

MARCH

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Tuesday, March 1, 2016

(Lec.238)

1) Daniel 3:25, 34-43

2) Matthew 18:21-35

Gospel related: CCC 982, 2227, 2843, 2845

TUESDAY OF
THIRD WEEK OF LENT

FOCUS: Living as a disciple of Jesus requires that we be ever-willing to forgive those who sin against us.

“Lord, if my brother sins against me,” Peter asks Jesus, “How often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?” “No,” Jesus replies, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.” Jesus was saying that the duty of forgiveness is unlimited. Then, as he does so often, Jesus tells a parable to illustrate his teaching.

The beginning of the parable seems ominous, with a king deciding to settle accounts with servants who owed him money. One servant in particular owed the king a huge sum of money. Since the servant had no way of paying it back, the king ordered that the man and his family and all his property be sold to pay the debt. Then comes a surprise. When the man pleads for time to pay the debt, the king shows mercy: *Moved with compassion, the master ... forgave him the loan.*

No sooner delivered from his desperate plight, the servant encounters a fellow servant who owes him *a much smaller amount*, and demands immediate payment in full. The second servant's reaction to the demand that he pay his debt mirrors that of the first servant's, whose debt was forgiven. He says, *Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.* The sole difference is that the second servant's debt could easily be paid, given reasonable time. How shocking for those hearing the story for the first time to learn of the first official's harsh response. Seizing his fellow servant by the throat and throttling him, he insists that the man be imprisoned until the debt is paid.

In the parable's conclusion, the two debtors' colleagues report the injustice to the king. Summoning the first servant, whose debt he had forgiven, the king reminds him of the mercy he had received and, in an act of grim irony, grants the man what, in his original desperation, he had requested: time. Now, however, the king ordered that the servant be turned over to the torturers until he was able to pay back the debt in full.

One of the main lessons we can draw from this parable is that just as God places no limits on his love and mercy toward us and is ever-willing to forgive us when we turn to him, God expects us to then be ever-willing to forgive those who sin against us. If we are unwilling to forgive those who sin against us, bitterness and resentment will most likely build up within our hearts. This, in turn, can lead us to close our hearts to God's love, mercy and grace, and can potentially jeopardize our salvation. Mindful of this, let us give thanks to God for his love and forgiveness, and freely extend love and forgiveness to others. This will allow God's peace to reign more fully in our lives, and in the lives and hearts of others as well.

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Wednesday, March 2, 2016
(Lec.239)

WEDNESDAY OF
THIRD WEEK OF LENT

1) Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9

2) Matthew 5:17-19

Gospel related: **CCC** 577, 592, 1967, 2053

FOCUS: Jesus shows us what it means to love God with all our heart, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Today's readings lead us to ponder the purpose of religious laws, rules and regulations – and to draw us closer to God, and to his love. It's easy to follow the laws literally; it's more challenging to go above and beyond their strict application.

What is it that Jesus asks of us? He asks us to love God with our whole heart, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. That's hard.

Jesus declares:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until things have taken place.

Consider what immediately follows today's Gospel account:

"Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt 5:23-24).

Clearly, what matters is what is in our hearts. What matters is how we forgive, how we give of ourselves to God and to others. What matters is that we examine our consciences, accept the truth about what we have done or not done, and then ask God to help us to be better sons and daughters of his, and better brothers and sisters to those around us. What matters is that we take what is in the heart of Jesus and make his love real for those we encounter in our daily living.

In Chapter 25 of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus gives us the criteria by which we will be judged. You will recall his last judgment teaching: *For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me; in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him and say, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison and visit you?" And the king will say to them in reply, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25: 34-40).*

Jesus' expectations go way beyond strict observance of laws, rules and regulations. Jesus did not abolish them; he went far above and beyond them.

So should we.

Thursday, March 3, 2016

(Lec.240)

1) Jeremiah 7:23-28

2) Luke 11:14-23

Gospel related: **CCC** 385, 700

THURSDAY OF
THIRD WEEK OF LENT
(Opt. Mem. Saint Katharine
Drexel, Virgin)

FOCUS: As we move further into Lent, let us turn our faces toward God and redouble our efforts to grow closer to him.

Today marks just about the halfway point of Lent. It is an ideal time to reflect on how we are doing with the plans we made on Ash Wednesday. Have we actually done anything to help us grow closer to Jesus? Have we looked at those bad habits we excuse away and tried to make improvements? Today's readings may help, in case we have not made the headway we thought we would a few weeks ago.

The first reading assures us we are not alone if we have not done such a good job addressing our weaknesses. God speaks harshly of the Israelites, pointing out that he has sent many prophets to help them, but they turn their backs and continue their old ways. God tells the prophet Jeremiah he can expect the same. God says the Israelites have *stiffened their necks*. Are we, too, being stiff-necked? Have we grown stubborn and obstinate when it comes to making our lives more like Christ's? God knows we are not perfect, but he calls us to strive for perfection nonetheless. We must be willing to make an effort to change and to cooperate with his grace.

In the Gospel, Jesus drives a demon out of a person, but is accused of doing it through the power of the devil. We may think this is ridiculous, yet we may be guilty of doing something similar. Any time we give credit to people – even ourselves – for the good in our lives, we are denying God, who is the giver of every good gift.

As we continue through the rest of Lent, let us strive to turn our faces toward God, seeing with new clarity what he does for us every single day. Let us loosen up our necks and see God as the one who loves us as no other can. When we do so, it will surely become easier to let go of our excuses, and to do whatever is necessary to grow ever-closer to him.

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Friday, March 4, 2016

(Lec. 241)

1) Hosea 14:2-10

2) Mark 12:28-34

Gospel related: **CCC** 129, 202, 228, 575, 2196 **CSDC** 40, 112

FRIDAY OF
THIRD WEEK OF LENT
(Opt. Mem. Saint Casimir)

FOCUS: *You are not far from the kingdom of God.*

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus say to a scribe who understood his teaching, *You are not far from the kingdom of God.* Today the Church honors Saint Casimir, the "Grand Duke of Lithuania" and patron saint of Poland and Lithuania, who likewise was *not far from the kingdom of God*

Saint Casimir, who lived in the fifteenth century, ruled Lithuania but also saw himself as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. Upon his death at the age of twenty-six, he was received into God's heavenly kingdom.

"Why?" or "How did this come about?" you might ask. Casimir did this by spending time in prayer and by striving to listen to God and be faithful to what God asked him to do. He did this by striving to lead his life according to the teachings and example of Jesus, especially the two great commandments given by Jesus in today's Gospel: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart*, and *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* Indeed, Casimir seemed to embody the second commandment.

Young as he was, Casimir, in the words of the first reading from Hosea, was *wise* and sought to *understand these things* and came to *know them.* He was *prudent.* He walked in the ways of the Lord. He was a person whom we should emulate. He loved the Lord and lived accordingly.

I can hear some of you saying "Come on, Father, he was royalty. He had everything given to him. He didn't have to work like I do. He didn't have a family to take care of." Perhaps not, but in the Office of Readings from today's *Liturgy of the Hours*, we find this excerpt from a biography of Saint Casimir: *Nothing was more pleasant, nothing more desirable for him, than to share his belongings, even to dedicate and give his entire self to Christ's poor, to strangers, to the sick, to those in captivity and to all who suffer ... He always preferred to be counted among the meek and poor of spirit, among those who are promised the kingdom of heaven, rather than among the famous and powerful men of this world.*

What an example for us today! Saint Casimir was a person who wasn't "in it for himself," but rather listened to God in prayer and brought his people a true knowledge of the good news of Jesus. He embodied the Gospel, and was clearly *not far from the kingdom of God.* May we, too, care for the poor and needy, especially in our almsgiving during this Lenten season.

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Saturday March 5, 2016

(Lec.242)

1) Hosea 6:1-6

2) Luke 18:9-14

Gospel related: **CCC** 588, 2559, 2613, 2631, 2667, 2839

SATURDAY OF
THIRD WEEK OF LENT

FOCUS: We are to come before the Lord with humble and contrite hearts so we may love him more fully and truly.

Many of us choose to give something up during Lent – a favorite food, drink or activity we enjoy. We do this to unite ourselves spiritually with Christ as he spent forty days in the desert fasting in solitude. Although sacrifice can be a powerful spiritual exercise, today's readings remind us that we shouldn't become self-righteous or rigid about it, or lose sight of why we are offering it in the first place.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells us a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector. Pharisees were esteemed in society and known for their adherence to the laws prescribed by Moses, while tax collectors were looked down on as traitors, collecting money for the oppressive Roman Empire and often cheating their own people.

The parable begins with both men approaching the Temple area to pray. In his prayer, the Pharisee reminds God of all his good works and points out how he is above *the rest of humanity*, especially the tax collector next to him. The other man is humble. His short, simple prayer acknowledges his sinfulness and begs for God's mercy. Of the two, Jesus reveals it was the tax collector who goes home justified and in greater favor with the Lord.

