

SEPTEMBER

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Thursday, September 1, 2016
(Lec. 434)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 3:18-23
- 2) Luke 5:1-11

Gospel related: CCC 208

THURSDAY OF
22ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: What we think we know can keep us from trusting God's wisdom.

An old-timer recovering in Alcoholics Anonymous once said, "I never met anybody too dumb to get this program, but I've met a lot of people too smart to get it." Sometimes, what we think we know gets in our way. How can we learn anything new if we think we already know everything? Saint Paul warned the Corinthians not to think of themselves as wise, because what looks wise to us can be pretty foolish sometimes. And vice versa.

Take today's Gospel, for example. Simon Peter was a professional fisherman. He knew fish. He knew the waters. He knew when to call it quits. But when Jesus – a teacher with a background in carpentry – told Peter to try again, the fisherman let go of pride and headed back to sea. Pretty foolish, right? But what happened was beyond his comprehension. The miraculous catch made Peter fall to his knees in humble recognition of his human limitations and sinfulness. Peter's heart, in turn, became open and receptive to God's grace and the call of Jesus. When Jesus told him, *Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men*, Peter left everything and followed Jesus.

What about us? Maybe we trust only in our own understanding of things. The problem is, as humans, we're limited. We can be mistaken. Healthy humility means being open-minded. Let's make sure our opinions are informed by getting all sides of an issue. Let's not forget that God knows more than we do. Let's remember to pray for guidance and to listen to it when it comes.

Trusting in God and God's wisdom can be scary. What if things don't turn out the way we think they should? Think about it, though. Do we really know better than God?

We might be afraid to lean on something we can't see, so we count on things like our jobs, our health or our bankroll – things that can be lost in a moment. Let's not limit ourselves to relying exclusively on things that might let us down. God knows all about our circumstances. It's safe to trust him.

Maybe we're afraid we'll look foolish. Maybe we will. Peter risked looking foolish and it changed his life. How is God inviting us to trust him so that he can change our lives? How is he asking us to trust that his wisdom is better than our own? How might what we think we know be holding us back?

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Friday, September 2, 2016
(Lec. 435)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 4:1-5
- 2) Luke 5:33-39

FRIDAY OF
22ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Our Scripture readings today provide two kinds of challenges for us. The first is one of understanding the situation itself – who is Jesus talking to and what is he saying? The second challenge is: How do we follow this example? The answers to these challenges are also in today's Scriptures.

Saint Paul tells us that we are servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. As such, we should hold fast to our faith and beliefs, and not be concerned with how the world may view them. In other words, our job as Christians is to be faithful to the Gospel, and to trust God's judgment over that of our own or others.

The perfect example of how to follow Saint Paul's directions is found in today's Gospel from Luke. Jesus, the Son of God, is the ultimate steward of God's mysteries: He is both fully human and fully divine; he is the perfect embodiment of God's love. He is the author of life and bearer of our salvation.

So when the Pharisees question him and his activities, Jesus knows they are not interested in learning as much as they want to challenge him and find him at fault. He knows they will not understand; he knows they are judging him from their *own* viewpoint, and not God's. But he ignores their scorn, and refuses to be anything other than who he is. He answers their questions truthfully and honestly, using metaphors and imagery that they should understand, but he knows it does not matter. The Pharisees continue to find Jesus at fault.

Although we do not have to give colorful or metaphorical answers when someone asks us about the Christian life, the point is that we are servants and stewards of the Gospel message. Sometimes others will challenge us in order to find fault with that message, or to purposefully misunderstand. Our duty as trustworthy stewards is to refuse to be anything other than who we are, answering those challenges using words and the example of a faithful Christian life.

Jesus stayed true to himself and God's commandments. He was a steward of the mysteries of life and love to which God invites us, and to which we are to respond as servants of Christ.

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Saturday, September 3, 2016
(Lec. 436)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 4:6b-15
- 2) Luke 6:1-5

SATURDAY OF
22ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Gregory the Great,
Pope and Doctor of the Church)

FOCUS: We are the body of Christ, united in one Spirit to give honor and glory to God.

Intrigue, division and jealousy. These common problems might lead you to think that today's homily is a critique of the modern world in which we live. But that is not the case. The fact is: These sinful and negative behaviors have existed in the lives of people for eons. No one is immune. All people, including those striving to live as faithful followers of Jesus, are beset by sin and human weakness. We see this in today's readings, with the religious leaders of Jesus' day who opposed him. We find it with Saint Paul, as he struggles to heal divisions among the Christians at Corinth.

