

NOVEMBER

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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2016

(Lec. 667)

1) Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14

2) 1 John 3:1-3

3) Matthew 5:1-12a

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

ALL SAINTS

- SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: God invites all of us to sainthood.

On this feast of All Saints, we hear the author of Revelation share two visions of those belonging to God's kingdom. In the first, 144,000 people from the twelve tribes of Israel are marked as God's own. This highly symbolic number signifies the immensity of God's promise of salvation in and through Christ Jesus. It also symbolizes the multitudes of people – too many to be counted – who have responded to God's gracious offer of salvation by placing their faith in Christ Jesus.

Similarly, the second vision speaks of more people than can be counted, privileged to stand before the throne of God and Christ the Lamb. This throng includes people from every nation and race. God's plan for salvation is open to all who die in right relationship with him. These worshippers testify that this is not a do-it-yourself project. Salvation comes from God. As they proclaim, thanksgiving, glory and power belong to God, not to us.

In today's Gospel, Jesus also paints a picture of those who belong to God's kingdom. Notice that he shares this picture – the beatitudes – with the crowds, not just with the Apostles. This teaching is for all of us.

What does this heavenly picture reveal? Those who sorrow will be comforted. The merciful will receive mercy. Those who are meek – and meekness doesn't mean being wimpy, but having the strength to be gentle – they will receive the Promised Land of God's kingdom. That kingdom also includes those who work for peace and are faithful in spite of challenges and persecution.

Who heads the list? The poor in spirit – those who recognize their weakness and rely upon God, not their own strength or resources. Like those described in Revelation, they don't need to build their fragile egos up by glorifying themselves, but freely give glory to God.

So where do we fit in? We are challenged to let go of what the world sees as success, and to invest in spiritual and moral growth instead. Jesus invites us to die to self-will and follow him. Letting go of self-will frees us from egos that say it's all about us, making us open to living out the beatitudes.

And notice: The beatitudes describe qualities, not actions. We don't pull ourselves up to God by our spiritual bootstraps. On the contrary, we face our weaknesses and, therefore, our need for God and for his mercy. We become aware that we are poor in spirit. We grow in healthy humility.

God loves us not because we are perfect, but because he is loving and merciful. When we accept this, we become much more likely to show mercy and forgiveness to others.

Our reward will be great in heaven, but that's not a "pie in the sky" promise. When we live as God invites us to live, we help build up God's kingdom. We come to have hearts that are open to God's grace, and experience the good gifts of peace and joy he wants to bestow on us.

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Wednesday, November 2, 2016

(Lec. 668)

- 1) Wisdom 3:1-9
- 2) Romans 5:5-11
or Romans 6:3-9
- 3) John 6:37-40

Gospel related: **CCC** 161, 606, 989, 994, 1001, 2824

**THE COMMEMORATION
OF ALL THE FAITHFUL
DEPARTED
(ALL SOULS DAY)**

FOCUS: The faithful will rise again with Christ.

What comes to mind when you hear the word “church”? Maybe you think of a building, parishioners or your parish priest. While these are all aspects of “church,” the Church encompasses more than our presence here on earth.

The Church is a communion of saints (CCC 960) – a family of the faithful at different stages of spiritual existence. It includes us as pilgrims in this world, the saints and blessed whom we remembered yesterday on All Saints’ Day, and the dead undergoing purification – those we pray for on this feast of All Souls’ Day. Together, we are the Church.

As we pray for the souls of our loved ones, an array of emotions may arise within us – grief, sorrow, uncertainty, maybe even anger. We miss our loved ones and cling to precious memories, perhaps recalling suffering they faced in this life. Today’s readings offer us consolation. They remind us of our hope as Christians – to one day rise again with Christ. In the Gospel, Jesus explains that he was sent to do his Father’s will: *For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day.*

While faith in Christ should be all we need to believe his words, Scripture offers us further evidence of Jesus’ power over death. He raised the widow’s son, the daughter of a synagogue official and Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha. In Romans, Paul assures believers that *if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, once reconciled, will we be saved by his life.*

All Souls’ Day has been part of Catholic tradition for centuries. The way it is celebrated has changed over time and varies across cultures; however, it remains a powerful reminder to pray for souls undergoing purification. Like *gold in the furnace* and *sparks through stubble*, they will shine. We can pray for the dead and offer the Eucharist in their name. Pope Francis has said that doing so “is the best spiritual help that we can give to their souls, particularly to those who are the most forsaken.” (Angelus address, Nov. 2, 2014)

The Lord’s grace and mercy are with his faithful. Let All Souls’ Day be a day of hope. We can assist our loved ones with prayers – that they may be cleansed and purified, and enter eternal life in heaven. If we believe in Jesus and follow his path, we hope to one day find rest in the arms of our Lord. As Saint Paul reminds us, *Hope does not disappoint.*

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Thursday, November 3, 2016

(Lec. 488)

1) Philippians 3:3-8a

2) Luke 15:1-10

THURSDAY OF
31ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Martin de Porres,
Religious)

Gospel related: **CCC** 545, 589, 1443, 1846

FOCUS: Even when we stray, God will go to great lengths to bring us back.

What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? Jesus' rhetorical question invites the answer, "Of course, any shepherd would do that." In reality, *no* shepherd in his right mind would think for a moment of doing what Jesus suggests. That would risk turning a minor misfortune, the loss of a single sheep, into a major disaster: the possible loss of the entire flock.

"That's how good God is," Jesus is saying with this simple parable. God's care for us is not reasonable, measured or prudent. God's love for us is *reckless*, according to ordinary worldly standards. When we stray from him, God will go to any lengths, and search without limit, to get us back.

But what about Jesus' next assertion, that *there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance*? Shouldn't there be some rejoicing, at least, over those who have no need to repent?

To answer that question we must ask another. Who are these ninety-nine who do not need to repent? Do you know anyone like that? I don't. Oh, I know many people who *think* they have no need to repent. But they are wrong. How can there be any rejoicing over people who are so mistaken about their spiritual condition?

In reality, all of us stray from our heavenly Father in some way and at some time. All of us need the Father's loving forgiveness. With this short and simple parable, Jesus is telling us that God's care, love and forgiveness are available to us always. Or, as Pope Francis never tires of telling us: God never gets tired of forgiving us. It is we who grow tired of asking for forgiveness.

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Friday, November 4, 2016

(Lec. 489)

1) Philippians 3:17–4:1

2) Luke 16:1-8

FRIDAY OF
31ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Charles Borromeo,
Bishop)

Gospel related: **CCC 952**

FOCUS: Our earthly dwelling, and all that is in it, is made by and for God. We are meant to use it wisely.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us: “A Christian is a steward of the Lord’s goods” (952), and that everything we have belongs to God. Luke’s parable of the dishonest steward thoughtfully considers a man who at first glance seems devious. He has squandered his employer’s goods and made a bit of a mess of things. Before he gets the boot, he decides to make sure he doesn’t have to dig ditches for a living. He calls in his employer’s debtors and tells them to rewrite promissory notes to reflect a lower debt than they originally owed. His employer commends him for acting prudently.

Has the steward acted prudently? Perhaps. After all, he has cut the debt by a significant amount, in keeping with the Christian tradition of coming to the aid of “neighbors in want” (CCC 952). The catechism also states that, “Everything the true Christian has is to be regarded as a good possessed in common with everyone else” (CCC 952). In some ways, the steward’s actions could be interpreted as sharing common goods. The rest of the story isn’t part of today’s reading, but Jesus later tells his disciples, *You cannot serve God and mammon*” (Lk 16:13).

