

# OCTOBER

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**CYCLE C**  
**YEAR II**

Saturday, October 1, 2016  
(Lec. 460)

- 1) Job 42:1-3, 5-6, 12-17
- 2) Luke 10:17-24

SATURDAY OF  
26<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM)

Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus,  
Virgin and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 787, 1083, 2603

FOCUS: Trials and hardship go hand-in-hand with discipleship and faith.

Let's look at the first two readings. God rewards Job for his faith with new children and greater material well-being than he had before his trials. In the Gospel, the disciples proclaim they have seen Satan falling from the skies, that they performed all kinds of great works when they were on their mission. These great events are a witness of God's greatness, but can also distract us.

Some followed Christ for a while because he fed them, because the miracles he performed were entertaining and brought wonderment. They did not realize that the miracles were proof that Jesus was the Messiah, the son of the living God, and that they should change their lives as a result of this. Like Job, the disciples who stayed with Christ would go through their own trials, at times they would run, and they would be puzzled, but all but one would hang on and wait – wait to see how the great wonders Christ had revealed would unfold.

We are often impatient and try to hurry to the answer. We want things to be right, and problems to be fixed now. This is not how Job reacted as his life fell apart. He exhibited what some have called "Holy Indifference": If Job accepted the good that God gave him, then he should accept the hardships as well. He was patient and kept his faith.

Christ's disciples would take a longer journey to get to this point. In today's Gospel, they have seen many wonders and performed great deeds as they proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand. But we know that later they would experience trials, fear and doubt.

St. Thérèse, whom we honor today, loved simplicity and tried to focus on the reality of the lives of the saints rather than on pretense or improbable events. She was confident each day in God's infinite love for her, and patient and steadfast. She once wrote: "What matters in life is not great deeds, but great love."

Let us take the examples of Job, St. Thérèse and the disciples that we heard about today, and try to apply their patience and steadfastness to our own lives. Let's try to forget our troubles and use our gifts to focus on others. Let others see God's good gifts of peace and joy and faith alive in us.

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**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2016**

(Lec. 141)

1) Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4

2) 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14

3) Luke 17:5-10

Gospel related: **CCC** 162

**TWENTY-SEVENTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: God will bring about the kingdom by his own power. We are merely his servants.

The readings today speak of the power, courage and strength that is given to us through faith in Jesus, such as the strength to bear hardship for the Gospel and the marvels God can work through our faith, like a tree being *uprooted and planted in the sea*. The words and images are aimed at stirring up a flame in us. They call us into action. In response, we may feel the urge to *do* something for God, to accomplish many things on behalf of his Church.

Sometimes it can be hard to feel we are making a difference. If we are involved in parish life, we may feel the push and pull of many different elements: programs and committees, pressure to make the liturgy more engaging, the need to increase church membership numbers, or perhaps to proclaim the Gospel in fresh and innovative ways. The weight of these responsibilities may add up, and we can feel discouraged that we are not making enough headway in building up the kingdom of God.

These activities are well-intended, and certainly in line with our understanding of the Gospel. So it may come as a shock to hear these words from Jesus: *When you have done all you have been commanded, say "We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do."* We expect praise, or perhaps even gratitude, from the Lord. We expect him to appreciate our efforts, not respond in such a dismissive tone. But then again, who are we to expect, or even demand, anything from the Lord?

The experience of Carlo Carretto may be instructive here. Carretto was a leader of an Italian youth movement called Catholic Action for twenty years before and after the Second World War. At age forty-four, he experienced a call to the contemplative life, and responded by joining a community called the Little Brothers in Algeria.

During his novitiate, he spent a week alone in the desert in adoration of the exposed Eucharist. In his life as an activist, he had felt responsible for bearing the weight of the Church on his shoulders. But kneeling before the Eucharist, in a moment of deep contemplation, he understood the truth: "I had walked, run, spoken, organized, worked in the belief that I was supporting something; and in reality I had been holding up absolutely nothing. The weight of the world was all on Christ Crucified. I was nothing, absolutely nothing. It had taken some effort to believe the words of Jesus who had said to me two thousand years earlier: 'When you have done everything that is commanded you to do, say We are unprofitable servants, because we have only done our duty.'" [*Letters from the Desert*, 1972.]

These words of Jesus are not unkind, they are merely truthful. In today's reading from the Second Letter of Timothy, we are reminded: *kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you*. Everything we have, we have received from him. He alone bears the weight of the world. Without him, we can do nothing.

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Monday, October 3, 2016

(Lec. 461)

1) Galatians 1:6-12

2) Luke 10:25-37

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

MONDAY OF  
27<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

**FOCUS:** Remembering Jesus' ultimate sacrifice for us, we are to love each other as he loved us.

This well-known story of the Good Samaritan was Jesus' response to the question: *And who is my neighbor?* In other words, what are the limits to my obligation? Jesus never answers that question. Instead, he tells a story about what it means to *be* a neighbor. And he concludes the story with a question of his own: *Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?* The answer is obvious: the Samaritan. But Jesus' questioner can't bring himself to say that hated word because Samaritans were despised by Jews. So he resorts to a workaround: *The one who treated him with mercy.* To which Jesus responds: *Go and do likewise.* The man had asked about the limits of his obligation, and the parable says, in effect, there are no limits.

How, we ask, can Jesus make such a radical demand? First and foremost, because in humble obedience to the will of his Father, and out of love for us, Jesus emptied himself of his lofty position in heaven and became human for the sake of our salvation. Throughout the course of his public ministry, by word and example, Jesus taught about God's great love for us and the Father's plan of salvation. He poured himself out in love to all those he encountered – healing those who were sick and extending mercy and forgiveness to all who sought it. Ultimately, as we know, he freely chose to die upon the cross to win forgiveness for the sins of humankind and to reconcile us to the Father.

Beyond this, Jesus is the one who finds us lying mortally wounded along life's way. By no merit of our own, but simply because of his infinite compassion, Jesus comes to our aid. He binds up our wounds, offers forgiveness in the sacraments of baptism and penance, and gives us his holy word and the wine of his love in the Eucharist.

We have Jesus' words: *Go and do likewise.* In other words, show mercy and love to those whom you meet. So, today, in humility and gratitude for all Jesus has done for us and continues to do, let us go out and serve others with hearts transformed. Let's make an effort to forgive others and sow the seeds of unity and peace.

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Tuesday, October 4, 2016

(Lec. 462)

1) Galatians 1:13-24

2) Luke 10:38-42

TUESDAY OF

27<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

Saint Francis of Assisi)

Gospel related: **CSDC** 260

FOCUS: Let us listen for the voice of God in our lives.

Today, we are blessed with beautiful readings for the Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi. These readings proclaim a striking truth: God knows us intimately and calls us from our mother's womb. We are called to set aside that which distracts us. We are called to listen for his voice in our lives. We are called to preach the faith. We are called to serve the poor. And we are called to bring peace into the world.

In the first reading, Saint Paul describes how his zeal for Jewish traditions caused him to persecute the early Christians, but that God revealed Jesus to him and called him to preach the Gospel. He speaks of his missions to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles throughout the Mediterranean world and how people glorified God for his conversion. An encounter with Jesus caused Saint Paul to change from a persecutor to a preacher!

According to tradition, Saint Francis also had an ill-spent youth as a wealthy young man. After an encounter with a beggar, he renounced his wealth and took on a life of simplicity. Francis experienced a mystical vision of Christ, who asked him to rebuild his church. At first, Francis believed that he was supposed to fix up a chapel that was in disrepair. Through prayer, Francis came to understand that he was called to help rebuild the faith of the entire Church through preaching. He gathered other men and women around him, forming the Order of Friars Minor and the Poor Clares, and lay orders who assisted them in their work without taking vows.