Corinth was a major seaport at the time Paul lived. Its population was large, diverse and espoused many different religious cults. Paul established the first Christian community there around the year A.D.51. One can only imagine the diverse backgrounds his new followers brought to Christianity.

Today's passage gives us an understanding of the struggle of the Christian community at Corinth to remain united in belief and the practice of the faith. Aware of the divisions among them, Paul admonishes them to drop favoritism and to realize that their gifts have come from God. He reminds them to be united as humble followers of Christ.

Today's Gospel tells of another confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders of his time, a common occurrence during his public ministry. The passage from Luke comes at a time when several healings had prompted the Pharisees to ask who this man is. They want to know how Jesus can honor the Law of Moses, and at the same time pick grain on the Sabbath, a form of work considered unlawful and forbidden.

When Jesus told them that *The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath*, this is not what they wanted to hear. They were unable to see that Jesus was indeed the Son of Man. It seems they were convinced they had all the answers, and Jesus didn't meet their expectations of a Messiah. As a result of their hard-heartedness, they closed themselves off to the new life and salvation Jesus came to bring.

Pride, jealousy and selfishness can sow division among our brothers and sisters in Christ. These traits can close our hearts to the gifts of new life and salvation we are offered in Christ. This day and every day, may we humbly recognize our need for Christ, and lay down our lives in service to God and neighbor. When we do so, our feet will remain firmly planted on the path to salvation, and our hearts will be open to the many good gifts and blessings God wants to give us.

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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2016

(Lec. 129)

- 1) Wisdom 9:13-18b
- 2) Philemon 9-10, 12-17
- 3) Luke 14:25-33

Gospel related: CCC 1618, 2544

**TWENTY-THIRD
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: God will give us what we need to live as his faithful disciples.

If anyone comes after me, Jesus tells us in today's Gospel, without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Is that good news? Can Jesus really be serious?

In this passage hating, for Jesus, meant simply detaching oneself from someone or something. What he was really saying is that the Father must come first. That is how Jesus himself lived. Even at age twelve, Jesus put his love for his heavenly Father ahead of his love for Mary and Joseph by staying behind in Jerusalem after his earthly parents had left. *Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?* (Lk 2:49) This is what Jesus asked them when they scolded him for staying behind. Luke tells us *they did not understand what he said to them.* (Lk 2:50) But Jesus understood, though he was only a boy.

Love for the Lord does not exclude other loves. But it puts them in the right order. God is not jealous. How could the One who is love, and who in creating us in his image has given us the ability to love, be jealous of what he has made? Jesus asks everything of us because he has given us everything.

Which of you wishing to construct a tower, Jesus asks, does not first sit down and calculate the cost? It was the dream of every small farmer in Palestine in Jesus' day to have a proper tower on his property, rather than merely a shed. During harvest time he could sleep in the tower, keeping watch for trespassers and predatory animals.

Valuable as such a tower might be, Jesus' hearers also knew that it would be folly to start building one without first calculating whether the available resources were sufficient to complete the job. If they were not, the farmer would have nothing to show for his hard work but some useless foundations. And his friends would laugh at him for his imprudence.

The second teaching begins differently: not *Which of you?*, but, *What king?* That, too, was easy to understand, even though no one hearing Jesus' words was a king with an army at his disposal. Common to both teachings is the sentence about sitting down first and counting the cost. The first step in any important undertaking, Jesus was saying, is not action, but reflection. Too often, we act first and reflect later (if we reflect at all). The crowds who followed Jesus with so much enthusiasm had not reflected. When, finally, they did reflect, some of them would shout: "Crucify him, crucify him."

If you want to be my disciple, Jesus says, count the cost. First reflect. Then act. So let's reflect. If following Jesus Christ really means putting him first – ahead of money, possessions, success, those we love – which of us could say with confidence that we had the necessary self-denial and staying power?

Does that mean we should not follow Jesus Christ? Of course not. It does mean, however, that we should never try to follow Jesus while depending on our own resources alone. That would

mean certain failure. If today's Gospel is good news, it is because of what it does not say: that we can find adequate resources for Christian discipleship on our own. What we could never achieve on our own, we can achieve if we depend on the strength that comes from God alone.

