

JUNE

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8 9 10 11 12

13 14 15 16 17

18 19 20 21 22

23 24 25 26 27

28 29 30

Wednesday, June 1, 2016
(Lec. 355)

- 1) 2 Timothy 1:1-3, 6-12
- 2) Mark 12:18-27

WEDNESDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL. MEM. Saint Justin,
Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 993, 1619

FOCUS: With the spirit of power and love given to us by God, let us carry out our mission of sharing the Gospel.

To many of us, the argument the Sadducees present to Jesus in today's Gospel might seem silly. It appears they are trying to have fun at his expense. In truth, the Sadducees may have been trying to see where Jesus stood on a valid part of the Jewish law, one that was not agreed upon by all Jews. It was about what happens to us after we die. Many people are still searching for answers to that question, even if they do not ask the question quite as colorfully as the Sadducees did.

Whatever their real motive, Jesus used the opportunity to teach an important lesson about eternal life and the resurrection of the body. Jesus set the record straight. There is life everlasting, and life in heaven will be unlike anything here on earth.

Jesus also is affirming that belief in the resurrection is clearly rooted in Scripture. In the last verse of today's Gospel, Jesus tells the Sadducees that God *is not the God of the dead, but of the living*.

Whether the Sadducees meant to be derisive or were totally earnest in their question, Jesus took the opportunity to give a valuable teaching on the nature of eternal life. For that, let us give thanks to the Sadducees.

So that we might come to share eternal life in heaven, Saint Paul reminds us in today's reading what our lives need to be focused in and around. He teaches that we are now the ones who need to speak out about God's kingdom. Paul shows us that we are to seize every opportunity to help people see the truth of God's love for us. The Holy Spirit will help us choose the right words, but we have to do our part through studying Scripture and being familiar with Church teachings on various aspects of the Gospel message.

It is not always easy to speak up and declare our beliefs, but it is what we are called to do. Paul reminds us that God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but one of power and love. Those are the things we need in order to carry out our mandate to share the Gospel and the promise of eternal life with others.

* * * * *

Thursday, June 2, 2016
(Lec. 356)

- 1) 2 Timothy 2:8-15
- 2) Mark 12:28-34

THURSDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saints Marcellinus and Peter,
Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 575 CSDC 40, 112

FOCUS: God's love is not ours to keep, but to share with others in simple and direct ways.

The Gospel account today about the lawyers questioning Jesus appears in three Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. Any time a particular event is recorded in multiple Gospels, we know it is important.

In the accounts of Matthew and Luke, the lawyer's question is a tricky one that attempts to trip Jesus up – to disconcert him or trap him. The question isn't one that seeks a genuine answer. No. It is designed to trap Jesus so the Pharisees can accuse him of misusing sacred Scripture and discredit him. It was all a part of building up a case against Jesus.

The Pharisees were obsessed with categorizing the teachings found in the Mosaic Law, and were very skilled at asking questions about the six-hundred and sixteen precepts of the law and their order of importance. Jesus cuts through all of their debates and goes to the first in importance, the first and fundamental principle – loving God first.

This episode is perhaps the only time when Jesus and the Pharisees agreed with each other. What does God require of us? Simply that we love everyone as he loves! God is love and everything he does flows from his love for us. God loved us first and our love for him is a response to his love. The love of God comes first and the love of neighbor is firmly grounded in and flows from the love of God.

You and I are here to receive the love God has given to us in the life, death and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ. We are here to receive in order to give, to give without restrictions for the life of the world.

May we share God's love simply, directly and with no complicated attachments. May we love those around us, both near and far, with the simplicity of the love Jesus has given to us. God's love is not ours to keep. God's love is ours to share, to share as Jesus Christ shared it. We have a wonderful example of what Jesus was talking about in the life of Pope Francis, in the way he relates to everyone, in the way he loves without restrictions. We would all do well to follow his lead.

* * * * *

Friday, June 3, 2016

(Lec. 172)

1) Ezekiel 34:11-16

2) Romans 5:5b-11

3) Luke 15:3-7

Gospel related: CCC 545, 1443, 1846

**THE MOST
SACRED HEART
OF JESUS
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: God promises to be our Savior, and sends his Son to be the ultimate fulfillment of that promise.

In the first reading, the Lord God proclaims that he will search for his sheep, will deliver them, will lead them, will bring them back and will pasture them.

These are just some of God's promises to his people, spoken through the prophet, Ezekiel. As we hear these words proclaimed to us today, we know they are true because God has kept his promises to us time and time again throughout salvation history.

In today's Gospel, Jesus uses the parable of the lost sheep to teach us about the depths of God's love and mercy. God tirelessly seeks us out when we are lost, like a shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine in search of the one. But if we are to receive this incredible mercy, we must repent. Then, as Jesus tells us, there will be much joy in heaven.

Every time we come to Mass, we begin by asking the Lord for his mercy and help. We do that in a special way today, as we celebrate Mass for the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. We call on his mercy because we are indeed his sheep, and he promises to care for us each day. The more we open our hearts to God's love and mercy, the more we come to experience this in our lives and hearts.

This solemnity is closely related to the devotion of Divine Mercy revealed to Saint Faustina Kowalska in the early twentieth century. In her mystical experiences, Jesus often implored her to trust him more and more. In fact, the phrase, "Jesus, I trust in You," is printed below the image of Divine Mercy.

Why should we trust Jesus? First, because he is the Son of God through whom we are saved and redeemed, through whom we are set free from bondage to sin to lead a new and abundant life in God's love. Lest we have any doubt about the depths of God's love and the lengths to which God will go to save us, we have only to look to today's second reading. Saint Paul reminds us that *God proved his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.*

Since Christ won forgiveness for our sins through his sacrifice on the cross, we are offered the gift of new life and salvation when we place our faith and trust in Jesus. We do not receive these gifts for free. We must freely choose to place our faith in Jesus over and over each day.

Today's feast of the Sacred Heart helps us go deeper into the reality of Jesus' love and mercy. Think of an image of the Sacred Heart. Notice how Jesus is either pointing to his bleeding heart or extending it toward us. He did not die for his own purification. No, He is ever anxious to give his heart to whoever accepts his invitation. So, as we profess our faith in the creed and approach his table to receive him, let us come with repentant faith saying, "Jesus, I trust in You."

* * * * *

Saturday, June 4, 2016

(Lec. 358)

1) 2 Timothy 4:1-8

(Lec. 573)

2) Luke 2:41-51

SATURDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL. MEM.)

The Immaculate Heart of
the Blessed Virgin Mary)

Gospel related: CCC 503, 517, 531, 534, 583, 2196, 2599 CSDC 259

FOCUS: Our lives are but a journey. We must choose whether we will take Christ with us.

Today's readings are about journeys, both physical and spiritual. In the letter to Timothy, Paul encourages his young disciple to stay the course, to fight the good fight, to be persistent in his ministry. Some of the most well-known words in the Bible are found in this passage: *I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.* Timothy is told to be strong in the face of adversity and false teachings, to *convince, reprimand, encourage*, to be persistent *whether it is convenient or inconvenient.* Paul tells Timothy to continue the mission of preaching the word of God among the Gentiles. Paul's earthly journey is almost over, and now it falls on Timothy to lead the charge in preaching the Gospel message to the Gentiles.

Luke's familiar report of the boy Jesus in the Temple closes the infancy narrative, showing Jesus to be an obedient and proper Jewish boy, who mystifies his teachers in the Temple. Mary and Joseph are on a journey to Jerusalem for the Passover. Afterward, they begin the long trip back to Nazareth, not realizing their twelve-year-old son stayed behind. Once they realize he is missing, they travel back to Jerusalem, where they search for three days before discovering him in the Temple. They are anxious and cannot understand what he is doing there. Even when Jesus tells them that he *must be in my Father's house*, they do not seem to quite get it. Although he is yet a child, it is here that Jesus' journey as the Savior of the world begins.