In his late thirties, Saint Francis sought to convert the Sultan of Egypt during the fifth crusade. His encounter with the Sultan was peaceful, and he was given permission to continue on to Jerusalem. The Franciscans have remained as ministers of many sites in the Holy Land for 800 years! Saint Francis was also known for his prayers praising God for all of creation and for sharing in Christ's suffering through the stigmata.

In recent years, Saint Francis' inspiring life has been a model for our Church under the leadership of Pope Francis. When he was elected pope, he chose the name "Francis" in order to focus on renewal of the Church through the New Evangelization, a return to simplicity and service to the poor, the care of God's creation through good stewardship of natural resources, and peaceful dialogue between different faith traditions.

Today, we have a choice. Like Martha in the Gospel, we are invited to set aside our distractions and listen to the word of the Lord. Like Saint Paul and Saint Francis, we are invited to share the faith with others and renew the Church in our families, our parish and our country. We can imitate Saint Francis by living more simply, sharing what we have with the poor and leaving a gentler mark on the earth. We can avoid religious polarization, and seek to be peacemakers instead.

May God, who knows our inmost being, strengthen us for this journey.

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Wednesday, October 5, 2016

(Lec. 463)

1) Galatians 2:1-2, 7-14

2) Luke 11:1-4

Gospel related: CCC 520, 1425, 2601, 2632, 2759, 2773, 2845

WEDNESDAY OF  
27<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The Lord's Prayer is a model for what we believe, and what we hope for from God.

Memorized prayers are important. When we know a prayer by heart, we can call it to mind at a moment's notice.

A risk we take in memorizing and repeating prayers often, though, is growing so familiar with them that we don't often think about how profound they are. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus himself teaches us a prayer. Let's look at his words together.

Jesus wants us to think of God as a loving Father to whom we should never hesitate to turn. He wants us to honor and respect God's holy name in all our thoughts and actions. *Father*, he says, *hallowed be your name*. He goes on to say *your kingdom come*. Jesus wants us to place God's will – the manifestation of his kingdom – above our own, or better yet, to unite our will with that of our heavenly Father.

It's okay to ask God for our everyday needs – Jesus says so. *Give us each day our daily bread*, he says, and *forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us*. Our Lord wants us to acknowledge our need for forgiveness – for mercy – and to show mercy to everyone. As we approach the end of the Jubilee Year of Mercy proclaimed by our Holy Father Pope Francis, this focus on forgiveness and mercy is especially pertinent.

*Do not subject us to the final test*, Jesus asks us to pray. God allows temptation to come our way. We pray that he will provide the grace we need to resist temptation and avoid sin. We know that when we fail, and choose a sinful desire of ours over his holy and perfect will, he waits for us with open arms, offering mercy and forgiveness – especially in the sacrament of penance.

Soon we will pray the Our Father together in preparation for receiving our Lord Jesus in Holy Communion. Let us savor the words of this beautiful prayer, appreciate the joy of being united with Jesus as well as with each other, and go forth to live lives of gratitude – thankful that we have so loving a Father in heaven. Hallowed be his name.

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Thursday, October 6, 2016

(Lec. 464)

1) Galatians 3:1-5

2) Luke 11:5-13

THURSDAY OF

27<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Bruno, Priest;

USA: Blessed Marie Rose Durocher,

Virgin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 443, 728, 2613, 2623, 2671, 2761 **CSDC** 453

FOCUS: Persist in prayer and the Lord will answer.

As you listened to today's readings, you may have been surprised by their contrast in tone. Paul harshly addresses his audience, *O stupid Galatians!* He then goes on to imply that they are bewitched. Jesus' words, on the other hand, are gentle. With them, he gives us hope that the Lord answers our prayers. While Paul and Jesus differ in their approach, their purpose is the same – to bring us into loving union with the Lord.

Paul doesn't use the word *stupid* to imply that the Galatians lack knowledge. He uses it because he knows how much is at stake when they disregard what they have learned about Christ and return to their old ways. He doesn't understand how this could happen. Someone must have cast a spell on them! But Paul's message needs to be strong, because by growing lax in faith and reverting to some of their old ways, the Galatians jeopardize their salvation. Paul is determined to appeal to their innermost desire of turning away from the flesh and back to the Spirit.

Our Gospel picks up after the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray, and he gives them the Our Father. In today's passage, Jesus offers two more lessons about prayer. First, with the parable of the man who visits his friend's house late at night for bread, he tells us to persist. Keep on praying! Second, Jesus promises that the Lord will answer our prayers beyond what we can imagine. He provides us with infinitely more than any father here on earth. His gift to us includes what we need, as well as the Spirit, who bears even more gifts.

Jesus tells us to *ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you*. These words are full of promise and hope, yet they may leave some of us wondering how we can practically follow these instructions.

Asking requires us to pray – not to simply think about something, but to formulate our innermost desires into messages directed toward God.

Seeking requires us to search for the Lord. Where do we find him? We find him when we spend time quietly in prayer, when we meditate upon sacred Scripture, and when we come forward to be nourished and strengthened by Jesus himself in holy Communion. Jesus is there waiting.

Knocking requires us to take action – to go to the Lord's door and knock like the man who visits his friend in the middle of the night. We, too, must persist and patiently wait for the Lord to answer.

Our Father hears our prayers, and he knows what we need most in our lives. Trust Jesus' promise. The door will be opened to you.

Friday, October 7, 2016

(Lec. 465)

1) Galatians 3:7-14

2) Luke 11:15-26

FRIDAY OF  
27<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Our Lady of the Rosary)

Gospel related: **CCC** 385, 700

FOCUS: Only God can drive out demons.

Today's Gospel presents a very tense exchange between Jesus and some members of the crowd that surround him as he casts out a demon. Like many other such encounters, these people fail to see who is truly at work. In today's confrontation, some members of the crowd see only the possibility that Jesus might be working in league with Beelzebul. They seem to be either unwilling, or unable, to see the other possibility – that Jesus is the son of God, and that God is at work, casting evil out of our lives.

The demons of today's Gospel represent the varied forces of evil and darkness that still afflict the human condition. These demons take many contemporary shapes and sizes. The unbalanced desire for power is a kind of demon that afflicts many. It causes some to blatantly disregard those around them so they see fellow men and women as tools that can be used to reach a particular end. Greed is another demon that causes some to look beyond what they need and reach endlessly for what they want. Often, that which is desired will simply be ignored once it has been acquired. The endless quest for acquisition quickly becomes pointless.

The demon of control can be sly and dangerous. Thinking that we can impose our own will upon people and situations can lead to an inflated ego. It can also lead to alienation from those who are most important to us. Addiction is another dangerous demon. It leaves monumental destruction in its wake. This demon seeks to convince its victims that ultimate pleasure and satisfaction come from something that can be swallowed, smoked or snorted.

Only God can cast out such demons. In his love for us, Jesus shows us that we can find true fulfillment in being sensitive to the needs of others – seeing them as brothers and sisters, fellow travelers on the path that he opens before us. As we walk that path with our brothers and sisters in the Lord, we are reminded to take only what is necessary for the work at hand, nothing more. In responding to the Lord's desire for simplicity of life, God's grace can cast out the demon of greed.

The Lord seeks to guide our lives each day. In surrendering to his will for us, we can leave behind the demon of control, finding instead the deep satisfaction that comes only from doing God's will for us, allowing ourselves to be guided by God's goodness. It is only Goodness – only God – who can cast out the demons, guiding us on the path that leads us to the kingdom of God.

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Saturday, October 8, 2016  
(Lec. 466)

- 1) Galatians 3:22-29
- 2) Luke 11:27-28

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

FOCUS: We are called to embrace our faith and live as one in Christ.

Humankind has always sought and cherished freedom. Today's readings teach of the great gifts and freedoms we enjoy when we enter into communion with Christ through the sacrament of baptism, and "clothe ourselves with Christ."

