exist. Satan disguises evil so as to make it appear to be good. That is the ploy he used to tempt Adam and Eve, and the ploy he used to tempt Jesus when Jesus was out in the desert for forty days and forty nights preparing to embark on his public ministry.

Lent is a time during which we make our journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter. Lent is a time when we step back and look at the big picture, a time when we examine what we are about in our lives, a time to face some fundamental truths about who we are, where we came from and where we are going.

Although we are not in the Lenten period of the year, we must, from time to time, along with the disciples, ask our Lord where evil comes from. In other words, where do the weeds come from, and how we are facing it? For as Saint Paul tells us in Ephesians: *We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* (6:12)

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Wednesday, July 27, 2016  
(Lec. 403)  
1) Jeremiah 15:10, 16-21  
2) Matthew 13:44-46  
Gospel related: CCC 546

WEDNESDAY OF  
17TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Hope is the antidote to despair, and it is treasure we need to share.

The antidote to despair is hope, and our Scriptures today give us a perfect example of both sentiments.

The prophet Jeremiah is unhappy. He had come upon the word of the Lord and devoured it, making it the central foundation of his life and the happiness of his heart. And yet, he complains to God, *Why is my pain continuous, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?* His life is not as he imagined it would be as a good servant of the Lord. He is in such despair he wishes he had never been born.

So God responds. He tells Jeremiah, essentially, that all will be well. Being a servant of the Lord does not mean there will not be trials and tribulations; what it means is that God will be present in those trials and tribulations, and will deliver Jeremiah – and us – from them.

God tells Jeremiah that if he repents, he will make him *a solid wall of brass* against whom his enemies will not prevail. God will be, as the psalmist states, a refuge on our day of distress.

As always, God does not break his promises. He is our hope, our stronghold, our refuge, our fount of mercy. For Jeremiah, God's promise relieved him of despair and gave him the strength to continue to do what he had been called to do. For us, too, this promise can relieve us from the burden of despair, and encourage us to be faithful to God and what he calls us to do.

Similarly, the two parables in today's Gospel of the treasure in a field and the pearl of great price offer us hope and encouragement. Each of these speaks of the kingdom, and the hope of salvation gained for us by Jesus Christ. We now are owners of the field, and the pearl. The question for the disciples, and for us, is: What do we do with them?

If the field stays barren and the treasure hidden, or if the pearl stays unpolished and out of sight, then what of the hope they represent? These priceless items, this hope for salvation and eternal life in Christ they represent, are meant to be cultivated and shared. Let us pray each day for the courage and strength needed to share this hope with others.

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Thursday, July 28, 2016  
(Lec. 404)

- 1) Jeremiah 18:1-6
- 2) Matthew 13:47-53

Gospel related: CCC 1034, 1117 CSDC 12

THURSDAY OF  
17TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

**FOCUS:** Let us give our best for the Lord each day so he might judge us worthy of eternal life in heaven.

We are perhaps most familiar with Jesus' analogies where the kingdom of heaven is likened to a mustard seed or a pearl or a treasure. In today's Gospel, however, Jesus describes the kingdom more bluntly. It is like a net filled with a big catch of fish; the fishermen keep the good fish and toss the bad. When the kingdom comes, *at the end of the age*, Jesus says, the wicked will be thrown *into the fiery furnace*.

Some might be tempted to explain away these statements as cultural anomalies, but we should resist that temptation. The message is clear and important. A judgment will come, and we had better be ready. This is a recurring theme in Jesus' teaching. We ignore it at our own risk.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to interpret Jesus' words as simply a warning. And certainly today's reading is not an invitation for us to judge others whom we believe ought to be tossed into the fiery furnace. No, this is an invitation to love authentically and give generously of ourselves in love and service to others.

Answering this invitation means making the choice each day to love and serve others. We also are free to not accept this invitation, and to follow our own path instead of the one the Lord has laid out for us. However, it is important to remember that choosing to turn away from the Lord and going our own way has consequences.

Today's message is also one of hope. Until the end of the age, we can choose to turn back to Jesus. This is the mercy he offers us, the gift he gave us when he died on the cross. If we desire it, then we must acknowledge our own sins and choose him – choose love. So let us pray that we choose wisely, and that we stay true to that choice to the very end.

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Friday, July 29, 2016

(Lec. 405)

1) Jeremiah 26-1-9

(Lec. 607)

2) John 11:19-27

or Luke 10:38-42

Gospel related: CCC 439, 993, 994, 1001 CSDC 260

FRIDAY OF  
17TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Martha)

**FOCUS:** We open the way for Jesus to accomplish marvels in and through us when we make him the number one priority in our lives.

For the Feast of Saint Martha we have a choice of Gospels in which Martha is prominent. These readings provide contrasting views of a very modern woman.

When we meet Martha in Luke's Gospel, she is a busy homemaker serving Christ and her sister Mary. Who could blame Martha for being agitated? She is doing all the work and her sister Mary is just sitting and listening to Jesus. You can imagine many a working mother, a father who works long hours, even a pastor feeling overworked and underappreciated, much like Martha. That sense of being used is a risk for anyone who serves. Even worse, when she looks for comfort and asks Christ to tell Mary to help her, he responds that Mary has chosen a better path.

You can only imagine what she is thinking: I could show them, how would they like something cold to eat and a pile of dirty dishes?

What is the better path that Mary takes? Another name for conversing with the Lord is prayer. She prays while Martha frets.

When we encounter Mary and Martha in John's Gospel, their fortunes have reversed. Their brother, Lazarus, has died. Mary is at home weeping and overcome by the loss of her brother. Martha is the one who prays. She seeks out Christ and asks for his help.