Like the Pharisee, we can become so fixed on certain aspects of religion that we become self-righteous, judging others for their sins and not recognizing our own. This form of pride interferes with spiritual progress. Instead of approaching God as if we are deserving of his consideration through our own doing, we must reach up to him from the depths of our sinful nature. It is through our humility that we are to seek him in prayer and receive him in the Eucharist.

Much like this parable, our first reading from the prophet Hosea speaks of the inner sincerity the Lord desires. All worship of God and all offerings to the Lord should be made with humble and contrite hearts, motivated by sincere love for God. As the last verse of today's reading reminds us, *For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*

What approach have we taken this Lenten season? Has our sacrifice caused us to feel self-righteous or judgmental of others, or has it given us the freedom to express the love and charity God desires? In these remaining weeks of Lent, let these readings inspire us to continue to grow in our love for God and be prepared to share in the joy of Easter.

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SUNDAY, MARCH 6, 2016

(Lec. 33)

1) Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

2) 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

3) Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Gospel related: **CCC** 545, 589, 1423, 1439, 1443, 1468, 1700, 1846, 2795, 2839

**FOURTH SUNDAY
OF LENT**

FOCUS Forgiveness is God-like.

We love this Gospel parable! Especially in this Lenten season, we can relate to the prodigal son. Sinful though we are, if we convert our lives, God, symbolized by the father, will always forgive us and welcome us back. (CCC1439)

However, what if we focus on the **father** in this story? What can we learn from him? He already had generously given his younger son the inheritance that he “owed” him. He must have been broken-hearted when the son rejected his home and family to pursue another lifestyle. When the son saw the error of his ways and returned home, however, the father ran out to greet him with warmth and affection. He gave him a ring, a robe and a party! The father offered forgiveness – not begrudgingly – but freely, lavishly, lovingly.

Moreover, he went out again to seek his older son and carefully taught him how to forgive.

In this Year of Mercy, whom do we need to forgive? Is there someone in the family with whom we have not spoken? Is there someone at work who has wronged us? A spouse who has betrayed us? Is there a child who has rebelled?

Can we be as generous as our merciful God? Is there anything more God-like than forgiveness?

Jesus’ ministry was often about forgiveness – eating with sinners, forgiving sins publicly, gently preaching about his Father’s unbounded mercy. In the ultimate act of forgiveness, obedient to his Father, Jesus gave his life for the forgiveness of our sins. This is what salvation history is all about – forgiveness. How can we possibly be grateful enough for such unbounded mercy?

Our reading today from second Corinthians reminds us that God *has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation ... entrusting to us the message of reconciliation*. Let us resolve to be *ambassadors for Christ* and share God’s message of love and forgiveness.

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**OPTIONAL HOMILY FOR
SUNDAY, MARCH 6, 2016**

(Lec. 31)

1) 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a

2) Ephesians 5:8-14

3) John 9:1-41 or 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38

Gospel related: **CCC** 575, 588, 595, 596, 1151, 1504, 2173, 2827

FOCUS: Faith in Jesus is the way by which the eyes of our heart, mind and soul are opened to truth and life. Through faith, we truly become children of the light.

If a person had a choice to be blind or to see, what would they choose? Who wouldn't choose to see? It is one of our most important senses. People do everything possible to protect and preserve their vision.

It may sound strange, but each day people remain blind. I am not speaking of a physical blindness, but a spiritual one whereby people remain blind to the truth, to the needs of others, to their own sins and to their need for God. People quite often have 20/20 vision but are spiritually blind.

The questions of the disciples and the attitude of the Pharisees reveal that at the time of Jesus, people believed blindness was the result of sin. Jesus reveals that people were not physically blind as a result of sin. Rather, Jesus' words and actions reveal that people are spiritually blind because of sin.

Jesus' action of healing the man born blind speaks to us at a deeper level. It reminds us that Jesus came to give sight to all those who were spiritually blind. However, for this to happen, we must place our faith in Jesus so as to restore our spiritual sight and free us to walk in the light of God's truth and love.

Today's Gospel reading invites and challenges us to thoughtfully reflect upon our lives, and identify those sins that hamper the clarity of our spiritual sight. We need to turn to God and ask for forgiveness and his grace to help us overcome the sins that blind us, so that we may walk more fully in the light of his love. This will enable us to share his love with others, and experience the gift and blessings he wishes to bestow upon us more abundantly.

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NOTE: The following readings may be used on any day this week, especially in Years B and C when the Gospel of the Man Born Blind is not read on the Fourth Sunday of Lent: Micah 7:7-9; John 9:1-41 (Lec. 243)

Monday, March 7, 2016

(Lec.244)

1) Isaiah 65:17-21

2) John 4:43-54

MONDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK OF LENT
(Opt. Mem. Saints Perpetua
and Felicity, Martyrs)

FOCUS: It is natural to want a sign, but only faith and trust in God will sustain us for the long haul.

People are skeptical by nature. We know instinctively that the world is a troubled place. We say truthfully that everyone is a child of God, and we want to think the best of people. But, if we're honest, we also know the sin in ourselves and others. We don't want to trust too much for fear of being betrayed and hurt. So we ask for a sign, something to tell us we can lower our guard.

The people in Jesus' time wanted signs, too, and you can't blame them. First-century Judea was riddled with strife, its people ruled and oppressed by the Romans. Religious leaders from differing factions within Judaism sowed confusion and division.

Jesus said he was the Good Shepherd, but the people wanted proof, and it was only after they saw signs – at Cana and in Jerusalem – that they began to let their guard down. But Jesus knew how tentative their trust was. He knew that their faith in him would fail at the first sign of trouble.

Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe. Jesus calls them out, and, as if on cue, a man too desperate to wait for signs approaches him: *Sir, come down before my child dies.* We can imagine the desperation in his voice. He is too desperate to be skeptical. Jesus replies, *You may go; your son will live.* And he believed, because it was his only choice.

His faith was rewarded. His son began to recover at that very moment. The man didn't know that Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, spoke with the authority of creation – let there be light; let there be life – but he believed.

In a similar way, when Perpetua and Felicity and their companions faced death in the arena for the amusement of the local mob, they held on to their faith in the face of whips, horns, claws and teeth. They had faith that their martyrdom would be rewarded in heaven and that their spilled blood could be used by God for good, to help build up his kingdom on earth.

Most of us will probably never have to face the prospect of martyrdom. We do, however, live in an increasingly secularized culture that sees little inherent worth in faith and religious values and beliefs. Mindful of this, we should turn to God each day and ask him for the grace and strength to be true to our faith against the forces at work in our society trying to deter us.

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Tuesday, March 8, 2016

(Lec. 245)

1) Ezekiel 47:1-9

2) John 5:1-16

Gospel related: **CCC** 575, 583, 594

TUESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK OF LENT
(Opt. Mem. Saint John of God,
Religious)

FOCUS: We honor the Lord by serving the sick and suffering.

Today is the optional feast of Saint John of God. Mentioning it is important because of the link between his life and our Gospel reading. In that reading, we hear about Jesus visiting the pool of Bethesda, a gathering place for the sick and the lame.

The Hebrew legend was that an angel would at times be sent by God to stir up the water in the pool. When that happened, the first person to touch the water would be healed. This is why, in the Gospel, the man who is lame says he has no one to put him into the pool after Jesus asks him if he wants to be well.

Jesus, taking pity on the man, heals him then and there, but the Jews become angry at him for healing someone on the Sabbath, a day when no work could be done. For the Pharisees, the Sabbath had become a symbol of their power over the people; they had lost sight of the real meaning of the Lord's day.

In the healing of the lame man, Jesus gives us an important lesson, which would be lived out by Saint John of God many centuries later.

Saint John of God was a Portuguese shepherd turned soldier, turned mental patient, turned religious leader. Living in the first half of the 1500s, and after many years of wandering, he had a remarkable conversion but became obsessed with own sinfulness. His behavior became so erratic, as he tried to do penance for his sins, that he was placed in a hospital for the mentally ill.

Eventually, a sound spiritual director taught Saint John of God to take his passion for God and turn it away from himself and his sins and toward care for his neighbor. He started to beg in order to help poor and ailing. Eventually, he founded the religious institution the Brothers Hospitallers, who ran hospitals open to all regardless of their ability to pay.

Saint John of God understood Jesus' lesson from the Gospel very well. The Sabbath was given to us by God and we should keep it sacred. But the best way to honor the Lord on his day is to love our neighbor by visiting the suffering or helping someone in need, for example. Let us learn to keep this Lenten season sacred, then, by engaging in some good work for the poor, the sick or the lonely. Jesus waits for us in them.

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Wednesday, March 9, 2016

(Lec. 246)

1) Isaiah 49:8-15

2) John 5:17-30

Gospel related: **CCC** 574, 589, 594, 612, 635, 679, 859, 994, 998, 1038, 1063, 1470, 2824 **CSDC** 259

WEDNESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

(Opt. Mem. Saint Frances
of Rome, Religious)

FOCUS: We have heard the testimony about the Son of God – from the Bible, the saints and the martyrs – will we, too, place our faith in Jesus?

Imagine that you are in a court of law and sitting as a member of the jury in a trial. The defendant is giving his testimony and it is your task as a juror to determine whether or not he is telling the truth, and the whole truth.