Young children yearn for the day they will be free of the constraints of their parent's rules. As adults, we learn to live by laws so that our freedom may not be taken from us. However, true freedom does not come from laws, but rather from placing our faith in Jesus. Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus freed us from the bonds of sin and death, won forgiveness for our sin and opened the way to eternal life. Through the sacrament of baptism, we are given new life in Christ by water and the Holy Spirit, and called to do our part to further the work and mission of the Church. We also are claimed by God as his dearly beloved sons and daughters – called to lead lives which are pleasing and holy.

With such great gifts come responsibility. Our greatest challenge is to truly "appreciate the magnitude of the gift God has given us each day in and through the sacrament of baptism," and as such to live each day as one who has "put on Christ" (CCC#1425). Though we may have no memory of our baptism, and our baptismal garments are long gone, we must still try to live each day "clothed in Christ." Our lives must be a sign to others of our faith.

In our first reading, Paul reminds the people of the "constraints" of the man-made Mosaic laws which caused hardships and deprived many because of their status or race (CCC#581). Paul heartens the people to reflect on the freedom and wondrous inheritance their faith in Jesus has brought them, and the joy they will know in living as sons and daughters of God in imitation of Christ.

In the Gospel, Jesus says, *Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.* The more we do this, the more our lives give witness to the Gospel and we come to experience God's gifts of peace and fulfillment in our lives. The good news is that Jesus does not leave us on our own to try to live as his disciples. He gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us, and he speaks to us through Sacred Scripture, daily prayer and the sacraments so we may continue to grow in faith and holiness of life.

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**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2016**

(Lec. 144)

1) 2 Kings 5:14-17

2) 2 Timothy 2:8-13

3) Luke 17:11-19

Gospel related: **CCC** 586, 2463

**TWENTY-EIGHTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: *The word of God cannot be chained.*

The word of God cannot be chained. These are powerful words of Saint Paul written from prison. His preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ landed him in jail and also in chains.

As we know Saint Paul, after his conversion, harnessed his religious zeal to further the message of the Prince of Peace. There was no price Paul was not willing to pay to bring the message of redemption to the ends of the earth.

The most prolific writer of the New Testament and the most traveled of any Apostle, Saint Paul literally went to the four corners of the known world of his day, to preach that there was a new and most powerful way in which people were being called to live out their lives.

We, like the generations of faithful servants of Jesus who have come before us, must be willing to pay the price for our strong conviction that the way to wholeness of life, free from the leprosy of our sins, is to follow the ways of our savior, Jesus Christ.

Saint Paul goes on to tell us that even if we are unfaithful to the Lord, Jesus will not deny us and will remain faithful to us, for to do otherwise, would be to deny that he is the Savior of the world. This he will never do!

Let us, therefore, strengthen our resolve to never imprison the word of the Lord because we are embarrassed by it or it is too hard for us to carry out its message. Let us shed the leprosy of our sins and the chains brought on by our doubts, and rededicate ourselves to being missionaries of God's mercy and love to a world in crisis.

Whenever we are feeling a little weak-kneed about our call to discipleship, let us look for the nearest cross and there realize the depths of God's love for each and every one of us. Strengthened by God's abiding and unending love, let us be about our Father's business, and bring others to know his son and our brother, Jesus Christ.

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Monday, October 10, 2016

(Lec. 467)

1) Galatians 4:22-24,  
26-27, 31—5:1

2) Luke 11:29-32

MONDAY OF  
28<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We need God's grace, through the sacraments, in order to repent from our sins.

Jesus' words in the Gospel today seem harsh when he says that the current generation will be condemned. Why does he say this? Because they don't repent at Jesus' preaching, instead they ask for a sign. Jesus reminds us that he is greater than Jonah, and the Ninevites did repent when they heard Jonah speak.

How is it that Christ could have been in their midst and yet not everyone believed and not everyone repented from their sin? We do this too. Christ remains with us, truly present in the Eucharist, and yet we go through times on our journey of faith when we doubt, when we give into sin, when our vices blind us from seeing Christ.

Jesus came to free us from our sin, but we have to choose to accept it. We have to choose to repent. We have to do our part to recognize our vices and ask God for the grace to identify and practice the virtues we need to counteract those vices. We all have a tendency, due to sin and human weakness, to become attached to the things of the world.

In a sense, we make the things of the world, our gods – our desire for wealth or recognition, for example, can consume us. When we attach too much importance to these false idols, it can hinder our relationship with God. We must make the choice to change our hearts. We must first ask God for help in prayer, "Jesus, I have this idol, I need your help to get rid of it."

Other important things we can do are to study our faith, read and reflect upon sacred Scripture, spend time with Jesus in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and prepare well for Mass and confession. Taking the time each day to examine our conscience is a wonderful way of helping us identify vices in our lives so that with God's help, we can make progress each day in living more fully and faithfully as disciples of Jesus.

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Tuesday, October 11, 2016

(Lec. 468)

1) Galatians 5:1-6

2) Luke 11:37-41

Gospel related: CCC 579, 588, 2447

TUESDAY OF  
28<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Do people know we are Christians by the good works that we do?

How do we show we are Christians? How do we demonstrate that we have listened to Jesus and have decided to live as he taught? The first reading from Paul's letter to the Galatians sheds some light on the answers to these questions by reminding us that Christ has set us free, has forgiven our sins and calls us to live as his followers. It also underscores that what matters is *faith working through love*.

Let's take a moment to digest this. Faith that works through love seems clearly to suggest action. So, what are the works we are supposed to do that flow forth from our faith and love for Jesus? Certainly the Corporal Works of Mercy are always a good starting point, especially as we approach the last month of this Jubilee Year of Mercy declared by Pope Francis. As Catholic Christians, our faith in action often takes the form of helping those who are less fortunate or visiting someone who is alone or sick.

And let's not forget about putting our faith into action by considering the Spiritual Works of Mercy. This may consist of bearing wrongs patiently, forgiving offenses willingly or praying for the living and the dead. The "action" part of these spiritual works may seem less obvious, but they are equally important. Many of you may remember the old song, "They'll Know we are Christians by our Love." Is it clear to those around us that our faith is *working through love*?

Let's not be like the Pharisees in today's Gospel to whom Jesus says: *You clean the outside of the cup and dish but inside you are filled with greed and wickedness*. Let's not have our faith be something we merely profess with our lips. But rather, let's make our faith something we continue to grow in, and which is evidenced by our deeds of love and mercy, and by lives led in accordance with the teachings of Jesus.

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Wednesday, October 12, 2016

(Lec. 469)

1) Galatians 5:18-25

2) Luke 11:42-46

WEDNESDAY OF

28<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Preoccupation with religious externals can close our mind and heart to God's loving Spirit.

Jesus had strong words for the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Their scrupulous observance of the Law of Moses blinded them to its underlying purpose: to teach God's people to grow in their love for God, and to grow in their understanding of what it means to love one's neighbor.

The religious leaders' fussy compliance with the details of the law left little room for truly loving and honoring God or respecting others. Instead, they focused on earning recognition for acting piously. Keeping track of how well they were doing made the religious leaders self-centered and self-righteous. They traded the letter of the law for the heart of the law.

If they'd had a chance to read the *works of the flesh* listed in today's first reading, the Pharisees might have congratulated themselves on avoiding drunkenness, orgies, immorality and sorcery. But would they have identified with the selfishness, envy, and rivalry that stems from self-centered pride over meticulous religious performance?

Notice that Saint Paul calls these *the works of the flesh*. These are products of our own efforts. What a contrast to the fruits of the Spirit that Saint Paul also lists. There's no room for ego or pride in qualities such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity and gentleness. These aren't works we achieve. They're fruits – an outgrowth of the Spirit within us. We receive them by accepting God's grace.