That is why Jesus tells us in several places to become *like little children*. (Mt 18:3) Little children are naturally dependent on others. It never occurs to them that they can make it on their own. As children grow, we encourage them to become more and more independent, and to take risks. That is fine in the things of this world.

In spiritual things, however, and hence in our relationship with God, we must unlearn that spirit of independence which, in worldly affairs, is the difference between maturity and childhood. When it comes to following Jesus Christ, we dare not trust in our own resources. If we do, we are like the farmer building his tower without calculating the cost, or like the king setting out recklessly on a military campaign against impossible odds.

Jesus never asks us to fight against impossible odds. He does not want us to build with inadequate resources. That is why Jesus assures us that God will provide us with what we need to live as his faithful disciples. If we trust in the power which God alone can give us, we are safe. We can build with confidence. We can set out with confidence against seemingly impossible odds.

We are gathered around these twin tables of word and sacrament to receive that power that can do for us what we can never do for ourselves. This power is not something impersonal, a kind of spiritual electricity, as if we were here to get our batteries charged for another week. The power that is offered to us here is a person.

His name is Jesus Christ.

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Monday, September 5, 2016
(Lec. 437)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 5:1-8
- 2) Luke 6:6-11

Gospel related: **CCC 581 CSDC 261**

MONDAY OF
23RD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The Lord ministers to us at Mass, and sends us forth renewed so that we may minister to others.

Changes in life can bring joy or disappointment. Jesus preached changes and practices that disavowed the traditions and “opposed the beliefs the [Pharisees] had held forever.” (CCC 581) His words threatened not only their authority, but their comfortable status over the people. For the man with the withered hand, however, Jesus’ words were filled with joyous hope. Had this man ever imagined that such a great change in his life would occur during his typical Sabbath visit to the synagogue?

Jesus had asked the Pharisees to explain that if the Sabbath was given by God to his people for good, *is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or destroy it?*

Today’s Gospel calls us to reflect on how we view our Sabbath. Do we see it as God ministering to us, or as part of our routine as Catholics? The unexpected healing experienced by the man in the Gospel is indicative of the great blessings and graces the Lord showers upon us at Mass. It is not just something that happened then; it is happening now. The Word is as alive and active and transforming today as it was when Jesus bid the man in the Gospel to *come forward*. Ponder the Lord’s real presence and embrace as we receive him in the Eucharist, and reflect on that vision as you go about your day.

Imagine the fervor of coming to Mass in anticipation of what the Lord will give us. It is by our human reasoning that we put limits on what God can and will do for us. We must ask for the grace of confident trust in the power and love of God, and dare to ask for our greatest hope.

The exuberance we all desire in attending holy Mass does not come from within ourselves, but from the Lord who calls us to come to him. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we are moved to come to Mass.

Let us thank God today for the unseen graces he has showered upon us. Let us act with gratitude, trusting that the Lord has ministered to the deepest needs of our hearts and souls. He also has blessed us fully to be aware of the needs of others, and to minister to them. To truly be called followers, we cannot ration our compassion, but act where we see need. The Lord has blessed us to do his work, beyond what we believe we are capable of.

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Tuesday, September 6, 2016
(Lec. 438)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 6:1-11
- 2) Luke 6:12-19

Gospel related: CCC 695, 1115, 1504, 1577, 2600

TUESDAY OF
23RD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus spent the night in prayer to God.

Discernment is defined as the ability to judge well. We are meant to discern right from wrong. We discern our vocations – whether we are called to marry, or to serve God in consecrated, ordained life or the single life. Parents strive to discern what is best for their families, and leaders strive to discern what is best for their communities.

Today's readings from sacred Scripture share this theme of discernment. In the first reading, Saint Paul scolds the Christian community in Corinth for failing to settle their disputes on their own. The people are bringing lawsuits against one another and waiting for pagan courts to decide their cases. Paul calls on them to settle their disputes *between brothers*, or to find a wise member of the community to solve problems.

We know how difficult it is to maintain peace in a close family or community. Families must work hard each day to be kind and patient to each other. And in our Christian community, the more we bicker, the less truth is found in the saying “they shall know we are Christians by our love.” Saint Paul's words are as relevant for us today as they were two thousand years ago.

