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NOTE: When the Ascension of the Lord is celebrated on the following Sunday, the Second Reading and Gospel from the Seventh Sunday of Easter (see Lec. 61) may be read on the Sixth Sunday of Easter.

SUNDAY, MAY 1, 2016

**SIXTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

(Lec. 57)

- 1) Acts 15:1-2, 22-29
- 2) Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23
- 3) John 14:23-29

Gospel related: **CCC** 243, 244, 260, 263, 692, 729, 1099, 2466, 2615, 2623 **CSDC** 70, 491, 516

FOCUS: We never walk alone.

It has been six weeks since we celebrated our Lord's resurrection, but the story did not end there. For the past six weeks, we have walked with the risen Lord, and next week we will celebrate his Ascension into heaven. Jesus' Ascension obviously marked the end of his earthly life. However, we never walk alone. Jesus continues to be present to us in all times and all places by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus also is present to us through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Jesus gives us the gift of himself – body, blood, soul and divinity – that we might grow in faith and holiness of life.

With this as our backdrop, it is easy to understand why the disciples didn't want Jesus to leave them. They were afraid, and they had had no idea what they would do next. But Jesus told them, *Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.* It was time for him to return to the Father. He assured them, *The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything.* They would never walk alone.

A few days later, he ascended in their sight. For the next nine days they prayed, and on the feast of Pentecost, their prayers were answered. The Holy Spirit descended upon them with tongues of fire. Filled with the same Spirit, they went out and preached the good news of Christ's resurrection. In that moment, a confused gathering of ordinary, faithful Jews – who had little if any formal education – became the Church. And the world was never the same.

We are the Church – quite likely as average as the first disciples of Jesus, and, without him, every bit as confused. We, at times, deny him as Peter did. We, at times, doubt him as Thomas did. We, at times, might wish him to rain fire on our enemies, as James and John did. We, at times, panic at the first sign of trouble, as all the Apostles did.

How does Jesus respond? He loves us, and he never abandons us. We are each “the beloved disciple” in his eyes, and he fills us with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Filled with this grace, the Church has gone around the world, bringing billions of people to the light of Christ. This is the most amazing accomplishment in human history, and it began with a few courageous people who took the risk and followed Jesus. It continues today. The Spirit is among us and goes forth with us.

A little more than seven weeks ago, many Catholics around the world prayed for nine days, from Good Friday until Divine Mercy Sunday. This novena is a recent practice, a gift from our Lord to Saint Faustina Kowalska that was highly commended by Saint John Paul II. But the practice of nine days of prayer dates back to the birth of the Church, when the Apostles prayed for the Holy Spirit to come to them as Jesus promised. I commend this novena to you today. Beginning this Friday, pray each day for the Holy Spirit who dwells in the Church to fill you with graces so that you may proclaim the Gospel.

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Monday, May 2, 2016
(Lec. 291)

- 1) Acts 16:11-15
- 2) John 15:26—16:4a

MONDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK OF EASTER
(OBL. MEM. Saint Athanasius,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 244, 248, 263, 692, 719, 729, 1433, 2671 CSDC 39

FOCUS: The Holy Spirit helps us bear witness to Jesus.

In the movie *Gravity*, Sandra Bullock portrays a woman stranded in space. When her attempts to return to earth fail, she prepares to give up. Suddenly, her deceased fellow astronaut, played by George Clooney, appears beside her. He encourages her not to quit and guides her toward earth. When we are in trouble, wouldn't it be nice if someone like George Clooney came to assist us? We do have such a helper, albeit an invisible one – the Holy Spirit.

At the Last Supper, Jesus promised to send the Spirit from the Father. He referred to this Spirit as the *Paraclete*, a Greek word that means “someone called to be at the side.” Synonyms are comforter, counselor and advocate. The Spirit would bear witness to Jesus and help us bear witness. We were baptized by water and the Spirit. The Spirit came to dwell in us. Because the Father, the Son and the Spirit are one, the Trinity lives in us. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, through whom Jesus keeps his promise to be with us forever. The Holy Spirit helps us bear witness to Jesus in the face of persecution.

Coincidentally, today we remember Saint Athanasius, who developed our understanding of the Holy Spirit. During the fourth century, people were denying the divinity of Jesus. Saint Athanasius not only defended that belief, but taught that the Holy Spirit was God and coequal to the Father and the Son. Saint Athanasius was exiled five times. No doubt the Holy Spirit helped him keep the faith through difficult times.

The Holy Spirit is often ignored by believers. Yet the Holy Spirit can be a powerful ally and friend. Pray to the Holy Spirit before making a critical phone call, when facing a major decision, before a job interview, in the midst of an argument, when suffering a tragedy, or when in need of inspiration. Is your faith ever shaken? Pray to the Holy Spirit.

Above all, as we strive to live and spread faith in Jesus, we are to call upon the Holy Spirit. The Spirit came upon the Apostles as wind and flames, giving them courage to speak boldly. That same Spirit lives and works within each of us. We must cooperate with the grace and action of the Holy Spirit working within us, and be attentive to the promptings of the Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit will be more fully manifested in our lives. Our lives will be set on fire for the Lord, enabling us to bear a more faithful and effective witness to the Gospel.

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Tuesday, May 3, 2016
(Lec. 561)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 15:1-8
- 2) John 14:6-14

Gospel related: CCC 74, 459, 470, 516, 1698, 2466, 2614, 2633, 2815 CSDC 1, 555, 28

**SAINTS PHILIP AND JAMES,
APOSTLES
- FEAST**

FOCUS: The Apostles are the foundation of our faith life. They were commissioned by Christ to preach the good news of salvation to the world.

Prior to the beginning of today's Gospel passage, Jesus begins a lengthy conversation with his disciples by telling them he is leaving. He says that he is going to prepare a place for them. As they heard these words, they must have felt confused and fearful. After all, they still had a lot to learn from him. Jesus tries to alleviate such fears by saying that they know where he is going. Thomas speaks out: *Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?*

Today's Gospel passage continues the conversation. Jesus responds to Thomas by saying, *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* Philip, whose feast we celebrate today, wants more proof. He asks Jesus to show them the Father. Jesus responds patiently, spelling out the significance of what he has just said. He tells them that when they understand the meaning of his life and make it their own, they will know the Father. They will realize that he is the only begotten Son of the Father who became flesh for the salvation of the world.

In the reading from the first letter to the Corinthians, it is evident that the disciples grasped what Jesus was saying to them in the Gospel. Paul speaks about his own calling to be an Apostle. It centers on his belief that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose from the dead on the third day. After his resurrection, he appeared to Peter and other Apostles. Then he appeared to five hundred disciples and to James, whose feast we celebrate today. Paul knows that the Corinthian community has accepted these teachings. He asks them to hold fast to these beliefs, because they are the foundation of their faith.

In the Nicene Creed, we profess our faith in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Then we declare our belief in "one holy, catholic and apostolic Church." Why do we use the word "apostolic"? The Church's foundation is built upon the teaching and preaching of the Apostles, who were privileged to be in the intimate company of Jesus. It is evident from today's readings that they were among the first to become followers of Jesus and to develop a significant relationship with him. That is why our Catholic Christian beliefs are rooted in the faith, teaching and preaching of the Apostles. These Apostles are not simply a distant memory. They live on through our bishops, who are the successors to the Apostles. They have been given the sacred trust of being the chief shepherds of God's people, and preserving and passing on the faith.

Wednesday, May 4, 2016

(Lec. 293)

1) Acts 17: 15, 22—18:1

2) John 16:12-15

Gospel related: CCC 91, 243, 244, 485, 687, 690, 692, 729, 1117, 1287, 2466, 2615, 2671 CSDC 29, 104

WEDNESDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK OF EASTER

FOCUS: The message of Jesus Christ needs to be proclaimed in a bold and courageous manner to everyone.

In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Paul is on his second missionary journey. His travels take him to Athens, a cultural center in the Mediterranean. While waiting for Silas and Timothy to arrive, he is shocked to see so much idolatry in such a sophisticated city. He starts having discussions with various people. Even though they find his words quite strange, they invite him to address the council. He realizes that if he could win the Athenians over to accepting the message of Christ, it would have far-reaching effects. He then journeys into the heart of the city and speaks to the assembly.