The Spirit empowers us to live as God wants us to live – at peace with one another. We can't be generous or patient when we're concentrating on how we measure up. We can't be gentle or kind while calculating how well we're doing compared to everyone else. We can't be loving or at peace if we're busy building ourselves up by trying to prove – to others, to ourselves, or even to God – how right we are.

God is love. When we're filled with his Spirit, we can let go of trying so hard to be perfect or to earn the love we already have. When we stop competing, we're free to focus on loving God, loving others and loving ourselves. After all, Jesus said those were the most important commandments of all.

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Thursday, October 13, 2016

(Lec. 470)

1) Ephesians 1:1-10

2) Luke 11:47-54

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

FOCUS: How open are we to the power of God in our lives?

It can be so easy to forget the power of God that is at work in the everyday events that we face, and to leave God out of the equation in our small, daily decisions. Today's readings show the contrast between those who are open to God's Spirit – and those who shut God out.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks poetically of the spiritual blessings we receive simply because we are followers of Christ – of God's adoption of us through Jesus, and of Jesus' loving, redemptive act for our sake. Paul points out clearly that we are the recipients of God's lavish grace – we have done nothing to earn it, and all God asks is that we be open to receiving this gift.

It seems that the Scribes, also referred to as the *scholars of the law* in today's Gospel, had yet to learn this lesson. In forceful and blunt terms, Jesus points out how the Scribes and other religious leaders of his day bear a share of the blame for the murders of the prophets. Following the example of their ancestors, they are plotting to murder the greatest prophet of all, the Son of God. Even more, they have *taken away the key of knowledge* and prevented others from using it – simply by blocking their minds and hearts from the message God is trying to convey to them through Jesus.

We can assume that the Scribes truly believed that, in relying on their own strength and strictly following the law, they were pleasing to God. Yet, they were so focused and locked into their way of doing things that they were blinded from seeing the works of Jesus – his healings, exorcisms and beautiful teachings of the love of God. If they had opened their hearts and minds, they might have recognized these works of Jesus as signs to them of God at work in the world.

Though we profess our faith in Jesus, we are not immune from falling into the same trap that ensnared the Scribes. We can try so hard to be perfect that we don't see the many signs around us that point to God's gracious love for us: from the kind and loving gestures of a family member or stranger to the beauty of God revealed through the sunrise or a butterfly.

Today, take some time to consider prayerfully: Are you open and willing to receive the love that God wishes to bestow on you through Jesus? Or do you consciously or unconsciously believe you have all the answers and are in complete charge of your life? What signs has God given to you today of his love for you and his willingness to care for you?

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Friday, October 14, 2016

(Lec. 471)

1) Ephesians 1:11-14

2) Luke 12:1-7

FRIDAY OF  
28<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Callistus I,  
Pope and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 342, 678

FOCUS:

We exist for the praise of God's glory.

The reading today from Ephesians tells us we exist for the praise of God's glory and, through the coming of the Holy Spirit into our hearts, we have received the *first installment of our inheritance* of everlasting life in heaven.

Do you feel that? Do you sense the Holy Spirit in you? Do you see yourself as praising God with your very existence?

If you do, you know you are blessed. If you do not, let today's reading help you see yourself in that light. It could change your day and even your life. Knowing God is in you and you are in God can help you rise above the cares and disappointments of life, and lift your mind and heart in remarkable ways.

In fact, the Gospel today tells us that we need not fear the tribulations of life. Jesus teaches that *Even the hairs of your head have been counted* by God. He knows you, he fashioned you in your mother's womb, he provides for you. God knows your secret longings, your frustrations, your needs. He will never abandon you.

If we let the cares of life get us down, we are missing out on the joy God wants for us. He has given us Jesus as our savior, our teacher, our light. We exist to show God's glory. How can we do that today? Each of us can examine our own life. Do I need to make some changes in how I interact with people in order to let God's glory shine through me? Could I reach out to someone who might need my help? Do I need to talk to God more?

Jesus tells us in today's Gospel that God sees and hears everything. We can keep no secrets from him. We can be afraid of this closeness or we can embrace it and live as beloved children of a generous, compassionate Father. The choice is ours. The Holy Spirit is in us, and God's love is there waiting for our response.

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Saturday, October 15, 2016

(Lec. 472)

1) Ephesians 1:15-23

2) Luke 12:8-12

SATURDAY OF

28<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

Saint Teresa of Jesus,

Virgin and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 1287, 1864

**FOCUS:** A strong prayer life can bring us closer to Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit, and help us navigate the path to God.

Saint Teresa of Ávila was born in 1515 and died in 1582. She lived during a time of great social and political change, much like our world today. During her lifetime, European explorers discovered the “New World,” Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral, Henry VIII split with the Catholic Church over the issue of divorce, Saint Ignatius of Loyola founded the Society of Jesus, or “Jesuits,” and the Council of Trent was called to respond to the Protestant Reformation.

And in her native Spain, Teresa was engaged not just in contemplative, continuous prayer, but she also worked to reform her Carmelite order to grow closer to God through prayer. In 2015 on Vatican Radio, Pope Francis called the life of Saint Teresa a role model for today. He said her prayer “arose spontaneously in the most diverse occasions ... she was convinced of the value of continuous prayer, even if it was not always perfect.”

Today’s readings remind us of the importance of just such prayer. In the first reading from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, Paul assures the members of the early Church in Ephesus that he is praying for *a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in the knowledge of [God]*. Paul’s prayers are for the Ephesians to be open to the plan God has in store for them.

In today’s reading from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus exhorts his disciples to have courage in the face of persecution, for the Holy Spirit will protect them. He says, *When they take you before synagogues and before rulers and authorities, do not worry about how or what your defense will be or about what you are to say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say.* This short passage is part of a larger message in which Jesus tells his disciples not to worry about their lives, about what they will eat or wear because *life is more than food and the body more than clothing* (22-23). In other words, life is about more than our own mortality – it is about following God’s plan and seeking his eternal kingdom.

We are taught to pray from an early age. We memorize the Glory Be, the Hail Mary and the Our Father even before our first Communion. And while such prayers are among the great prayers of the Church, we also are called to pray in a more intimate and contemplative manner, as Saint Teresa prayed. More than 600 years ago she wrote, “Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

Saint Teresa’s words are still a powerful commentary on our responsibility as Christians in our imperfect world. With a strong prayer life and infused with the grace of the Holy Spirit, we as Christians must continue to work to build up the kingdom of God here on earth.

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**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2016**

(Lec. 147)

- 1) Exodus 17:8-13
- 2) 2 Timothy 3:14–4:2
- 3) Luke 18:1-8

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

**TWENTY-NINTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Praying daily is key for growing in our faith and love for God.

Today's first reading from the Book of Exodus gives us a wonderful example of how God is always with his people, continually working to watch over them and provide for their needs.

It's important to remember that on their way to the Promised Land, the Israelites experienced many hardships. The first reading tells about another bump in the road when war is waged against them. Their great leader, Moses, initially addresses the situation by giving some practical commands. But the most important thing Moses does is to stand at the top of the hill with the staff of God in his hand.

This staff has been evident throughout the book of Exodus. For example, think of the parting of the Red Sea. The staff is a symbol of God's saving power and might. In this case, it reminds the people that God will bring them safely to the Promised Land if they place their trust in him. In lifting the staff and allowing others to help him keep it lifted, Moses recognized the Israelites' need to be assured that God was indeed with them and would lead them to victory. This assurance helped give them the courage they needed to go forward into battle.

Today's second reading parallels the message we heard in the first reading. We are encouraged to persevere and be faithful to what we learn through sacred Scripture. We must study it throughout our lives to become wiser in the ways of the Lord. This practice will help us gain more insight into how God is working in our own life.