How can we attain the peace and unity we all need and want? The answer can be found in Jesus' example from today's Gospel. Before he discerned whom he would call as Apostles, Jesus spent an entire night in prayer. In prayer, we receive guidance and strength from God. This is especially helpful in regard to resolving disputes and difficulties with others. For in turning to God in prayer, we receive the guidance needed to arrive at solutions that are a win-win for all involved. For situations where resolution isn't possible or the issue isn't of major importance, we receive the grace and strength needed to bear with others in love.

When we are trying to discern something serious for our lives or our communities, the guidance and grace we receive from God in prayer can help us avoid selfishness, hasty decisions and tempting shortcuts.

Today, when we are frustrated with a family member or friend, or irritated over a polarizing issue in the community, offer the concern to God in prayer. If a decision is due, seek the advice of a wise Christian, or simply ask yourself, “What would Jesus do?” Right judgment is a blessing and gift of the Holy Spirit. Ask God in prayer for this blessing and good gift!

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Wednesday, September 7, 2016
(Lec. 439)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 7:25-31
- 2) Luke 6:20-26

Gospel related: **CCC** 2444, 2546, 2547 **CSDC** 325

WEDNESDAY OF
23RD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Prayerfully reflecting on the beatitudes can transform us.

The beatitudes are compact but rich statements about the blessings God offers us. At the same time, they are a call to reform our lives. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' statements starting with *Woe to you* are included as a warning about the seriousness of living a life according to this framework. It is well worth it to look closely to see how the beatitudes apply to our own lives, and consider how carefully we have been practicing what they prescribe. Although we may not follow them perfectly, a good examination will bring us closer to Jesus and to following his commands.

The first line of Luke's *Blessed are you who are poor* and Matthew's *Blessed are the poor in spirit* can cause some confusion with a general reading of this passage. If we look a little deeper, it is clear that Luke and Matthew are describing not simply a physical poverty, but something more. To be poor, or poor in spirit, is to have a sense of our relationship to God, as creator-creature. Poverty, spiritual or otherwise, is a position from which we recognize our dependence on God. We see this dynamic in the gifts of the Holy Spirit as well, especially in the fear of the Lord.

It is said that the further we move from an agricultural setting, the more removed we become from an awareness of our dependence on God. Any farmer whose work is dependent on the seasons understands the humility with which he must approach his work. This is true for all of us; we would do well to take up this humble approach in every aspect of our lives and recognize our dependence on God, our creator. To live in awareness of our poverty is to embrace the first beatitude. And what is the promise given here? We will receive the kingdom of God! What good news this is for each of us!

Let's look at another of the beatitudes. When Luke writes, *Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep*, does he mean that there should never be any laughter or joy in our lives? Definitely not! The caution here is that if we are so carefree that we do not recognize the suffering of our brothers and sisters and ignore their needs, there will be a price to pay later.

As we examine our lives and attitudes, the beatitudes call us to greater love of others. They remind us that we are called to be disciples first. I would encourage you to spend some time in prayerful reflection on the beatitudes, which have the power to transform our lives.

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Thursday, September 8, 2016
(Lec. 636)

**THE NATIVITY OF
THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
– FEAST**

- 1) Micah 5:1-4a or
Romans 8:28-30
- 2) Matthew 1:1-16, 18-23 or
1:18-23

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 430, 437, 452, 486, 497, 744, 1507, 1846, 2666, 2812 **CSDC** 378

FOCUS: Let us join Mary in her devotion to God.

Today we celebrate the birth of Mary, the mother of God. Other than Mary's birth and the birth of Jesus, the only other nativity celebrated by the Church is the birth of John the Baptist on June 24.

The Catholic Church teaches that what it believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ. In other words, any relationship we have with Mary draws us into a deeper relationship with her Son. So it is not surprising that the Gospel reading chosen for Mary's birthday is the story of Jesus' birth.

Mothers are like that, though, aren't they – always pointing to their children. It's a joy to listen to mothers greeting each other. Inevitably, the question is asked, "How are your children?" and the stories shared are filled with pride, love and delight. By the end of the conversation, nearly every detail of the child's life is shared.

It is no different from the conversation we have when we pray a rosary, a Marian novena, or a Marian prayer. We are inevitably asking Mary, "How is your Son?" We are praying to Mary so that she, in turn, with love and delight, shows us Christ. She is not an end unto herself; she is a means to an end. Mary guides us.

In many ways, Mary's life witnesses to the best version of our humanity. Moments like the Annunciation and Visitation demonstrate the fullest potential we as humans have to respond to God's invitation to relationship. Mary placed the whole of her life into God's hands.