Paul chooses to speak about the knowledge of God, a popular theme during that period. He takes his cue from an altar dedicated to an “unknown” god. He realizes that this sort of dedication was the people’s way of making certain that none of the Greek gods were left out of their worship.

Paul spells out just who this “unknown” God really is. He states that this is the God who made the world and all that lives. He is the Lord who encompasses the heavens and the earth, giving life and breath to everything and everyone. Therefore, God is not limited to sanctuaries. While the people listen intently, some begin to mock Paul when he speaks about resurrection from the dead. Belief in the Resurrection was strongly resisted. It becomes clear that many were interested only in intellectual speculation rather than entering into a religious and spiritual encounter.

There were very few converts in Athens. Based on this disappointing experience, Paul decides to rely more strongly on the power of the Gospel message. In making this decision, Paul allows the message of today’s Gospel to grow stronger in him. In the Gospel, we heard Jesus say that the Spirit of truth would guide the Apostles. Such guidance is still needed, because the preaching of the Gospel first undertaken by Paul and the other Apostles has not ended. Rather, it continues through the work of the Church, which will proclaim the Gospel message to the world until the day when Jesus returns in glory to fully establish God’s kingdom.

We also need the constant guidance of the Holy Spirit so that we can remain faithful to the truth that has been given to us, and so we can learn how to share it more fully with others.

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NOTE: Regarding the Ascension of the Lord, the ecclesiastical provinces of Boston, Hartford, New York, Newark, Omaha, and Philadelphia have retained its celebration on the proper Thursday, while all other provinces have transferred this solemnity to the Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 8. If transferred, Thursday, May 5, is observed as an Easter Weekday. The following readings are used: Acts 18:1-8/John 16:16-20 (Lec. 294).

Thursday, May 5, 2016

(Lec. 58)

- 1) Acts 1:1-11
- 2) Ephesians 1:17-23
or Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:19-23
- 3) Luke 24:46-53

Gospel related: **CCC** 112, 627, 652, 659, 730, 981, 1120, 1122, 1304 **CSDC** 52

**THE ASCENSION
OF THE LORD
- SOLEMNITY**
(Holy Day of Obligation)

FOCUS: God's promise holds fast over time, place and circumstance – giving us the hope of salvation.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Ascension of the Lord. This feast commemorates the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, and is intimately tied in with another feast we will celebrate in just a few days: Pentecost. In the Ascension, something of the earth – the fullness of Jesus' humanity – moves into the heavenly sphere. The *Catechism* says this: "[it is] the irreversible entry of his humanity into divine glory, symbolized by the cloud and by heaven, where he is seated from that time forward at God's right hand." (CCC 659) At Pentecost, a bit of that heavenly sphere – the Holy Spirit – descends into our earthly existence, manifesting the fullness of the triune God into creation. In these events, we have a glimpse of the perfect reconciliation between creator and creation. While we will not focus further today on Pentecost, its relationship to the Ascension is important – especially as it is foretold in the Scriptures we just heard.

In the last moments of Jesus' earthly ministry, he offers assurance to his followers that they will not be lost without him physically present. He promises that they will have the power to publicly profess faith in him as Lord. Immediately before ascending, Jesus tells his disciples to wait for the promise of the Father to be fulfilled: *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

It is probable that the disciples had no idea of the power of the Holy Spirit. Even with nearly two thousand years of Church history and tradition, we probably do not, either! But we can appreciate the importance and unmerited grace of the promise itself. The reason: The Church exists, and in the year 2015, there are billions of believers. Despite the passage of time, the hope of salvation gained for us by Jesus' death and resurrection continues to burn brightly.

The promise made to the disciples was not just for that moment, and not just for them. It was for all of us, for the rest of history. From that moment forth, no matter our time, circumstance or place of birth, the promise would be kept – there would be a constant outpouring of the Spirit into the world, awakening our hearts to faith.

Today – two thousand years removed from the earthly presence of Jesus Christ – hearts are newly awakened to faith every day. We celebrate the Eucharist and profess our faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We believe in and hope for the salvation of the world.

God has kept his promise. Let us hold up our end of the bargain, keeping our hearts open to the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our world.

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***Optional Homily for May 5, 2016**

Thursday, May 5, 2016
(Lec. 294)

- 1) Acts 18:1-8
- 2) John 16:16-20

THURSDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK OF EASTER

FOCUS: Christ's victory over death assures us that sin and pain will not have the final say.

Have you ever cleaned a child's small cut? No matter how much we prepare them by telling them "this may sting," they are shocked when it does and they cry out from the pain. It's often our hope that preparing them for the sting will decrease the pain. Inevitably, it still hurts. We are not powerful enough to take away the pain, but in our love, we enfold them in a tender embrace as they shed their tears. We will often caress their cheeks and rock them gently until their tears begin to dissipate.

This preparation of sorts demonstrates to the child that he or she can trust that we understand their hurt and are willing to try to ease their pain as best we can. It makes it clear that we are present in their pain. Our words of preparation are expressions of love and compassion for the child. Our hugs and caresses are evidence that love is strong enough to contain the pain.

Christ's words in today's Gospel are words of preparation offered in love and compassion. He is preparing those whom he loves for the coming days of his passion, death and resurrection. He understands the fear and pain they will encounter. He offers them words of encouragement: *your grief will become joy*. He does not tell them it won't hurt. It will hurt, but they need not fear it. Jesus assures them that they will see him again. They only need to believe in him, to have faith that it will indeed be so.

As Catholics, we are witnesses to this truth, especially as we continue to celebrate the Easter season. Our Eucharistic celebration today recognizes Christ's victory over death and our redemption. We have faith that sin and pain do not have the final say; grief is indeed turned into joy. However, at times, our inclination can be to avoid pain and grief. We can be led to believe that we should always be happy and if we are not, something is wrong with us. This is not the case. The more we attempt to construct a life of constant happiness, the more we come to depend on "things" to feed our misguided desire.

We, like the injured child, face our pain and sorrow by turning to someone who loves us to tend to our wounds – Jesus Christ. His words in today's Gospel express the tender assurance that by placing our trust in him and holding firm to our faith, we will heal. Our grief will become joy. Alleluia indeed!

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Friday, May 6, 2016
(Lec. 295)

- 1) Acts 18:9-18
- 2) John 16:20-23

Gospel related: **CCC** 2615

FRIDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK OF EASTER

FOCUS: In the midst of pain, there is an underlying joy that has its foundation in a faith-filled life.

In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Paul is having success in his missionary work in Corinth. In a vision, the Lord encourages him to keep preaching the Gospel. So Paul stays in this city for quite a while. During this time, some of the Jews who opposed him bring Paul to civil court. They accuse him of advocating a religion that is not recognized by Roman law.

The case is heard by Gallio, the proconsul. After listening to their arguments, Gallio decides that they are fighting about religious issues. He states that he has no competence or interest in the case, enraging those who brought it before him. They respond by beating a man named Sosthenes. Gallio ignores this deplorable response. Despite this, Paul continues preaching.

Perhaps Paul and other members of the early Church were able to share the message of Christ because they had taken to heart the message conveyed in today's Gospel reading. It speaks about the sorrow they will experience when Jesus suffers and dies. It also conveys the joy they will know when Jesus rises from the dead. Jesus compares such experiences to a woman who will soon give birth. She suffers during delivery, but is utterly happy once her child is born. The disciples will go through a similar experience.

The passage adds the promise that when Jesus sees them again, they will experience the sort of joy that no one can take away from them. It does not mean that there will be no more suffering. It means that those who commit their lives to the Lord will know that pain and joy are not incompatible. Rather, they go hand in hand with living as disciples of Jesus and sharing the good news of salvation. Let us pray that we might come to more fully realize that, in spite of the inevitable trials that come our way, we will know a deep, underlying joy that comes from living as faithful disciples of Jesus.

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Saturday, May 7, 2016
(Lec. 296)

- 1) Acts 18:23-28
- 2) John 16:23b-28

Gospel related: **CCC** 661, 2615, 2795, 2815

SATURDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus reveals who he is, and what he wants to do for us.