Finally, today's Gospel reading highlights the importance of praying always to strengthen our relationship with God. It uses the parable of the persistent widow to make the point.

Widows in the ancient world were incredibly vulnerable. They were listed with orphans and aliens as people deserving special protection. The fact that this widow is unattended by family when she beseeches a judge highlights how extremely vulnerable she was. Yet she was strong enough to not only petition the judge, but also to persist in her pleas for justice. She even put sufficient pressure on him to influence his actions. Even though the judge was an unsavory character, he granted her request in order to avoid being hurt by the widow in some way.

The lesson for us is that, unlike the unjust judge who granted the widow's request for self-serving motives, God the Father hears and answers all the prayers of his dearly beloved sons and daughters in the way and time which is best for us.

God is with us. We know that. So when we turn to him in prayer each day, we draw closer to him and receive the grace and strength needed to persevere in our faith and lead lives that give glory to God.

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Monday, October 17, 2016

(Lec. 473)

1) Ephesians 2:1-10

2) Luke 12:13-21

MONDAY OF  
29<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Ignatius of Antioch,  
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 549 **CSDC** 325, 326

FOCUS: We must be attentive to what matters to God.

It's not much of a stretch to say that today's Gospel account seems to apply directly to modern Western culture and values. Media and culture focus on the rich and famous. Successful people are rich, and rich people are successful, or so we are told.

Yet at the same time, we all know that we can't take it with us when we enter the next life. But for many people, there is no next life. They either ignore or deny that there is a next life. The secularist view is to enjoy what the world offers now because there is no life after death.

Jesus speaks of what matters to God in today's Gospel, and warns us that giving our hearts and souls over to material possessions is not only futile, but can blind us from seeing what makes us truly happy both in this life and in the next.

We have to guard ourselves against thoughts of envy and jealousy because of what others have. We can judge ourselves to be failures because we don't possess enough, or because we don't have the net worth that allows us to feel we have been successful. As Christians, we need to see that success is measured in other terms. We must turn the tables on this flawed view and ask ourselves who Jesus regards as successful.

When we pass over from this life to the next and meet Jesus face-to-face, what will he ask us? Will he not want to know who we loved, who we cared for and how we treated people? Won't the relationships we have had interest him more than what we owned when we died? Will Jesus not want to know how closely we lived with him, and how we treated others as he would have? Will Jesus not want to know how we worked to realize God's kingdom in our world?

We need to be rich in our relationships – both in number and quality. We need to have enriched the lives of others, particularly with regard to their spiritual lives. Have we enriched our own souls and the souls of others with the things of God or the things of this world?

As we go through the rest of this day, perhaps it would be good to spend a little time thinking about this: How much do we concern ourselves with the sacred and how much do we concern ourselves with the things of this world?

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Tuesday, October 18, 2016

(Lec. 661)

1) 2 Timothy 4:10-17b

2) Luke 10:1-9

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

**SAINT LUKE,  
EVANGELIST  
- FEAST**

FOCUS: The Christian life has its challenges, but God prepares us and strengthens us.

Most of us are familiar with the process of looking for a job. One necessary step in that process is finding and reading the job description for the particular position that is available. Imagine if the job description said this:

“There is a **ton** of work to do, but not many of you to do it. It is dangerous work: you will be threatened, and possibly killed. You cannot take money, extra clothes or provisions, or even shoes to the job site. Don’t talk to anyone on the way to work, but when you arrive extend peace to all, and eat whatever they give you (even if you don’t like it or think you shouldn’t eat it). Finally, anyone who is sick? Cure them. And then give them a special message.”

Who, in the world, would **take** such a job?! Well, as odd as it sounds, all of us here who have been baptized into the life of Christ are already on that payroll. And while the day-to-day work may be difficult, we have to admit the benefits are out of this world! Granted, the wording of that description is exaggerated a bit for effect, especially for us in the modern world, but it is not entirely wrong.

Today’s Scriptures, in celebrating the life and ministry of Saint Luke the Evangelist, tell us how this is so, and remind us that even in the midst of the challenges of the Christian life, God prepares us and stands by us.

In today’s reading from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus sends his disciples out to do their work. And the job description is not completely unlike the one we just imagined, except that it adds two very important, and distinctive, elements: 1) the disciples are sent out in pairs – they do not do this work alone; and 2) the “special message” – not spelled out in the example above – is that *the kingdom of God is at hand*.

We have already heard, in Paul’s letter to Timothy, what it looks like for those who have been sent; how difficult the work of discipleship is. Paul is expressing his sorrow and his frustration with human failures and disappointment. He has been imprisoned. And yet Paul’s experience reflects the two important elements we just saw in the Gospel: 1) he, and they, do not do their work alone – Luke is still with him; and 2) God has remained at his side and given him strength. This strength has ensured that his proclamation – that the kingdom of God is at hand – would be proclaimed to the Gentiles.

Depending upon when we were baptized, we most likely did not know what the Christian life entailed before we took on the job of living it. And it is true that it does not look exactly as described above, or in Luke’s Gospel. But it is also true that no matter the trials, no matter the joys and sorrows, we do not do the work alone. And we do not have to procure the Kingdom because it is already here! We simply have to proclaim it and help build it up by the witness and example of our lives. And God will give us the strength to do so.

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Wednesday, October 19, 2016

(Lec. 475)

1) Ephesians 3:2-12

2) Luke 12:39-48

WEDNESDAY OF

29<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

USA: Saints John de Brébeuf  
and Isaac Jogues, Priests,  
and Companions, Martyrs)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2849

FOCUS: Live as good stewards of Christ.

It's the middle of the night. A thief breaks into your home. A flood of emotions surges through you – anger, fear, surprise. You want to protect your possessions, and, more importantly, you want to ensure the safety of yourself and your loved ones. But you were caught off guard.

In today's Gospel, Jesus compares the timing of the Son of Man's coming to that of a thief. Like the homeowner in the parable, we must be prepared for him to come at an hour we least expect. We must be ready at all times.

Jesus offers another perspective on his coming when he tells a story about a master who puts his faithful steward in charge of his estate while he's gone. The servant is obedient to the master's instructions and is blessed.

Then, Jesus talks about another steward. He is aware of the master's will but decides to take advantage of his absence by eating and drinking his food and mistreating the other servants. He is punished upon the master's return.

In this parable, Jesus answers Peter's question about the intended audience of his message and tells us how we should prepare. Who is Jesus speaking to? Initially, we assume those in authority, but the reality is that he is speaking to anyone who has received spiritual or temporal gifts – we are all stewards of the Lord. We all need to be vigilant. And to prepare, we must be aware of our master's will and remain obedient. The more we receive from God, the more he expects of us.

In today's first reading from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells of the grace bestowed on Jesus' Apostles to carry on Christ's eternal mission – to preach and share the mystery of God's plan with all people. Today, we celebrate the feast of Saints John de Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues, as well as four other Jesuit priests and two laymen who were martyred while serving as missionaries to the Iroquois and Huron people of North America during the 1600s. They planted the early seeds of the Church in the U.S. and Canada, and helped continue Christ's eternal mission which Paul spoke of in our reading.

The words of Saint Isaac Jogues to a friend in France echo the message of today's readings. In a letter, he writes, "My confidence is placed in God ... Our single endeavor should be to give ourselves to the work and to be faithful to him ..." As we reflect on the sacrifices of these martyrs, let us be inspired to remain vigilant, and be the faithful stewards God calls us to be.

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Thursday, October 20, 2016

(Lec. 476)

1) Ephesians 3:14-21

2) Luke 12:49-53

THURSDAY OF

29<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

USA: Saint Paul of the Cross,

Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 536, 607, 696, 1225, 2804

FOCUS: Jesus stayed true to his Father's will, even unto death.