Mary is able to pray during everyday life, but is overcome by grief at a great loss. Martha feels the anxiety of daily life, but when her brother dies she responds not in anxiety and fear, but in great faith that Christ can provide comfort even at the time of death of a loved one.

When she meets Christ along the way, Martha proclaims that Jesus is the Christ. Later, she goes and tells Mary that Jesus has arrived. It is Martha's confident faith in Jesus that presents him with the opportunity to clearly reveal the truth that he is the Resurrection and the Life by raising Lazarus from the dead. It is Martha's faith that will call Mary to seek comfort in Christ.

It appears that Martha steadily grew in her faith and love for Jesus. We can only surmise that this came about through becoming one of Jesus' disciples and through spending time in prayer. So, because of Martha growing in her faith for the Lord and turning to him in good times and bad, Jesus was able to bring about great things in her life.

The same will be true for us if we are willing to slow down and make Christ the number one priority in our lives. By doing things such as attending Mass each week and praying daily, we most assuredly will grow in our faith and love for the Lord Jesus. This, in turn, will allow Jesus to work in and through us to touch the lives of others, and give us the strength needed to persevere amidst trials of life.

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Saturday, July 30, 2016  
(Lec. 406)  
1) Jeremiah 26:11-16, 24  
2) Matthew 14:1-12

SATURDAY OF  
17TH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Peter Chysologus,  
Bishop and Doctor  
of the Church;  
Saturday in honor of BVM)

**FOCUS:** In our daily lives, we should think before we speak, seeking to build people up rather than tear them down.

Today's readings tell the stories of two figures from different ages who proclaim God's message, only to be greeted by opposition and scorn. Likewise, in both passages, people speak impulsively, and it does not serve them well. In the reading from Jeremiah, the priests and prophets do not like Jeremiah's message of repentance, and cry out to sentence him to death. After realizing that they would be shedding *innocent blood*, these priests and princes decide to spare Jeremiah's life. In the Gospel, Herod makes a rash promise that he later regrets, and this results in John the Baptist being put to death.

It is unlikely anyone in our own lives will die because of imprudent or unkind things we say or do to them, but certainly great damage can be done to them and their reputations. We might try to justify ourselves by stating that the harmful things we say are true. Or we might claim that as hard as we try not to say such things, we can't stop ourselves. This would mean we have no control over ourselves and what we say and do, which is a frightening prospect.

Let us strive to be more mindful of our speech, and remember that Saint Paul, throughout his writings, encourages us to let our *conversation be always full of grace*. (Col 4:6) In the same way, let's make an effort to think before we speak, so that only those things which are beneficial and good pass our lips. When we do this, we not only build others up, but we come to live in a manner that is more genuinely reflective of the faith we profess. This, in turn, will bring us to live in such a way that we bear a more effective witness to the Gospel.

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**SUNDAY, JULY 31, 2016**

(Lec. 114)

- 1) Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:21-23
- 2) Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11
- 3) Luke 12:13-21

Gospel related: CCC 549 CSDC 325, 326, 453

**EIGHTEENTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

**FOCUS:** The word of God urges us to take off the *old self* and put on the new.

The word “vanity” means different things to different people. Some think of the bathroom counter. Others think of it as a preoccupation with one’s physical appearance. According to Qoheleth, who wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes, vanity defines worthless and futile pursuits: *Vanity of vanities, all things are vanity*. Qoheleth lived among a people so intent on the pursuit of wealth and possessions that they became forgetful of God, and of goodness. He asserts that nothing but *sorrow and grief* come from our earthly labors – far better for us to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

Speaking to the Colossians, Saint Paul couldn’t agree more, telling us to *seek what is above ... not of what is on earth*. He, too, saw people so bogged down with everyday stresses and anxieties that they had lost sight of who they were and what they were called to be. *Put earthly parts to death, take off the old self and put on the new self*, the Apostle states. We are called upon to part with the sins and selfishness of our past, and concentrate on the pursuit of eternal life. He promises that we who die with Christ in baptism will one day appear with him in glory. Telling us that our true identity is hidden from us, as is our future fate, we are encouraged to find our true selves by uniting more closely to Jesus.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus warns against greed and gluttony, reminding us that *one’s life does not consist of possessions*, but in the spiritual treasures we store up for ourselves by doing good and seeking justice.

Jesus uses the all-too-familiar parable of the wealthy landowner building bigger barns for his harvest to show us that what we have here is not making the journey with us to the afterlife. All it takes is one swift wind to knock down those barns and scatter the grains like dust across the countryside. It would have been far better for this man, who had been so blessed, to share his wealth, especially with the hungry and the homeless, the widow and the orphan. Jesus then points out the moral of the story by saying, *woe to those who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God*.

What does matter to God? How much money we have or how much property we own? Accolades we may have received? It may have more to do with how much we are willing to share than how much we can keep for ourselves. What matters most to God is our faith, hope and charity, and how we use these virtues to benefit our brothers and sisters. So much of our time and attention is devoted to work, financial matters and recreation, there is little time left for prayer. The landowner’s sudden demise is a sign for us that we will face the judgment day at a time we least expect. Our degrees and property holdings will not speak for us on that day, only how much love we shared with those around us.

Jesus owned nothing. He was a prince who lived like a pauper – born in someone else’s barn and buried in another’s tomb. Everything he did have he gave for us – to break the chains of sin, Satan and death – forever and for everyone. In order to live like Jesus, we have to learn to give like Jesus and to love like Jesus, not counting the cost. Yes, Christ came with nothing and left with nothing, but gained everything in the process – for himself and for us. He did it because he loves us. What we do for love of him will help us to know him, love him and serve him, and one day be joined to him forever in heaven.