This section of Scripture is the only section to refer to Jesus' life as a child. The *Catechism* tells us in this section, "Here Jesus lets us catch a glimpse of the mystery of his total consecration to a mission that flows from his divine sonship: 'Did you not know that I must be about my Father's work?' Mary and Joseph did not understand these words, but they accepted them in faith." (CCC 534) We hear that Jesus went back with his parents and was obedient to them, and grew in *wisdom and age and favor before God and man.*

What does it mean to model our journey after Christ's or Paul's? Obedience. Surrender. Persistence. Patience. It means we empty ourselves. As Paul says so eloquently in the first reading, *I am already being poured out like a libation.* Only then may Christ fill us with his grace.

* * * * *

SUNDAY, JUNE 5, 2016

(Lec. 90)

1) 1 Kings 17:17-24

2) Galatians 1:11-19

3) Luke 7:11-17

Gospel related: CCC 994, 1503

**TENTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: *God created man in his image; in the divine image ... male and female he created them.* (Gen 1:27)

Without doubt, the gift of life should be a subject for our daily prayer of thanksgiving to God. Physical life is precious and it is part of human nature to do all we can to preserve it. In today's readings, we heard of two incidents in which human life was restored. In the first Book of Kings, a widow's son is revived after Elijah asks God to restore his life. The Gospel tells of Jesus raising the son of another widow from the dead. Imagine the joy these mothers must have felt at having their sons back.

As Christians, we treasure life from conception until natural death, for it comes from God our creator. Created in the image and likeness of God, we are more than our physical bodies. We also have a spiritual self, a soul that is distinctly ours. We are charged to care for our bodies; we are also charged to care for our souls. To paraphrase a teaching of Jesus: What does it profit one to gain the whole world [physical life] but destroy the spiritual life within? (cf Mk 8:36)

We learn from family and experience how to care for our bodies, and how various activities make strong muscles and sharp mental function. We can learn to nurture the spiritual life that is within us as well. With the gift of faith that comes to us at baptism comes the Holy Spirit to dwell within our souls. We may recall learning about the gifts of the Spirit, such as wisdom, understanding, courage and right judgment – these help us in our interactions and relationships with others. Paul writes in the fifth chapter of his letter to the Galatians about the *fruits of Spirit* – the effect the Spirit has upon those who nurture the life of God within them. We see the fruits of love, joy, kindness and generosity in the actions of caring Christians every day. (Gal 5:16-26)

How do we develop these spiritual gifts and fruits? When we regularly engage in spiritual reading and reflection, when we pray to the Father that the Spirit may grow in us, and when we begin to practice acts of love, kindness and patient endurance, these virtues will take hold within us. They will begin to shine through in our acts of mercy, both corporal –feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless – and spiritual – counseling those who doubt, comforting those who are sorrowful, forgiving those who have injured us. Ah yes, physical life is a wonderful gift. But so is our *life within*, especially when it reflects the presence of God acting in the world through us.

* * * * *

Monday, June 6, 2016

(Lec. 359)

1) 1 Kings 17:1-6

2) Matthew 5:1-12

MONDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem. Saint Norbert,
Bishop)

Gospel related: CCC 520, 544, 581, 764, 1716, 1720, 2305, 2330, 2518, 2546, 2763 CSDC 492

FOCUS: We are encouraged by God's blessings.

Most of us are familiar with the motivational speech. We know Knute Rockne exhorted his players to "win one for the Gipper!" We've listened to other coaches inspire teams or statesmen to encourage their people to overcome the greatest of obstacles to survive and prosper.

How many of us have ever thought of the beatitudes, the words we heard in today's Gospel, as fitting into this category? Probably not too many, right?

Well, let's look at what it means to be blessed. As a verb – "I bless you" – bless is a statement of goodwill and happiness toward another. It conveys a desire for the other to have peace and prosperity in line with God's original design for creation.

As an adjective – "blessed are those" – it describes the state of happiness encountered by all who find their purpose and fulfillment in God. Being blessed is the state of appreciating, day to day, our earthly and temporary gifts, with the joyful knowledge that the spiritual blessings available to us in Christ will surpass all time and eternity. It comes from God, and leads us back to him.

Thus, in these passages from Matthew, Jesus' words are not so much an evangelistic outreach to the masses ("If you want to be blessed, then go mourn! Go be poor!") as much as they are a sort of pep talk for his own disciples. At this point in Jesus' public ministry, his disciples are willing, but exhausted; they are unsure and struggling. They have not yet experienced his death and resurrection, and so do not yet fully understand how the kingdom is to be brought about.

Jesus knows this, and so to motivate them for the upcoming ministry and trials, he tells them who they are (blessed, chosen by God), and what they already have (the promise of eternal life). He rallies and encourages them in their daily activities: *Blessed* are you for being who you are and following me, despite the difficulties of the world; *blessed* are you who mourn at death and sin, and seek righteousness, and humble yourselves for me – for the kingdom shall be yours.

We, too, can find encouragement in these words. The beatitudes are a profound statement of goodwill from God, to each and every one of us! "Blessed" ... and ... "*bless-ed*"; no matter the trials and difficulties of the world, as we participate faithfully in the kingdom here, we shall experience eternal life in God's heavenly kingdom.

* * * * *

Tuesday, June 7, 2016

(Lec. 360)

1) 1 Kings 17:7-16

2) Matthew 5:13-16

Gospel related: CCC 326, 764, 782, 1243, 2763, 2821

TUESDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus calls us to *bear his light and love to the world.*

I am the light of the world. These are Jesus' words as recorded in John's Gospel, (8:12) and it is a title we have no trouble understanding. He is the light that *shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* (1:5) Those are John's own words describing Jesus, and the Church reflects those words at Easter when the paschal candle is lit. The paschal candle is put away after Pentecost, but the candles that accompany the Gospel book to the pulpit, and the candles that grace the altar as our Lord comes among us in the Blessed Sacrament, are constant reminders. He is the light of the world.

So what does it mean when Jesus says, *You are the light of the world?* We are not Jesus, of course. He is Lord. We are not. Period. But we are the body of Christ, and the light of Christ is a gift of the Holy Spirit, received in baptism and fueled by the other sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

In Christ and through Christ, we are the light of the world. So what happens when we hide our light under a bushel basket? If I turn on a lamp and put a bucket over it, I'm in the dark until I lift the bucket again. But remember, Jesus isn't talking about our electric lights, he's talking about an oil lamp – like the ones he refers to in the Parable of the Foolish Virgins – or a candle. These are open flames. And what happens when I put a basket over a flame? It goes out.

The light isn't just covered. It smolders and could all too easily be extinguished.

We are given a gift – the light of Christ – and we are called to share that light with the world. If we try to keep to ourselves, we squelch it within, leaving us to walk in the darkness of selfishness and sin.

This happens to most of us at one time or another. We close ourselves off from our brothers and sisters in Christ because of past hurts. Or we grow comfortable in our own salvation but forget our call to evangelize. Maybe we walk away from the Church, or maybe we come to Mass every Sunday but don't go forward to share Christ's light and love afterward. Either way, the light of Christ that once burned brightly slowly dims to all but a few small embers that are kindled by God's grace.

But the Holy Spirit is an eternal flame ready to reignite and fan the flames of faith in our hearts. All we have to do is come back – to the sacraments, or to prayer, or to acts of spiritual and corporal mercy. All we have to do is lift up the basket and the love of God, in Christ Jesus, will ignite our hearts all over again. Christ's light will once again shine brightly in and through us and be reflected in all we do.

* * * * *

Wednesday, June 8, 2016

(Lec. 361)

1) 1 Kings 18:20-39

2) Matthew 5:17-19

Gospel related: CCC 577, 592, 764, 1967, 2053, 2763

WEDNESDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Would you like to be a prophet?

It would be quite an honor to be the voice of God here on earth. All you have to do is tell people what they are doing wrong and persuade them to do the things that God wants. Nobody would object to that, would they? Do you have what it takes to be a prophet?