Concern for the common good is exemplified in the life of Saint Charles Borromeo, whose feast we celebrate today. Saint Charles was a sixteenth-century cardinal and bishop who devoted his life to reform when political and religious upheaval was the rule of the day. He saw that many of the issues that led to the Protestant Reformation were due to a lack of education and training for the clerics of his time. Because of his efforts, the Council of Trent was reconvened, resulting in reforms that included the establishment of seminaries for the education of the clergy. He also founded the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, an association devoted to providing religious education. Saint Charles dedicated his life to serving God, and provided for the poor and needy.

Although Charles was born into great wealth, he chose to devote his life in service to God. He placed his gifts – not only material things, but his intellect and leadership – at the service of others. As it says in the First Letter of Peter, *As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace* (4:10). Saint Charles is a model for us of good stewardship.

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Saturday, November 5, 2016

(Lec. 490)

1) Philippians 4:10-19

2) Luke 16:9-15

SATURDAY OF
31ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC 2424 CSDC 181, 453**

FOCUS: All we have – every talent, every gift – comes from God.

Most of us have heard the words that Jesus spoke in today's Gospel: You cannot serve God and mammon. But what is "mammon"? Actually, the etymology of this word is not universally agreed-upon. Although it is often translated simply as "riches" or "wealth," there is a far more interesting translation for the word from some scholars, which comes from the Greek transliteration of a Hebrew or Aramaic word meaning "that in which one trusts."

In what do we trust? Do we trust positions, privileges and titles? Perhaps "mammon" in this context is anything that takes our focus away from God, the source of our life and our very being. Jesus speaks of wealth in this passage as "dishonest." Does he mean that the dogged pursuit of wealth can lead to dishonesty? It most likely can. But Jesus might be trying to get his listeners to stop and think about earthly riches, and how they use them. Do we use our wealth for self-gain? Or do we put it to good use? Jesus is warning us not to put our trust in worldly treasure, but rather to use it to build the kingdom of God here on earth. We must place our trust in God, and use our gifts in ways that serve him.

The things of this world are fleeting. We see all too often how people's lives can be changed forever in an instant. But God and his kingdom are eternal and will not pass away. This is why we must place our trust solely in him. We have one master in this world: our merciful Father. Let's strive to love him and serve him so that our lives may be blessed with peace and joy, and one day we may be blessed with an eternal dwelling place in heaven.

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SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2016

(Lec. 156)

- 1) 2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14
- 2) 2 Thessalonians 2:16–3:5
- 3) Luke 20:27-38
or 20:27, 34-38

Gospel related: **CCC** 330

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *We may be deprived of life in this world, but the King of the world will raise us up to live forever with him.*

Today's Scripture passages truly engage our imagination: the brutality of the scene in Maccabees; Paul's letter to the Thessalonians depicting God as a vigilant sentinel; and Luke's Gospel enticing us to visualize the resurrected life.

Vastly different imagery, with one central theme: Whatever we know of this life pales in comparison to the fullness of life in Christ that is promised to us in the resurrection. And the reason we are not able to fully understand the resurrection is precisely because it is a wondrous mystery that far exceeds the limits of the human mind. Though the resurrection is a mystery beyond our comprehension, images and concepts from the teachings of Jesus and sacred Scripture can help us make sense of it for our lives.

Scripture reminds us that our relationship with God is the reason for our existence. The resurrection is more than just something we hope or believe will happen upon our death. It represents the basis, promise and fulfillment of our relationship with God.

The first reading assures us *we may be deprived of life in this world, but the King of the world will raise us up to live forever with him.* There is much to consider in this statement. First, there will be suffering and death in this world, events and experiences that will cause us pain. But that is not the end of the story.

The statement continues with the declaration of God as the King of the world. No matter what the world throws at us – whatever pain, suffering and death come our way – God is greater than all that. He rules *over* that. God is king.

Therefore, God has the final say about our eternity – and he wants it to be, as Jesus says, where we *are like angels; and [we] are the children of God.* God rescues us from the depths of sin and death – raising us up, out of the darkness and into the light of Christ. He does this first at our baptism, and again upon our death – in our resurrection to new life.

God does not just raise us up, he raises us up *to live forever with him.* The one who created us out of love is faithful to us in all things, and remains with us through our suffering. God encourages us and strengthens us, and guards us from evil.

Our relationship with God is not just about this world; it is about living forever with him.

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Monday, November 7, 2016

(Lec. 491)

1) Titus 1:1-9

2) Luke 17:1-6

Gospel related: **CCC** 162, 2227, 2287, 2845

MONDAY OF
32ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: As followers of Christ, we are called to always set a good example.

Taken together, today's readings call on us, as followers of Christ, to take the high road. We are to set an example of propriety, humility and loyalty to the word of God.

The first reading describes the qualities bishops or *presbyters* are to have, but they apply to all of us. Bishops, for example, are called *God's stewards*, and we are all to serve in that capacity. The list of attributes serves as a great examination of conscience for any Christian.

Paul lists five things *not to be* and seven things *to be*. God's stewards *must be blameless, not arrogant, not irritable, not a drunkard, not aggressive, not greedy for sordid gain, but rather hospitable, a lover of goodness, temperate, just, holy, and self-controlled, holding fast to the true message given by Jesus*. We may not be able to fulfill all these high-minded qualities all the time, but we certainly can try. It would not hurt any of us to write out this list and look at it before we go to bed each night and see how well we are doing.

The Gospel continues in a similar way. Jesus gives us two injunctions: Avoid leading others into sin, and forgive those who wrong you. This forgiveness is not a simple acceptance of the wrongdoing, however. Jesus tells us to rebuke the person – try to help him or her see the wrong they have done. Then, if the person repents, forgive – and keep forgiving as many times as needed. Sometimes it takes a while before a person can reform his or her ways, but we are to help, rather than condemn or reject.

The list of attributes from our first reading can come in handy here. We will truly be following Jesus if we can help someone without being aggressive or arrogant, but instead temperate, just, holy and self-controlled. Since this is Monday, let us try every day this week to put these ideas into action. See how it goes. You may find your life being blessed in ways you never expected.

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Tuesday, November 8, 2016

(Lec. 492)

1) Titus 2:1-8, 11-14

2) Luke 17:7-10

TUESDAY OF
32ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: In the liturgy, the heavenly banquet, we are both servants and guests.

Today's reading from Luke's Gospel gives a fascinating description of the proper attitude of one who follows Jesus. In these few short verses, we hear a story that leads us to make an honest assessment of our own attitude of service in light of the Gospel. It raises questions for personal reflection that may challenge us to look closely at what we do, and why we do it. Let us walk this path to see where it takes us.

The story begins with a question: *Who among you would say to your servant who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, "Come here immediately and take your place at table?"* We hear that the servant's place is *not* resting at the table when there is work to be done. He should not expect applause for doing what he was supposed to do. So let us ask ourselves: Why do we do what we do? What is our motivation? Is there a sense of dignity and purpose to our work? Do we bring our love of God and neighbor to everything we do? And perhaps, just as important, do we see that our ability to serve stems from our relationship with God and is pure gift?

Yes, pure gift. Today's Gospel describes humility in a servant's heart. It identifies the true relationship between God and humanity – giver and receiver. Each of us is called by God to be in relationship with him and to carry out work particular to our vocation. This passage should not be interpreted as implying that a servant is never invited to the banquet. In other Gospel passages, everyone is invited to the meal – the upper class as well as the downtrodden.

With all of this talk about serving at table, we cannot overlook the obvious: Each of us is called to the table, here today, to share in the Eucharistic meal, the heavenly banquet. Here today, what a gift it is to be at once servant and guest! You and I enjoy both. We are called to serve in the kingdom and we are called to share in it. Every liturgy is an opportunity for us to come in humility and thanksgiving for the gift of service to which we are called. As servant-guests, we are strengthened and nourished in this divine meal that we share together.