Jesus is speaking to his Apostles at the Last Supper. This is not just an ordinary conversation, but special words for a solemn moment. He reveals to them, and to us who hear these words many generations later, things that had been hidden since the beginning of the world. So, listen up! You won't hear this from anybody else, or anywhere else.

Jesus, the only begotten Son of the Father, who became flesh for the sake of our salvation, has the words of eternal life. *Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.* Ask and you shall receive. God wants to give us joy – isn't that marvelous!

What are we to make of this? At one time or another, we've all had the experience of feeling our prayers are unanswered. Well, Jesus isn't giving us some magic formula so we can "twist God's arm" and get whatever we want. "In the name of Jesus I want a Lamborghini, a red one" – or a new house, or big bank balance. No, asking in the name of Jesus means asking while we are united with him and his holy will. That way we will be asking what God wants to give us and what is best for us.

He goes on to assure us: *For the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have come to believe that I came from the Father and have come into the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.* In this way, Jesus prepares the Apostles for his resurrection from the dead and his Ascension.

John begins his Gospel with these tremendous words: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* (Jn 1:1) Jesus came to reveal this to us, and now, mission almost accomplished, he prepares to return to his Father in heaven.

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NOTE: In those places where the observance of the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord has been transferred to this day, the Mass and readings of the Ascension are used: Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23 or Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:19-23; Luke 24:46-53.

SUNDAY, MAY 8, 2016

**SEVENTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

(Lec. 61)

- 1) Acts 7:55-60
- 2) Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20
- 3) John 17:20-26

Gospel related: **CCC** 260, 589, 690, 729, 820, 877, 2749, 2750, 2751, 2821 **CSDC** 34

FOCUS: Prayer, with the assistance of God's grace, helps us to have hearts that are ever-willing to forgive.

We hear many answers to the question, "Who was Jesus?" Some people say he was a great preacher who called the poor blessed and promised the world to the meek. Others remark about the amazing miracles he performed, healing those who were sick, calming the stormy sea, and multiplying fish and bread to feed thousands. For Christians, Jesus is Savior and Redeemer, Brother and Shepherd.

One of the most persistent themes in the Gospels is Jesus as forgiver and reconciler. This is of utmost importance for us if we want to imitate Jesus. In the most basic prayer Jesus taught, we ask for forgiveness to the same degree that we are willing to forgive. Time and again people came to Jesus to be cured of their ailments, and the first act of Jesus was to forgive their sins.

The first words Jesus spoke to the paralyzed man whose friends lowered him through an opening in the roof were words of forgiveness. (Lk 5:20) Restoring the man's ability to walk seemed to be of less importance than restoring him to right relationship with God. The scribes and Pharisees tried to trap Jesus by presenting a case before him of a woman caught in adultery. Would Jesus agree with the law of Moses and condemn the woman to be stoned? When faced with the question of personal sin, no one was willing to cast the first stone. Jesus dismissed the woman without condemnation. (Jn 8:11)

Peter's generous offer to forgive his brother seven times was dismissed by Jesus as inadequate. We are to forgive seventy times seven. Jesus concludes his teaching about the merciless official who begged forgiveness for his debt, but was ready to imprison those indebted to him, with the warning: *So will my heavenly father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart.* (Mt 18:35)

As we proclaimed the passion during Holy Week, we surely heard the words of Jesus forgiving even those who condemned and crucified him. Today, we heard Stephen echo that forgiveness, even as he lay dying beneath the stones thrown by his attackers. How must those words have struck the bystanders? Perhaps some went away with forgiveness in their hearts.

To have a forgiving heart is a goal for each of us. When we hold a grudge, it hurts our own well-being. We can become bitter and hard, and the object of our disdain may well feel nothing. Once in a while in the news, we may hear of parents able to forgive the murderer of their child, or a spouse willing to forgive a wrong that threatens a marriage. We may even admire such actions and wonder if we would be capable of such generous deeds. Jesus said that whatever we ask in prayer, if we believe that we will receive it, we will. It is possible to have a forgiving heart, if we pray for it.

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Monday, May 9, 2016

(Lec. 297)

1) Acts 19:1-8

2) John 16:29-33

Gospel related: **CCC** 1808

MONDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK OF EASTER

FOCUS: Those who believe in Jesus will be filled with the Holy Spirit and be at peace in the world.

In the 1970s, UCLA basketball coach John Wooden became known as the “Wizard” because of his incredible success. His players were like his disciples. He coached them and drilled them in the discipline of his method of playing the game. Under him, you might say they conquered the basketball world, winning a record 10 NCAA championships in 12 years. Players and coaches under his instruction went on to great success years later. That success is only on a secular level, however. How much greater is the good news that Jesus has conquered the world!

In today’s Gospel, Jesus told his disciples that he would be leaving them, but they were to be at peace because he had conquered the world. How is this possible? How is it that what Jesus did while he was still with us would matter after he left?

In our first reading, Paul is on a journey. He comes across a group of believers. He asks them: Have you received the Holy Spirit? They had not, so he baptized them in the name of Jesus and they began to prophesy.

Far greater than the words of a great coach are the words of the great teacher, Jesus.

Far greater than the human spirit of a coaching wizard is the Holy Spirit, who truly lives in us.

By the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, mind and souls, we truly can conquer the world in the name of Jesus. But the kingdom of God that Jesus ushered in and established is not a worldly crown. Rather, it is a kingdom of justice, love, salvation and peace. For us to experience the riches of God’s kingdom, God’s love must reign in our lives and hearts. We will then be moved by the power of the Spirit to help build up God’s kingdom on earth.

We can have peace as we go forth to build up the kingdom of God on earth. Though many may reject us, we will never be alone. The Spirit of God will be in us as the Father and the Son are one. As Jesus prayed, *Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are one.* (Jn 17:11).

We are also to be confident as we go forward to give a faithful witness to the Gospel – that Christ who has conquered the world and who is with us by the power of the Spirit will give us the grace to overcome the obstacles we encounter along the way.

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Tuesday, May 10, 2016
(Lec. 298)

- 1) Acts 20:17-27
- 2) John 17:1-11a

TUESDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Damien de Veuster,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 217, 589, 684, 730, 1069, 1085, 1721, 1996, 2604, 2746, 2747, 2749, 2750, 2751, 2758, 2765, 2812, 2815, 2849 CSDC 122

FOCUS: As Jesus and his saints gave everything, we ask the Lord daily for the grace to do the same.

A person's last words are often treasured. They seem to echo beyond their final breath and thus remain very powerful. For this reason, Scripture gives us the last words of many of its most important figures. Today we hear what can be considered the part of the final testaments of Jesus and Paul to their disciples. These verses are personal and rich, offering us much to ponder and meditate upon.

In our Gospel, we hear Jesus praying to his heavenly Father. He senses the culmination of his work: *I glorified you on earth by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do.* He places his disciples into his Father's hands. He no doubt possessed the grace to do the will of his Father until the end, yet still had to choose to do it even though he knew what was to come.

In our first reading, Paul is on his way to Jerusalem, having been *compelled by the Spirit*, and places his life into God's hands. He will be put on trial and, after an appeal to Rome, martyred. The heart of his words describe just how far he has come since the days when he persecuted the Church he now serves: *Yet I consider life of no importance to me, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear witness to the Gospel of God's grace.*

This is the culmination of a life of conversion. As John the Baptist so aptly put it: *He must increase; I must decrease.* (Jn 3:30) It is no small wonder that Paul was able to give his physical life in martyrdom, in imitation of his Lord. We do not know whether we will be called to the witness of martyrdom. But we do know that we are called to entrust everything to the Lord, and be prepared to give our life should it be requested of us. This is the essence of doing the Father's will, and it is present in the life of every saint.

When we come to the end of our lives, what will be our testament, our parting words? Will we be able to say, with Paul, *I served the Lord with all humility?* Let us pray for the grace to be able to answer "yes," having led lives in which we have served the Lord with humility and sincerity of heart. As we come forward to receive holy Communion, let us recommit ourselves to doing the will of God and placing our lives into the hands of the Lord.