The Gospel talks about how the law of the prophets will not be diminished, only fulfilled. The first reading talks about Elijah and how he calls down the power of the Lord. Who was this guy Elijah? How was he able to do that? Elijah was a prophet. A prophet speaks for God. A prophet is the voice of God here on earth. What if you were called to be a prophet? Would you be able to handle the assignment? Prophets don't have it easy, you know.

Just think about it for a moment. You are sent from God to tell everybody what they are doing is wrong. You tell these people that they need to give up their pleasures, their fun, their lust and their greed, and start doing things the way God commands. Do you think a prophet would be well-received? And the reward for these changes is a seemingly vague promise of happiness after death.

Let's see, trade all my money, power and fun now for a promise of happiness after I die. And who is this person anyway? How do we know God speaks to him? How do we know there is a God, anyway? We believe in God because we see the power and majesty of his creation. We see the influence of his grace in our lives. We believe in God because we know we would be lost without him. But do we have the strength and the guts to be his servant, his prophet? Can we spread the word and make his kingdom grow? Most prophets also became martyrs, you know?

It isn't easy telling people things they don't want to hear. But what if we can do it? What if we become the servants of God we are called to be? What are the rewards of being a prophet, a servant of God? You get to talk to God. You get a special place in heaven reserved only for the servants of God. To be a prophet is to be a friend to God. What greater reward can there be? Everybody ready to sign up?

* * * * *

Thursday, June 9, 2016
(Lec. 362)

- 1) 1 Kings 18:41-46
- 2) Matthew 5:20-26

THURSDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem. Saint Ephrem,
Deacon and Doctor of the Church)

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

FOCUS: Persevere in God's word.

Today's reading from Kings recalls how the Lord worked through Elijah to end a drought in Samaria. While listening to this reading, some of us may have focused on the vivid imagery of rain falling from the sky, or Elijah running with superhuman strength ahead of Ahab's chariot all the way to Jezreel. But in the actions of Elijah's young servant we find another lesson – perseverance.

Imagine that your master journeys to the top of a mountain, crouches in a strange position, then tells you to climb up and look for rain during the time of a drought. The servant isn't commanded to do this once or twice; he does it seven times! What a patient, trusting servant he was, even when what was being asked of him seemed impossible.

Our Gospel reading is taken from the Sermon on the Mount, where we find a compilation of Jesus's most important teachings. The passage begins with Jesus telling his followers that unless their righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, they would not enter the kingdom of heaven. These were the teachers and interpreters of the law set by Moses; they were the religious leaders of Jesus' time. His followers would have thought this was impossible.

In the words that follow his challenge, Jesus tells us how it can be achieved. By revealing the full meaning of the law at its deepest levels, he tells his people how they can reach the level of righteousness desired by God. While the scribes and Pharisees followed the literal commandment, *thou shall not kill*, they were blind to the motives leading up to it – anger, name-calling and unsettled disputes.

Most of us find it easy not to kill, but how many times do we feel angry each day? Resort to name-calling? Find ourselves in conflict? Jesus is so adamant about this teaching that he says to forego offering gifts and worship to God until we are at peace with one another.

Like the young servant in our first reading, we, too, must be patient and trusting. We must persevere when faced with difficult or even impossible circumstances, such as people who annoy us, those who do wrong against us, or those with whom we disagree.

God knew this law wouldn't be easy. Fortunately, we have the sacraments to help us. As we take part in reconciliation, we seek forgiveness for our trespasses just "as we forgive those who trespass against us." In the Eucharist, we celebrate the ultimate example of love and forgiveness. We must be at peace with our brothers and sisters in order to be at peace with our Father.

* * * * *

Friday, June 10, 2016

(Lec. 363)

1) 1 Kings 19:9a, 11-16

2) Matthew 5:27-32

Gospel related: CCC 226, 764, 1034, 1456, 2330, 2336, 2380, 2382, 2513, 2528, 2763

FRIDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God is always speaking and inviting us into relationship with him.

In the passage from the Book of Kings, Elijah is looking for God on the mountain. Massive winds, earthquakes and fire pass by, but God is not in them. Then Elijah hears *a tiny whispering sound*, and knows that God is in it. The often-quoted King James version describes it as *a still small voice*.

We live in a noisy world. Someone is always selling us something and telling us how to be happy. We are assaulted by claims about truth, justice and faith. Media steps in like the voice of God to tell us who we are and what we should be doing. So do our families and friends. Our jobs or our neighborhoods can be voices, too. Everywhere we look, there are messages and noise.

But where is God? In the midst of our noise and chaos, in the midst of the winds of uncertainty, where is God? For every time we have ever asked that question, this passage is for us.

In Elijah's story, we see a God who wants us to look for him, – a God who may not speak as we expect, but a God who speaks and who listens. This, Scripture teaches, is a picture of our God.

The Gospel reading underscores the idea that God intended the covenant of marriage to mirror his covenant relationship with us. It urges us to avoid anything that would threaten our relationship with God, to remove from our lives anything that causes us to sin.

Writing in 1706, Matthew Henry's *Concise Commentary* explains what we can take from today's Gospel passage this way: "Victory over the desires of the heart must be attended with painful exertions. But it must be done. . . All our senses and powers must be kept from those things which lead to transgression." Henry concludes: "There is tender mercy under all the Divine requirements, and the grace and consolations of the Spirit will enable us to attend to them."

Like Elijah, we, too, are invited to tune our ear to the "tiny whispering sound," of God's voice. God longs to speak to us with words of tender mercy. He is still speaking today. But where can we hear God? In a meadow? A library? A child's question? A gift from a friend, an empty church? In the green of a plant or the softness of rain? We won't all hear God in the same places, but if we listen, we will hear God's voice inviting us to deeper relationship.

* * * * *

Saturday, June 11, 2016

(Lec. 580)

1) Acts 11:21b-26; 13:1-3

(Lec. 364)

2) Matthew 5:33-37

Gospel related: CCC 581, 592, 764, 2141, 2153, 2338, 2463, 2466, 2763

SATURDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL. MEM.)

Saint Barnabas, Apostle)

FOCUS: Go forth and make disciples among all nations.

We can look at the fact that many people in the United States and around the world have no affiliation with any religion in one of two ways: crisis or opportunity. If we view this as an opportunity, what actions can we take? How can we bring others to share the faith that we have received? The primary mission of the Catholic Church is to teach, baptize and lead others to Jesus. Each of us has been given the gift of the Catholic faith, not only for our own salvation, but so we can share it with others and bring them to know and follow Jesus.

Saint Barnabas the Apostle was among the first company of believers who made up the early Church in Jerusalem. Barnabas' faith and love for Jesus were so great that, as Acts 4:36-37 tells us, he sold a piece of property and gave the proceeds to the Apostles to support the work and mission of the Church. Beyond Barnabas' great faith and love for Jesus, we see in our first reading that Barnabas was also a beacon of faith for others. He did not hide his faith under a basket, or keep it to himself for his own edification. He took it out into the open so that others could come to believe that Jesus was Lord and Savior.

Filled with the Holy Spirit and faith, Barnabas was sent by the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem to go to Antioch to the many new believers and members of the fledging Church. He saw among the Gentiles the grace of God. Together with Paul, he spent one year teaching the people. After their year in Antioch, Barnabas and Paul traveled together for a number of years preaching and teaching the Gospel to Jew and Gentile alike, and winning many new converts to the faith.

The witness and example of Saint Barnabas the Apostle remind us of the importance of continuing to do what is necessary to grow in our faith and love for the Lord Jesus. Let us go forward, then, to give a faithful and effective witness to the Lord so that those we meet may come to know the love of Christ, which saves and sets them free.

* * * * *

SUNDAY, JUNE 12, 2016

(Lec. 93)

- 1) 2 Samuel 12:7-10, 13
- 2) Galatians 2:16, 19-21
- 3) Luke 7:36—8:3 or 7:36-50

Gospel related: CCC 575, 588, 1441, 2616, 2712

**ELEVENTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Jesus forgives a woman who shows great repentance for her sins.