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Wednesday, November 9, 2016

(Lec. 671)

1) Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12

2) 1 Corinthians 3:9c-11, 16-17

3) John 2:13-22

Gospel related: **CCC** 575, 583, 584, 586, 994

**THE DEDICATION
OF THE
LATERAN BASILICA
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Worship is an act of gratitude and love, not a transaction with God.

This feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica is a day for all Catholics to celebrate. The Lateran Basilica is situated in the Diocese of Rome and is the cathedral of the pope. That being the case, it is our home, – a central place to which we all are connected. Since the pope is the vicar of Christ on earth, it is our mother church.

In today's Gospel, we have the account of the cleansing of the Temple, which describes Jesus going up to Jerusalem. Upon entering the Temple area, Jesus fashions a whip of cords and drives out those selling oxen, sheep and doves, and then overturns the tables of the money changers. We can imagine the scene as John describes the spilled coins of the money changers and overturned tables, and the strong words of Jesus to *take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace.*

But this Temple area *was* a marketplace. It was where those on pilgrimage could have easy access to animals they needed for offering sacrifice. Rather than bringing animals with them, they could purchase them here. Naturally, wherever people and money mix, there is potential for corruption, but was this what angered Jesus so much? If we read a couple of verses beyond today's reading, we hear this comment: *Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all, and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well (2:24-25).* We might think the statement about human nature is referring to the likelihood of deception in the exchange of goods, but there may be something else we are overlooking.

Perhaps Jesus was reacting less to *what* the people were doing than *why* they were doing it. Jesus may not have been as upset about the activity going on in the physical building, as, perhaps, the lack of conversion in the hearts of the people, who may have thought that simply going through the ritual sacrifices was sufficient. You see, their *behavior* had not changed, even though they went through the motions.

For us, it is a good reminder that when we join our brothers and sisters in this Eucharistic celebration, we are to come in thanksgiving for all God has done for us. We are to come out of love, not simply to make a transaction with God. Every time we gather during Mass to give praise and thanks, we are in some way changed for the better. We are prepared to go out into the world and lead lives of discipleship and service.

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Thursday, November 10, 2016

(Lec. 494)

1) Philemon 7-20

2) Luke 17:20-25

THURSDAY OF
32ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
SAINT LEO THE GREAT,
POPE AND DOCTOR
OF THE CHURCH)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2463

FOCUS: *The kingdom of God is among you.*

“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Imagine what this world could be like if we all lived according to God’s will as we pray in the Our Father. Imagine a world where people love and respect the Lord, forgive one another and live free of evil. Perhaps this seems so unattainable that it has caused us to feel that the kingdom of God is far away – a world beyond this one or a time yet to come.

The Pharisees of Jesus’ time seem to have felt this way as well. In today’s Gospel, they ask him when the kingdom of God will come. He surprises them with his response: *The kingdom of God is among you.* What does this mean? It means that in and through Jesus, the kingdom of God had broken into the world, and will come in its fullness when Jesus returns in glory at the end of time to establish God’s kingdom over all the earth. Although the coming of God’s kingdom in its fullness will not occur until the end of time, each of us, by virtue of our baptism, is called to do our part in helping build up God’s kingdom on earth.

In terms of fleshing out the practical implications of this for our lives, let us turn to Saint John Paul II. Following the 1987 Synod of Bishops, he explained the vocation of the lay faithful in this way: “to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to the plan of God” (*Christifideles Laici*, 9). In other words, Saint John Paul II is urging us to look at what is happening around us through the eyes of a Christian who understands God’s plan of salvation. Then, he wants us to evoke change.

Our first reading from Philemon offers an example of this. Paul developed a relationship with a runaway slave named Onesimus, who he converted to Christianity. Paul sends the former slave back to his master with a letter pleading Philemon to welcome him back – not as a slave, but as a brother in the Lord. Paul goes against the social norms of his time and offers Philemon a new way of understanding the relationship according to the truths present in Christ’s teachings.

While we may not have the persuasive power of Paul, we were each created with unique gifts and talents to help build up the kingdom of God on earth. As we reflect on the lessons in today’s readings, let’s prayerfully consider how we might more fully use our gifts and talents to help build up God’s kingdom on earth so that his peace and love may reign more fully upon the earth.

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Friday, November 11, 2016
(Lec. 495)

- 1) 2 John 4-9
- 2) Luke 17:26-37

FRIDAY OF
32ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Martin of Tours,
Bishop)

Gospel related: **CCC** 1889, 2463 **CSDC** 34, 583

FOCUS: Our lives are to be firmly rooted in Christ so that we might be judged worthy of eternal life.

Are we so busy with life that we don't stop to ask ourselves why we are doing what we're doing? So many things to do and people to see. We work, we go to school, we do our chores or homework – sometimes we take work home with us. We check our messages and reply and, when we get a chance, we unwind with filling our time with more and more. When do we take time to stop and ask why? When do we wonder what is really important? When do we look beyond all that we see and ask ourselves what really matters? Who and what should be most important in our lives?

I lift up these questions for our reflection because they have consequences for our lives. If we ignore them, we do so at our own peril. For as Jesus makes clear in today's Gospel, our lives on earth are brief. And at a time unknown to us, each of us will have to stand before the Lord, Jesus to give an account of how we lived our lives. To prepare for this day and be found worthy of heaven, we need to be rooted in Christ and strive to practice his teachings in all areas of our lives.

So let us ask ourselves: do we know his commands? Have we taken time to love others? Are we so busy with life that we have not stopped to look at what lies at the core of life? When was the last time we sat with the Gospels? When was the last time we read the sermons of Jesus, reflected on his parables, read how Jesus explained them to the Apostles?

Read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Learn what the light is, and then shine it for all to see. Read Jesus' discourse to the Apostles in John 14-17, and love as Jesus loved us.

Our Gospel reading reminds us of the utter importance of walking in Christ's way of love by practicing his teachings. Let us sit with Jesus' words and actions and follow him so that when our time comes to stand before the Lord, he may say, *Well done, my good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master* (Mt 25:21).

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Saturday, November 12, 2016

(Lec. 496)

- 1) 3 John 5-8
- 2) Luke 18:1-8

SATURDAY OF
32ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Josaphat,
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 675, 2098, 2573, 2613

FOCUS: Praying persistently and consistently is essential for strengthening and deepening our relationship with God.

At the Academy Awards every year, the winners thank various people, from relatives and friends to co-stars, directors and producers, for playing a part in their success. Even in Hollywood, a place we don't often associate with the virtues of humility or keeping one's ego in check, an Academy Award is acknowledged as a team effort.

Our pilgrimage on this earth toward eternal life with God in heaven also involves the support of others. In today's first reading, John describes the aid given by early Christians to missionaries spreading the Gospel; he thanks them for their support and exhorts them to continue. John doesn't specify what sort of aid the missionaries received from their fellow Christians, but we can imagine it being food, lodging, money, maybe even new sandals and garments – whatever they needed to continue their mission.

We also play a role in others' journeys in life – in their journey toward God. Instilling Christian values in our children, volunteering our time to Catholic charitable and missionary groups, and simply setting a good example by our actions assist the Church in her mission, and provide aid and inspiration to others.

In addition to supporting and relying on others, of course, the ultimate source of strength on our earthly pilgrimage of faith is God. To grow in our love for God and receive the grace needed to persevere in faith, it is imperative that we pray each day.

Today's Gospel reminds us of the importance of praying persistently and consistently. God may not answer our prayers as fast as we'd like, or in the manner we'd prefer, but he is surely much more responsive and attentive to our prayers than the judge in the Gospel was toward the widow! Prayer is so important that Saint Paul, in his first letter to the Thessalonians, tells us to do it without ceasing (5:16-18). Our prayers don't always have to be long or wordy – just a moment or two to acknowledge God with a few unspoken words and thoughts while going about our day is also a form of prayer. And when it becomes habitual, it becomes powerful.