Perhaps you have heard the wise advice that tells us, "To thine own self be true." The maxim is widely used in the context of urging us to live with honesty, commitment and self-respect. Parents use it to warn their children to refrain from keeping bad company. Bosses and managers may use this phrase to lead their employees to a higher level of commitment, dedication and adherence to quality and standards, not only in what they produce but in how they conduct themselves.

In today's Gospel account, we find Jesus preparing his disciples for his coming passion and death – a passion and death precipitated by who he was, who he represented and what he stood for. In spite of every temptation to do otherwise, Jesus was uncompromising. He was uncompromising to the point that he suffered death in order to maintain his integrity – an integrity rooted in doing his Father's will, no matter what the cost. In being true to his Father's will, he had to be true to his own self as the Son of God.

If we, as followers of Jesus, are going to withstand temptations to compromise our values as committed Christians, we need to strengthen our relationship with him. How do we do that? What about spending some time in the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament? What about joining a faith-sharing or prayer group? What about making a commitment to a regular prayer time? What about making an effort to go to daily Mass? We need to draw strength from these sources, and they will help us remain true to our baptismal calling.

Today's Gospel account presents us with Jesus preparing his disciples for his passion and death. He was also preparing them for the rejection they were going to receive from their own people, and even from their own families in the years that would follow his ascension into heaven. They would need the fire of the Holy Spirit, the light of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit to face the world as the years unfolded after Jesus' time here on earth.

Today you and I stand in their shoes.

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Friday, October 21, 2016

(Lec. 477)

1) Ephesians 4:1-6

2) Luke 12:54-59

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

FOCUS: God created us to live in love and unity with him and one another.

The readings for today's Mass caused me to reflect on unity. The Gospel is all about restoring concord and peace between disputing parties. The first reading from Saint Paul's letter to the Ephesians calls us to patiently strive to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace, bearing with one another through love. We are called to live as brothers and sisters in the Lord, united in love and unity with God the Father.

When you stand back and look at the big picture, nature is filled with the impulse for unity. Atoms seek to join to form molecules, and molecules seek to form cells. An overarching gravitational pull draws these atoms, the stars and the planets in our solar system toward each other. The desire for unity drives our relationships with one another. Discord is immediately recognized as out of place. Our hearts seek to belong – to closely belong – to those we love. Love seeks union.

The nature of the world, our human nature and everything that exists came from God, who is bound together as three persons, united in perfect unity. That being the nature of God himself, it should be no surprise that unity is at the core of existence. Nor should it be a surprise that we all have within ourselves the recognition that division is wrong, that it is out of order, and does not belong in the grand scheme of things.

The desire to foster unity, peace and reconciliation in the world is at the core of the mission of the Church. In our Creed, we profess that we belong to one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Our pope works to preserve the unity of the many churches throughout the world. He is to preside over them in love, keeping us together in one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.

Each of us is called to heal our fractured world, to heal our personal relationships where there is division, and bring about the unity that God desires for us all.

So as we go about our daily tasks, let's try to focus on how we are fostering and enhancing our unity with those around us. In this way, we will reflect the heart of Jesus Christ – sent by our Father in heaven to draw us to himself and to take us back home to our Father in heaven.

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Saturday, October 22, 2016

(Lec. 478)

1) Ephesians 4:7-16

2) Luke 13:1-9

SATURDAY OF

29<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

USA: Saint John Paul II, Pope;

Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: Ongoing repentance and conversion of heart are necessary for leading lives that bear good fruit for God.

No doubt you have experienced one of your plants withering and looking half-dead. Perhaps with a little water, it perked up. Maybe you changed the plant's position, placed it in the sun or gave it some plant food. With care, your plant regained its health.

Jesus used the image of a barren fig tree to teach a lesson on the importance of repentance and reforming one's life. The vinedresser planned to hoe around the tree and fertilize it, in hopes that it would bear fruit. If it didn't, he was planning to destroy it. Likewise, people who do not lead lives that bear good fruit for God face the possible consequence of eternal separation from God – or eternal damnation. Each person has choices to make, and these choices have consequences, both now and for eternity. So it is important to choose wisely.

Jesus affirms this in today's Gospel with regard to the people who died in tragedies in his time. Jesus says that people didn't die because they were greater sinners. But in this world every person will die, and we don't know when or whether it will be from natural or tragic causes. That is why we must continually seek to turn away from sin so that we may live more fully as disciples of Jesus and bear good fruit. That way, when our time comes, we may be judged worthy.

So what fertilizer can we apply to our lives to encourage growth in virtues and good deeds? First and foremost is prayer. When we become close to God by communicating with him in prayer, we are less likely to act in ways that displease him. Another kind of fertilizer for us is the company we keep. The good influence of fellow Christians on the path of discipleship can cultivate goodness in us. And always, the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist can coax good fruit from us. The grace that flows from these sacraments will strengthen and empower us.

And in the same way that the vinedresser would periodically check the progress of the fig tree, we can make a daily examination of conscience. Reviewing where we have loved and have failed to love alerts us to areas that need attention. It also spurs us on to be better people – to be people of God.

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**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2016**

(Lec. 150)

1) Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18

2) 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

3) Luke 18:9-14

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

**THIRTIETH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: As we stand before the Lord in prayer, we should strive to do so in honesty and truth.

When future historians write about this generation, they may comment on our hunger for self-knowledge. Hardly a week goes by when we do not receive mail about a workshop, course or conference designed to help us grow in self-knowledge. These invitations usually come with a guarantee that this self-knowledge will make the participant a better person, spouse, parent, employer/employee, man/woman. The basic premise is that, by knowing oneself better, one can become more responsible, more in control of life and destiny, more self-assured. Jesus even said in John's Gospel that the truth will set you free (8:32). But it is still important to ask: What is truth?

The Pharisee and the tax collector both stand before God, each expressing his own truth. On one level, the Pharisee is correct in his self-analysis; by all standards he is a good and faithful Jew.

Yet his relationship with God seems based on rewards and punishments. His prayer sounds more like a monologue than a heartfelt plea. He approaches the Lord like a businessperson asserting rights and expectations. The center of his life is his ego and not his God! Even his comparison with the tax collector is geared to bolstering his superiority. He has failed to understand the most basic rule of Judaism: *You shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength* (Dt. 6:5).

The tax collector, on the other hand, is a sinner in the eyes of others and in his own estimation. Living on the fringes of Jewish society, many see him as a thief and a collaborator. Remember what Groucho Marx once said: "I would never join a club that would have me as a member." The tax collector most likely would have shared that sentiment! His acknowledgement of his sinfulness stands in marked contrast with the self-centered superiority of the Pharisee.

The tax collector recognizes the basic truth that we cannot earn our way to heaven. We depend totally on God's free gift of grace. God owes us nothing, yet he gives us everything. If only self-help programs could help us embrace that truth: No matter how successful we are in this life, when it comes to eternal life, we depend totally on God. Paul the Apostle knew this early on, but came to a deeper understanding as he grew older. As we heard in today's reading, he knew everything, including his achievements, came from God. He writes, *The Lord stood by me and gave me strength*.

To think that we can save ourselves or enter into eternal life through our own endeavors is to delude ourselves. Instead, we must face the truth of our human weakness and in that honest moment make room for God in our lives. This is the real truth that will set us free!

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Monday, October 24, 2016  
(Lec. 479)

- 1) Ephesians 4:32-5:8
- 2) Luke 13:10-17

MONDAY OF  
30<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Anthony Mary Claret,  
Bishop)

Gospel related: **CCC 582 CSDC 261**

FOCUS: Jesus shows us how loving one another in actions, not just words, changes the world.