In a certain sense, that is what today's readings are all about. The defendant in this case is Jesus, and the prosecuting attorneys are the Jewish religious authorities who are trying to convict and condemn him. What infuriated those religious authorities was Jesus' assertion that he was doing the work of his Father, and that he and his Father were one. If that were true, then Jesus was divine, the divine son of his Father in heaven. One reason religious leaders had a hard time accepting that was because it would have stripped them of their power over the Jewish people.

As we approach Easter and the climax of the drama between Jesus and the Jewish authorities, we hear many terms associated with courts and trials. We hear of evidence, proofs, testimonies, witnesses, judges and so forth. Even the precepts of God were called laws.

While this is a scene we have constructed in our imaginations, we need to realize that we are in fact in the jury box. The testimony of the Bible has been made available to us. The lives of the apostles, the early Christians, and the saints have likewise been made available to us. They are pieces of evidence for us to consider.

We must ask: Are these testimonies fables and myths? Have all of these witnesses been charlatans and liars? Were they fools who were naïve and gullible? Yet, many of them were put to death for their convictions. Would they have gone to their graves if they knew they were only telling fables?

Finally, we should all realize that the followers of Jesus are even now being persecuted in the Middle East because they profess their faith in Jesus Christ. The Greek word *martyr* means witness. We should pray for them, and thank God for their witness to the truth of who Jesus Christ really is. Their witness, their martyrdom, confirms me in faith. I hope the same is true for all of us.

Thursday, March 10, 2016
(Lec. 247)

THURSDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

1) Exodus 32:7-14

2) John 5:31-47

Gospel related: CCC 548, 582, 702, 719

FOCUS: Jesus is the manifestation of God's relentless love and relenting judgment.

In today's reading from Exodus, we hear that the people have been whining and complaining to Moses and Aaron; they have constructed a golden calf to serve as their focus for belief, praise and worship. We also know that God is angry and vows to destroy the people, while promising to spare Moses.

In his response, Moses does not focus on saving himself, but on defending and saving his people. He does so with surprising candor. And God, who continuously seeks relationship with us, relents.

He relents!

Moses stands up for his people in the desert, and God relents.

What might God's action at that point in history have to offer us today, in this fourth week of Lent? *Relentless* in his love for us, but *relenting* in his judgment, God lays the foundation for the moment when he will enter human history by becoming one of us that he might save and redeem humankind.

Jesus the man was aware of this event in history, of course. Educated in the Scriptures, he knew the importance of this exchange. In the Gospel passage just proclaimed, Jesus criticizes the Pharisees and other listeners for dismissing the truth they have heard and seen. The Father has sent him; he comes in the name of, and performs works on behalf of the Father. Jesus, like Moses, will stand for his people – and God will relent.

This is the witness to which John speaks today: In dwelling among us, Jesus manifests God's relentless love for us. In his death and resurrection, Jesus stands as the personification of God's relenting judgment. No longer does God seek to consume us with his wrath. Instead, he offers his son for our salvation. Upon Jesus' sacrifice he will build not a new nation, but a kingdom of love and peace that will endure for eternity.

God relented. And he is relentless. Let us give thanks to God for being so, for sending his Son to save and redeem us through his life, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven.

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Friday, March 11, 2016

(Lec. 248)

1) Wisdom 2:1a, 12-22

2) John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Gospel related: **CCC 583**

FRIDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: Christ is our Truth.

Last week a gentleman was sharing that he had gone to visit his primary care physician to discuss the results of his bloodwork. Much to his surprise, his sugar levels were very high, in fact they were pre-diabetic. He ended his story by saying, "They say the truth will set you free. It may do so, but it sure hurts."

The sentiment this gentleman expressed – in finding out his love of desserts was undermining his health – is similar to the faithful Jews mentioned in today's Gospel who recoiled at Jesus' proclamation that he was sent by the Father and thus was the Son of God. It seems they did so because they were unable and unwilling to change their mindset and way of living. They closed themselves off from accepting the truth that could set them free, and instead sought to arrest Jesus because they thought he was committing blasphemy by naming himself as the Son of God – thereby making himself equal to God

How often do we, when confronted with a truth that challenges us to change our lifestyle, look for ways to avoid doing so? Most likely, we think of multiple ways we can excuse it away, ignore it or rationalize it.

The truth does indeed set us free. It is misguided, however, to think it doesn't come at a cost. Our lives are a pilgrimage journey that, through God's grace and mercy, will culminate in being welcomed into the heavenly kingdom. As we travel the terrain of this journey, we must align our lives with the truth – that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and the Savior of the world.

Like any good pilgrim, we need to be equipped with the proper equipment, nourishment and guides. As much as we like to think we are charting the course, we don't know the topography.

We must set our compass so that it constantly reveals the Truth – Jesus Christ. When we do this, we need to consider three things: employing our equipment, sustaining ourselves through nourishment and seeking out guides.

Our equipment consists of daily prayer, personal devotions such as the rosary, adoration, novenas, retreats, spiritual reading, and meditation and contemplation on the paschal mystery. This equipment helps us discern if what we hold dear moves us along on our journey to Christ – the Truth – or serves as a distraction.

Our nourishment is daily prayer, participating in the sacrament of reconciliation, seeking forgiveness and granting it in our families, workplaces and communities, receiving the Eucharist, and listening intently to the Liturgy of the Word during Mass. The journey will be challenging at times, and being nourished will sustain us to keep our internal compass pointing toward Christ – the Truth.

Our guides are daily prayer, growing in a deeper understanding of Church teaching, seeking out faith formation opportunities, Bible studies, and spiritual direction. Our guides help us entrust our journey – our lives – to God, as opposed to relying on our own designs.

By gathering in this sacred space today, we recognize that we are on our pilgrimage journey of faith. Let us commit to allowing God to direct and rule our lives.

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Saturday, March 12, 2016

(Lec. 249)

1) Jeremiah 11:18-20

2) John 7:40-53

Gospel related: **CCC** 574, 575, 588, 595

SATURDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: Listen to the word of the Lord.

Imagine being in the midst of today's Gospel. You're in a large crowd. Conflict erupts. Some argue that this man Jesus, who has performed miracles and proven himself to be a great teacher, is the Messiah! Others argue that since Jesus was from Galilee, he can't be the Messiah, but a prophet instead. A few want him arrested. Even the guards and religious authorities are at odds about who Jesus really is. What is your heart telling you?

In present time, we often find ourselves in similar situations. Some of our friends and family accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, while many simply think he was a "good man." A few doubt if he existed at all. People still debate Jesus' identity – even after the resurrection, the preaching of the apostles and testimonies of the saints. Why do we continue to question?

As humans, we have the tendency to avoid or silence anything (or anyone) that challenges our beliefs or way of life – mostly because the alternative is that we have to change ourselves, which is difficult. Jesus uses parables and real-world situations to make his message easy to understand, but he doesn't always make it easy to follow. In fact, he admits in two of the Gospels that his teachings will lead to division within households (Matt. 10:35 and Luke 12:53). Rather than fight temptation, make sacrifices or go against popular opinion, we may resort to our old ways and choose to do what will provide the most comfort. We often choose not to listen.

Jeremiah clearly understood this tendency, as he did not initially embrace his call to prophecy. He knew that the words God commanded him to speak would stir trouble and not likely be accepted by his people. He was accusing them of sin – pointing out how their mistreatment of one another was a crime against God, who commands us to love and care for each other. This caused his own relatives to plot against him, as we read today.

Jeremiah was well aware of the conflict and persecution happening around him. He even wished to witness the Lord's vengeance upon them! But, like Jesus, he put aside his personal agenda and let his trust rest in the Lord. This trust continued through death for both of them, as Jesus faced crucifixion, and Jeremiah was exiled to Egypt where his own people stoned him.

What is our reaction as we listen to the word of the Lord? Do we let it transform our lives, or do we alter the message (or its relevance) to coincide with the way we are already living? Lent is a time of deep reflection. Let God's word change our heart and renew our spirit.

SUNDAY, MARCH 13, 2016

(Lec. 36)

1) Isaiah 43:16-21

2) Philippians 3:8-14

3) John 8:1-11

Gospel related: **CCC 583**

**FIFTH SUNDAY
OF LENT**

FOCUS: Jesus is *the image of the invisible God*.

Like the prophets who preceded him, Jesus' life and ministry was tied to the Temple. It was there that he was presented by Mary and Joseph at forty days old. It was there that he held priests and scribes spellbound at the age of twelve. It was there that his ministry was centered, especially during the week leading up to his passion.

Today we hear of one particular visit to the Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus was teaching a large group of people in the Temple courtyard when a group of scribes and Pharisees interrupt him and say: *Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. What do you say?*

Jesus knows that the scribes and Pharisees are setting a trap, and he doesn't answer right away. Instead he writes in the dirt. One might wonder if he was writing the relevant passage from the Law that condemned both partners in an adulterous relationship. He couldn't help but notice that the man was conspicuously absent.