Mary demonstrates wisdom as she ponders the sort of greeting the angel extends, and she seeks divine counsel when she asks the angel how such a thing can be. Finally, her fiat, her "yes," is offered as one who is a free, courageous, humble servant of the Lord. She places herself at the complete disposal of God when she says: *May it be done to me according to your word. (Lk 1:38)*

Mary's Magnificat gives the glory to God. Mary seemingly understood that the glory of being the Mother of God is not her glory singularly, but God's glory and the glory of Israel.

Today's feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary honors Mary and the important role she played and continues to play in God's unfolding plan of salvation. It also challenges us to strive to say "yes" to God and all that he ask us to do, just as the Blessed Virgin Mary said "yes" to all God asked of her, and lived her life in perfect fidelity and devotion to God.

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Friday, September 9, 2016
(Lec. 441)
1) 1 Corinthians 9:16-19,
22b-27
2) Luke 6:39-42

FRIDAY OF
23RD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(USA OBL MEM
Saint Peter Claver,
Priest)

FOCUS: Saint Paul and the holy men and women who followed him show us how to be Christ-like, placing the needs of others before our own.

I have made myself a slave to all so as to win over as many as possible. Saint Paul wrote these words, which we heard in today's first reading, nearly 2,000 years ago to the Christians of Corinth.

About 400 years ago, the saint whom we celebrate today, Saint Peter Claver, took Saint Paul's words to heart and put them into practice in his life and ministry. A Spanish Jesuit priest, Peter Claver ministered for decades in Cartagena (present-day Colombia) to the hundreds of thousands of Africans brought there to be sold as slaves.

Saint Peter Claver became, in a very real way, a slave to those being enslaved. He baptized some 300,000 slaves, was a strong advocate for their humane treatment and founded organizations for their care.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus said that *No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher.* Peter Claver learned to be like Christ, his teacher.

He became an ever-more clear image of Jesus who, out of love for us, *emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.* (Phil 2:7)

Being forced to serve other people as a slave is an affront to human dignity. The examples of Jesus, Saint Paul, Saint Peter Claver and so many other holy men and women through the ages witness to the paradox that freely serving others out of love is a transfiguring fulfillment of that same dignity.

We, too, are called to lay down our lives in humble love and service to others, especially those who are poor and vulnerable. As Saint Peter Claver ministered to the slaves of his day, we are called to reach out to those ensnared by materialism, addiction or hopelessness. We can lift them up in their need to be assured of God's love, and help them discover new hope and possibilities for their lives.

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Saturday, September 10, 2016
(Lec. 442)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 10:14-22
- 2) Luke 6:43-49

SATURDAY OF
23RD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor of
BVM)

Gospel related: **CSDC 70**

FOCUS: As members of the body of Christ, we are called to give our lives wholeheartedly to God.

The readings for today are filled with numerous rich metaphors that we can apply to our lives as followers of Jesus. Paul writes to the Corinthians about taking part in the cup of blessing and the one loaf – and, through these rituals, partaking in the body and blood of Christ. Jesus uses two symbols to describe our relationship to him: the good tree that can only produce good fruit, and the house built on a foundation, able to withstand the storms of life.

As poetic as they are, these metaphors speak truth about the heart of our role as Christians. We are all members of the body of Christ and, as such, belong to one another as well as to Jesus. Jesus describes us, his followers, as good trees that *out of the store of goodness* in our hearts, can only produce good fruit. Built on the foundation of Christ, we, his followers, have the strength and depth to remain faithful to him even in times of great trouble. Nothing can shake us.

At the same time, these metaphors warn us of the spiritual dangers we face if we are not grounded in Christ and instead dally with idols of any kind – from money to power, or even endless activity without prayer. If we are unfaithful to Jesus, we will fail to help build up the body of Christ – or may become a stumbling block for other brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus reminds us that calling *Lord, Lord* is not enough. Only by listening to his words and following them – truly being a disciple who learns from the Master in word and deed – can we have the strong foundation that we need in life.

Today, on this day that the Church dedicates to Mary, let us turn to our Blessed Mother for help in our faithfulness to her Son. From the very beginning, Mary was pure of heart – completely devoted to God and willing to obey his word and his will in every aspect of her life. If we turn to her for her help and intercession, she will point the way to her Son, teaching us total commitment to our Christian way of life and helping us to listen to and obey his words. With the help of Mary, our mother, we can become, or remain, the good trees that bear only good fruit, the houses built on a secure foundation.