We know that God hears our prayers because he's not in some far-off, inaccessible realm of existence. He is present in the person of the son, Jesus, in the Eucharist. This is the most powerful and most important way that God helps us – by the body and blood of Christ, given for the life of the world. May this heavenly food nourish our prayer lives and strengthen us along our earthly pilgrimage of faith toward eternal life in heaven.

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SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2016

(Lec. 159)

1) Malachi 3:19-20a

2) 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12

3) Luke 21:5-19

Gospel related: **CCC** 675, 2544

**THIRTY-THIRD
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: God gives us concrete signs and symbols that remind us of how we are called to live as Catholic Christians.

Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome receives millions of visitors each year. Some are tourists, lovers of art and architecture. For them, Saint Peter's is just one of many "must see" attractions in Rome, like the Colosseum or the Spanish Steps. For others, it is the very heart of the Catholic Church – a concrete sign of the unity we share as Catholic Christians.

Imagine yourself as one of these pilgrims, shuffling along the marble floor through a crowd of thousands, trying to take in the beauty and majesty of this remarkable place. Perhaps you are struck by Bernini's twisting bronze columns supporting the canopy high over the altar, or moved by the delicate beauty of Michelangelo's *Pietà* – the sculpture of the Blessed Mother holding the lifeless body of Jesus in her lap.

Just as Saint Peter's is, for many, the heart of the Catholic Church, the Temple in Jerusalem was the center of the Jewish faith. God was worshipped in the Temple. He resided in the Holy of Holies, the innermost sanctuary of the Temple – so sacred that only the high priest could enter, and only once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Sacrifices could only be offered to God at the Temple, which is why Jerusalem was flooded with pilgrims during all of the major feasts.

But we are not to put our faith in temples made by human hands. We are to put our faith in the living God. Ultimately all things made by human hands – as beautiful as they may be – will turn to rubble. The promises of God stand unshaken. Therefore, let us continue to pray and support one another in growing in our love for God and keeping our eyes firmly fixed upon Jesus. Let us witness to our faith and love of God by living in love and unity with one another.

The Lord gives us many concrete signs and symbols, such as Saint Peter's in Rome, which remind us how to lead our lives as Catholic Christians. Let us open our hearts to what these signs and symbols tell us, and keep our sights firmly fixed upon Jesus, and our feet firmly planted on the path that leads to eternal life in heaven.

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Monday, November 14, 2016
(Lec. 497)

- 1) Revelation 1:1-4; 2:1-5
- 2) Luke 18:35-43

MONDAY OF
33RD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus helps us to see past our blind spots and shows us the path toward healing.

Automotive technology is advancing at a rapid pace. We hear more and more about autonomous or self-driving vehicles that may be widely available in less than a decade. The vehicles that many of us drive have electronic advances and innovations that could only be dreamt of just a few years ago. In some vehicles, cruise control can now adjust our speed so that we keep a safe distance from vehicles in front of us, while automated braking can assist when a vehicle or pedestrian unexpectedly moves into our path. Many vehicles even use radar to detect people or objects in our blind spots, signaling their presence to us.

Wouldn't it be nice if somehow each of us had a way of seeing what is in our spiritual "blind spots" so that we could open ourselves to God's grace and healing, rather than allowing old habits or grudges to accumulate just out of view? In today's Gospel, Jesus is intent on healing a man born blind – someone who needs to have his eyes opened so that he can see clearly. To some, the man's lack of sight was proof of his sinfulness, or the sinfulness of his parents. However, to Jesus, healing the man's blindness is an opportunity to share a healing word, providing the man born blind with even deeper insight about his role and responsibility as a child of God.

The sacrament of reconciliation provides a powerful opportunity for us to hear and receive Jesus' healing word, allowing our eyes and hearts to be opened more fully. In taking the time for a prayerful examination of conscience, each of us has the opportunity to respond to God's grace and guidance, peering into those blind spots in order to uncover sinful behaviors that can too often be a part of our daily lives. Do I harbor a grudge? Am I unwilling to offer forgiveness to others even when it is given to me by God? Do I tend to be too obsessed with success or material possessions? In my daily life, are there issues or areas that I tend to avoid that need to be addressed, that need God's healing and forgiveness?

In the sacrament of reconciliation, once Jesus has helped us to peer deeply into those blind spots and discover what may be hiding there, he offers his healing words of forgiveness, and we are given a penance that can help us to correct whatever may have been hiding. Like the man born blind, with clarity of vision restored, we, too, are encouraged to follow Jesus more closely, as we go forth to proclaim the Good News of God's mercy and healing.

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Tuesday, November 15, 2016
(Lec. 498)

- 1) Revelation 3:1-6, 14-22
- 2) Luke 19:1-10

TUESDAY OF
33RD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Albert the Great,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 549, 1443, 2412, 2712

FOCUS: Following Christ means going “all in” – striving to give bold, effective witness to the Gospel in all areas of our lives.

Many who immigrated to America and helped build it up were so firm in their Christian faith that they chose to name the towns they founded after places mentioned in the Bible. Look at an atlas and you’ll see towns named after Bethel, Hebron and Corinth.

There are probably few towns named Laodicea, however. This ancient city, which existed in what is now Turkey, was rebuked by Christ himself as we heard in today’s first reading from Revelation.

The Apostle John, traditionally understood as the author of Revelation, received a vision of Christ judging the state of the faithful of Laodicea and other cities in the region. Regarding the Laodiceans, the Lord said, *Because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.*

The earliest Americans who traveled halfway around the world to make a new life were anything but lukewarm. Many of those who came with little more than the clothes on their back had a deep and abiding faith. This gave them the grace to overcome the obstacles they faced.

Today, however, many of us have grown tepid in our faith. Perhaps we just get so busy that we forget our need for God.

Today’s Gospel shows that we do not have to grow disheartened, for all things are possible with God. Take the example of Zacchaeus. As a reviled tax collector, he may have been searching for a way he could atone for his misdeeds as he climbed the tree to get a glimpse of Jesus. We heard today that after he came to know Jesus, his heart was changed forever.

The stories of Zacchaeus and immigrant Catholics remind us not to grow lukewarm, but to continually strive to grow in our faith and love for Jesus. It may not involve climbing a tree – but may be something as simple as turning our phones to silent on Sundays, pulling out Grandma’s rosary, or getting up early to pray before the demands of the day take over. We need to allow the flames of faith to burn strongly in our lives so that we may give faithful witness to the Gospel, and experience Christ’s light and love.

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Wednesday, November 16, 2016

(Lec. 499)

1) Revelation 4:1-11

2) Luke 19:11-28

WEDNESDAY OF

33RD WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Margaret of Scotland;

Saint Gertrude, Virgin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 1880, 1936 **CSDC** 326

FOCUS: Jesus calls us to generously give of our time, treasure and talent to help build up God's kingdom on earth.

Today's Gospel invites us to reflect upon the strength of our commitment to living as disciples of Jesus: Is Jesus truly the ruler of our lives and hearts? And are we using our gifts, talents and material blessings to help build up God's kingdom on earth? Do we humbly offer and place ourselves into God's hands so he can use us in whatever way he deems best?

This question is present in today's Gospel as Jesus tells a parable that portrays him as a nobleman going *to a distant country* to claim his kingship. Before leaving, the nobleman gives his servants gold coins. He expects his servants to invest prudently so as to earn more money for him in his absence. One of the main lessons underscored by this parable is that Jesus expects all those who aspire to live as one of his disciples to use the unique talents, along with the material blessings they have been given by God, to help build up God's kingdom on earth.