The scribes and Pharisees press him, and he answers, *Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to cast a stone at her*. They have nothing to say in response, and one by one they walk away. Once Jesus and the woman are alone, he asks her, *Where are they? Has no one condemned you?* She replies, *No one, sir*, and he tells her, *neither do I condemn you. Go and from now on sin no more*.

Jesus is the one without sin, the only one with the right to judge, but he doesn't. He dismisses the woman and her accusers without condemning them. This says a lot about Jesus and the invisible God whom he makes visible.

Elsewhere in John's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples that *he who has seen me has seen the Father*. In Colossians, Saint Paul, who saw Jesus on the road to Damascus, calls him *the image of the invisible God* (1:15), and in today's reading from Philippians, Paul says that knowing him is *the supreme good*. We don't have the privilege that the disciples had of seeing Jesus in the flesh. We don't have the privilege that Paul had of seeing the Risen Lord in heavenly glory. Instead, we know Jesus through the teachings of the apostles, through sacred Scripture, through the teachings of the Church and through the sacraments, to name a few ways.

In Jesus, we see God entering his Temple and dwelling among his people. And we see the kind of God he is. Not a God of judgement, but a God of forgiveness. Not a God of wrath, but a God of mercy. Not a God who conquers by the sword, but a God who conquers by the cross.

This is the God who is making something truly new. Something the world has not seen or even imagined.

OPTIONAL HOMILY FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 13, 2016

(Lec. 34)

1) Ezekiel 37:12-14

2) Romans 8:8-11

3) John 11:1-45 or 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45

Gospel related: CCC 439, 472, 581, 627, 640, 993, 994, 1001, 2604

FOCUS: Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life – as well as the manifestation of God’s hope for us.

Very shortly, we will be entering into the holiest week of the Church’s calendar. At this time, we will see how quickly Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem, and then how he died. His death was to be the end – or so people thought. However, it was not the end. In fact, in the Gospel today, Jesus tells us: *I am the resurrection and the life*. These words were said as an assurance to the sister of Lazarus. Yet even Martha knew their true meaning. She came to believe not only in the words of Jesus, but in his promise.

The hope that Jesus offered to Martha is echoed in our second reading today. It is the Spirit who will give us life. In fact, it is the Spirit who is dwelling in us. What was written in the first reading this day, *I will open your graves and have you rise from them*, could be metaphorically tied to the hope that is engendered in the words of Jesus Christ. When Jesus told Martha, *I am the resurrection and the life*, it related directly to what Jesus told his disciples when he first learned that Lazarus was ill. Namely, that Lazarus’ illness was not to end in death but was to be for the glory of God. Now after making this statement to the disciples and after telling Martha that he was the *resurrection and the life*, no one had any idea what Jesus was going to do with regard to Lazarus.

What Jesus was going to do was earth-shaking, and it would change lives and hearts forever. He went to Lazarus’ tomb and commanded that the stone covering it be removed. Jesus then commanded Lazarus to come out of the tomb. Lazarus came out of the tomb still covered in the bands and cloths in which he was buried. Through this miracle, Jesus clearly demonstrated that he, in fact, was the *resurrection and the life*, and foreshadowed what would happen with him.

Now, let’s shift gears a bit and reflect on how all of this applies to us. During this Lenten season, we offer the light of hope to our Catechumens and candidates.

What happened with Lazarus prefigured what would soon happen to Jesus. Because of our faith, we realize that what happened to Jesus gives us hope for everlasting life. It is a hope that is manifested in the words of Jesus to Martha: *I am the resurrection and the life*.

In the psalm response, we have an indication of what we should do in our relationship with the Lord, which is to trust him. His sending of Jesus into our lives shows us in a rather large and wonderful way that God wants us to be saved and ultimately living with him in heaven. So let us be comforted, as Martha was, not only with the words of Jesus but also by his example of suffering and dying on the cross. Jesus’ death on the cross won forgiveness for our sins, reconciled us to the Father, and defeated the power of sin and evil. His death also reveals the depths of God’s love for us.

In and through his resurrection, Jesus has freed us from living in fear and the shadow of death and opened the way to eternal life.

The following readings may be used on any Lenten day this week, especially in years B and C when the Gospel of Lazarus is not read on the Fifth Sunday of Lent: 2 Kings 4:18b-21, 32-37; John 11:1-45 (Lec. 250).

Monday, March 14, 2016

(Lec. 251)

1) Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62
or 13:41c-62

2) John 8:12-20

Gospel related: **CCC** 2466

MONDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: We are to live and walk in the light of God's truth.

The pairing of today's first reading and Gospel reveal to us one of many differences between human beings and God. In the first reading, we see that the tradition of giving witness testimony has been corrupted by human sin. Jewish law stated that a man's testimony needed to be verified by another's testimony to be considered valid. The men in the first reading worked together to give false testimony for their evil purposes. We see here how human sin took reasonable, sound elements of the law and corrupted them. A law that was created to maintain the integrity and honesty of trials and testimonies was twisted for sinful purposes. Because God worked through his prophet, Daniel, the truth was revealed in the end and justice was served.

In the Gospel, we see that human laws created to maintain honesty and truth are limited. They may help us to discern the truth, but they don't contain all truth within them. This becomes clear when the Pharisees ask Jesus for corroboration of his statement that he is the light of the world. Jesus tells them that what he says is true, and can be verified because *I know where I came from and where I am going*. He is from God and will return to God, who is Truth itself. He goes on to say that he does not judge alone, and that his Father testifies on his behalf. After hearing Jesus say that his Father testifies on his behalf, the Pharisees respond by asking Jesus where his Father is. Jesus responds by saying that if they knew and believed in him, they would know his Father as well.

One of the reasons the Pharisees had a hard time believing in Jesus and accepting his teachings is that they were men of great learning who thought they understood what it meant to live as a faithful Jew and believer in God. This was a major shortcoming on their part, and made them fail to recognize their human limitations with regard to understanding God's truths. They were no different from anyone else who needed to keep their minds and hearts open to God so that they could grow in their understanding of his truths and walk more fully in his way of love.

Today's readings challenge us in a number of ways. First, we are challenged to be continually cognizant of our human limitations and of our need to keep our minds and hearts open to God so we might walk more fully in God's way of love. Second, we are reminded of our duty as Christians to turn to the Holy Spirit to help us to discern truth from lies and to work for justice. Finally, we are reminded we are sinners who are saved by God's grace and mercy. In gratitude for this, let us do our best to share this gift with others by treating them with kindness, love, mercy and compassion.

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Tuesday, March 15, 2016

(Lec. 252)

1) Numbers 21:4-9

2) John 8:21-30

Gospel related: CCC 211, 603, 653, 1693, 2812, 2824, 2825

TUESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: The cross is a sign of victory and eternal life.

The cross is a central symbol for Catholic churches, and for each member of the congregation. We sign ourselves with a cross when we pray, and the accompanying words are among the first prayers we learn as children. With the crucifix, we are visually reminded of the price Jesus paid to assure our redemption. Yet, this symbol of eternal life for us was a symbol of shame and disgraceful death in ancient times. We know that the message of Jesus did not end on the cross. We know it continued to the glory of Easter morning and Jesus' resurrection from the tomb. At each liturgy, when we see and hear with the eyes and ears of faith, we are led from the sign of the cross to the sign of the Eucharist, where we participate in the sacrifice of Jesus and rejoice in his resurrection.

In today's first reading from Numbers, the Israelites had been on the desert journey for a long while and had lost sight of God's presence with them. The way had often been hard, and the people once again began to complain to Moses and to rebel against their situation. God's punishment came in the form of deadly serpents. The people soon repented of their disloyalty and begged Moses to intercede with God on their behalf. Under God's direction, Moses made a bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole. When those who had been bitten looked at the bronze serpent, they recovered. As with the symbol of the cross, the very means of death had been turned into the means of life. Once again, the people were united in their journey toward the land promised through Moses.

Earlier in John's Gospel, Jesus recalls the incident in the desert: *Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that all who believe in him may have eternal life* (Jn 3:14). Jesus identifies himself with the God of Moses and the God of the desert people when he declares *I AM*. Slowly, the minds and hearts of many people would open to the truth of Jesus as the Son of God. This is the foundation of our faith: God sent his Son into the world to do God's will, and through his death and resurrection to lead all people to the life that awaits those who believe.

Each week at Mass, we express with certain language our acceptance of God's message in the Scriptures. The revision of the creed puts the words squarely in the first person. It is *my* belief, it is *my* faith, *I* must own it and live it out. *I* believe in Jesus as the Son of God, one with the Father, Incarnate of the Virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit, lifted on the Cross for *my* sins. It is *me* whom Christ will judge and *me* that he will lead through death to life in the world to come. It is to *me* that Jesus said: *If you want to be a follower of mine, renounce your very self, take up your cross, and begin to follow in my footsteps* (Mt 16:24).