In the Gospel today, Jesus illustrates for us the power of forgiveness. We all know it is difficult to ask to be forgiven. In fact, it is easier for us to boast when we have done something good – at times to the point that we lose sight of the bad things we sometimes do. As we look at our first reading today, we find that David truly feels bad for his sin. He knew that it was wrong and proclaimed this. Perhaps David feared that God would take a terrible retribution on him. But the response from Nathan is, *For his part, the Lord has removed your sin*. This is akin to what we hear from a priest in the confessional.

In the *Catechism*, we find that only God can forgive sinners. (CCC, 1441) The son of God also exercises this power, and Jesus displays it in the Gospel today. The woman's faith has saved her. It is very humbling to be forgiven of sins. It is also wonderful and liberating to experience God the Father's boundless mercy, love and forgiveness.

Listening to Jesus' story about the person who owed a large debt that was forgiven, it seems we can all find ourselves in this predicament. Sin has a way of weaving itself into our lives. There is one way to defeat it – to ask for forgiveness and for the grace to overcome that sin, especially if it is habitual. In our psalm response, we pray that the Lord will forgive the wrongs that we do.

What the woman in the Gospel had done must have been bad, or the Pharisee would not have pointed this out to Jesus to make him realize who she was. Perhaps Jesus knew who this woman was and what sort of sin she had committed. Yet, we see with Jesus that this did not matter. He was going to forgive her. Also, to ensure that she understood she was forgiven, Jesus added, *Your faith has saved you; go in peace*.

It is by our faith that we know we will be saved. It is by our faith that we understand the healing power of the words of absolution by the priest in the confessional. It is by our faith that we will know that Jesus loves us very much, and that we can be forgiven of our transgressions. David and the woman in the Gospel both felt the healing power of God's love. May our faith be so strong that we will feel it too! As we ask the Lord to forgive the wrongs we have done, may we have the hope and faith to realize that God loves us so much that he will, indeed, forgive us.

* * * * *

Monday, June 13, 2016

(Lec. 365)

1) 1 Kings 21:1-16

2) Matthew 5:38-42

MONDAY OF

11TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL. MEM. Saint Anthony
of Padua, Priest
and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 764, 2443, 2763

FOCUS: We possess inherent rights as children of God.

Both our readings today are concerned with justice. We talk a great deal about “justice” in modern times. In the past, our focus has been on criminal justice – laws to protect society from crime and the enforcement of those laws. But in today’s world, we seem to focus a great deal on “social justice.”

What does that term mean? What does it mean to secular society and to the world, and what does it mean to the Church and to us as Christians? In some ways, the meaning of social justice is the same, both for people of faith and for secular society. In other ways, the meaning is quite different. The difference is not an expression of competing “liberal” versus “conservative” political views, but of something much deeper, much more basic – something that determines how we view ourselves, each other, our obligations to each other and even life itself.

Modern secularism concerns itself with human “rights and freedoms,” as defined by prevailing social views and norms. The Catholic Church, however, throughout history, has been a tireless advocate and champion of the inherent rights that all people have by virtue of being created in God’s image and likeness as his dearly beloved sons and daughters. This means that all people are to be treated with dignity and respect. This means that all people have a rightful claim to those things that provide for their basic needs and that promote their full flourishing as human beings. This is why the Church has worked, and continues to work, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and house the homeless.

This unchanging Church view means, among other things, that the life of a child in the womb is precious, even holy. The life of the old, or the terminally ill, is just as precious. And it means that we live and love in accordance with the laws God has given us throughout all of his creation. For us, “social justice” does not involve the undoing of God’s design, but of fulfilling it. It means we see ourselves as part of his creation, not something above it or separate from it – but as faithful stewards of it. So, blessed with inherent rights as children of God, it is our sacred and solemn duty to defend them in all times and places.

* * * * *

Tuesday, June 14, 2016
(Lec. 366)

1) 1 Kings 21:17-29

2) Matthew 5:43-48

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

TUESDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are called to practice what we preach, especially with regard to our enemies.

Clearly, as Christians, we are called to practice what we preach. Of course, what we need to preach is what the Lord Jesus preached – forgiveness, mercy, respect and love. With family and friends, there is at least a natural inclination to such practice and preaching. It may not even be that difficult for us to offer mercy and respect to strangers in need. Our enemies, however, offer the truest test of our Christian mettle.

This reality is affirmed the words of Jesus in today's Gospel reading: *You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and good, and causes rain to fall on the just and unjust.*

Now, in considering these words of Jesus instructing and exhorting us to love our enemies, and recognizing that doing so is perhaps the truest test of our Christian mettle, I think it would prove useful to reflect on: Just who are our enemies? Our enemies can be those people who like to trip us up and make our lives difficult in one way or another. It can be a co-worker who tries to undermine us in carrying out our duties and responsibilities at work. It can be a neighbor who likes to play music loudly late at night just to get under our skin.

Our enemies are also those people who have hurt or offended us in one way or another. It could be a friend who betrayed our trust. It could be a family member who came to a gathering at our home and then proceeded to insult or assail us for our values and beliefs.

Now that we have clarified who are enemies are, the question becomes: What does it mean to love them? Loving our enemies, practically speaking, doesn't mean that we have to like them. It means that we treat them with kindness and respect, just as we wish to be treated. Though this may sound simple and straightforward – as most of us know, it isn't easy, and is a real challenge.

As most of us have probably learned thus far from our own life experiences, we cannot rise to this type of challenge and meet it relying on our own strength and resources. We must turn to God each day in prayer for the grace and strength needed to love our enemies, as well as everyone else we encounter in our daily lives. So this day and every day, let us begin and end our day with prayer so we may be people who truly practice what we preach. The gifts we realize from meeting this challenge will be an abundance of blessings such as peace, joy and fulfillment, and the promise of eternal life in heaven.

* * * * *

Wednesday, June 15, 2016
(Lec. 367)

- 1) 2 Kings 2:1, 6-14
- 2) Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

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

WEDNESDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Let us purify our intentions, and direct all our honor and glory toward God.

A motive is an intention behind one's words or actions. It is the reason or driving force behind why we do what we do. Sometimes, our motives are clear, while other times we act without thinking and without taking the proper time to analyze what is driving us to act in a particular way. Regardless of how seemingly "good" our actions may be, we must have the right motives to live as faithful followers of Jesus. This is made explicitly clear in today's Gospel reading.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus calls his disciples to have the right motive when performing righteous deeds that are directed toward God. The motive of a disciple must be to please and honor God the Father. If one's motive behind a deed directed to God is to receive the praise of others, Jesus calls this a hypocritical action. If the focus that should be directed to God is bringing attention to the person performing the deed, this acknowledgement of their righteous deeds by others is their final reward. Righteous deeds must be done in a manner that focuses on God alone. Whether public or private, one's actions must reflect the purity of one's motive.

If we have any doubt that all our actions must be done for the honor and glory of God, let's remember Jesus' words in the previous chapter of Matthew: *Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.* (5:16)

Ultimately, my friends, when our actions are motivated by the desire to give glory to God, Christ's light and love will shine in and through us to touch the lives of others. This will allow our lives to be blessed with peace and joy, and buoyed by a hope that springs eternal.

* * * * *

Thursday, June 16, 2016
(Lec. 368)

- 1) Sirach 48:1-14
- 2) Matthew 6:7-15

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

THURSDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The Our Father teaches us how to live, and invites us to pray with the confidence that we are loved.

Prayer can be intimidating. We can feel embarrassed by our inability to concentrate, by our lack of faith, because our prayers are infrequent, or because we aren't sure what to say. But we should never give up. Prayer was very important to Jesus. Throughout Scripture, we have many examples of Jesus stopping to pray. Jesus taught us to pray by giving us the Lord's Prayer, or as we say more frequently as Catholics, the Our Father.