Practically speaking, what does this mean for our lives? It could mean sharing our money or goods with those in need or with charitable organizations. It could mean sharing our talents at the service of our parish or our community. Very simply, it means taking every opportunity we can to generously give of our gifts and talents to serve the needs of others.

What are we waiting for? Are we waiting for some inspiration? The time is now. We cannot wait for some special signal or moment to start spreading the message of God's kingdom. We must have faith that Jesus will show us how we are to work for the kingdom. Ten servants are mentioned at the beginning of the parable, but only three are mentioned at the end. Perhaps we are more like one of the other seven servants who need to figure out what gifts and blessings we have been given so we can use them boldly to proclaim God's kingdom here on earth.

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Thursday, November 17, 2016

(Lec. 500)

1) Revelation 5:1-10

2) Luke 19:41-44

THURSDAY OF
33RD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Elizabeth of Hungary,
Religious)

Gospel related: **CCC 558**

FOCUS: As the perfect embodiment of God's love, Jesus reveals the depths of God's love and mercy for humankind.

In today's Gospel, Jesus expresses his incredible love for his people and his desire that they turn away from evil and turn toward him in faith. Jesus is looking over Jerusalem in the days preceding his passion, death and resurrection. He weeps over the city, prophesying about its judgment. Listen to these words again, and hear his desire for our conversion: *He saw the city and wept over it*. Now hear them again, with your name in place of *the city*. What message do the words speak to your mind and heart?

These words also affirm a core tenant of our Catholic Christian faith. God has revealed himself to us through the people of Israel and ultimately, most clearly and definitively, through his son, Jesus Christ. As the perfect embodiment of God's love, Jesus reveals that God loves each and every one of us unconditionally and without limit.

This core tenant is also affirmed earlier in Luke's Gospel, as Jesus laments over Jerusalem with even more poignant language: *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were unwilling* (13:34). This love of God for humankind is not just an idea or a thought; it is deeply personal – deeply merciful.

This is why, in our first reading from Revelation, God is seen both as a lion and a lamb. We see his great power throughout the Gospels as he goes about doing mighty deeds. He is like a lion, and we can be confident in his ability to save us from our enemies. But he is also like a lamb, and in this way we can take comfort in his willingness to suffer with and for us.

It is as both a lion and a lamb that Jesus looks upon Jerusalem, and looks upon us, and weeps because he wants to save us by the power of his love. As we encounter the lion and the lamb today, let us lay our sinfulness and weaknesses upon his altar, and ask him to deepen our conversion to the life he offers.

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Friday, November 18, 2016

(Lec. 501)

1) Revelation 10:8-11

2) Luke 19:45-48

FRIDAY OF

33RD WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

The Dedication of the Basilicas
of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles;
USA: Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne,
Virgin)

NOTE: Or, for the Memorial of the Dedication, Acts 28:11-16, 30-31; Matthew 14:22-33 (Lec. 679)

FOCUS: The New Evangelization invites us to deepen our prayer lives and give witness to our faith.

In the Book of Revelation, John is offered a small scroll by an angel of God. The scroll stands for the word of God. He is asked to take it from the hand of the angel. Then he is told to eat it, and it tastes both sweet and sour. The word of God is sweet because it contains the promise of victory for God's people. It's also sour because there will be pain and suffering when the people of God live its message.

Now that John is filled with the revelation of God, he is told to prophesy. In other words, he must proclaim the word of God that has been entrusted to him. These prophecies are recorded after the seventh trumpet sounds in chapter eleven. They proclaim the reign of God.

We must also allow the words of sacred Scripture to be a part of our lives. We need to read the Scriptures and learn their meaning. We are called to be attentive when they are proclaimed at Mass, and explained in the homily. We must be willing to give witness to them every moment of our lives.

In the Gospel, it is evident that Jesus is the true prophet because he speaks and lives the message of God. When he comes to the Temple, he sees people coming to buy animals for sacrifice. They had to change their Roman coins into acceptable Jewish currency, known as shekels, to make their contributions to the Temple. Jesus objects because this business is being carried out inside of the Temple. And corruption and greed usually accompanied these practices.

Jesus responds to this hypocrisy by saying, *It is written, my house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.* These are the words of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. He stands as an example of the true prophet who came into the world to reveal his Father's message. Therefore, it is not surprising that the chief priests, the scribes and the leaders of the people get upset. He is challenging their authority and accusing them of participating in injustices. They begin talking about putting him to death.

At this time when we, as Catholic Christians, are asked to evangelize and be witnesses to Christ in our everyday lives, let us strive to live out the Gospel message. We must proclaim the Good News not only with words, but above all by a life that has been transfigured in Christ – rooted in prayer and filled with good works.

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Saturday, November 19, 2016
(Lec. 502)

- 1) Revelation 11:4-12
- 2) Luke 20:27-40

SATURDAY OF
33RD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 330, 575

FOCUS: We believe in the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting.

As the liturgical year comes to a close, we hear the Scripture readings about the end times, when all of us will be ushered into the judgment before our savior, Jesus Christ. No one knows when the last judgment will occur, only that we will be called to account for how we have lived our lives. How will we fare as individuals and as a Church as we stand before Christ?

If we have opened our hearts to receive the grace of Christ, we will have been able to carry out the Gospel message, not just in words, but in deeds. We will have had the strength to bring the good news of salvation to the person without hope. We will have shared what we have with those less fortunate. We will have been the mercy of God for others as we stand before the throne of judgment.

The two witnesses in our first reading are examples of how we can live in readiness for the last judgment. These prophets have been given the power to testify on behalf of God's plan. And this they did, after which they were persecuted and killed. But this was not the end of the story. After their torment, God breathed life into them and called them to heaven *in a cloud*. The meaning of this highly symbolic vision lies in the fact that the Christian community was under severe persecution by Roman authorities at the time. The writer's intent was to give them hope in their suffering and torment, and let them know that God's grace would sustain them and bring them to eternal life. God's goodness will triumph over evil.

The theme of life after death reappears in today's Gospel. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. Even though they were experts in the law, they were unable to understand the underlying meaning of the law. So they posed a hypothetical question to trick Jesus: If a woman is widowed seven times, whose wife will she be at the resurrection? Jesus knew and understood the law and the Scriptures. He based his answer on Scripture when he said that God is not God of the dead, but of the living, *for to him all are alive*.

Jesus lived, suffered, died and rose from the dead so that all people could have eternal life. He shows us the way to the Father, and has given us the Advocate – the Holy Spirit – to guide us. All we have to do is take up our cross and follow him. While not an easy path, with God's grace we can be one with Christ now and for all eternity in heaven.

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SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2016

(Lec. 162)

- 1) 2 Samuel 5:1-3
- 2) Colossians 1:12-20
- 3) Luke 23:35-43

Gospel related: **CCC** 440, 1021, 2266, 2616

**OUR LORD
JESUS CHRIST,
KING OF THE UNIVERSE,
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: Jesus' kingdom is not of this world.

The Second Book of Samuel recalls the anointing of David to replace Saul as Israel's king, almost a thousand years before the birth of Jesus. "The anointed one" in Greek is rendered as *Christos*, in Hebrew as *Messiah*. Through his foster father, Joseph, Jesus, who descended from heaven to earth, is also a descendant of the Royal House of David. For his part, David was a shepherd who became a king. Jesus is a king who became a shepherd.

Chapter One of Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians is known in Biblical history as one of the greatest spiritual hymns of all time. Paul uses these words to beautifully describe the sovereignty of the Christ, who existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit before the world was created. This divinity within the Most Holy Trinity is the source of Jesus' kingship, authority and power.