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Wednesday, March 16, 2016

(Lec. 253)

1) Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95

2) John 8:31-42

Gospel related: CCC 89, 549, 588, 601, 613, 1741, 2466

WEDNESDAY OF

FIFTH WEEK

OF LENT

FOCUS: Jesus came to free us from the greatest slavery of all – the slavery of sin.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has much to say about sin and redemption, and today's readings underscore these tenets in a colorful and decisive way. Daniel writes of King Nebuchadnezzar's efforts to convince Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to worship his golden statue or be tossed into a fiery furnace. The trio, administrators in the province of Babylon, refuse. Even if their God doesn't deliver them from the white-hot furnace, they respond, *we will not serve your god or worship the golden statue which you set up.*

The fire is so hot, we are told, that the men who threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the furnace were themselves consumed by it. The king's servants continued to stoke the fire until it grew to a height of 49 cubits. Inside the furnace, an angel of the Lord appeared and made the inside *as though a dew-laden breeze were blowing through it* (3:50). When the king saw the three were not harmed by the blaze, he renounced his pagan ways and accepted the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

In the passage from John's Gospel, we see Jesus explaining to the Jews who believed in him that the truth will set them free. The Jews were confused because they did not consider themselves slaves, but rather descendants of Abraham who had never experienced slavery. Jesus tells them: *Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. A slave does not remain in a household forever, but a son always remains.* In other words, sin will not remain forever, but the Son of God will be with us for eternity. Sadly, the Jews cannot accept Jesus' words and at the close of the chapter, they attempt to stone him because they believe he is possessed by demons.

The catechism tells us Jesus did not come to "abolish all evils here below, but to free men from the gravest slavery, sin, which...causes all forms of human bondage." (CCC 549) If you think about it, we are continually challenged by sin and we are often enslaved by it without being aware of its chains. One of the ways in which we sin, for example, is by failing to look out for the well-being of others and putting our own wants and desires ahead of all else in our lives. Sin is always there, and we must be vigilant in our efforts to resist it. And on those occasions when we sin and fall short, there is no reason to get down and demoralized. Rather, we need to simply turn to Jesus and ask for forgiveness and know that it will be granted. From there, with Jesus' help, we are to get up, dust ourselves off and get back to living as Jesus calls us to live.

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Thursday, March 17, 2016

(Lec. 254)

1) Genesis 17:3-9

2) John 8:51-59

THURSDAY OF

FIFTH WEEK

OF LENT

(Opt. Mem. Saint Patrick,

Bishop)

Gospel related: **CCC** 473, 574, 590

FOCUS: Trust in the Lord and his promises.

In today's readings, we hear two messages that defy all expectations. First, Abraham, an old man, will become a father, not only of one child but a *host of nations*. Second, Jesus reveals himself as God using the same words that our Lord spoke to Moses when he said, *before Abraham came to be, I AM* (cf Ex 3:14). How did people react? Abraham's wife laughed at the thought of him becoming a father, and the crowds listening to Jesus picked up stones to throw at him for making such a seemingly impossible statement.

While certain events that occur in our lives can be difficult to understand, we must be willing to accept them and understand they are part of God's plan. For example, in addition to finding out that he was going to become a father, Abraham learned about some of the other plans God had in store for him: a new name, an inheritance of land and a lineage that would include kings. Abraham could have thrown his arms up in disbelief or denied this could happen to him at his age; instead he trusted God. His acceptance established a covenant that has lasted through the ages. And today, we, too, share in this covenant as God's people.

The crowds listening to Jesus faced an even more radical message – that this man before them was God! He claimed to have existed before Abraham, one of their earliest religious fathers, and this defied their concept of time. He said to them, *whoever keeps my word will never see death* and referred to himself as *I AM*. These statements were interpreted as insane or blasphemous, given the crowd's reaction. In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes, "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher ... Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse." We, too, can either pick up rocks (metaphorically) or accept Jesus as the Son of God and receive his promise of eternal life.

Like Abraham and the crowds questioning Jesus, we can experience God working in our lives in wonderful and unexpected ways. We may be caught off-guard, wondering why these things happen to us. Today's readings teach us that sometimes the plans we have for our lives are not the same as God's plans. In his infinite wisdom, God sees the big picture not just for us, but for all of humanity. The messages we heard in today's readings didn't affect only Abraham and Jesus and the people around them; they were part of God's plan for eternal salvation. Rather than resist, we need to trust God. Through prayer and the Eucharist, we can find the strength and grace to open ourselves to the many and varied ways that God works in our lives.

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Friday, March 18, 2016

(Lec. 255)

1) Jeremiah 20:10-13

2) John 10:31-42

FRIDAY OF

FIFTH WEEK

OF LENT

(Opt. Mem. Saint Cyril
of Jerusalem, Bishop
and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 437, 444, 548, 574, 582, 589, 591, 594, 1562

FOCUS: We must be open to receiving from the Father our identity as his adopted children in Jesus Christ.

Are we ever guilty of making ourselves God? Do we believe that we are our own masters of the universe? Are we the ones in charge of our lives, do we sit upon the throne and order our lives according to our likes? Is God our Lord and are we his followers, or is he like a consultant for us, there when we need an outside opinion that we might listen to?

If you have not surrendered your life to God, then you should try it out. Pray a short prayer in your own words and give your life to Jesus. See what happens when you give an infinitely loving, and completely powerful God full permission to work in your life. It is guaranteed not to disappoint.

If you have already given your life to Christ, then continue to surrender. It is a lifelong decision. We need a constant commitment to give our lives to Jesus, to put our trust in him daily so we may come to share in the divine life of the Trinity and the many graces and gifts Christ wants to give us.

A share in Christ's divinity comes about by remembering that in baptism, we are given the divine life as a seed. It must grow as we mature, it must be watered by daily prayer. Our identity as children of God is learned by our personal relationship with him. And what happens when we follow Jesus and allow his life to grow in us? We are able to do the works of the Father. We are able to work miracles in the lives of those around us. Maybe they are small miracles – acts of love and kindness needed at difficult times – or maybe they are more powerful manifestations of God's love. Either way, God has shared his life with us, and he does not want it to be hidden, but wants us to reveal to the world that Jesus is Lord.

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Saturday, March 19, 2016

(Lec. 543)

1) 2 Samuel 7:4-5a,
12-14a, 16

2) Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22

3) Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a or Luke 2:41-51a

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 430, 437, 452, 486, 497, 503, 517, 531, 534, 583, 1507, 1846, 2196, 2599, 2666, 2812 **CSDC** 259, 378

**SAINT JOSEPH,
SPOUSE of the
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: Saint Joseph, fully devoted to Mary and Jesus, is our ideal spiritual father.

What an honor Joseph had! He was the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the greatest woman who ever lived, the Mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He was the foster father of Jesus. Could anyone but the holiest, most faith-filled, and strongest man possibly have filled such a role? It was a role that came with a heavy responsibility, though. God the Father chose this man – this simple carpenter from Bethlehem – and entrusted the care and protection of his own Son and his Blessed Mother to him. And Joseph couldn't have done a better job.

If there was ever an ideal example of strong holiness, Joseph was it. Perhaps we imagine that he was the “strong silent type.” He is never quoted as saying anything in the Gospels, but his holiness and his example for us lie in his faith and his actions, not his words.

Joseph was a man devoutly obedient to the Law of Moses, under which he and all other Jews of his time were called to live. That's why, upon hearing that Mary was pregnant with a child that was not biologically his own, he planned to break off their betrothal. But he planned to do so quietly, to protect her from the shame that society, mistakenly believing her to be an adulteress, would heap on her. Joseph was righteous, but not without the human element. He balanced devotion and respect for the moral law with compassion and humanity – certainly an example for all of us.

Joseph also was a man of faith and trust in God. When God's angel explained to him how Mary came to be with child, and told him that there was no reason not to take Mary as his wife, Joseph took Mary into his home. Today's Gospel reading tells us that he did this upon waking up at the angel's command – strongly suggesting that there was no doubt or hesitation in his mind. And this act of faith made Joseph, though he was not Jesus' father biologically, his father as recognized under Jewish law at the time. In human terms, at least, Joseph is rightly called not only the spouse of Mary – the title whose feast day we celebrate today – but also the father of Jesus. The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, as Saint Paul describes it, and thus Joseph is the “father figure,” so to speak, of the Church.

As we move forward this Lenten season and approach the celebration of Christ's passion and resurrection, let us ask the Blessed Virgin Mary and her spouse, Saint Joseph, to pray for us. Let us look to Joseph as the embodiment of righteousness applied with love, as a model of devotion to God and to the people entrusted to him, and as a true spiritual father for all of us.

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SUNDAY, MARCH 20, 2016

(Lec. 38)

Procession with Palms:

1) Luke 19:28-40 (Lec. 37)

Mass Readings:

1) Isaiah 50:4-7

2) Philippians 2:6-11

3) Luke 22:14—23:56 or 23:1-49

Gospel related: **CCC** 162, 333, 440, 441, 443, 532, 551, 552, 591, 596, 597, 607, 610, 611, 612, 621, 641, 643, 730, 765, 787, 894, 1011, 1021, 1130, 1151, 1328, 1339, 1365, 1381, 1403, 1429, 1570, 2045, 2266, 2600, 2605, 2612, 2616, 2635, 2806, 2824
CSDC 193, 379

**PALM SUNDAY
OF THE PASSION
OF THE LORD**

FOCUS: Together, we are all joined into the Suffering Servant.