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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2016

(Lec. 132)

1) Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14

2) 1 Timothy 1:12-17

3) Luke 15:1-32 or 15:1-10

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

**TWENTY-FOURTH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: God's mercy is poured out on us because we need it, not because we deserve it.

One of the greatest conversion stories recorded in all of the Scriptures is the conversion of Saint Paul. Having once been responsible for the persecution of Christians, he becomes one of the greatest advocates of our salvation in Jesus Christ. So we can believe him when he says, *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

As we move toward the end of another liturgical year and the conclusion of the Year of Mercy, we are once again reminded of God's boundless love for even one lost sheep. In today's Gospel, Jesus goes on to compare a lost sheep with a lost son of a loving father.

We all know the story of the prodigal son, or – as I like to call it – “The Doting Father,” inside out. The powerful image of the embrace between the father and his son still softens hardened hearts to this day.

How different a message would have been conveyed had the father reacted the way many of us do when hurt in such a way, with arms crossed instead of outstretched: “You deeply hurt me, now you come wanting my forgiveness. I will have to think about whether I can do that or not, because right now I don't think you deserve it.”

God's mercy is not parsed out in dribs and drabs. God's mercy is not divvied up based on who is most worthy of it. Rather, God's mercy is lavishly poured out upon us because we need it – not because we deserve it.

We must not fall into the trap of being the other son mentioned in today's Gospel. If we are to be faithful to God's plan for us in this life, we cannot walk around with hardened hearts. God's plan for us is to bring Saint Paul's message alive in our time and place. Do we live our lives in such a way that people will believe us when we tell them, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”?

If I believe that Jesus came to save me, then I must walk and talk as someone saved, not as someone still lost. Holding onto grudges, past hurts, bitterness or hostility have no place in the life of a Christian.

Remember that when Jesus was asked by his disciples how to pray, he gave them the Lord's Prayer. He indicates that being forgiven is linked to how we forgive: *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.* We need to remember this the next time we try winning a grudge match with someone.

Walking in the ways of the Lord requires that we be ever-mindful that we have been saved by our faith in Jesus, and that there is no room in our lives for revenge. Rather, there is room only for love, mercy and forgiveness in the life of a disciple of Jesus.

Monday, September 12, 2016

(Lec. 443)

1) 1 Corinthians 11:17-26, 33

2) Luke 7:1-10

MONDAY OF
24TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
The Most
Holy Name of Mary)

FOCUS: The Holy Spirit guides the Church and her members in the way of all truth.

Factions and divisions have been present in the Church from her earliest days. Logic dictates that when it comes to basic doctrinal and moral teaching, two factions presenting divergent views or teachings cannot both be correct. Given this, where are we to turn for correct teaching in what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus?

We are blessed in that Saint Paul in today's first reading gives us part of the answer. It comes in his appeal to the Lord's authority: *For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you.*

Jesus, in today's Gospel, provides the rest of the answer in his interaction with the centurion. The centurion recognizes the authority of Jesus because he knows what it means to have, use and obey authority. He says, *For I too am a person subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me.* The centurion trusts Jesus to use his authority well in providing help, this time in the form of healing power. Jesus, in turn, considers the centurion's trust and respect for authority an amazing display of faith. *I tell you, says Jesus, not even in Israel have I found such faith.*

Jesus is commending the centurion's grasp of his authority. Christ gave his Apostles his own authority to continue his mission, and in turn gave the Church the authority to teach in his name. Specifically, the teaching authority of our Church is called the magisterium, from the Latin word for teacher. What the Apostles received from the Lord, they handed on to their successors, the pope and the bishops of the Church. This, then, continued on throughout history – up to and including today – and will continue on in the Church until Jesus returns in glory to fully establish his kingdom on Earth.

This teaching authority of the Church is a great gift from our loving God. What we receive from the Lord, he also asks us to hand on to others. We do this when we teach the faith as parents, catechists and parishioners who share the truth in love by our words and deeds. Let us receive from the Lord all the love and guidance he offers us today and each day of our life.