At his trial, Jesus would tell Pontius Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world. Indeed, Jesus' kingdom comes from heaven, and those who are baptized are already citizens and subjects of the new and heavenly Jerusalem. Whether we are loyal subjects of our king and his kingdom remains to be seen, but of his mercy there can be no doubt.

The feast of Christ the King was established by Pope Pius XI in 1925. Europe was still healing from the effects of World War I. The once great Catholic monarchies of Europe had been replaced by fascists, socialists and communists – all styles of government that are opposed to religious observance. Europe was beginning to turn away from God and his Church. The intent of this solemnity was to let all people know that the kings of men will never match the great and glorious, merciful and mighty kingship of Jesus Christ. The Church was staking her claim with the powers of heaven.

In the Gospel, Jesus is mocked on the cross, even by those crucified with him. The good thief is aware that they have condemned an innocent man, undeserving of the most cruel punishment to which he was subjected. This thief, known in history as Dismas, is also well aware that he is in the presence of his Lord, Savior and king. His faith motivates his dying wish: *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom*. There on Calvary, as darkness covered the earth and all hope seemed lost, a convicted sinner professed his faith – that Jesus would live again and forever, that he alone had the power to forgive and to grant new life, but most importantly, that his kingship would reign in this world and in the next.

Let us pray that in the darkest moments of our life, when we find ourselves like the Good Thief – up against adversity, on the cross, persecuted, left behind – that we, like him, will trust in the Lord who is our friend, confidant and our king. He will set us free and remind us that one day we, too, will be with him in paradise.

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Monday, November 21, 2016

(Lec. 503)

1) Revelation 14:1-3, 4b-5

2) Luke 21:1-4

MONDAY OF

34TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

The Presentation
of the Blessed Virgin Mary)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2544

FOCUS: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Most of us are familiar with the Ten Commandments. We've either read them in the Bible, memorized them during our spiritual formation, or learned them from people close to us. The commandments are so important that God wrote them in stone!

Over time, the people of Israel became too fixated on these commandments and lost sight of their purpose: to love God and our neighbor. Jesus came to bring these truths to light.

Yesterday concluded the Jubilee Year of Mercy, during which our attention was directed at the ways we are to serve and care for the needs of others in mind, body and spirit. Inspiring these works are the beatitudes, the heart of Jesus' teachings, which give us the hope and promise of eternal life in heaven. To emphasize the beatitudes' relevance to us as Christians, Pope Francis has asked us to memorize them and imprint them on our hearts.

The widow in today's Gospel illustrates the first beatitude, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 5:3). The widow gave two coins, which is all that she had, while the others gave from their surplus. Jesus offers us a new perspective in this passage: Rather than compare the amounts each gave, we should consider what each kept.

The widow's contribution was not merely a financial act, but a demonstration of faith. With no husband or material wealth, she places her complete trust in God. This parable is in contrast to that of the rich man in Mark (10:17-31) who turns away from Jesus because he cannot part with his many possessions to follow him.

This great act of love offered by the widow calls to mind another sacrifice – that of Saints Anne and Joachim as they offered their child, Mary, to the Lord. Today's feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary honors the day Mary's parents presented her in the Temple as a form of thanksgiving for blessing them with a child. It also reveals the holiness of the Blessed Virgin's life from an early age. Like the widow, Mary placed her trust in the Lord and gave all she had – her gift of self. It was through this lifelong "yes" to God's will that our savior, Jesus, was born into the world to bring about our salvation through his life, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven.

As we prepare for the start of Advent this Sunday, let us reflect on the ways we can say "yes" to God. What is the Lord asking of us? How much are we willing to give?

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Tuesday, November 22, 2016
(Lec. 504)

- 1) Revelation 14:14-19
- 2) Luke 21:5-11

TUESDAY OF
34TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Cecilia,
Virgin and Martyr)

FOCUS: Jesus will one day return in glory to set all things right.

In the last few weeks of every liturgical year, we read of the “end times,” where the disciples ask Jesus what signs they should be seeking. Throughout this current liturgical year, we have explored the Gospel of Luke. Tradition tells us Luke was a physician and a companion of Saint Paul, concerned with presenting God’s promise of salvation coming to fulfillment in Christ within the context of human history. Luke also wrote about how Christ’s saving mission would continue through the Church. Luke’s Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, which he also composed, are considered a “two-volume set.” They tell the story of Jesus and his ministry, and how Jesus accomplished the saving mission his Father had sent him to fulfill.

Today’s reading includes Jesus’ prediction that the Temple will be destroyed, and that there will be false prophets, great natural disasters and wars between nations heralding the end. The earth will pass away and the Son of Man will come to rule in eternity. The theme is a fitting prelude to Advent, which calls us to focus on repentance and amending our lives so that we are prepared when our time comes to stand before the Lord to give an account of our lives.

The reading from the Book of Revelation underscores the theme of the “end times” as we close the liturgical season. Today’s passage dovetails with Luke’s Gospel: The end will come, and Jesus will one day return to set all things right.

As we approach Advent, we are reminded of the importance of living in such a way that we are properly prepared – at a time known only to the Lord – to stand before God to give an account of our lives, that he might judge us worthy of entering into eternal life in heaven. Mindful of this, now is an ideal time to recommit to turning to the Lord in prayer and opening our hearts to God’s grace. When we do so, our faith and love of God and others will grow, spilling over into every area of our lives.

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Wednesday, November 23, 2016

(Lec. 505)

1) Revelation 15:1-4

2) Luke 21:12-19

WEDNESDAY OF

34TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Clement I,

Pope and Martyr;

Saint Columban, Abbot;

USA: Blessed Miguel Agustin Pro,

Priest and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 675

FOCUS: *They will seize you and persecute you.*

This year, we have read about Christians who have suffered and died for their faith. Militants in Syria have killed Christians and other ethnic minorities; sisters of Saint Teresa of Calcutta's Missionaries of Charity were martyred in Yemen; Christians are living in refugee camps; Christians in some regions have to pray in secret.

In today's Gospel, Jesus warns his disciples that they will face persecution. He tells them that even the families of Christians will turn against them, they will be hated, and some will be put to death. Jesus' prophetic statements have come true: Two thousand years of Christian history are filled with persecutions and martyrdom, beginning with Jesus' death on the cross and the martyrdom of his Apostles, to the men and women who died for their faith in 2016.

Yet Jesus also instructs his followers not to worry about the trials and hardships they will face. Rather, they must trust that the Holy Spirit will give them the grace, strength and gifts needed to stand steadfast in faith through the trials and hardships that befall them.

We find examples in the story of Blessed Miguel Pro and in the words of Revelation.

Today is the memorial of Blessed Miguel Pro. He was martyred in the early twentieth century during a period of suppression of Catholicism in Mexico. Before he was shot by a firing squad, he prayed for mercy and blessings on his executioners and cried out, "Long live Christ the King!" Blessed Miguel Pro died with God's praise on his lips!

The reading from the Book of Revelation closes with praise for God in the victory of the Lamb. To praise God, even in our darkest moments of persecution, brings wisdom and clarity to our pain. Our victory is in Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven, by which he restored our life and opened the way to eternal life. Our perseverance in faith helps to secure a place for ourselves in heaven, but doesn't secure our lives on earth.

Most of us will lead Christian lives that do not end in martyrdom. We will face little persecutions, such as misunderstandings and rejections by family and friends, but it is unlikely that we will be truly hated or imprisoned. Nonetheless, even in these persecutions, we should turn to the Holy Spirit for the grace, gifts and strength to persevere in faith. And let's remember the example of the martyrs, and ask for their intercession to help us remain steadfast when it's not so easy to do so.