Have you ever noticed how sometimes the most extraordinary things come from moments, or circumstances, that at first glance seem just ordinary? Take today's Gospel, for example. Luke tells us that Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath. He cures a woman of her infirmity. It seems simple, and somewhat normal – after all, the Sabbath was for attending synagogue, where teaching took place. And Jesus was often performing miracles, so that, too, is unsurprising.

But let's take a deeper look at the story.

First, is the synagogue. This would have been a crowded place, with people moving around a bit, perhaps engaged in different prayerful postures. Some may have been sitting; others standing. We can presume that Jesus was somehow the center of attention, whether he was up front, or milling about in the middle of the group.

Second, Jesus was teaching. He would have been reading from Scriptural scrolls or reciting Scriptural passages – maybe even telling parables. He would have been engaged with the crowd, who may or may not have been responding with words, statements or even questions.

And yet, in the midst of this, Jesus notices someone: He sees a woman, crippled and bent over. He knows, without being told, that this is an affliction, not a temporary posture. And so, interrupting his teaching, he calls to her, announces that she is free of her infirmity, and lays hands on her – the action of which causes her to stand up straight, and glorify God. This ... *this* is the extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary.

Why?

Because, for his efforts, Jesus is rebuked by the leader of the synagogue for performing work on the Sabbath. And yet, Jesus does not apologize, nor does he try to justify his actions within the context of the law under which the Jewish community lived, and the synagogue elders taught.

Instead, he challenges the leader's hypocritical anger, saying that even an ox or ass needs to be freed from the manger and led out for watering on the Sabbath – and that is all, essentially, that he has done for this woman.

In other words, he moved from words – preaching the law as written, to action – living the law as love. In doing so, he not only set this woman free of her affliction, but led her and us to what we know as the living water. Love, not law, became the foundation and the teaching. Love, not law, moved her and all God's people from bound to free. Love, not law, turned the ordinary into the extraordinary. Love through action helps change the world.

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Tuesday, October 25, 2016

(Lec. 480)

1) Ephesians 5:21-33 or  
Ephesians 5:2a, 25-32 (Lec. 122)

2) Luke 13:18-21

Gospel related: **CCC** 2660

TUESDAY OF  
30<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We help build up the kingdom of God when we cooperate with God's grace.

How many of us here have tried to grow a plant or a garden, or use a recipe to cook a great feast? Perhaps we have engaged in science experiments, monitoring cell growth in a petri dish. Maybe we have had a bad haircut that we had to wait patiently to grow out.

In the examples above, much of what needs to occur is out of our hands. Physical and chemical reactions take place on their own: Cells must divide, reproduce, die and regenerate. We are responsible for creating an environment and medium as close to perfect as possible, but fullness of growth depends on the things themselves, doing what they will according to their nature. Sometimes, as in the case of the bad haircut, we just need time.

This is not unlike what Jesus meant when he compared the kingdom of God to the growth of the mustard seed and the leavening of bread. We are the environment and the medium for the kingdom of God, but its fullness of growth comes from God according to *his* nature. We may plant and mix for the sake of the kingdom, but we do so in cooperation with God's grace.

This is a wondrously freeing gift that God has given us. We have an obligation to help build up the kingdom, without being responsible for its success. God alone has authority over that.

Why is this a good thing? Because we are not God. Too often, we like to think we are: If we just go to the right school, get the right job, elect the right public official, pass the right laws, say the right prayers, etc. ... we just might save the economy, the country, the world. The thing is, God has already saved the world. Our obligation is to help the world come to know God. We are to *cultivate* the kingdom of God.

As the mustard seed grows externally into a bush, providing for the birds, so the kingdom of God grows in size and plenitude. Let us provide fertile soil, sun, water and the culling of weeds. Let us love and care for the seed as much as we can so it is viable and open to God's grace, and therefore growth.

As the yeast grows internally, spreading throughout the dough and filling the entire loaf, so the kingdom of God grows within each one of us. Let us make space for that yeast in ourselves, allowing love to multiply and fill us in our entirety. Let us be broken and shared in order to share that love with others, allowing them to be open to God's grace, and therefore their own growth.

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Wednesday, October 26, 2016

(Lec. 481)

1) Ephesians 6:1-9

2) Luke 13:22-30

WEDNESDAY OF  
30<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus came to comfort the afflicted, and to afflict the comfortable.

Many people have trouble memorizing the Ten Commandments. Saint Paul today reminds the Ephesians that it is even harder to live by them. Paul's admonitions on how we should treat one another are easily summed up with Jesus' Golden Rule: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

Saint Paul has been criticized by some for telling slaves and masters how to interact with each other, without taking on the issue of slavery directly and attempting to abolish it. We must understand, however, that Paul was preparing the Ephesians – and every community he visited – for the immediate return of Jesus. For the first Christians, the Second Coming of Christ was imminent. They did not address social change because they truly believed this world was passing away, and no one would be around to benefit from their efforts. All Paul asked is that we treat one another with the love of Jesus.

Turning to today's Gospel, we hear words of challenge from Jesus. As he speaks of the narrow gate, our Lord informs us that not everyone will be strong enough to make it to the other side and inherit the kingdom of God. When Jesus refuses to open the doors to those outside and says, *I do not know where you are from*, he conveys an important message that is underscored in Matthew's Gospel: *Whatever you fail to do for one of these my least ones, you failed to do it for me*" (Mt 25:45). He will only recognize and welcome us once we have set aside our differences and welcomed and cared for the stranger in our midst.

The key for us is to get through that gate before the door is locked. In other words, we are to hear and respond to the word of God now, not tomorrow. This way, when the day of our death comes at a time known only to the Lord, he might judge us worthy of entering into eternal life in heaven.

Jesus was asked: *Lord, will only a few people be saved?* Perhaps the answer is simpler than we think. Those who will be saved will be those who spent their lives on earth storing up for treasures in heaven and sharing God's many blessings with those around them, especially the least among us.

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Thursday, October 27, 2016

(Lec. 482)

1) Ephesians 6:10-20

2) Luke 13:31-35

Gospel related: CCC 557, 575, 585

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

FOCUS: The real force that is with us is the righteousness of a loving and just God.

*Star Wars: The Force Awakens* garnered unprecedented fanfare and publicity when it was released in 2015. The blockbuster movie generated toys and other products, and fans were seen brandishing their lightsabers – armed for battle against the dark side.

Is it too much of a stretch to imagine the creators of *Star Wars* stole their idea from Saint Paul and his letter to the Ephesians? Here, Saint Paul tells us to *put on the armor of God* and stand firm against the tactics of the devil. That sounds to me like the forces of good waging a battle against the dark side.

All kidding aside, putting on the righteousness of truth and wearing shoes made from the *gospel of peace*, as Saint Paul said, is the only way we will defeat the darkness of evil. Like Jesus, we must not be deterred from our mission.

With holy perseverance and by the grace of God dwelling within each of us, we must be bold like Saint Paul and have the courage to stand up for those who have no voice. The forces of selfishness and greed may try to deter us. But we have a force much greater than a lightsaber – the Spirit of the Lord. That Spirit resides within us, telling us what to say when we are at a loss for words, and strengthening our nerve when we need to act against an injustice.

Shortly after his election, Pope Francis created quite a stir when he went to a prison on Holy Thursday and washed the feet of prisoners, some of whom were women and nonbelievers. The pope's authenticity may threaten some who wish to hang onto the status quo, However, what some may characterize as bold moves are little more than a gentle shepherd living out the core of the Gospel.

I don't know whether Pope Francis has seen the latest *Star Wars* movie, but he is a wonderful modern-day example of a force for good decked out in white taking on the darker side of life that dwells in far too many people. We would be well-advised to take up our spiritual lightsabers and follow suit.

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Friday, October 28, 2016

(Lec. 666)

1) Ephesians 2:19-22

2) Luke 6:12-16

Gospel related: CCC 1577, 2600

**SAINTS SIMON AND JUDE,  
APOSTLES  
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Jesus Christ is the capstone who brings together the household of God.