This week we are with Christ, and taken into the mystery of evil. Without giving us answers as to why there is evil in the first place, we are led with Christ to deal with it head on. The ultimate mystery is that sin has led us all into rejection of God, a rejection that is the root cause of all human suffering – separation from the source of our happiness. All of us have sinned; all of us are accomplices in bringing evil, and the suffering that results from it, into our world.

How, then, are we to deal with it? Can we deal with evil apart from Christ? The events of Holy Week give us answers.

The voice in today's first reading is the voice of the Old Testament's Suffering Servant, the one who personifies not only the eventual Messiah, but also the one who represents Israel – the community of sufferers. Compassion is the primary virtue to be shared; it is a community activity. The very word "compassion" means "to suffer with," and therein rests the answer to the question of how we are to deal with suffering.

God knows of our powerlessness. Knowing of it, and loving us as he does, he came among us in compassion, to share in our suffering from the consequences of evil. God the Son, Jesus Christ, takes on our human condition by joining himself into our humanity, while at the same time empowering us to share in his life.

Let's remember that the medieval theologians referred to the whole corporate body of the baptized and confirmed as the "Mystical Body of Christ." At the same time, they referred to the Blessed Sacrament as the "Mystical Body of Christ." They recognized that the Eucharist makes the Church, while the Church makes the Eucharist. The Church does not come from the Bible, the Church comes from the Eucharist. Later on, the Church produced the Bible. Together, the baptized and confirmed receiving the Eucharist constitute the Mystical Body of Christ. Likewise, together we are all joined into the Suffering Servant. That is what the liturgies of Holy Week are all about.

In his letter to the Colossians, Saint Paul writes about suffering – his own suffering – while recognizing that he is talking about all who suffer: *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church...* (Col 1:24). In writing these words, Saint Paul is speaking of the solidarity we all share not only with each other, but our solidarity with Christ in his redemptive suffering.

Our psalm response today is taken from Psalm 22 with the words, *My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?* It is spoken repeatedly. Once again the voice is that of the Old Testament's Suffering Servant. But at the same time, those were the last words Jesus Christ uttered at the moment of his death on the cross. Truly, God has not shielded himself from the consequences of our sins, and the human suffering that results from it. He knows us through and through, and has compassion for us. He, in Christ, suffers with and for us.

But God's compassion turns into mercy, and opens up to us our eventual victory over sin, over suffering, and even over death itself. For as the early Christians sang in one of our earliest hymns:

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:5-11).

And so we now enter that week we call "holy" – a week that ends with us joining into Jesus Christ in his Easter glory.

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Monday, March 21, 2016

(Lec. 257)

1) Isaiah 42:1-7

2) John 12:1-11

Gospel related: **CCC 2449 CSDC 183**

MONDAY OF
HOLY WEEK

FOCUS: We are to root greed out of our lives so that we may pour ourselves out more fully in love and service to God and others.

The sin of greed, operative in so many different ways in the world, undermines the cause of justice. Today's Gospel shows that greed can cloak more serious sins: Judas criticized Mary's use of expensive oil to anoint the feet of Jesus, saying the it could have been sold for three hundred days wages to feed the poor. As the Gospel states, Judas said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief who used to steal from the money bag that provided for the needs of Jesus and his disciples.

Pope Francis, whose choice of a name reveals his option for the poor, has repeatedly spoken out for justice. He, too, sees greed as among the root causes of trouble and inequity in many societies.

Today's reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah is the first of four "servant songs": these are oracles in which the prophet tells of a person the Lord will raise up to bring about peace, justice and salvation for the world. During Holy Week, the Church sets before us Jesus as the fulfillment of these messianic prophecies. At the same time, she reminds us of the price Jesus paid in that fulfillment: Jesus identifies Mary's anointing as preparation for his burial.

Judas, as today's Gospel reading makes clear, was burdened by greed and selfishness – two serious sins that undoubtedly influenced his decision to betray Jesus. We need to regularly examine our lives and root out the sins of greed and selfishness, so that our light can shine, and we may lead lives that give a faithful witness to the Gospel. Rooting out greed and selfishness frees us to help build up God's kingdom of love, justice and peace in the world.

We can do this in small ways every day. Even seemingly inconsequential acts of practical charity can light up the lives of people who cross our paths. Smiles go a long way to lift others. In our homes, we can show patience and love to our children and spouses. Building upon that foundation, we can do works of charity in this Year of Mercy such as serving at a food shelter, visiting the sick and elderly, or becoming a pen pal to someone in prison.

Tuesday, March 22, 2016

(Lec. 258)

1) Isaiah 49:1-6

2) John 13:21-33, 36-38

Gospel related: **CSDC** 196, 580

TUESDAY OF

HOLY WEEK

FOCUS: Choosing to live as a faithful disciple of Jesus, and walking in his ways, makes all the difference.

In a famous poem *The Road Not Taken*, Robert Frost wrote:

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.”

This poem is a metaphor for the two different paths we can take in life. We can choose to use the gift of our free will to strive to love the Lord, walk in his ways and to do what is right by keeping his commandments. Or, we can use our free will to reject God and his love for us, and instead choose to lead our lives according to our sinful and selfish desires. When we think about the path we may have chosen to live, it is important to remember that it is seldom an either-or proposition.

For example, even though we may have made the choice to strive to serve the Lord and walk in his ways, most of us at one time or another get sidetracked and veer from the path. When this happens, we need not be disheartened but simply turn again to the Lord, who loves us unconditionally and is ever-willing to forgive. He will give us the grace, strength and guidance to set our feet again to walking the path that leads to eternal life. The same can be said for those who have chosen to reject the Lord's love, leading their lives according to their own selfish and sinful desires. If they come to the realization that they have chosen the wrong path, they need only turn to God for forgiveness and for the grace to get their lives on the path that leads to salvation. The Lord, in his love and mercy, will surely forgive the person and grant them the grace, gifts, strength and guidance to come out of the darkness and begin walking in the light of his love.

Lest we ever have any doubt, we need only think about all the things Jesus experienced during the course of his passion and death. He was betrayed by Judas, one of his closest followers. After his arrest, he was abandoned by most of the disciples. Ultimately, however, when Jesus rose from the dead, he loved and forgave his disciples, drawing them closer to himself. This brought about a change and transformation within them. After Jesus' ascension into heaven, the disciples were able to move forward, strengthened and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to give a faithful witness to the Gospel.

My friends, as we continue our Holy Week journey of faith, let us remember that even though choosing to live as disciples of Jesus can bring trials and tribulations, it is worth the cost. For in being faithful to Jesus, we will receive an abundance of blessings such as peace, joy, fulfillment and the hope of coming to share eternal life in heaven. So, this day and every day, let us choose to live as disciples of Jesus, trusting that choosing this path will make all the difference.

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Wednesday, March 23, 2016

(Lec. 259)

1) Isaiah 50:4-9a

2) Matthew 26:14-25

Gospel related: **CCC** 610, 1339

WEDNESDAY OF

HOLY WEEK

FOCUS: In times of distress, we can rely on our God to be our help and salvation.

On this day, on the threshold of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, we reflect on the last hours of his life. Today's Gospel reading recounts the betrayal of Jesus as well as the Last Supper. Jesus was going to die and leave his disciples for several days. But he would be raised from the dead on the third day, and return to them for forty days until he ascended into heaven.

For now, we see that his time is short on this earth. In looking at all of the things that happened to Jesus, it can still overwhelm us. His betrayal by one of his disciples can remind us of a time when we were betrayed by a trusted friend. His Last Supper can be reminiscent of a time that we felt certain something bad was going to happen to us.

Yet, the true message in all of this is that with Jesus, there is hope. His betrayal at the hands of Judas was part of God's plan of salvation. In our human nature, we can never fully understand the reason. It had to be this way for a reason known only to God. During the life of Jesus, he had spoken words that had healed many. He had performed signs that healed the sick and relieved many. Peter even remarked: *You have the words of everlasting life* (John 6:68). However, Jesus had to rely on God. We can see that God did not abandon Jesus. We will find out very soon how God glorified Jesus in the resurrection.

We, as disciples of Jesus, are to look at the bigger picture. For we believe that God is our help in times of trial and tribulation. When we carry our own crosses, God is with us. We seek the Lord's answer, and in his great love, he reveals himself in ways that we do not even realize. At times we may feel that we have to endure our betrayals alone. But we do not, because our God is with us.

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Thursday, March 24, 2016

(Lec. 39)

1) Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

2) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

3) John 13:1-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 423, 447, 520, 557, 609, 616, 622, 730, 1085, 1269, 1337, 1380, 1524, 1694, 1823, 2843 **CSDC** 484

**THURSDAY OF
HOLY WEEK
(HOLY THURSDAY)**

FOCUS: Jesus gives us the gift of himself in the Eucharist so that we may share his love with others through our everyday gestures of kindness.

Three questions are central to what this Mass is all about:

“Is God a God of love?” Most of the time, we would say “yes,” except perhaps during times of suffering in our lives. All of us, in those moments, may at times wonder whether or not God is a God of love. When we stand back and closely examine the question, however, we agree that God truly is a God of love.