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Thursday, November 24, 2016

(Lec. 506)

- 1) Revelation 18:1-2, 21-23;
19:1-3, 9a
- 2) Luke 21:20-28

THURSDAY OF
35TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM

Saint Andrew Dũng-Lạc,
Priest, and Companions,
Martyrs)

NOTE: Or for Thanksgiving Day in the United States of America, any readings from the *Lectionary for Ritual Masses* (vol. IV), the Mass: "In Thanksgiving to God," nos. (943-947). See especially Sirach 50:22-24 (943.2), 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 (944.1), Luke 17:11-19(947.6).

Gospel related: **CCC** 58, 671, 674, 697

FOCUS: In the midst of hardship, Christians will triumph when they are faithful to the teachings of Jesus.

The last book of the Bible, the Revelation to John, is one of the most difficult to understand because it abounds in extravagant symbolism. Its vision is often borrowed from various Old Testament books. At best, such language appears strange to today's reader even though it enjoyed wide popularity in Jewish and Christian circles before and after the time of Christ. Such descriptions are not to be taken literally. The author uses images to convey a particular meaning, and to make it strikingly clear that Christ has defeated the power over sin, evil and death. In the end, God will set all things right.

In today's reading, an angel lights up the earth and speaks with God's voice. He announces the fall of Babylon, the Roman Empire, because Christians are being persecuted. In a symbolic act, another angel hurls a huge boulder into the sea to emphasize that Rome is going to be destroyed because of its idolatry. The hymn that follows describes a city that has become a ghost town. Then the vision of John moves to a huge heavenly assembly singing for joy, having successfully made it through the persecution and oppression. The reading ends with an invitation to live the fourth of seven beatitudes scattered throughout this final book of the Bible.

In the Gospel, Jesus continues his warnings about what the future holds. He blends predictions about the future of Jerusalem and the end of time. As in the first reading, the images are not to be taken literally. In other words, Jesus is not focusing on the way the actual events will occur. His central concern is what causes the events. He sees infidelity and corruption, and the inescapable outcome of these is destruction. When our Lord speaks about the end of time, he describes the glorious victory brought about by his suffering, death and resurrection. He says that those who have lived the Gospel message will eventually experience utter peace, joy and consolation.

The more than 100 saints we celebrate today exemplify the meaning of these readings. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, Christians were persecuted in Vietnam because of their faith. Unwilling to give up living the Gospel message, these martyrs are strong witnesses for us. In the midst of our own hardships and suffering and the evil that is present in our world, we also need the courage to continue living our faith. We can rest assured that Christ has won the victory. In the end, God will set all things right in a way beyond our understanding.

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Friday, November 25, 2016

(Lec. 507)

1) Revelation 20:1-4, 11-21:2

2) Luke 21:29-33

FRIDAY OF
35TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Catherine of Alexandria,
Virgin and Martyr)

FOCUS: Christians are confident that their future is safely in Christ's hands when they live the message of the Gospel.

The beautiful symbolism in the Book of Revelation is taken from a long, rich heritage that blends history and religion with ritual and folklore. It comes from the conviction that the mystery of God is beyond us, and yet very close to us. Revelation uses powerful signs to convey such a reality. The point is to learn its central meaning rather than get carried away with its vivid images in either a positive or negative way.

Today's reading begins with several important points. God's messenger, an angel, overpowers Satan. Since he can become active once again, no one can feel complacent about his temptations. The scene then shifts to the elect. They represent those who have remained faithful to the message of the Gospel. They refused to follow evil ways, and now they reign forever with Christ. The reading continues by describing the dead gathered before God. They are judged according to the degree they have opened their hearts to him. They have been transformed by his message that is working in and through them.

The reading ends when John sees *a new heaven and a new earth*. This description depicts the way the faithful will experience God when they see him face to face. It also points to the day when creation will be freed from decay, corruption and dominance, and to a time of the glorious victory of Christ that is beyond anyone's comprehension. It will be an awesome moment.

Jesus also speaks about the future, using a parable in today's Gospel. The key to understanding what he is saying is to watch for signs. They are evident in our family, our neighborhood, our place of employment and throughout the world. In digging beneath the surface and asking God to help us listen perceptively, we will understand when we are hearing the word of God. This announcement of the presence of Christ points us in the right direction. It is a message that will not go away because it heralds the coming of the kingdom of God.

The symbolism in today's readings attracts a lot of attention. Let's not get distracted or preoccupied with trying to figure out the exact date for the end of the world, and the events leading up to it. Many attempts have been made over the centuries, and then plans are revised when the end does not come. Instead, let's focus on hearing the message of Christ in the present and entrusting our future to his loving ways.

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Saturday, November 26, 2016
(Lec. 508)

- 1) Revelation 22:1-7
- 2) Luke 21:34-36

SATURDAY OF
34TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2612

FOCUS: Jesus warns us out of love to be vigilant and alert at all times so we might be judged worthy of entering into eternal life in heaven.

So often in our lives, a parent or someone else may have said to us, "I'm warning you!" We would then imagine the dire straits we would be in if we did – or did not do – something. Such a warning would most often be construed as negative, setting limits or restraints on us.

Jesus' warning in today's Gospel is just the opposite. It is not a threat or a precursor to dreaded happenings. Rather, it is motivated by love. Jesus tells us to *Be vigilant at all times* and to pray for strength. As we hear in a passage from John's Gospel, the Lord does not want any one of us to become lost. (6:39) Jesus' warning today is meant to encourage us to do what is necessary to ensure that when the end of our life occurs, we will be found watchful and waiting, and ready to enter the kingdom.

What must we do to be found watchful and waiting? Through prayer, fasting and the sacraments of the Church, we prepare ourselves for that day. We also must practice what is the core of our Christian faith: to love the Lord our God, and to love one another. This love must be something that is concrete and put into action – simple acts of kindness to one another. In doing these good works, in being found watchful and waiting, the glory of the kingdom described in the Book of Revelation will be ours.

It is also important to note that today is the last Saturday of the current Church year, a day in which we honor the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary is the model of faithful expectation. At the Annunciation, she said yes to God though she did not know the price she would have to pay. When she visited with her cousin, Elizabeth, she proclaimed the greatness of the Lord. When she held the Incarnate Word of God in her arms, she felt the blessings all generations would bestow on her. When she presented her holy child to Simeon, she felt the first sharp stab of the sword that would pierce her immaculate heart. When she lost Jesus in the Temple and then found him, she experienced a foreshadowing of the grief of the cross and the joy of the resurrection.

These are the joyful mysteries of the rosary, a set of prayers many of us take up during Advent. Praying with our Mother, we await his coming. We share her sorrows and her joys as we prepare to celebrate his birth anew at Christmas. We pray, and we are vigilant, both "now and at the hour of our death."

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CYCLE A YEAR I

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2016

(Lec. 1)

- 1) Isaiah 2:1-5
- 2) Romans 13:11-14
- 3) Matthew 24:37-44

Gospel related: **CCC 673**

**FIRST SUNDAY
OF ADVENT**

FOCUS: Each day we are to give our best for the Lord that he might judge us worthy of eternal life.

It is worth noting that today's psalm is the same one that was used for the feast of Christ the King: *Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord*. This is no coincidence. The Church wants us to see that the ultimate goal of faith is that, when our lives are over, we might be found worthy – in the words of Isaiah – *to climb the Lord's mountain*.

As we begin Advent, our Scriptures invite us to reflect on this truth, and place before us a selection of images: from the pilgrim people ascending the Lord's mountain to the light and dark of Paul's Letter to the Romans. Even the very sobering Gospel reference to Noah and the great flood is heavy with meaning and worthy of reflection. Jesus doesn't mince his words! We need to be vigilant and prayerful – *to stay awake*. There is going to be a judgment and, like the master who expects his house to be broken into, we need to be prepared.