Jesus gives us the Our Father as our model for prayer. From the first two words, this prayer both teaches us to pray and pulls us into dynamic dialogue with a good and loving God. Many of the saints also speak of the riches they found within this prayer.

For example, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, in her autobiography, says: "Sometimes when I am in such a state of spiritual dryness that not a single good thought occurs to me. I say very slowly the 'Our Father,' or the 'Hail Mary,' and these prayers suffice to take me out of myself, and wonderfully refresh me."

In 412 AD, Saint Augustine wrote, "If we pray rightly, and as becomes our wants, we say nothing but what is already contained in the Lord's Prayer."

When we pray the Our Father, we pray in chorus, not only with Jesus but with all our sisters and brothers in the faith, both living and dead. God is not my father or your father, God is Our Father. We name God as Father, and we find our place as beloved children of God. We learn from this prayer to honor the holiness of God's name, to ask for our needs, to forgive and to plead for deliverance.

Today's reading from Sirach celebrates the life of a holy man named Elijah. The Lord's Prayer is a lifetime's worth of lessons on how we can become holy. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem reminds us in 350 AD that, above all, the Lord's Prayer is an invitation to love.

Says Saint Cyril, "O how immense God's love is for men! To those who have gone far from him and fallen into the worst evil he grants so great a pardon for their sins and makes them share so greatly in his grace that they can call him 'Father.'"

* * * * *

Friday, June 17, 2016
(Lec. 369)

- 1) 2 Kings 11:1-4, 9-18, 20
- 2) Matthew 6:19-23

Gospel related: CCC 368, 764, 2533, 2551, 2604, 2608, 2729, 2763, 2848 CSDC 260

FRIDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are to store up treasure for ourselves in heaven.

In the Old Testament, the books of First and Second Kings are the final chapters in the history of the Israelites, which begins with Genesis. The outcome is not too favorable for the Israelites, who by the time of the Kings had strayed far from the path God intended for them. This would ultimately result in the Israelites being conquered and carried off into exile.

In the first reading, Athaliah discovers that her son, the young king Ahaziah, has been killed after only a year as king of Judah. To keep the wealth and power she enjoyed as queen mother, she kills off all royal contenders. But her treasure is only temporary. The sole heir, the infant king Joash, eventually is restored to the throne and Athaliah is put to death. A covenant is made between the Lord, the new king and the people.

In the Gospel, Jesus reminds us of the impermanence of earthly treasures such as the wealth, power and possessions that Athaliah so desired. He says, *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy.* Instead, Jesus says, *Store up treasures in heaven ... For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.*

The *Catechism* tells us the spiritual tradition of the Church “also emphasizes the heart, where the person decides for or against God.” (368) Therefore, we are called to dedicate our hearts to God, to love him and to cast aside our desires for fame and fortune.

We may think, as we read this passage, that we have done exactly that – accepted God and given our hearts to him. Yet, how often do we find ourselves distracted by the very things we believe are unimportant? Are we focused more on our worldly treasures? Not just wealth or material possessions, but by the drive to be promoted in a job? Personal or professional success? Are we overly focused on the world around us at the expense of the world within us?

These are the kinds of distractions that can consume us and potentially prevent us from coming to share in eternal life in heaven. This brings us back to Matthew’s words – that the treasures of the earth are consumed, while those in heaven are imperishable. When we become preoccupied with our own world, we run the risk of ignoring God and neglecting our spiritual lives. If we focus on the treasure with true meaning and purpose in our lives – our love for God – the rest will take care of itself.

* * * * *

Saturday, June 18, 2016

(Lec. 370)

1) 2 Chronicles 24:17-25

2) Matthew 6:24-34

SATURDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: CCC 270, 305, 322, 764, 1942, 2113, 2416, 2424, 2547, 2604, 2608, 2632, 2659, 2729, 2763, 2821, 2830, 2836, 2848 CSDC 181, 260, 325

FOCUS: The beauty of human beings comes from God.

Sometimes we hear passages from Scripture that are so familiar that it is easy to forget what God is telling us. In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us not to worry about our life, what we will eat or drink, our body or what we will wear. How are we doing on this not-worrying thing, so far, do you think? Pick any day, and it is likely that we have been concerned about these very things. Worry seems to be our default state. We worry about our families, our finances and our future. We fret over these very real concerns that we must face.

Yet here, in this passage, we are told there is no need to worry! How is it that God expects us not to worry? We live in the real world, where bills have to be paid, children get sick and unfortunate circumstances arise. Jesus is not saying that we should ignore these things. We do have a responsibility to take care of ourselves and those around us. But in all of these cares, he is telling us that he will be with us, guiding us, supporting us, lifting us up. When Jesus says, *All these things the pagans seek*, he is making a distinction.

For those who follow Jesus, the focus should be different. Pagans, who do not believe in the one true God, would have to rely on their personal fortitude alone when difficulties arise. They would be without any awareness that we have a loving Father who does not abandon us to ourselves. For a Christian, we have a relationship with the Father based on trust. If we look to the ways the flowers grow, as Jesus implores us in the Gospel, we can see a good model.

The flowers do not self-create. Their beauty does not come from their work, but from the one who made them. And together, they can transform a field into a thing of beauty. Likewise, God created us. Our beauty is the result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The power to transform the world takes place through the perfection of being who we are called to be. When you and I, through our confidence in God, let go of our worry and endless work, it is then that we can enjoy all that God, in his goodness, has in mind for us.

* * * * *

SUNDAY, JUNE 19, 2016

(Lec. 96)

- 1) Zechariah 12:10-11; 13:1
- 2) Galatians 3:26-29
- 3) Luke 9:18-24

Gospel related: CCC 1435, 2600

**TWELFTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: *If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*

The gift of prophecy can be found in many individuals in the Gospel of Luke. Early on, the Gospel blesses us with the Canticle of Mary and the Canticle of Zechariah – beautiful prayers that reveal how God will work in their lives and the lives of their sons. Simeon and Anna serve as prophets in the Temple while Jesus is still a baby, and John the Baptist is clearly portrayed as a prophet to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus.

In today's Gospel, Peter is given a prophetic voice. Peter speaks the truth of Jesus' identity when he reveals that Jesus is the Messiah of God. The title "messiah" carried many expectations for the Jewish people. They were a people who had suffered much oppression by outside powers. They longed to throw off the occupying force of Rome and return to self-rule. They hoped that God would send a military savior to drive out foreign enemies and rule as the heir of King David, restoring freedom and holiness to their nation.

Yet, as we heard in our first reading from Zechariah, there were already prophecies and teachings that alluded to a different kind of messiah. This Messiah would restore holiness, forgive sins and purify the people – but not without personal suffering and sacrifice. It is clear that the glorious, military-savior type of messiah was more popular!

Jesus responds to Peter's declaration of his messianic identity with a prophetic statement of his own: *The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day raised.* He then tells his disciples that they too must deny themselves in order to follow him. Jesus says that *whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.*

As confusing as this must have sounded at first, the disciples did in fact die to themselves. They did this by placing their lives into God's hands, and by offering all they had for the sake of the Gospel. Luke's second narrative, the Acts of the Apostles, shares their stories of both suffering and success in the building up of the Church.

As modern-day disciples of Jesus, we, too, are called to speak with a prophetic voice. We live in a world where self-serving behavior is more common than self-denial. Getting ahead in life is more popular than getting to heaven. The world needs the Church and her members to speak out against consumerism, greed and selfishness in relationships. The Church and her members must speak prophetically for the dignity of all persons, as Saint Paul teaches in his Letter to the Galatians – that people of every ethnicity, social status, gender or age, from womb to tomb, be treated with equal dignity and respect as children of God.

Understanding this, let's do our best day in and day out to treat all people we meet with dignity and respect. Let's seek to act justly in all we say and do to help build up God's kingdom on earth.