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Wednesday, May 11, 2016
(Lec. 299)

WEDNESDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK OF EASTER

1) Acts 20:28-38

2) John 17:11b-19

Gospel related: CCC 611, 858, 2466, 2747, 2749, 2750, 2812, 2815, 2821, 2849, 2850 CSDC 18

FOCUS: The follower of Christ, like Paul's followers, can move forward in the knowledge of God's love and the gift of courage.

Nobody likes goodbyes, especially when they know they will never be reunited. Imagine being among Paul's followers in Ephesus as the situation is described in the Acts of the Apostles. They knew that *they would never see his face again*. Now imagine Paul, desperately trying to impart that last bit of advice to them about the need to stay vigilant, as his voice is raised in love and concern for the people he spent three years laboring over. Knowing his people were going to face very hard times, Paul packs his goodbye with countless warnings.

"Watch yourselves, and everyone else. You have been appointed by the Holy Spirit for this work. Jesus, with his own blood, died for you. Be aware that after I am gone, you will be tried, even by people you know. These men are going to pervert the truth in an effort to lead people away from you and from Jesus."

Paul warned them not to forget his time with him and the model he left for them in his life's work. He reminded them that it is through the word of God that they are appointed and sustained.

Paul further tells the presbyters of the Church that they must work on behalf of those who are weak, giving more than they receive. The parting scene is painful to consider, with everyone throwing their arms around Paul, weeping and very distressed. Clearly, he loved them, and was loved by them. The desperation of the situation is evident. For us today, there is much in Paul's goodbye speech that we would be wise to pay attention to.

We, too, have been called God, and we, too, have much work to do. Likewise, we should also tread cautiously so as not to be led astray by the familiar. Whether it is the culture tugging at us in temptation, or our own forgetfulness over the distance of centuries, it is good to recall the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John today. He assures his Father that he protects us, guards us and will not lose us. These are comforting words in difficult times. Knowing we are saved by Jesus, with whom we are one as he is one with the Father, and knowing that we are deeply loved by him as he is loved by the Father, we receive great encouragement to continue on and persevere in faith amidst the challenges we face in life.

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Thursday, May 12, 2016
(Lec. 300)

- 1) Acts 22:30; 23:6-11
- 2) John 17:20-26

THURSDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem. Saints
Nereus and Achilleus, Martyrs;
Saint Pancras, Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 260, 589, 690, 729, 820, 877, 2749, 2750, 2751 CSDC 34

FOCUS: Jesus prayed for the disciples before undergoing his trial. Likewise, he is ever-present for his faithful.

“I’ve got your back” is a common expression these days. It is an expression of support, letting another person know that we’re with them. No matter how strong our faith, all of us occasionally need to be reminded that Jesus “has our back.” Through the hustle and bustle of modern life, and particularly when we go through trying times, it’s all too easy to forget that the Lord is with us. Today’s reading serves as a reminder.

In today’s Gospel, we hear Jesus praying for his disciples following the Last Supper. Jesus had just finished speaking to the disciples at length – encouraging them to remain strong in the faith, and warning them of the trials and persecution they would face on account of him. Now he is praying to the Father, with the disciples still present and overhearing him. One can only imagine how strengthening, how inspiring, how spiritually powerful it must have been for the disciples to hear Jesus, son of God, pray these words on their behalf: *that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you ... that where I am they also may be with me.* Overhearing this prayer, the disciples could take strength from knowing that Jesus “had their back.”

Jesus’ prayer extends beyond the disciples. He prays *not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.* Every Christian, including each of us, has come to believe in Christ through the words and acts of those original Apostles. Their missionary activity and preaching gained more converts and disciples, who in turn gained more converts and disciples, and so on, right up to today.

This is a powerful thought as we receive Communion today. The body and blood of Christ, by which Jesus promised to be with us forever, is in the form of bread and wine consecrated and distributed by a priest ordained by a bishop. He in turn was ordained by a bishop, who himself was ordained by one, all the way back to the original Apostles, who were ordained by Christ himself. Thus, we can honestly say that we don’t just believe that Jesus is with us. We *know* he is.

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Friday, May 13, 2016
(Lec. 301)

- 1) Acts 25:13b-21
- 2) John 21:15-19

Gospel related: CCC 553, 618, 645, 881, 1429, 1551

FRIDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem. Our Lady of Fatima)

FOCUS: How might we best follow the command, *Feed my sheep?*

Do you love me? Feed my lambs.
Do you love me? Tend my sheep.
Do you love me? Feed my sheep.

This is such a quirky conversation, is it not? Can you imagine sitting around your kitchen table after a meal, and having this conversation with a loved one? In this day and age, it would likely include some impatient person saying, “Yes, I already **told** you!” to the questions, or a teenager employing the “whatever!” combined with an eye roll, in response to the commands. If it strikes us as odd, and maybe even annoying, can we glean any value from it? What, if anything, is special about this three-peat give-and-take about love, and taking care of sheep?

The first thing we might consider is which is the most important in this passage: the questions, the answers or the commands?

Most scholarship about this exchange asserts that the threefold asking of Peter, “Do you love me?” is to counteract his threefold denial of Christ prior to Christ’s torture and death. Whether that was the author’s intent or not, it does press home this rather amazing point: For every sin, there is an opportunity for redemption. And Christ will always offer it.

Peter answers each time that he does love Christ, showing some distress at being asked a third time. In doing so, he professes not just an emotion or feeling, but a belief and a commitment – though it would be reasonable to assume he does not yet fully understand what that commitment entails. This commitment – even if not yet fully tested – is what Jesus is looking for, and so he replies in turn.

Three times, Jesus gives a command to Peter in response. The wording of each command is a variation of “attend to the flock,” but they all mean the same thing: Do what is necessary to build the kingdom, including laying down your life.

We know, from hindsight, that the Apostles did just that. We even see in today’s first reading from Acts how Paul, the self-proclaimed last of the disciples, demonstrated his willingness to buck religious authority and give up his freedom for his faith and love for Jesus.

Aren’t we all called to the same? Our own imagined kitchen table experience of this conversation notwithstanding, how might we each best follow that command to *Feed my sheep* if we really and truly understood it? Perhaps that is the essence of this Scripture. The true consideration is not whether the questions, answers or commands are most important – but whether, and how, we have truly heeded the command.

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Saturday, May 14, 2016
(Lec. 564)

- 1) Acts 1:15-17, 20-26
- 2) John 15:9-17

Gospel related: CCC 363, 434, 459, 609, 614, 737, 1108, 1823, 1824, 1970, 1972, 2074, 2347, 2615, 2745, 2815 CSDC 13, 29, 39, 580

**SAINT MATTHIAS, APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: All of us are called by our baptism to be witnesses to the Gospel.

What a way to become an Apostle – “a roll of the dice.” Perhaps that is where the expression came from. In any event, today we celebrate the feast of the Apostle Saint Matthias.

Matthias’ claim to fame is that he was chosen by lot – after prayer, of course – to take Judas’ place as one of the Twelve. Depending on your point of view, this could be considered lucky or unlucky – it was simply the roll of the dice. From a faith perspective, it wasn’t luck; it was divinely inspired. From a purely human perspective, Matthias was sealing his fate; tradition tells us that he was martyred.

We know nothing else about Matthias. There is no other reference to him in Scripture. Tradition has it that he brought the Gospel to parts of Greece – at least the Greeks believe so. Our faith teaches us that Matthias, as an Apostle, preached the Gospel so well they shut him up – literally.

The word *martyr* is rooted in a Greek word meaning to give witness. In the broadest sense of the word, every one of us who is baptized is called to be a martyr – a witness to the Gospel. Even today, some people are killed simply for believing in Jesus.

We don’t have to shed blood to be a modern martyr. You and I can be persecuted. Often times, it is very subtle – a smirk or a frown if we pray in public or stand up for our Catholic faith. Sometimes it is more obvious – people in our face because our Church isn’t “with it” enough to suit their tastes. Our teachings are seen as out of touch.

Pope Francis continues to get to the heart of the matter. Time and again, he reminds us to live our lives by Gospel values, especially the virtues of faith, hope and charity. As believers, and as a universal Church, we get further with acts of compassion and mercy than with words of condemnation and judgment.