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Tuesday, September 13, 2016
(Lec. 444)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 12:12-14,
27-31a
- 2) Luke 7:11-17

TUESDAY OF
24TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint John Chrysostom,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 994, 1503

FOCUS: Jesus demonstrates compassion as a model for us to follow, and to bring others closer to God.

Today's Gospel presents us with a marvelous story of compassion. Jesus, his disciples and a large group are traveling to the city of Nain when they happen upon a normal, everyday occurrence: the procession to the burial of someone who has died.

Luke tells us, *when the Lord saw her [the widow], he was moved with pity for her*. In other words, the Lord had *compassion* for her. And what is the definition of compassion? It means, "to suffer with."

Jesus did not just have a "feeling" of sympathetic sorrow for the woman; he entered into her suffering with her. He recognized not only her current sadness in the loss of her son, but the grief she had already experienced in the death of her husband (remember, she was a widow), and the difficulties she would face ahead.

So Jesus acted *with compassion* – not just because he was Jesus, the Son of God, but because he was Jesus the man, *the fully human being*. He desired greatly to relieve her suffering – and because he could, he did. The young man sat up, and Jesus returned him to his mother.

Two things are important here. First, as we listen to this story, we know that she is a widow burying her only son. But no one has said anything to Jesus about the circumstances. He observes, understands and acts. His willingness to enter into her grief – his compassion – has given him insight into the situation.

Jesus' actions save not only her son's life, but hers, because her son was her primary means of support. In doing this, Jesus shows us that true compassion means opening our eyes to the causes of another's suffering. That insight enables us to do something about it.

Second, Jesus' compassion brings others closer to God. We know this by the crowd's reaction to what has happened. They do not run in fear as if from evil spirits, a magician or a false prophet. Instead, they recognize the mercy of God in Jesus, immediately glorify God, and declare that, *God has visited his people*. True compassion makes visible the glory of God.

May we always be people of compassion, with insight and action to relieve suffering, all for the glory of God.

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Wednesday, September 14, 2016
(Lec. 638)

- 1) Numbers 21:4b-9
- 2) Philippians 2:6-11
- 3) John 3:13-17

Gospel related: **CCC** 219, 423, 440, 444, 454, 458, 661, 679, 706, 2130 **CSDC** 3, 64

THE EXALTATION
OF THE HOLY CROSS
– FEAST

FOCUS: We are to look upon the cross of Christ with gratitude, faith and love.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, which invites us to ponder depths of God's love for us and the sacrifice he made to save us.

The second reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians conveys this in beautiful and poetic terms. Christ Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, in humble obedience to the will of his Father and out of his love for us, emptied himself. He became one of us to bring about our salvation. Jesus lived his life in humble obedience to the will of his Father in order to reveal the depths of God's love for us and to win our salvation. In doing so, he taught us how to live so that we might enter into eternal life in heaven.

These realities are made clear by Jesus in today's Gospel: *Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.* Jesus' words allude to the reality that, in accord with the will of his Father, Jesus would one day die upon the cross to win our salvation. Jesus freely chose to die upon the cross because each of us is utterly precious to him. He offered his life as a perfect sacrifice of love so that we might one day be one with him in heaven.

May we, today and every day, look upon the cross of Christ with gratitude and love. Let us resolve to take up our cross each day, walking in the footsteps of our Savior, by humbly loving and serving others. In doing so, we continue to build up God's kingdom of peace and love, so that more and more people may turn to Jesus and be saved.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

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Thursday, September 15, 2016
(Lec. 446)

1) 1 Corinthians 15:1-11
(Lec. 639)

2) John 19:25-27 or
Luke 2:33-35

Gospel related: **CCC** 149, 495, 501, 575, 587, 618, 726, 964, 2605, 2618, 2677, 2679

THURSDAY OF
24TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Our Lady of Sorrows)

FOCUS: Mary's "yes" to becoming the mother of God led to many sorrows.

Today, as we honor Mary under her title Our Lady of Sorrows, we recall the dire prediction of Simeon at the Presentation. Mary's Son would face opposition, and a sword would pierce her soul. Tradition holds that there are seven sorrows of Mary. Let's take a look at each of them.

Simeon's prediction was the first sorrow. Bad news about her infant is not something a new mother wants to hear. Mary could only wonder about and dread the difficulties Jesus would face. The second sorrow is the flight into Egypt. Imagine the terror Mary felt when Joseph woke her and told her that King Herod was intent on killing her son. Then she endured the hardship of traveling to Egypt with her infant and living in a foreign land.