Monday, June 20, 2016

(Lec. 371)

1) 2 Kings 17:5-8, 13-15a, 18

2) Matthew 7:1-5

Gospel related: CCC 678, 2763

MONDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Be aware and watchful for God's loving guidance.

Our God is a loving and truly caring Father to his people. Throughout salvation history, we see where God would send messenger after messenger with important warnings and punishments for the people's disobedience. Despite all the warnings that God sent the Israelites, they continued their sinful ways and were carried off into exile. They repeated the pattern of their ancestors, who did not believe in God.

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks plainly to his followers. If they are to do his will, Jesus tells them they have to "get their own house in order," so to speak, and stop judging each other. Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said, "If you are judging others, you have no time to love them." Many times, what we are judging in another is what we struggle with ourselves, which is that wooden beam in our eye! God meant for us to love each other as Jesus commanded us to do. Judging prevents a person from seeing past the other's faults and into their soul, and loving that person.

Along these same lines, how can we help another with their problems, faults and mistakes when we refuse to deal with our own? You've heard the saying, "Clean up your own backyard before you barge into another's." It makes total sense because no one is perfect. As Jesus himself said to the crowd with stones in their hands aimed at the woman caught in adultery in John's Gospel, *He who is without sin, cast the first stone.* (8:7) As we know, not one stone was thrown then and there. In a similar scene today, would the end result be the same? Would those in a current-day crowd be honest and put down their stones?

God will send us gentle warnings to steer us through our days and help us avoid stubborn sinfulness and judgmental thoughts. Be aware and watchful for his loving guidance.

* * * * *

Tuesday, June 21, 2016
(Lec. 372)

- 1) 2 Kings 19:9b-11, 14-21,
31-35a, 36
- 2) Matthew 7:6, 12-14

TUESDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL. MEM.
Saint Aloysius Gonzaga,
Religious)

Gospel related: CCC 1036, 1696, 1789, 1970, 2609, 2763, 2821 CSDC 20

FOCUS: Living a life in Christ means we must make difficult choices that our culture may not understand.

In today's Gospel, Jesus calls us to enter his kingdom through the narrow gate, rather than traveling down the wide path that will lead to our destruction. He knows that the way he is calling us to live our life is not the easy way. He knows we may be ridiculed or misunderstood for our Christianity, but still he urges us to stay on the more difficult path of discipleship. It's through the trials of a life of discipleship that we will be perfected and prepared to enter into his kingdom.

Earlier in the Gospel reading, Jesus tells us not to give what is holy to dogs. He then goes on to say that we should do to others what we would have them do to us. In some ways, these two commands seem in contrast to one another. By keeping what is holy away from "dogs," we may have to make some difficult decisions about how we interact with others who are determined to continue their sinful ways. At the same time, very few of us would want to be judged harshly by our sinfulness. This is the narrow gate that Jesus later speaks of. It's hard to maintain the holy while still thinking of others with compassion, but we are called to do the impossible with God's grace.

Entering God's kingdom through the "narrow gate" doesn't mean that we always have to choose the more difficult choice just because it's more difficult. It means we must have the faith and courage to stay true to our faith – even when the world tries to undermine our convictions. The only way we can enter through the narrow gate is through the grace of God. By relying on him and giving ourselves over to him completely, we will do what seems to be impossible – enter into the kingdom of heaven and live in the presence of God for all eternity.

* * * * *

Wednesday, June 22, 2016

(Lec. 373)

1) 2 Kings 22:8-13; 23:1-3

2) Matthew 7:15-20

WEDNESDAY OF

12TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem. Saint Paulinus
of Nola, Bishop;
Saints John Fisher, Bishop,
and Thomas More, Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 2005, 2285, 2763

FOCUS: If our minds and hearts are centered upon Christ, we may lead lives which bear good fruit for God.

In the first reading, we heard about Josiah, a righteous king. Upon hearing of the Book of the Law that had been found, Josiah becomes upset that ancestors in previous generations did not obey the law, and immediately responds with a call to prayer to revive the terms of the covenant and their relationship with God. We, too, are called to be a people of prayer, so we might continue to deepen our relationship with Jesus and come to live in greater accord with his teachings.

In the Gospel, we hear Jesus compare human beings to trees that bear fruit. He says that a good tree cannot bear rotten fruit, and a rotten tree cannot bear good fruit. The question is: How can we be sure that we are bearing good fruit to avoid being *cut down and thrown into the fire*?

Jesus uses the example of not being able to pick figs from thistles. We hear about fig trees several times in the Gospels because they were cultivated in ancient times. The fig tree grows wild in dry, sunny areas in either deep fresh soil or in rocky areas. The fig tree prefers light and well-drained soil, but can also grow in nutritionally poor soil. It can tolerate seasonal drought and can take root in the most inhospitable places. The fig tree is a deep-rooted plant that has a strong need for water that comes from the ground, so it does really well near running water, like a river.

Perhaps Jesus was telling us we should be like the fig tree. We, too, should prefer the light. If we are deeply rooted in prayer, and nurture our faith, keeping it fresh, we will be able to grow in our faith no matter how harsh the environment. We'll survive droughts and difficult times. Like the fig tree, we need running water, which is the grace that comes from God.

When the fig tree is fully grown, it can provide dense shade. The tree cools the environment in hot places, and creates a fresh place for animals to take shelter in times of intense heat. The fruit of the tree has high nutrient value. Figs have been known to treat mild diseases and been used to prevent or reduce other ailments relating to heart and skin disease. Knowing all this, it seems no wonder Jesus would compare us to the fig tree.

When we have a mature faith, like a good tree, others will benefit – others will be blessed by our presence. Then the fruit of our deep prayer life, our relationship with Christ, will allow Christ's light and love to work more fully in and through us to touch the lives and hearts of others. They will know us by our fruit.

* * * * *

Thursday, June 23, 2016
(Lec. 374)

- 1) 2 Kings 24:8-17
- 2) Matthew 7:21-29

Gospel related: CCC 443, 581, 1821, 1970, 2611, 2763, 2826 CSDC 70

THURSDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We must build our lives around Jesus, the foundation.

Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. At the time of Jesus, it would make no sense to build one's house on sand. After each heavy rain, a torrent would come and wash away anything in its path. Jesus had probably seen structures carried away by heavy rains and storms in Palestine.

To build one's house on sand means to build our lives on things that are unstable and fleeting – things that cannot withstand the test of time and the hazards of chance. What are such things? Money, success, and even health and prosperity.

To build one's house on rock means to base our lives on principles that are solid and enduring – principles that cannot be carried away with life's storms. *Heaven and earth will pass away*, Jesus says later in Matthew's Gospel, *but my words will not pass away* (24:35). To build our house on rock means building our life on God. Rock is one of the preferred biblical symbols for God, as we hear time and again. *Trust in the Lord forever*, we read in the prophet Isaiah, *for the Lord is an eternal rock* (26:4). In the book of Deuteronomy we hear: *He is the Rock; his deeds are perfect. Everything he does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright he is.* (32:4)

Today's Gospel starts with what seems a harsh message. Jesus speaks about people who refer to him as their Lord. But what good is it to cry out, *Lord, Lord*, Jesus asks, when works are not done for him but for your own glory? When we cry out "Lord," it should mean that we belong to him at all times, and not just when it is convenient. When the Lord responds, *I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers* – a harsh message indeed – Jesus is really expressing his longing for people who are truly close to him in daily life.

Those who do things in his name in order to be seen and honored, yet refuse to be in daily fellowship with him, are fraudulent. Those who are deaf to the word of God, who do not act upon it, and whose lives are not built upon God, will be swept away when the storms of life descend. Let us pray today that we will strive to build our house upon rock, upon the solid foundation of Jesus, our Lord.

* * * * *

Friday, June 24, 2016
(Lec. 587)

- 1) Isaiah 49:1-6
- 2) Acts 13:22-26
- 3) Luke 1:57-66, 80

**THE NATIVITY
OF SAINT JOHN
THE BAPTIST
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: We are called to play a unique role in God's unfolding plan of salvation.