Like Saint Matthias, let us move among the faithful and nonbelievers quietly, and live our Gospel values day in and day out.

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SUNDAY, MAY 15, 2016

(Lec. 63)

1) Acts 2:1-11

2) 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13 or Romans 8:8-17

3) John 20:19-23 or John 14:15-16. 23b-26

Gospel related: **CCC** 575, 643, 645, 659, 730, 788, 858, 976, 1087, 1120, 1287, 1441, 1461, 1485, 2839 or 243, 244, 260, 263, 692, 729, 1099, 2466, 2615, 2623 **CSDC** 70, 104, 491

PENTECOST SUNDAY

- SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: Lord, send us your Spirit so we may bring new vigor to renewing ourselves and our world.

In the life of the Church, Christmas, Easter and Pentecost are designated as solemnities of equal rank and importance. They present us with the actions of the Holy Trinity, of a loving God who gave us his only begotten Son whose mission it was to fill us with God's life-giving Spirit. Conceived and born by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus handed over his Spirit as he died on the cross.

Pentecost is regarded as the birthday of the Church. The Apostles had locked themselves in the Upper Room in fear. But then God unleashed an unheard-of power upon them. They courageously burst out of their private little room into the public square, driven by wind and fire, to spread throughout the world the presence of God that had come to us from the Father of Jesus Christ.

I would suggest that we in modern America are very much like the pre-Pentecost Apostles, huddled together in fear of what's going on in the world's marketplace and the culture that surrounds us, which can be hostile. Pope Francis is prodding us to engage in our culture – not to condemn it but to love it enough to save it.

Today, we face waves of social change that weigh heavily upon us. Our lives are often layered in fear, resulting from so many social ills. Added to this is the devaluing of the dignity and sanctity of human life from womb to tomb through abortion and assisted suicide, which is now legal in several states.

Clearly, we have an American culture that's in distress. Moreover, we rejoice in our American diversity while we find unity more elusive. Individualism is something dear to the American heart. Some would suggest, however, that our living together in shared community is being lost. Whoever talks these days about the common good, or about the rights we should have as a community?

The coming of the Holy Spirit brought a sense of unity and purpose to those fractured eleven Apostles. More importantly, it brought one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all in Jesus Christ. The Church was endowed with unity and universality so the hearts of all could be touched, and the lives of all could be shared in the one Christ, in the one bread and in the one cup, in the one Church.

How, then, can we challenge our culture, one in which individuality and privacy are exalted over community and the common good?

We stand 2,000 years removed from the pre-Pentecost Church huddled together in the Upper Room, but we, too, can be insulated. Perhaps we would do well to long, with the Apostles, for the Holy Spirit. Let us pray today:

Dear loving Father, send your Holy Spirit upon us to renew us and to renew our troubled world. Renew us, loving Father, in that wondrous life that you gave to your Church 2,000 years ago. With fresh vigor we may join ourselves in the mission of your Apostles and live together in the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church -- in order to accomplish your work.

Monday, May 16, 2016
(Lec. 341)

- 1) James 3:13-18
- 2) Mark 9:14-29

Gospel related: CCC 162, 649, 1504, 2610

MONDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Divine wisdom and a strong faith will bring about great results.

Saint James asks us a good question today. *Who among you is wise and understanding?* He goes on to answer his own question. Heavenly wisdom will outshine and outlast any and all human vices, such as jealousy and selfish ambition. This dichotomy is not new. It goes back to the beginning, when human beings first roamed the earth. Mel Brooks brings humor to this dichotomy with the movie, *History of the World, Part One*, which covers events from the Old Testament to the French Revolution.

Whenever we get into the mindset that we know better than God, we are asking for trouble. Our human vices are no match for God's wisdom. Are we really interested in cultivating the seven deadly sins over the seven heavenly virtues? Of course not! Well – of course not in our heads, but not always in our hearts. Saint James is good at reminding us that our actions speak much louder than our words.

To be a faithful follower of Jesus means we are in this together and not in it for ourselves alone. It is not me first and everyone else comes second. It is always God first and we all come in together as a close second. Jesus did not call love of God and love of neighbor the two great suggestions. They are called commandments for a reason.

To be a faithful follower of Jesus is to adopt the cry of the frantic father in today's Gospel, *I do believe, help my unbelief*. Let's pray today: "I do believe in virtue over vice, help my unbelief. I do believe in good works over selfish ambition and foul practice, help my unbelief." Let us remember wisdom from above brings us peace, mercy and righteousness. Let's get it right. Let us choose to live our lives in the shadow of God's heavenly wisdom today.

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Tuesday, May 17, 2016
(Lec. 342)

- 1) James 4:1-10
- 2) Mark 9:30-37

Gospel related: CCC 474, 557, 1825 CSDC 379

TUESDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Choose peace over violence, and thus protect each person as a child of God.

Today's readings speak so clearly to our present reality. At a time when violence and war haunt so many on our planet, when governments still turn to war over diplomacy, when the message of peacemaking and healing that Jesus preached seem overlooked, we need to listen carefully to how the Scripture can guide us.

In the first reading, Saint James asks: *Where do wars and where do conflicts among you come from?* His answer also speaks to our current experience: *You covet but do not possess ... you kill and envy ... you fight and wage war.* Not only do such attitudes lead to immense suffering, but they fail to uphold what God wants, that is, *God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.* Saint James tells the people of his day, and us today, that *whoever wants to be a lover of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* So we have a choice, the way of world politics with its emphasis on violence and disrespect for human dignity, or the way of Jesus, the one who says, *Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God.* (Mt.5:9)

And this takes us forward to Jesus' teaching in the Gospel. *Jesus reached for a little child, placed him among the Twelve, and embraced him, Then he said, 'Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me isn't actually welcoming me but rather the One who sent me.'* In essence, if we are to know God, we must respect the dignity of each person as a child of God, and even more, those who are the world's children.

Clearly, we live in a difficult time, but we have the lessons of a long human history, and even more importantly, the words of Jesus. We also can remember that as today's disciples of Jesus, we hold "dual citizenship": indeed to a national identity, but even more importantly, to the kingdom of God that Jesus announced. Let there be no doubt about where our primary allegiance lies.

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Wednesday, May 18, 2016
(Lec. 343)

- 1) James 4:13-17
- 2) Mark 9:38-40

WEDNESDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem. Saint John I,
Pope and Martyr)

FOCUS: Reflection and prayer are necessary tools in finding God's will for us.

In the United States today we could name quite a few people whom we might consider "self-made." They have worked hard at their chosen craft, perhaps advancing well beyond the level at which they had started their careers. Our American culture has taught us to be independent individuals, intent on taking care of ourselves and our own. We've heard the adage: "God helps those who help themselves." There is nothing really wrong with this thinking unless it leads us to believe that we must do everything on our own. When we hurt ourselves by not asking for help when it is needed, something is wrong. This type of thinking can jaundice the way we look at those who ask for help, labeling them as freeloaders. Or we may call those who help the needy "do-gooders" or "enablers."

In the first reading, James makes clear that because life can be uncertain, we should approach each day with complete dependence on God, always seeking to do God's will. Disregarding this instruction will surely lead to pride and arrogance. When we do not do what is right, we sin – plain and simple. When we think we are doing well because we do not need anyone's help, we may want to think again. We need each other, but most of all, we need God.

Today's short Gospel passage has a somewhat different focus. As we work toward building God's kingdom, keeping our eyes on God and trying to follow his will, we are bound to see others accomplishing more, or doing so in a different way. Instead of acting with jealousy or intolerance, we can rejoice in the fact that God is acting in our world, bringing about the kingdom. God's work can be realized in many ways and through many people. When we examine our actions regularly, we will see God's plan for our lives and also perceive the work God is achieving through us.

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Thursday, May 19, 2016
(Lec. 344)

1) James 5:1-6

2) Mark 9:41-50

Gospel related: CCC 1034

THURSDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We store up treasure in heaven by offering all we have and all we are in love and service to God and our neighbor.