Sometimes when we read Scripture, a word or phrase stands out so much that we keep going back to it and reflecting on it. The word *capstone* in today's passage from Saint Paul's letter to the Ephesians is one example.

Saint Paul says that Christ Jesus himself is the capstone. *Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord.* The word *capstone* has two fitting definitions. First, it is described as a "finishing stone of a structure." The second definition is "the crowning achievement, point, element or event."

Looking up images of capstones is interesting as well. In architecture, it seems to be the center block. Also called the cornerstone in Greek, at the top of an arch, it unifies the structure. When we consider these definitions and images, and reread today's passage, we get a word picture that unpacks the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. We heard today that the followers of Jesus are *built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets*, of which Jesus is the capstone. He is the piece that is needed to bring people together as the *household of God*.

What does all of this mean for us today? We, as well, are set upon this great foundation and joined with those who have gone before us. The saints we celebrate today, the Apostles Simon and Jude, are part of the foundation. All of this is possible only through Jesus Christ who unites, supports and holds together this household. Many today will try to come together in a quasi-religious setting without an acknowledgement or understanding of the need for Jesus. But, without Jesus, we cannot grow into a *temple sacred in the Lord*.

In Jesus, we, as members of the *household of God*, are being *built together into a dwelling place of God*. Even today, we are that dwelling place in the Holy Spirit – a place of love rooted in the Church and in the sacraments. When we, as members of the *household of God*, come together to share in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, the image of Christ as the capstone becomes clear. Without Jesus, without his unifying presence, without the strength he gives through the Holy Spirit, the Church and all her members would not be able to carry out its mission of giving witness to the good news of salvation.

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Saturday, October 29, 2016

(Lec. 484)

1) Philippians 1:18b-26

2) Luke 14:1, 7-11

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

Gospel related: **CCC** 575, 588 **CSDC** 261

FOCUS: We find our joy in life knowing that Christ continues to be proclaimed.

What is our understanding of the word humility? When we hear that someone is humble, how does that strike us? Does the image of a super-hero come to mind, or do we automatically think “wimp”? Yet, humility is a virtue for which we all should strive. Our role models of humility can be found in specific people. We know them when we see them: athletes, parents, actors, public figures, a spouse, religious leaders or maybe a friend, to name a few. These people possess a confidence in themselves that brings out their best selves, usually for the benefit of others. Mother Teresa, for example, was determined to do all she could for the poor and dying in India and eventually throughout the world. Humility allowed her to recognize her God-given gifts and give herself to others.

When pondering humility, I also think Saint Paul. In today’s first reading, we find him rejoicing in the fact that the Christian community in Philippi continues to grow in their faith. He rejoices because Christ is being proclaimed – and for no other reason. He expresses this joy even though he is imprisoned for preaching the Gospel. Paul has embraced the grace that God poured out on him and which emboldens him to preach the Risen Christ to the Gentiles. He sees signs that the seeds of faith that he and others have planted are taking root and growing. The self-assured Paul knows himself, his calling and his gifts, and is determined, even facing death in prison, to continue to preach the Gospel. He exemplifies joy in the midst of suffering.

Jesus gives us an introductory lesson in humility in today’s Gospel passage. Using the parable of a wedding banquet, he brings home his point by talking about seating etiquette. We’ve all experienced seating cards and seating charts at banquets. We may have been inclined to switch in order to sit with some of the important people. Jesus, however, wants us to realize that status is an illusion. Rather, he tells us to do the opposite. Sitting at the lowest place will bring us the greatest reward, Jesus says: ... *the one who humbles himself will be exalted*. Jesus, who exemplifies authentic humility, wants us to be humble like him. He empowers us with God’s grace and the Holy Spirit so that, like Saint Paul, we can rejoice that Christ is being proclaimed.

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**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2016**

(Lec. 153)

- 1) Wisdom 11:22–12:2
- 2) 2 Thessalonians 1:11–2:2
- 3) Luke 19:1-10

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

**THIRTY-FIRST  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Your sins are forgiven ... now what?

The Gospels are filled with stories that should give us sinners consolation and hope. Jesus forgave Peter even after he denied Christ. Jesus did not condemn the adulterous woman. He forgave the repentant thief. Jesus told powerful parables about a prodigal son, one lost sheep and a widow's lost coin. He ate with sinners and preached of God's love.

In today's Gospel, Jesus seeks out the tree-climbing, tax-collecting Zacchaeus – and announces that he would be staying at his home. Like so many others who had encountered Jesus, Zacchaeus is forgiven and then reforms. He makes restitution for his crooked dealings, and gives half of his possessions to the poor. Jesus announces that salvation has come to Zacchaeus and his house. Indeed, Jesus had come *to seek and to save what was lost*.

Jesus not only forgave sins – he came to restore the sinner into the life of the community. He imbued them with such grace that they were, once again, in right relationship with God. He spoke to them of the love of the Father, and of his enduring mercy. Each person was *changed* – they praised God, told others and became witnesses to Christ's power and authority.

Two thousand years later, we are still the beneficiaries of Jesus' salvific death and resurrection. Through Word and sacrament, we receive Jesus' saving grace. Through the sacraments of baptism and reconciliation, our sins are forgiven. How are we changed? What resolutions do we make to sin no more? What patterns of behavior do we need to address? How can we improve our prayer lives, our spending habits, our words and our actions to live more in harmony with the Gospels and to be found *worthy of his calling*?

Moreover, what have we learned as recipients of God's lavish, repeated forgiveness? Are we more forgiving? Are we more tolerant of another's mistakes? Do we reach out with mercy toward those who have hurt us?

Let us resolve to be grateful for God's gracious mercy, and to share that compassion and mercy with a world in need of it.

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Monday, October 31, 2016

(Lec. 485)

1) Philippians 2:1-4

2) Luke 14:12-14

MONDAY OF  
31<sup>ST</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are expected to share, and even give away, the gifts we have received from God.

Today, many of us are focused on the observance of Halloween, an important day of the year in the lives of our children and grandchildren. Kids have been thinking about dressing up as their favorite hero for weeks. This can be a good learning opportunity for children. We can share stories of our Christian heroes, saints and holy family members with them over the next few days as we celebrate not only Halloween, but All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day.

Halloween, after, all began as a way of anticipating the solemnity of All Saints. The word Halloween is based on the phrase All Hallows' Eve or All Saints' Eve. As we celebrate the lives of saints and holy people over these next few days, let us keep in mind that Jesus brought us new life through the mystery of his death and resurrection so that we, too, could be saints.

Saint Paul embraced all that Jesus taught in order to be one with Christ and make us one with him in all things. Paul boldly preached the Gospel, to the point of running afoul of the authorities of his day. He wrote his letter to the Philippians while in prison.

Yet, Paul is joyful. Imagine how difficult it must have been to maintain a joyful heart in the bowels of a Roman prison, knowing that your only crime was being a Christian. Paul's message to the people and to us is: *Complete my joy* by being one in Christ. Focus your mind and heart on one thing: following Jesus. Be humble and look out for the interest of others. Nothing could bring more joy to Paul than their unity in all things in Christ, and our oneness in Jesus.

In our Gospel, we heard Jesus' teaching about hospitality to strangers. "Payback" and "pay it forward" are commonly understood sayings today. A person is expected to pay back a gift or an act. Jesus contradicts this view, telling the Pharisee to invite those who cannot repay him. Why? Jesus is reflecting the unconditional love and grace that God pours out on all people. God does not expect "payback." Rather, as we see in the acts of Jesus, God expects that we share our gifts. Or, to use today's jargon, "pay it forward." Jesus did this. Saint Paul did it. The saints and holy people did it. Maybe we should consider doing the same.

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