“Does love seek union?” Isn’t it the inner nature and force of love to seek union with the beloved? I think we would all agree and answer the question with a strong “yes.”

“Has God come to us in Jesus Christ in order to join himself to us?” That is a theological question. Our Church is grounded on that truth. The sacraments of our Church exist in order to bring God to us and to bring us back to God in a profoundly deep and holy union.

Today is sometimes called "Maundy Thursday" (in Medieval Latin – *Mandatum* Thursday), from the root meaning "I give." This is the hour in which our Lord gives himself to us so that he can take us back to our Father in heaven. It is an hour during which we should take time out and reflect, pondering the awesome truth of God's giving of himself in total and humble love to us mere mortals.

Today is also the day when the Catholic Church celebrates what it means to be a priest. In every cathedral church throughout the world, a special liturgy called the Chrism Mass is devoted to the meaning of the priesthood.

In awesome silence we see in today’s Mass God the Son on his knees, washing our feet and giving himself over to us in utter powerlessness. Centuries ago, Saint Augustine said: “For you I am a bishop [priest], with you I am a Christian.” Those words inspire me.

A priest is most a priest when he humbly, and without self-centeredness or self-consciousness, washes the emotional and spiritual feet of those who come to him with the dust and the dirt of this world's roads clinging to them. He is fully a priest when he hands over his time, his comfort and all of his energies for the care of God's people – without counting the costs.

A priest is most a priest when he offers the holy sacrifice of the Mass. The priest is a loving priest when he hands over his life, his personal preferences and his convenience to devote himself to caring for those who come to him, as they came to Jesus, in their need. A priest is a humble priest when he gratefully accepts what's placed in front of him for his daily bread and is content with what God has given him. A priest is most a

priest when he forgets what he's going to get out of being a priest and simply, without regard for acclamation and human notoriety, does what God calls him to do.

“For you I am a bishop [priest], with you I am a Christian.” You and I can join hands and walk through the garden of Gethsemane into the garden of the resurrection, and, together in holy Communion, share Christ's life forever, both in this life and in the next.

Is God a God of love? Yes!

Does love seek union? Yes.

Has God come to us in Jesus Christ in order to join himself to us? Yes.

He is here, right now, for you and for me. Let him take you into his arms.

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Friday, March 25, 2016

(Lec. 40)

1) Isaiah 52:13—53:12

2) Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

3) John 18:1—19:42

Gospel related: **CCC** 217, 440, 478, 495, 501, 544, 549, 559, 575, 586, 595, 596, 600, 607, 608, 609, 624, 641, 694, 726, 730, 964, 1225, 1432, 2471, 2561, 2605, 2618, 2677, 2679

**FRIDAY
OF THE PASSION
OF THE LORD
(GOOD FRIDAY)**

FOCUS: Today's liturgy invites us to enter more deeply into Christ's passion and death, which defeated the power of sin and evil and brought about our salvation.

Today's liturgy of the Passion of the Lord Jesus is the second day of the Sacred Triduum, in which we celebrate anew and enter more deeply into the heart of paschal mystery. We celebrate the paschal mystery at every Mass, but do so more solemnly during the Triduum.

Writing seven hundred or so years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Isaiah foretells the advent of God's servant, who will be *raised high and greatly exalted*. This is the last of four oracles referred to as the "suffering servant" songs. Christians apply the image of the suffering servant to Jesus, the Christ. As we reflect on this passage, we begin to see the similarities between Isaiah's servant and the suffering Christ. Isaiah describes him as marred in appearance, spurned, avoided and held in no esteem. His servant submitted to his oppressors, was condemned and taken away to the slaughter. *Though he was harshly treated, he opened not his mouth*. His suffering was not in vain. He freely gave his life as an offering for our sins: *Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many*.

Today's account of the passion, according to Saint John, shows us the extent of the suffering that Jesus experienced for our sake. We see how Jesus, in humble obedience to the will of his Father and out of love for us, freely chooses to die on the cross for the sake of our salvation. Mindful and grateful for all that Christ endured for our salvation, may we seek to take up our cross and follow Jesus, without counting the cost. May we help build up God's kingdom on earth, giving faithful witness to the Gospel that helps bring others to Christ, so that we might one day come to share eternal life in heaven.

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Saturday, March 26, 2016

(Lec. 41)

HOLY SATURDAY

- EASTER VIGIL

Nine readings are assigned to the Easter Vigil: seven from the Old Testament, and two from the New. If circumstances demand in individual cases, the number of prescribed readings may be reduced. Three selections from the Old Testament, both from the Law and Prophets, should be read before the Epistle and Gospel. In any case, the reading from Exodus about the escape through the Red Sea (reading 3) should never be omitted.

- 1) Genesis 1:1—2:2 or 1:1, 26-31a
- 2) Genesis 22:1-18 or 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18
- 3) Exodus 14:15—15:1
- 4) Isaiah 54:5-14
- 5) Isaiah 55:1-11
- 6) Baruch 3:9-15, 32—4:4
- 7) Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28

New Testament Readings

8) Romans 6:3-11

9) Luke 24:1-12

Gospel related: **CCC** 626, 640, 641, 643, 652, 2174

FOCUS: Christ is risen. Alleluia! His resurrection gives meaning to our lives on earth and the promise of eternal life with him in heaven

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central event in the story of our humanity. Because of his resurrection, Christ is the central religious figure in all of human history. No other religious figure died and then rose from the dead.

The events of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday are at the core of all that constitutes the Catholic Church, as well as at the core of our central act of worship, the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

The events we relived this past Holy Week are not fables or myths. They are historical facts. Most of those close to Jesus gave up their lives in martyrdom because they witnessed these events and proclaimed them. The forces of evil tried and failed to silence and eliminate these witnesses, and we continue to see these forces at work in today's world.

The central fact is that the temporary tomb of Jesus became an empty tomb. Those who were with Christ when he died on the cross at first could not believe their eyes when they found the tomb empty. The Roman guards were terrified. The religious authorities plotted to spread a rumor that his body had been stolen. Even Thomas, a trusted Apostle, refused to believe unless and until he could touch Christ's wounds. However, the fact could not be overcome – he was risen.

Then there were Christ's post-resurrection appearances to his followers, a few of which are reported in the books of the New Testament. During the Masses of this coming week, the Church presents them in our liturgical readings. News of these events was also handed down verbally to friends, children, grandchildren and all who listened to their testimony.

The consequences of Christ's resurrection reverberate down through twenty centuries of human history to us now. They present us with our ultimate destiny, eternal life. Body and soul, we are constituted to be with our Father forever in heaven.

Our lives have meaning that no power on earth can either give us or take from us. The powers of darkness in our world have tried and failed. In our day, secularism and relativism are trying to wield power. They, too, will fail. In the end the central reality of Christ's resurrection from the dead shall overcome.

The chief consequences of Christ's resurrection, to my way of thinking, are consolation and hope. The empty tomb gives each one of us consolation and hope. We may fear death, but we are not terrorized by it. Because of Christ's resurrection, death was changed from being ultimate to being merely transitional.

Because Christ is risen, let all of us take hold of his presence, his power and his love among us. Countless saints have experienced his presence. Countless unrecognized holy ones have likewise experienced his presence, power and love.

And so to you who are newly baptized and confirmed, we greet you. Today we raise our voices with you in a shared "Alleluia!" and a shared communion of faith.

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SUNDAY, MARCH 27, 2016

(Lec. 42)

1) Acts 10:34a, 37-43

2) Colossians 3:1-4 or
1 Corinthians 5:6b-8

3) John 20:1-9 or
Luke 24:1-12 (Lec. 41)

Gospel related: CCC 515, 626, 640, 641, 643, 652, 2174

EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD - SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: Happy Easter! Let us surrender our hearts and our wills to our loving God, who offers us new life on earth and in heaven.

The good news we celebrate today is the fact that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. I deliberately use the word “fact” because in two thousand years, no scientific expedition has been able to discover the mortal remains of Jesus Christ. That is because his tomb is empty and there is no body to be found. The testimony of the eyewitnesses still stands. These witnesses went to their deaths proclaiming what we still proclaim: Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Alleluia.

Today is a day of glory and a day of hope for us all. God’s purpose and God’s will cannot be undone by human sin and rejection.

In his body here on earth, Christ Jesus suffered terribly. He was mocked, spit upon, terribly scourged, crowned with thorns, crucified, died and was buried. Today we celebrate the glorious fact of his resurrection from the dead.

We bear within us the hope that resurrection gives us. Our faith brings to us the truth that God has not abandoned us. God is bringing us into new life, and bringing new life to Christ’s body, the Church. God is calling us out of our tombs, as Christ called poor Lazarus into new life.

There is a reality, however, that must be faced when we enter into new life. All the wonderful feelings associated with new life must be balanced with the fact that what is new comes from what is old. To have what is new means we must let go of what is old, and this process can be painful.

Jesus Christ has made this journey. If we walk in his way, his truth and his life, he joins us in our journey, making his journey ours.