A young mother of two boys was ahead of me in line at the customer-service counter at the market that other day. The older one, who appeared to be about 5 years old, was in tears. He had taken a candy bar without paying for it and his mother had brought him back into the store to return it and apologize to the cashier. He was finding it difficult to do so, but his mother was insistent. Finally, gasping for breath and in a quivering voice, he offered his apology. At first, it was uncomfortable to watch. Then I realized, as hard as it seemed to be, this mother was trying to demonstrate an important lesson for her son; one that, much like today's readings, pertains to his very salvation.

Today's first reading strongly warns us that the treasures of this world we cling to and store up for our own purposes will rot away. Our earthly treasures may be abundant during our lifetime, but they may function as the testimony that condemns us in the eternal kingdom.

The little boy wanted what he wanted – the candy. In and of itself, candy is not a bad thing. It becomes so when the means of acquiring it or hoarding it are sinful and jeopardize eternal salvation. His mother knew this. By stealing the candy, he had damaged his relationship with God, his family, the market and himself.

Our treasures, like the candy, are not a bad thing as long as our means for acquiring them, using them and storing them are not sinful. Our material goods and wealth should be at the service of our hoped-for eternal destination – the heavenly kingdom.

Determining if we own our possessions, or if they own us, is a question we must seriously and often ask ourselves. Jesus' words in today's Gospel demonstrate that we must be willing to rid ourselves of those things we hold dear if they lead us into sin. It's a tough choice to make. We can have a penchant for instant gratification. Today's readings encourage us to take the long view – not only for ourselves but for our family, our children. The manner in which we model a relationship to material goods is teaching our young how to relate to material goods.

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. These words call us to prioritize our desires. The mother at the market stood firm while watching her son's distress. She knew that the short-term comfort of easing his pain would jeopardize his long-term salvation; something she was not willing to compromise.

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Friday, May 20, 2016
(Lec. 345)

- 1) James 5:9-12
- 2) Mark 10:1-12

FRIDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem. Saint Bernadine
of Siena, Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 1627, 1639, 1650, 2364, 2380, 2382 CSDC 217

FOCUS: We cannot change what is determined by God.

Early Christians struggled with some of the same issues facing us today — including society's views on marriage. The secular media is teeming with headlines about adultery, homosexuality, divorce, polygamy, scandal and deceit. Some of us have witnessed the damaging effects of these actions within our own families.

In our Gospel reading, the Pharisees confront Jesus with a “test.” Specifically, they question him about divorce. He acknowledges that Mosaic law permits a man to divorce and dismiss his wife, but attributes this allowance to the hardness of hearts. What Jesus says next is quite radical. He states that although divorce is permissible by law, it is not what God intended.

Jesus reminds the Pharisees of God's purpose in creating human beings both male and female — that they shall be joined and become *one flesh*. No human being can separate this bond. He goes on to say that anyone who divorces his or her spouse and marries another commits adultery.

This teaching encompasses several important conditions of sacramental marriage. First, it is a consensual gift of self between a man and woman. Second, it is a divine bond and covenant established by God, not merely a societal agreement. Third, it is permanent. Respect for this bond requires commitment and fidelity, not only to one another, but also to God's plan.

Our reading from James addresses another aspect of Christian life relevant for us today – the way we think about and speak with one another. We are reminded to be patient and not complain. Instead we are to show compassion and mercy, just as the Lord promises these to us. With our words, we should praise rather than speak harshly of one another or swear oaths, which can be broken and cause conflict. This will build stronger marriages and a greater sense of community among our neighbors.

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Saturday, May 21, 2016
(Lec. 346)

- 1) James 5:13-20
- 2) Mark 10:13-16

SATURDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem. Saint Christopher
Magallanes, Priest, and
Companions, Martyrs
Saturday in honor of BVM)

Gospel related: CCC 699, 1244, 1261

FOCUS: We are called to place our faith and trust firmly in the Lord, and to rely on him to provide for our needs.

The Letter of James was written primarily to encourage Jewish Christians outside Palestine who were being oppressed. Perseverance and consistency are key themes, and these are applicable today because it is not always easy to be a Christian in today's world. In this passage, we hear that the suffering should pray, the happy should sing praise, the sick should be anointed with oils and prayed over, the sinner should confess and the Christian should convert the pagan.

In today's reading from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus teaches by his actions. He blesses the children and tells those who desire to live as his disciples that they must have a childlike faith and trust in God. The reference to children seems to have both a historical and spiritual significance. In first-century Palestine, children ranked near the bottom of the social scale. Neglect, poverty and violence took a heavy toll on children, leading to high rates of mortality. In keeping with the principle Jesus taught throughout his ministry – that the last shall be first – he holds up children as an example. *I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.*

If we are serious about living as a disciple of Jesus, we must place our trust firmly in God. We can rely upon God to provide what we truly need and to give us the strength and grace to lay down our lives each day in humble service. Discipleship also means placing our lives into God's hands and going wherever he leads us.

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SUNDAY, MAY 22, 2016

(Lec. 166)

1) Proverbs 8:22-31

2) Romans 5:1-5

3) John 16:12-15

Gospel related: CCC 91, 243, 244, 485, 687, 690, 692, 729, 1117, 1287, 2466, 2615, 2691 CSDC 29, 104

**THE MOST
HOLY TRINITY
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: We celebrate the wonder of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Today we celebrate one of the most fundamental beliefs of Christianity: the Trinity – three distinct, coequal persons in one God. For the Church, the Trinity is considered a mystery. There are aspects of it we will never fully grasp while we are this side of heaven. But it is something that we hold as revealed truth. Today's readings touch on the distinctions, as well as the linkages, between and among the persons of the Trinity.

It has been said that such a theological mystery is not a puzzle to solve, but more like an ocean in which we are swimming. We may never comprehend its totality, but we experience its presence and accept its reality, as well as its magnificence.

There are references to the Holy Trinity in the Old Testament, but their meaning was mostly hidden. When Jesus became man, he revealed the three persons of the Trinity more fully. As Christ had promised before he ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit did come at Pentecost to help and empower the early Church to carry on Jesus' saving mission. The Spirit was also poured out upon the Church to guide it and its members in the way of truth. The Holy Spirit continues to be at work in and through the Church, empowering the Church and her members to continue doing the work Jesus calls her to do.

The Solemnity of the Holy Trinity has been an official and universal celebration in the Church since the thirteen-hundreds. It is even celebrated by most Protestant denominations. During today's liturgy, special prayers honor each of the persons of the Trinity, but every Mass is full of references to the Trinity and prayers showing our devotion.

Sometimes we pray to the Trinity without realizing what we are doing. The sign of the cross is a case in point. This is probably the prayer most commonly said by Catholics. Yet, many people do not think of it as a prayer to the Trinity. In fact, a good number of Catholics go through the motions of the sign of the cross, without thinking about the words at all. It has become what we call a *ritual*, something in which the motions become a prayer in themselves.

During today's Mass, make a point to notice how many times we make the sign of the cross. Think about the words. Listen, too, for other prayers throughout the Mass that honor the Holy Trinity. Of course, the creed is probably the most obvious, but you will find others that give voice to our belief in and adoration of the Holy Trinity.

Our *Catechism* tells us that the Trinity is the model and source of unity of the Church, as well as that of the family. (813, 2205) As we reflect on these things, let us pray to the Holy Trinity to guide us in strengthening our unity, as we continue to respect and cherish our diversity. Let us also see the Most Holy Trinity as a model for how we are to live. Just as the three persons of the Holy Trinity are perfectly united in a oneness of love, we are called to live in ever-greater love and unity with God and one another.

Monday, May 23, 2016
(Lec. 347)

- 1) 1 Peter 1:3-9
- 2) Mark 10:17-27

Gospel related: CCC 1858, 2728

MONDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *All things are possible for God.*

Yesterday we celebrated the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, certainly one of the most important mysteries of our faith. Today we turn to another mystery: salvation.

Saint Peter's letter tells us that God *gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*. The promise and hope of coming to share eternal life in heaven is perhaps God's greatest gift to us. In Mark's Gospel, the rich young man who *ran up* to Jesus was seeking just that: eternal life.