But let us remember that the idea of final judgment is not limited to Advent. Each week, in our Creed, we express the belief that Christ *will come to judge the living and the dead*. That judgment will be real – a review of life with its many choices and decisions, laid out before us in the light of God's revelation. We can find it hard to reconcile this part of faith with our view of God as loving and forgiving, especially as many have a distorted understanding of God as being indulgent and accepting of all types of behavior.

How easy it is to be like the folks at the time of Noah, indifferent to what was about to take place. How many hear the message, but prefer to discount it or to ignore it and so lose the opportunity to be prepared? Paul puts it so well – *our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed*. Our Gospel challenges us to *stay awake*, to be like that good master. Paul exhorts us *to put on Christ*: a wonderful image to reflect upon as we begin Advent, for this season is more than just the run-up to the holidays!

We know the final outcome in the conflict between good and evil: the victory of Christ! Our task is to ensure that we are on the victorious side by living lives worthy of him. We ought not to take eternal life for granted but, each day, renew our commitment to the Gospel and the hope that our baptism offers. As Christians, we are called to be realistic, to face the fact that our world is broken and in need of healing. Yet we are never without hope. Indeed, the Christian view is to see worldly imperfection not as a lost cause but as an opportunity for improvement and redemption. This is what we celebrate in this Advent time of preparation and anticipation. We look forward to the coming of Christ, striving to be vigilant and worthy to stand before the Son of Man.

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Monday, November 28, 2016

(Lec. 175)

1) Isaiah 4:2-6

2) Matthew 8:5-11

Gospel related: CCC 543, 1386, 2610

MONDAY
OF ADVENT
- FIRST WEEK

FOCUS: The mysteries of our faith can be illuminated by the wide range of people we encounter every day of our lives.

This weekday reading for the season of Advent begins with Isaiah's vision of the kingdom of God. Christ exists through the power of God. Therefore, he is named *the branch of the Lord*. He will flourish and spring up in this world. Those who remain close to him have been purified of their sinfulness and will be called holy. This wonderful invitation is extended to everyone. Today's reading also expresses a hope that all nations and races will be united harmoniously. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God promises to protect all people who belong to this kingdom.

Sometimes, Isaiah's vision seems unreachable. However, even small steps can begin to make it a reality. Going out of our way to help others in need is one way. Taking food to people who do not have enough to eat is another. Being willing to let go of grudges and injuries is also a sign. Even saying a kind word can point in such a direction. Yet, for the fullness of the vision to occur, we must be willing to open our minds and hearts to all different races and ethnic groups.

In today's Gospel, Christ demonstrates how to move away from our uncertainties and preconceived ideas about other people, and make Isaiah's vision a reality. A Roman centurion approaches Jesus and invites him to his home. The man was from a different religion and ethnic background. He represented a foreign oppressive invader. Free from all fear and preconceived ideas, Jesus accepts the invitation. The Roman hesitates, saying he is unworthy of Jesus' presence in his home.

Rather than ending the conversation, Jesus accents certain characteristics that describe the kingdom of God. He points to the centurion's gentle humility. He also is amazed at the centurion's concern for a slave, who was not a Roman. Jesus makes the point clearer by saying that this outsider is an example of a true and genuine follower and descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Jewish people hearing such statements must have been shocked that Jesus was including him in such a way.

During this Advent season, Jesus asks us to look toward this outsider for direction about how to become his true follower. In order to learn how to walk with Jesus, we cannot put any restrictions on who will teach us. Unexpected sources can provide new ways of learning.

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Tuesday, November 29, 2016

(Lec. 176)

1) Isaiah 11:1-10

2) Luke 10:21-24

Gospel related: **CCC** 1083, 2603

TUESDAY
OF ADVENT
- FIRST WEEK

FOCUS: How are we helping to build up God's peaceful kingdom here on earth?

Isaiah describes "the peaceful kingdom" where *the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord, as water covers the sea*. But don't we already have knowledge of the Lord? Don't we know of the power and the majesty of the Lord, our God? He made the heavens and the earth, the seas and the land, and all the plants and animals of our world. Don't we know the Ten Commandments, and the Golden Rule? Why, then, isn't the world at peace? Why do we have conflict and war? Where is this peaceful kingdom?

We know the Lord, but knowledge is not enough. We have to put into practice what Jesus taught, and that has proven difficult for humankind to master. We know the Ten Commandments, but can any of us say that we never violate them?

And how about the great commandments that Jesus taught? *You shall love Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind*. This is the greatest and foremost commandment. The second is: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*. How are we doing on those? Who of us gives our whole heart, our whole soul and whole mind to God? Who among us loves our neighbor as ourselves? The answer to these questions is "no one," because the ideals set forth by Jesus in these commandments require perfection. And not one of us will ever be perfect. The purpose of these commandments, however, is to call us to seek to continually grow in loving God with our whole being, and loving and serving our neighbor little by little each day.

For this growth to occur in us, we must open our hearts each day to Jesus and to the power of the Spirit. Spending time in prayer each day opens us to the grace and strength to practice the teachings of Jesus in our daily lives, and helps us build up God's kingdom on earth.

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Wednesday, November 30, 2016

(Lec. 684)

1) Romans 10:9-18

2) Matthew 4:18-22

Gospel related: **CCC** 878

**SAINT ANDREW,
APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: *Come after me.*

Students in literature classes are often surprised to find the Bible is studied as a piece of classical literature. It's a book rich with literary genres and motifs. The hero quest is a recurring motif. It appears individually in stories such as Jonah and the whale, and the Samaritan woman at the well. It appears as a collective endeavor in the Israelites' exodus from Egypt.

The hero's quest has common elements: responding to an invitation to find a treasure; taking a journey, during which the hero's life is transformed; receiving help from others in finding the treasure; and bringing the treasure back to the community, which thereby transforms the community.

Today's Gospel contains elements of the heroic. Peter, James, John and Andrew, whose feast we celebrate today, received Jesus' invitation to *come after me*. They are invited into a journey in which the treasure they seek is new life in Jesus Christ. The Gospel passage makes it clear – their response was immediate and seemingly sacrificial, in that they left behind family and careers.

We know that, while the response was immediate, the quest contained moments of purification, confusion, miracles and love. Each of these men was flawed. In taking the journey with Jesus and embracing God's grace and mercy, they were transformed.

As Catholics, the hero quest of this literary work is the call of our lives. For us, it is the living word of God being proclaimed in the Gospel. Just as we listened to the Gospel being proclaimed, we heard our own call. Jesus this day is inviting us to come after him.

As with the Apostles, our invitation occurs daily. Every day, we make choices that affirm or deny our faith in Jesus and our resolve to lead lives of faithful discipleship. Every day, we are faced with decisions that call on us to be heroic – that demand immediacy on our part and a sacrificial courage.

Saint Paul's letter to the Romans suggests a manner in which we can respond to the invitation. We are to confess with our mouths and believe with our hearts that Jesus is Lord. In a few minutes, we will do just that in our profession of faith.

Knowing that we, like the Apostles, are flawed, we need the assistance of others to help us obtain the treasure we seek – new and eternal life in Christ. And, like the Apostles, we have the Christian community to journey with us. This is why we make our profession in the context of communal prayer. If we are to obtain our treasure, we need the assistance of other believers, the grace of the sacraments – especially the Eucharist we celebrate today – the wisdom and teaching of the Church, and the witness and example of the communion of saints. Together, they encourage and inspire us to face our daily choices courageously, by affirming our desire and commitment to living as faithful disciples of Jesus, regardless of the cost. Saint Andrew, pray for us.

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