What was the key that unlocked the door of resurrection and new life for him? Let me suggest that it was *acceptance*. It was his surrender into the hands of the Father. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus cried out, *Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will* (Mk 14:36). Dying on the cross, Jesus cried out, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* (Lk 23:34). His last words were, *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit* (Lk 23:46).

Acceptance means surrender. It means letting go of a former way of life. We are not going to escape our Gardens of Gethsemane, nor are we going to escape our crosses.

The key to our success is to do what Jesus did – to surrender ourselves and our lives into the hands of our Father in heaven.

Today we celebrate the joyful news that Christ's hope is our hope, just as his faith in God is our faith in God. God our Father has given us power to enter into newer, better and happier lives no matter what the forces of darkness and evil have or will throw at us.

The only thing that stands in the way of happiness is our pride, our willfulness, our defiant selves who refuse to surrender control over our lives and place them in God's hands.

So, dear friends, today, give yourself all that God wants to give you by surrendering yourself to his powerful love. The forces of darkness and evil will throw themselves at you, but they cannot prevail.

May Easter's glory be with each one of you!

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Monday, March 28, 2016

(Lec. 261)

1) Acts 2:14, 22-33

2) Matthew 28:8-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 640, 641, 645, 654

MONDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The resurrection of Jesus is the source and reason for our hope.

A tradition in many churches is that Christians greet each other on Easter morning not with, "hello," or, "good morning," but with an affirmation of the resurrection. "He is risen," the first person says. All present respond happily, "He is risen indeed!"

We are in the Octave of Easter, an eight-day feast declared by the Church. Outside of ordinary time, the Easter season (which lasts a full fifty days until Pentecost) is the longest liturgical season. The celebration of the resurrection is the most significant moment in the Church calendar.

Time-honored advice suggests that any good speech or lesson should have three parts. First, tell them what you're going to tell them; second, tell them; third, tell them what you told them.

Through the liturgical calendar and the lectionary readings, the Church does something similar.

Lent, says the Church. Prepare your hearts. *Resurrection is going to be everything.*

Easter, says the Church. *Resurrection is everything.*

Ordinary time, says the Church. *Every Sunday we recall the Resurrection, the reason for everything.*

We are a resurrection people. Resurrection is our vocation and our reason for being. Today's Gospel recounts the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection, as well as attempts to discount it. Jesus knew that the resurrection was too important to be misunderstood. It wasn't enough for a few people to see the stone rolled away and Jesus standing in the garden. He appeared to his disciples and spoke with them. Over and over again until his ascension, Jesus appeared to countless people.

The Gospel tells us that even after his resurrection, the disciples were afraid and had doubts. Jesus responds to their worries with the great commission: *Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations.* And with a promise. *I am with you always, unto the end of the age* (Mt 28:16-20).

In the reading from Acts, we hear part of Peter's sermon at Pentecost. Newly filled with the spirit, Peter was unshackled from his fears and doubts and given the grace and gifts needed to boldly proclaim and preach the Gospel. To a crowd of unbelievers, Peter asserted a risen Christ to many witnesses. It was a radical claim upon which Peter risked everything. The Church has been preaching the resurrection ever since.

Resurrection is not just a tenet of our faith, it is our faith. Resurrection is our hope, our promise and our assurance. Easter reminds us: He is risen. He is risen indeed.

Tuesday, March 29, 2016

(Lec. 262)

1) Acts 2:36-41

2) John 20:11-18

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

TUESDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Saint Peter and Saint Mary Magdalene show us true discipleship.

In the first reading, we hear Saint Peter making the case to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah. One might wonder what a poor fisherman from Galilee might have said to convert and baptize three thousand people in one day. Maybe it was not so much his arguments that day, as the passion in his voice. Certainly, part of Peter's success is revealed in the events from the Gospel reading where we hear about Saint Mary Magdalene and her encounter with Jesus.

In the verses that come immediately before today's readings from the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene tells Peter and John that she saw that the stone had been rolled away when she went to visit the tomb early that morning. Saint John and Saint Peter run to the tomb, where they see the burial cloth on the ground. They come out, and then leave to go tell the others.

At the point that our Gospel reading picks up the narrative. Mary Magdalene is outside the tomb, weeping. She doesn't yet understand what has happened. After a time, she musters the courage to peek inside the tomb and sees two angels. Then the gardener, who is actually Jesus, appears behind her.

She asks him to take her to Jesus' body. She says, *I will take him*, meaning she will bring his body back to the tomb. Jesus reveals himself to her and tells her to go give a message to the apostles. Then Mary brings them the good news that Jesus has risen from the dead and that she saw him. Saint Mary Magdalene, the first announcer of the good news, shows us the heart of a disciple, the same heart that helped Peter convert so many.

Let us pray, then, that we might all follow the example of love for Jesus shown by Saint Peter and Saint Mary Magdalene – a love that can compel us to preach the Gospel undaunted.

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Wednesday, March 30, 2016
(Lec. 263)

- 1) Acts 3:1-10
- 2) Luke 24:13-35

Gospel related: **CCC** 112, 439, 552, 555, 572, 601, 640, 641, 643, 645, 652, 659, 710, 1094, 1166, 1329, 1347, 2625

WEDNESDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus is present in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Your best friend and teacher has died. You are beside yourself with grief, confusion and fear. You thought he was the leader who would overthrow the Romans in Jerusalem and restore the Promised Land to Israel. Instead, they crucified him and he died. How sorrowful and lonely you feel. You and Cleopas are walking to Emmaus. While on the road, you are discussing the recent events and arguing about the meaning of Jesus' death.

Suddenly, you are approached by a man who asks why you are so distressed. You cannot help but feel shock that this person seems to know nothing about the recent events in Jerusalem. Perhaps a bit perturbed, you ask him what was the meaning of all this and surprisingly, he starts teaching the Scriptures about the Messiah coming to redeem Israel. Curious, you invite him to eat with you and he accepts. He takes the bread at the meal, blesses it and gives it to you. It is at that moment when you both see who really is there with you – it is Jesus! Then he vanishes!

This is what happened in Emmaus. In the midst of the two disciples' bewilderment, Jesus appeared. But it wasn't until the breaking of the bread that they realized it was Jesus in his resurrected body. On Holy Thursday, Jesus broke the bread and told them it was his body. And now, three days later, he gave them the bread once again. They went from sadness to joy in a moment when they realized it was Jesus.

What can we learn from this? Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist on Holy Thursday. He told his disciples that the bread was his body and the wine was his blood. We celebrate this sacrament every time we come to Mass. Just like the disciples in Emmaus, we see and receive Christ in the consecrated bread and wine during Communion. We enter into oneness with him when we eat the bread and drink the wine. It is never to be taken for granted, because we are receiving Jesus. He is our Risen Lord who comes to us just as literally as he came to his disciples. Our hearts are to be filled with wonder, praise and joy because he loves us so much that he gives us the gift of himself in holy Communion.

He gives us this gift so that we may be drawn closer to him, that we may be raised up to a newer and fuller life in him, and given the grace and strength we need to lead lives of Christ-like love and service to others. Ultimately, others will have an opportunity to come to know about Jesus through the witness and example of our lives, so that we may one day come to share eternal life in heaven with our savior Jesus and the rest of the saints.

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Thursday, March 31, 2016

(Lec. 264)

1) Acts 3:11-26

2) Luke 24:35-48

Gospel related: **CCC** 108, 112, 572, 601, 627, 641, 644, 645, 652, 702, 730, 981, 999, 1120, 1122, 1304, 2605, 2625, 2763 **CSDC** 52, 491

THURSDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Encounter with the Risen Christ leads disciples to proclaim the good news.

Peter and John healed a crippled man who had been begging alms in the Temple area. People were amazed, and Peter took the opportunity to proclaim the message of salvation to them. Peter told the people God healed the man in the name of Jesus, his Son. This very same Son of God, Jesus, whom they had rejected and crucified. But Peter did not blame the people. He excused them, saying they acted out of ignorance. Peter further claimed that Jesus was the prophet proclaimed by Moses to be his equal, and Moses was the greatest law-giver of the Israelites.

Peter and John and the rest of the disciples were able to go forward and boldly proclaim the Gospel and bring Christ's healing and saving love to others. They were empowered by their encounters with the Risen Lord. Jesus appeared to the disciples numerous times over the course of forty days so they could grasp that he had really risen from the dead. Jesus also appeared to his disciples to open the Scriptures to them so they could fully understand why it was necessary for him to suffer, die and rise from the dead to bring about salvation.

Before, they had often faltered in their faith and failed to understand what Jesus was trying to teach them about how he was to bring about salvation. After their encounters with the Risen Christ, they understood the necessity of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection for the salvation of humankind. With the gift of the Holy Spirit, they were able to go forward to boldly preach and teach the Gospel, and to bring Christ's healing and saving love to others.

Similarly, each of us has been given new life in Christ through our baptism. Each time we gather for Mass, the Risen Lord Jesus speaks to us as the word of God is preached and proclaimed. Hearing the Risen Lord speak to us, we grow in our knowledge and love for him, enabling us to live our faith in Jesus more fully.

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