Jesus told him what he had to do: Keep the commandments. The young man replied that he had *observed them from (his) youth*. Jesus told him he had to do one more thing: *Go, sell what you have and give to the poor*.

He went away sad, Saint Mark wrote simply (and quite poignantly).

Did that man "throw away" salvation? Did he reject the grace of God offered him by Jesus? I hope not. We will not know for sure until we reach our heavenly reward.

But Jesus gives us hope. Similarly, today's reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter speaks of *a living hope* to come to eternal life, with Christ Jesus.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples: *How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!*

Jesus is not telling us all to be paupers or become homeless. Rather, he is telling us that we need to use the gifts God has given us for the benefit of others, not just for ourselves.

In other words, there is nothing wrong with being successful and having possessions. It is what we do with those possessions that can cause us to sin and make it hard for us to enter the kingdom of God.

Understanding what a great gift God offers us in and through Jesus – new life and the promise and hope of eternal life in heaven – may we, with grateful hearts, strive to give humble service to God each day.

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Tuesday, May 24, 2016

(Lec. 348)

1) 1 Peter 1:10-16

2) Mark 10:28-31

Gospel related: CCC 1618

TUESDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Service to others in the life of a Christian is of paramount importance.

Today's readings emphasize the importance of service in the life of a Christian. Our service can take many forms, and it may have unforeseen consequences. It may be something small, such as sharing a helpful insight into Scripture with a friend who is enduring a difficult situation. Turning to the Lord may mean enduring the loss of a friendship or family relationship. For some, it can mean laying down one's life for the faith.

All these examples point to an outward-looking selfless perspective that Christ calls us to have – in which we are willing to make sacrifices for the sake of the Gospel and to build up God's kingdom on earth. This is clearly affirmed by Jesus in today's Gospel.

In the Gospel, Jesus responds to Peter's comment that the Apostles had given up everything to follow him. He states that anyone who has given up homes or families for him or for the Gospel will receive many times that sacrifice in heaven. When Jesus refers to giving up homes and families for his sake, he indicates that we, as disciples, must be prepared to sacrifice greatly in our service to the Lord. However, Jesus assures us that these temporary losses will be more than restored to us in heaven. This should help us have the courage to do what is necessary to be a true servant of the Lord.

We can see that the life of faith is not an easy one, and not to be taken lightly. It is a call to deep service to God and to others, undertaken with great humility and a strong willingness to sacrifice. We can find the strength to do this in the example of Christ, who sacrificed all on the cross, and in our Lord's promise of eternal life for those who live as his faithful disciples.

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Wednesday, May 25, 2016
(Lec. 349)

- 1) 1 Peter 1:18-25
- 2) Mark 10:32-45

WEDNESDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem. Saint Bede
The Venerable, Priest and Doctor of the Church;
Saint Gregory VII, Pope;
Saint Mary Magdalene de 'Pazzi, Virgin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 474, 536, 557, 608, 618, 649, 994, 1225, 1551, 1570 **CSDC** 193, 379

FOCUS: Jesus' authority is rooted not in power, but in loving service and self-sacrifice.

The account in today's Gospel is likewise reported in Matthew and Luke's Gospels, so it must have been very important. And indeed it was and is.

It raises the question: Why must the Messiah be rejected and killed? That question certainly must have been on the minds of Jesus' disciples. From time to time, it's on our minds also. Didn't God promise that his Anointed One would deliver his people from their oppression and establish a kingdom of peace and justice? Yes, long ago, the prophet Isaiah had foretold that it was God's will that the Suffering Servant make atonement for sins through his suffering and death. (Is 53:5-12) To redeem us, to buy us back from the Evil One, our Messiah had to enter into the reality and consequences of sin. To deliver us, he himself had to enter into our condition and suffer the consequences we suffer.

The idea was incomprehensible to Jesus' disciples. They didn't know what to do with it. As a matter of fact, Saint Mark reports that James and John, the sons of Zebedee, requested places of honor at Jesus' side when he came into his kingdom, thus completely ignoring his prediction that he would suffer and die.

To accomplish his mission, Jesus did the unthinkable. He wedded authority with selfless service with loving sacrifice – the sacrifice of his life. Authority without sacrificial love is nothing but naked power. And it is self-serving as well. Jesus resolved to go the full distance and sacrifice his life in the most horrific of ways.

In today's Gospel account, we find Jesus using stark language to explain what kind of sacrifice was necessary if he was to be our Savior. With him, his disciples must drink of his cup if they expect follow in his ways in order to reign with him in his kingdom. The cup Jesus had in mind was a bitter one involving crucifixion.

What kind of cup does the Lord have in mind for us?

We ought not to let our own pains, losses and sufferings go to waste. We need to see these events as opportunities to join ourselves into the redemptive suffering of Christ. That's what Jesus asked of his disciples. That's what he is asking of us.

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Thursday, May 26, 2016

(Lec. 350)

1) 1 Peter 2:2-5, 9-12

2) Mark 10:46-52

Gospel related: CCC 548, 2616, 2667

THURSDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL. MEM. Saint Philip Neri,
Priest)

FOCUS: When we get our spiritual house in order, we can be a witness to others in a way that glorifies God.

The first reading from the Letter of Saint Peter urges us to turn away from sin and seek lives of purity. To seek purity means that we are living lives of virtue and growing in our faith. We are seeking spiritual perfection through the grace of God.

The idea of seeking purity is one that is foreign to most people in the world today. We seek to perfect our bodies, our beauty, our diet, our intellect, our career or even our carbon footprint – but rarely do we try to perfect our souls. In fact, most of us would say that perfecting our souls is an impossible task. We are only human, after all. If we were to pay as much attention to our spiritual health and growth as we do our physical health, however, the graces that God would pour upon us would go far in helping us attain perfection.

Unfortunately, our culture seems to value the purity of the food we eat more than the purity of what feeds our souls. By changing our focus to include the nurturing and growth of our souls in addition to the care of our bodies, we can make purity a realistic spiritual goal.

Today's first reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter goes on to say that by maintaining good conduct, our witness to others will bring glory to God. As we go about our daily lives, are we conscious of how our conduct speaks to others? Do we remember that our behavior has the potential to glorify God? Or, do we fall into the trap of thinking that our actions don't affect others? By being purposeful and conscious of the choices we make, we can constantly witness the love of God to the world, if we choose to do so. It is up to us: Are we ready to witness God's love to others?

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Friday, May 27, 2016

(Lec. 351)

1) 1 Peter 4:7-13

2) Mark 11:11-26

FRIDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem. Saint Augustine
of Canterbury)

Gospel related: CCC 2610, 2841

FOCUS: We can pray with confidence to our heavenly Father.

Today, we hear about two events that may send seemingly contradictory messages about Jesus. Usually, we think of Jesus healing people, talking with children, calming storms, teaching and praying. So it is a bit surprising to hear him cursing a fig tree so that it withers. And Jesus doesn't seem so meek and mild when he sees moneychangers at the Temple in Jerusalem and overturns their tables, causing chaos. He certainly surprised the Temple priests, the moneychangers and others present.

Was he just having a bad day? Don't draw your conclusions too quickly. Jesus clearly stated that the Temple was his Father's house. Prior to the resurrection, sacrifice of animals was required to atone for sin. Many could not afford lambs. The merchants in the Temple were selling doves to the poor – at exorbitant prices. No wonder Jesus was angry. He saw the Temple being used as a shop rather than a place of worship.

He also cursed a fig tree that subsequently withered. Again, this may seem as puzzling to us as it was to the disciples. Jesus explained that, like the thieves and Pharisees in the Temple, the fig tree was not producing good fruit. We then hear his lesson about the power of prayer. What is the connection?

Jesus tells us that when we pray, we are to have faith that God will answer our prayers. He wants us to trust God in all circumstances – good and bad. He repeats a key guideline for prayer that we hear each time we recite the Lord's Prayer. We are exhorted to *forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you.*

When we do not forgive, we are like the fruitless fig tree or thieving merchants – looking out for ourselves and not others. We are holding on to a hurt or injustice that closes our hearts to the grace of God. Forgiving means to let the offender off the hook. It isn't just to make that person feel better; it is to heal our hearts from anger and judgment. We then become like fig trees that produce good fruit, which pleases the heart of God. God forgives our trespasses and answers prayer. Let each of us examine our heart and ask Jesus to show us where we can let go of past hurts and serve him fully.