John was called from birth by God for a special task, that of heralding the coming of the Messiah. The events preceding John's birth indicate that God had something special in mind for him. His mother was beyond the normal age to bear children, and his coming was foretold by the Angel Gabriel to Zechariah while he was serving in the Temple. Zechariah became mute when he questioned the meaning of the message. He remained speechless until the child was born and Zechariah gave him the name John, a name meaning "God is gracious." Neighbors and friends were amazed at the restoration of Zachariah's speech and saw this as a sign of God's favor upon the child.

We may wonder how John came to know the role he was to take in the life of Jesus. Scripture doesn't tell us about the early years of John's life. It picks up John's story as an adult, after he had received a message from God in the desert. (Lk 3:2) John preached a baptism of repentance, and promoted actions of charity, honesty and fair play. John cited the words of Isaiah proclaiming that the Messiah was coming, and that all should *make ready the way of the Lord*. (Mt 3:3) It would be John who would first identify Jesus as the Lamb of God, the Chosen One, the long-awaited Messiah who would free the people from their bondage and bring about the salvation of God.

We have little trouble believing that John was singled out by God for a special role to play in his unfolding plan of salvation. But our unique role in God's plan might not be as evident. To help us discern this, let's remember a few things. First, in and through baptism, God has called us and claimed us as one of his precious children. Second, it is imperative that we respond to this call. For, as Jesus taught clearly later in this chapter of Luke, *to whom much has been given, much will be required*. (12:48) In other words, when God is determining whether we will be judged worthy of entering into eternal life, we will be asked: Did you sincerely strive to be faithful to his call for your life? Did you use your gifts and talents to help build up his kingdom on earth?

Finally, we need to take time on a regular basis to reflect on the gifts we have been given and determine if we are using them to build the kingdom, or are we wasting them on matters of the world? What is it that God is calling us to do? What are our gifts? Certainly not all are called to preach on the street corner. It may take some prayerful reflection, some assistance from a spiritual director, some time spent with spiritual reading, but in time, each of us can identify our unique gifts and find ways to use them how God intended them to be used.

In short, my friends, just as John the Baptist was called to play a unique role in God's unfolding plan of salvation, so are we. Understanding this, let us say "yes" each day to what God is calling and asking us to do. For therein lies our salvation, as well as our coming to experience more fully the blessings of peace and joy in our lives and hearts.

* * * * *

Saturday, June 25, 2016
(Lec. 376)

1) Lamentations 2:2,
10-14, 18-19

2) Matthew 8:5-17

Gospel related: CCC 517, 543, 1386, 1505, 2610

SATURDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The Gospel is hope in the midst of despair

The Book of Lamentations contains some of the most despairing verses in all of Holy Scripture. These are the words of a people who are at what they feel is their end. Devastated, destitute and beyond all hope of redemption. Jerusalem is fallen. The Temple is destroyed. The people feel they have been abandoned by God, and they have nowhere left to turn.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? This line from Psalm 22, uttered by Jesus on the cross, is the Lamentations condensed to one sentence. It is the darkest pit, what the Israelites called *Sheol*, and the Greeks called *Hades*. It is the common grave of all humanity, the one place without hope, because in the end we all die and return to dust.

Well, the good news is that the Gospel offers us hope in the midst of such despair. The centurion says that his beloved servant is paralyzed, suffering, dying. He has no reason to hope, but he comes to Jesus and his faith is rewarded. Peter's mother-in-law is in bed with a fever, and in those days, a fever could easily mean death. Jesus heals her. People are possessed by demons – a state which caused intense personal suffering – and Jesus drives the demons out.

Yes, as we can see, the Gospel truly offers hope in the midst of despair. The sick are healed, the possessed are liberated and the blind are given back their sight. Jesus' death and resurrection is the ultimate source of hope which undergirds the Gospel message. Through his death on the cross, Jesus defeated the power of evil and won forgiveness for our sins.

The Gospel is hope in the midst of despair. If, in the words of Saint Paul, *nothing, not even death ... can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus*, (Rom 8:38-39) then there is never a reason to lose hope. Ever.

So, when we are in our darkest hour, when our tears flow like a torrent, we have hope. Christ is there to lift us out of the darkness, to heal us and to wipe every tear from our eyes.

* * * * *

SUNDAY, JUNE 26, 2016

(Lec. 99)

1) 1 Kings 19:16b, 19-21

2) Galatians 5:1, 13-18

3) Luke 9:51-62

Gospel related: CCC 544, 557

**THIRTEENTH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Jesus has high standards for those who seek to live as his disciples.

So many things are going on in today's Gospel. Like most of us, Jesus had a lot on his plate, and today's reading gives us a glimpse of some of the seemingly small things. Viewed from the perspective of Jesus' mission, however, they add up to a lot.

First, Jesus is rejected in a Samaritan village. The reason given is political. The Samaritans were estranged from the Jews in Jerusalem, so if Jesus was stopping in this village on his way to Jerusalem, the Samaritans wanted nothing to do with him. Of course, we know that his message is not political, even though it may have actually helped find common ground between the two groups. Nevertheless, Jesus is met with rejection and misunderstanding.

Then, two of the Apostles want to retaliate for the rejection by burning the village to the ground. You can almost see Jesus shaking his head in frustration. Have they learned nothing of his way of doing things? His message is all about love, not about punishing those who will not accept him. This is a change from what happened with Elijah, who *did* burn a company of soldiers when they tried to stop his work. Jesus is, obviously, teaching something new, but even his closest disciples do not fully understand.

Then, when Jesus and his disciples move on to another town, people are telling Jesus they want to follow him. Jesus makes it clear that there is more to being his follower than saying nice words. There is sacrifice involved. He even indicates that it will be harder for his followers than it was for the prophets. The people of Jesus' time knew the Scriptures and knew the story of Elisha's calling, which we heard in today's first reading. Elijah allowed Elisha to tidy up his affairs before he answered the call to be God's newest prophet. Jesus gives no such leeway. If you are going to follow him, you do it completely, without looking back. His words and actions show clearly that the old ways are not his ways.

These readings are given to us at this time of the liturgical year, Ordinary Time, because they are part of the ongoing lesson of what it means to be a Christian, to follow Jesus in our daily lives. It is the long haul that matters on our road to everlasting life. Ordinary Time has no big feasts, no major celebrations. It is the time for study and reflection, for spiritual growth and for deepening our commitment to living as Jesus taught.

In our second reading, we are reminded that, while it is not easy, the mission is simple: Love your neighbor as yourself. This is what Jesus wants of us. But he wants it *now*. He wants it to permeate every aspect of our lives. He wants it to be a conscious decision on our part. As we finish our celebration today, and as we go out into the world, let us keep in mind that the Lord Jesus is calling us, and let's be sure to listen to the call.

* * * * *

Monday, June 27, 2016
(Lec. 377)
1) Amos 2:6-10, 13-16
2) Matthew 8:18-22

MONDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem. Saint Cyril
of Alexandria, Bishop and
Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 2444

FOCUS: The followers of Jesus must be willing to give up everything.

Today's readings, particularly the Gospel, can be difficult to accept. *Let the dead bury their dead*, says Jesus to a man who wishes to bury his father. What was Jesus communicating? Why did Matthew include this encounter in his Gospel? And what can we learn from it?

Let us start with the first reading. The prophet Amos is listing the sins of the Israelites. Among these are sexual sins and sins against the poor. But then Amos says, *Upon garments taken in pledge they recline beside any altar*.

This is a reference to a sin of the priests, who would take advantage of the poor by taking a blanket or a cloak instead of money to pay for sacrifices. But instead of returning the cloak to the poor, as was the law, they would keep it and then feast at the altar on the meat and wine that should have been burnt in a sacrifice to the Lord. What's more, the priests have rejected Yahweh and are now reclining next to any old altar, instead of the one altar of Yahweh at the Temple in Jerusalem.