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Saturday, May 28, 2016
(Lec. 352)
1) Jude 17, 20b-25
2) Mark 11:27-33

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

FOCUS: We are to give witness to the Gospel with steadfast faith, courage and love.

Anyone who has tried to share the Good News with children at home, in the classroom, in adult catechetical inquiry classes, or even in informal settings knows that challenges are sure to arise. Indeed, many of us have a tendency to push back when we are challenged to make a sacrifice or change entrenched habits, even when our salvation is at stake.

We may visualize Jesus, the master teacher who was swamped by crowds, as consistently well-loved and sought after as he brought the Good News to his audiences. Today's reading challenges the notion. Some of those who had heard Jesus teach and preach were downright belligerent toward him and his message.

We observe as Jesus, without spite or rancor, turns questions about his authority back on the scribes, Pharisees and chief priests.

The early Church learned from Jesus. Today's first reading from the Letter of Saint Jude advises the community not to give up their efforts to build membership, but to carry on with these efforts with love and mercy, and not with the sword. Through the centuries, the Church has raised up a long stream of saints who operated by the same principle – insisting on truth but delivering their message with loving compassion.

To arrive at such balance, we need personal prayer, a habit of obedience to the Spirit, fortitude and fear of the Lord. We must tend to our own motivation and pay attention to the Lord's word. Above all, we need courage and equanimity as we work toward what we pray in the Lord's Prayer at every Mass: "Thy kingdom come." Let it come first in us.

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SUNDAY, MAY 29, 2016

(Lec. 169)

- 1) Genesis 14:18-20
- 2) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
- 3) Luke 9:11b-17

**THE MOST HOLY
BODY AND BLOOD
OF CHRIST
(Corpus Christi)
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: On this feast, we do not celebrate *what* we receive in holy Communion, but *whom*.

Sacrifice in the Old Testament often consisted of animals placed on makeshift altars as a burnt offering to God. We see a different type of sacrifice in today's first reading, reminding us that much of the Hebrew Scriptures foreshadowed words, deeds and prophecies that would later be fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

In Genesis 14, Melchizedek is presented as both a king and a priest. He wishes to join Abram in offering sacrifice to God in thanksgiving for success in battle and the safe return of Abram's nephew, Lot. Melchizedek offers bread and wine in gratitude to God, a precursor of the Eucharist offered by Jesus, the high priest and King of kings, at the Last Supper.

The story of Abram and Melchizedek shows bread being offered in thanks to God for a miracle. So often in the Bible, the bread itself is the miracle, as when the Israelites were fed with manna in the desert, or when Elijah promised the widow and her son, both about to die of starvation, that the jug of oil would not go dry, or the flour jar go empty. No one could do greater things with bread than Jesus himself.

Recall that Jesus was born in a feeding trough in Bethlehem, a Hebrew name that translates as *house of bread*. It is as if the very circumstances of his birth intended to suggest that he was meant to become food for us as we make our pilgrim journey toward his kingdom.

The event recalled in today's reading from the Gospel of Luke matches closely the story of the loaves and fishes from John. Jesus, after having fed thousands, announces himself as the true bread sent from heaven. He promises that whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood will have eternal life, and be raised on the last day.

Christ, in the Eucharist, continues to feed multitudes with much more left over in abundance. The Eucharist has been offered by the Church from its beginning, and will be offered by her until the end of time because Jesus said, *Do this in remembrance of me*. The Eucharist will continue to feed us also because Jesus wishes to remain with us and in us, helping us to seek him, see him and serve him by how we love, honor, serve and forgive one another.

Paul, in today's first reading refers to holy Communion and Jesus being really and truly present in the Eucharist as a fact of faith. Too many Catholics have lost their way with regard to believing in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

In proclaiming the Year of the Eucharist in his 2003 encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Saint John Paul wrote: "The most holy Eucharist contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth: Christ Himself." He encouraged every Catholic to "rekindle this Eucharistic 'amazement.'" (par. 6).

On this feast of Corpus Christi, established by Pope Urban IV in the year 1264, we celebrate the miracle of the Eucharist. When we share in the Eucharist, we share in Jesus' miraculous love for us and for all sinners.

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Monday, May 30, 2016

(Lec. 353)

1) 2 Peter 1:2-7

2) Mark 12:1-12

MONDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: As Christians, we are challenged to boldly proclaim our beliefs, even when they go against the prevailing culture.

Today's Gospel account centers on the approaching final conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities in Jerusalem and the Temple. The battle lines are being drawn. Jesus is exposing their fraudulent lives and teachings as their anger reaches new heights. Soon he will be arrested, tried in a kangaroo court and put to death.

Today, we find him confronting the religious authorities with what their predecessors had done to many of the prophets God had previously sent to the Jews. Among those prophets were Amos, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah, all of whom were put to death for proclaiming God's word. Jesus was aware of what was about to happen to him.

Confronting evil, especially evil found in high places, can be deadly business. This is something we know in our own time. Doctor Martin Luther King comes to mind along with Archbishop Oscar Romero. Then, too, we think of Christians in the Middle East who are being persecuted and even being put to death in some countries for their faith in Jesus.

Jesus' confrontations are not limited to what happened to him over two thousand years ago. They are being played out in our own lives.

All of which should motivate us to enter into the time after Easter with renewed devotion. Looking ahead, we will celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost. Clearly, we need the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We need courage, wisdom, strength and the graces of God to help us follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We need to join ourselves into the experience of the Apostles, upon whom the Holy Spirit descended in tongues of fire. Boldly they "went public" and entered into the world around them, freed from the shackles of fear.

No one ever said that being a Christian was comfortable or easy. We have values and beliefs that are not of this world. The worldly will confront and challenge us, but that is exactly what we should expect.

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Tuesday, May 31, 2016

(Lec. 572)

1) Zephaniah 3:14-18a

or Romans 12:9-16

2) Luke 1:39-56

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

**THE VISITATION OF THE
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
- FEAST**

FOCUS: *The Lord, your God, is in your midst.*

From the moment the Blessed Virgin Mary gave her “yes” to the angel Gabriel and Jesus, the only begotten son of the Father, was conceived in her womb, the world would never be the same. The words from Zephaniah rang true: *The Lord, your God, is in your midst – a mighty Savior.*

In today’s Gospel, the young Mary makes haste to do what we’re all called to do: She carries Jesus with her to her cousin Elizabeth’s home. Perhaps she was eager to share her exciting news with her kinswoman, or perhaps she wanted to be of service to Elizabeth, who was approaching the time of the birth of her own child. Whatever her intent, Mary’s visit to Elizabeth brought incredible joy – both to Elizabeth and to her unborn child, who *leapt for joy* at the presence of Jesus. This seemingly unremarkable visit of two pregnant women and their unborn sons marked a change in the world: it was the fulfillment of God’s promise to raise up one who was to bring salvation to all who believe, and bring about a renewal of all creation.

Not too long ago, we celebrated the feast of the Ascension, when Jesus claimed his place at the right hand of the Father. At the same time, he promised the disciples of his day, and our day – and of all the generations to come – that he would be with us always, leading us and guiding us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

He nourishes and strengthens us with the gift of himself in the Eucharist, so that we may grow in our love for him, remain steadfast in our faith and lay down our lives more fully in service to others. He calls us to be Christ to one another, to support and encourage one another to grow in our love, and to share the Gospel with others. He speaks to us as the word of God is preached and proclaimed. He is present in every person we meet if we have eyes to see. Yes, this day and every day, Our Lord and Savior Jesus is with us. Let us rejoice and be glad.

So understanding this and with hearts filled with joy may we go forth from this liturgical celebration, in haste – as Mary did – to share the good news of Jesus’ presence and to be of service to our brothers and sisters. As Mary journeyed to the hill country to be with Elizabeth, let us travel through the highways and byways of our own time and place to bring joy and hope into the hearts of others.

The Lord, our God, is in our midst!

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