In contrast to these corrupt priests, then, Jesus tells us in the Gospel that those who want to follow him must love him above all things and be willing to make great personal sacrifices. The animals of God's creation have homes, he says, but *the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head*. What does this mean for us? It means we must be willing to give up everything – our personal possessions, the comforts of home and the company of family and friends – to do what Jesus calls us to do.

But Jesus is not mean or cruel. If we go back to Amos, we hear the Lord remind the Israelites that he was the one who saved them from Egypt and so *Look*, says the Lord, *I am groaning beneath you, as a wagon groans when laden with sheaves*. The image here of God in the Old Testament groaning under a heavy load should remind us of Jesus groaning under the load of the cross.

Jesus is telling his followers, and those who would be his disciples, that his is not an easy path. There is no room for corruption or self-serving sacrifice. We must be willing to give up everything.

He needs to tell them this because, in the verses just before this passage, Jesus is healing people miraculously. Many are attracted to him. They may be tempted to follow Jesus because of what he can give them. So he makes it clear: To follow him means to give up control and to take up our own cross.

The good news is that, when we do take up our cross, we will find true happiness and a true home and life everlasting. We will enjoy a heavenly treasure greater than anything we gave up here on earth.

Tuesday, June 28, 2016
(Lec. 378)

- 1) Amos 3:1-8; 4:11-12
- 2) Matthew 8:23-27

Gospel related: CCC 2610

TUESDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL. MEM. Saint Irenaeus,
Bishop and Martyr)

FOCUS: In times of adversity, we can turn to God, the source of all hope.

Today we learn of what Jesus did for his disciples who were in danger of death in their storm-tossed boat. Certainly, we know that events in our personal lives can test our faith. Events in our world can, and will, test our faith.

Jesus is Lord over the forces of nature, as well as the storms in our hearts and the storms in our souls. When terrible things happen, the question arises: To whom or to what do we turn? Some turn to alcohol, others to drugs. Still others, in anger, shake their fists at God.

Life is hard. We can have a tough go of it from time to time. It's easy enough to have faith at Christmastime or when everything is going well for us, but what about our faith when a loved one dies, or we are told that we have cancer, or when the nightly news overwhelms us with horrific events in the Middle East or a mass shooting?

In such times we should turn to our blessed Lord who, when he was about to suffer his terrible death, cried out to our Father in heaven: *Not my will but thine be done.*

Faith in times of adversity is not easy, nor is it a quick fix. But faith in God in times of adversity cannot help but win God's heart. Ultimately, Jesus rose from the dead. What better hope could we have?

We must always keep in mind that our hope is based on faith. Hope springs forth from faith, and without faith we cannot have a well-founded hope. Without faith we are left with empty, wishful thinking.

* * * * *

Wednesday, June 29, 2016
(Lec. 591)

- 1) Acts 12:1-11
- 2) 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18
- 3) Matthew 16:13-19

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

**SAINTS PETER
AND PAUL, APOSTLES
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: Let the courageous perseverance of Saints Peter and Paul speak to us today.

The excavations under Saint Peter's Basilica are one of the most interesting parts of any visit to the Eternal City. As you enter the long passageways directly under the basilica, you descend down through several layers of history until you finally arrive at what is known as the *Necropolis*, or the City of the Dead. Passing through its narrow damp and dark streets, you finally come to a small cavity where, scratched on the stone in Latin are the words, *Here is Peter*. Here, tradition tells us, Peter, the fisherman and prince of the Apostles, is laid to rest.

In many ways it's a far cry from the beauty and majesty of the great dome of the basilica where, written in marble and gold, are the words of Jesus to Peter: *You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church*. Written centuries apart, yet about the same man: the contrast couldn't be greater!

Contrast is a word that comes to mind when we reflect on the lives of the two saints we celebrate today: the contrast of their lives before and after they encounter the risen Christ. We know the story of Simon Peter, the simple fisherman who is called by Jesus to come and follow him. We know the character of Peter – impulsive, the one who speaks first and then thinks later, the one who, despite all his bravado, ends up denying Jesus three times and finally deserting him at the time of his greatest need. Yet today, we celebrate a different Peter. Today, as our first reading tells us, we see a post-resurrection, renewed Peter, one who has begun to suffer persecution for his restored fidelity to Christ. Imprisoned by King Herod, Peter is miraculously liberated by an angel so he might continue his mission.

That same stark contrast can be seen in the life of Paul, once Saul, the zealous Pharisee who persecuted the early Church, seeking to silence the Gospel message and its messengers, by death if necessary. Yet here we are presented with a different Paul. In this small snippet of the many letters that the Apostle has left us, Paul exhorts his friend, Timothy, to perseverance and courage. It's a very intimate and personal text, most likely written while Paul is in prison and toward the end of his life, but one full of great hope and faith.

Drawing from his own experiences, Paul reminds Timothy (and us) of the need for fidelity to Christ, even in the face of life's difficulty and trials. Through his many years of preaching, Paul has come to know and rely on the Lord's strength. It is, as he reminds Timothy, the Lord who has rescued him from every evil threat, and it is the Lord who will bring him safely home to the heavenly kingdom. What a contrast from the fiery Saul, who once approved of the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

So what can we learn from these two spiritual giants? Perhaps it's the call to courageous perseverance that will speak to us. Both Paul and Peter answered the call through the witness of their lives. Both were passionate for Christ, providing an example for us when we are faced with difficulty.

Or perhaps it's the contrast of their changed lives that will speak to us today. Both men underwent great moments of conversion and change. The moment they fully and unreservedly gave their lives to Christ, they underwent a kind of spiritual liberation, breaking free from the prisons of their brokenness and pride. The prisons we find ourselves in are many and varied – some physical, some emotional, some spiritual. By committing our lives to Christ, we, too, can experience that same freedom.

* * * * *

Thursday, June 30, 2016
(Lec. 380)

- 1) Amos 7:10-17
- 2) Matthew 9:1-8

THURSDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem. The First Martyrs
of the Holy Roman Church)

FOCUS: God gives us the grace and strength needed to do his will and help build up his kingdom on earth.

Today's readings show us that our response to the call of God can and will empower us to great deeds. This does not mean superior achievement as the world understands it, but rather an internal ability to know and understand the will of God, and the strength necessary to carry it out.

Take first the example of the prophet Amos in today's first reading, who is admonished by Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, for prophesying against the way the children of Israel were living. Amos, by his own admission, was a humble shepherd and a dresser of sycamore trees. Yet in responding to God's call, Amos was empowered with the courage to speak the truth to a high-ranking religious official of his time. This would not have been a comfortable position to be in, and popular opinion was probably against his prophesying any further. Yet, God gave Amos, a simple man, both the knowledge and the courage to stand up and speak the truth to this religious leader regardless of the personal cost to himself.

In today's Gospel, we see a similar reflection in the healing of the paralytic. The paralyzed man was incapable of doing anything for himself, and was literally carried to Jesus on a stretcher. At Christ's word, the man was able to stand and walk. In many ways, we may feel like the paralyzed man. We look about and see injustice, sorrow and immorality and feel powerless to do anything about it. We might feel this way because we think cultural influences are arrayed against us, or the problems themselves are far too pervasive for us to act against them. But Jesus, similar to the way he raised the paralyzed man to be able to walk, can raise us up to go forward and do our part to bring his light to others.

Today is the memorial of the first martyrs of the Holy Roman Church. These men and women came from all walks of life, and were living against the backdrop of the mighty Roman Empire. God, through the Holy Spirit, enabled these men and women to have courage, like the prophet Amos, to stand against the power of the world and the overwhelming cultural influences stacked against them. They were obedient to the call of the Lord until their own deaths, which they faced with bravery by the power of God.

Therefore, let us be bold and unafraid to stand against evil wherever we find it. We can be secure in the knowledge that God will make up for what may be lacking in us, and give us the strength to help build his kingdom on earth.

* * * * *