Mary's third sorrow was losing twelve-year-old Jesus after celebrating Passover in Jerusalem. If you've ever lost a child for even an hour, you can relate to her panic. For three days and nights, Mary did not know what had happened to Jesus. She had lost not only her son, but the Savior.

The fourth sorrow was Mary meeting Jesus carrying his cross. This occurrence is not in Scripture, but in Tradition. Mary suffered seeing her son bloodied, beaten and crowned with thorns. He was a condemned criminal, forced to walk in public carrying a cross.

The fifth sorrow was the crucifixion. Mary witnessed the execution of her only Son and stood beneath the cross. She who had heard Jesus take his first breath, was there for his last breath. The sixth sorrow is Mary receiving the body of Jesus when it was taken down from the cross. And the seventh sorrow is the body of Jesus being placed in a tomb. Mary's suffering was unique and excruciating. No wonder we call her Queen of Martyrs.

We owe Mary gratitude for saying "yes" to God's will for her; all that it entailed made it possible for God to save us. Mary is also our spiritual mother. Having endured her share of hardships and sorrow, she continually prays to God on our behalf that we might receive the grace and strength we need to persevere in faith. Her prayers of intercession on our behalf are powerful. This is one of the reasons we pray to her, "Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."

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Friday, September 16, 2016
(Lec. 447)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 15:12-20
- 2) Luke 8:1-3

FRIDAY OF
24TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saints Cornelius, Pope and
Cyprian, Bishop, Martyrs)

FOCUS: The disciple responds to Jesus by turning his or her life over to the Lord in service to others.

Today is the feast of Saints Cornelius and Cyprian. Saint Cornelius was one of the early popes. He died while in exile in 253. Saint Cyprian was the bishop of Carthage, and died in 258 under one of the several persecutions of Christians. Both men were martyred, and today's readings focus our attention on what it means to be followers of Christ.

In the Gospel of Luke, we heard that Jesus was traveling from village to village preaching *the good news of the kingdom of God*. Several women of Galilee, women who had been cured of illnesses and evil spirits, began following Jesus. They even began to *provide* for Jesus and the Twelve *out of their resources*.

Now, it would have been rare for women at that time to have many resources, much less enough to share with Jesus and the Twelve. Nevertheless, these women did have resources, and they put them to use for Jesus. They began to follow him out of love and gratitude for what he had done for them.

This is, of course, the proper response of a disciple of Jesus – of someone who has been healed from illness, or perhaps from an interior sense of shame, self-hatred or despair about life. The proper response of people who have met the Lord, truly met him, is to place their life at the service of the one who freed them.

The example of the women in the Gospel is similar to the example of Cornelius and Cyprian, the two saints whom we honor today. Both laid their lives down for Jesus, who had freed them. Saint Cyprian once wrote, recalling his baptism, that he was finally free from his enslavement to his passions. His response, like that of the women in the Gospel, was to give himself to the Lord. Eventually, he would give his life.

Finally, Paul reminds us today in the first reading that we do not believe this world is the end of the line. We are offered eternal life. And for this, we are called to do our part in furthering the work and mission of the Church. With this in mind, let us pray that we can respond with as much generosity as the women in the Gospel, and in the spirit of the saints.

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Saturday, September 17, 2016
(Lec. 448)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 15:35-37,
42-49
- 2) Luke 8:4-15

SATURDAY OF
24TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Robert Bellarmine,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church;
Saturday in honor of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 368, 1151, 2668, 2731, 2847

FOCUS: When we are open to hearing the message of sacred Scripture, it takes root in us and overflows to others.

In today's first reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, Paul uses questions and images to help the Corinthians and, consequently, believers of all generations understand what resurrection means.

He provides us with an example from plant life. When a seed is planted, something totally different emerges. The original seed dies and gives birth to something new. It is an extraordinary transformation. Just think about a caterpillar going into a cocoon and emerging as something very different. The butterfly is beautiful to behold.

Saint Paul says that his example from plant life is similar to the resurrection from the dead. A weak body dies and becomes transformed into something. While images can be used as a way of explaining life after death, they can never provide us with a full understanding of the experience of being face-to-face with God.

The Gospel is also about transformation. The parable about a sower and the seed describes a typical situation in Palestine, where fields were largely public places. The sower scatters the seed over his field. Some falls on the path. It is trampled and the birds eat it. Some seed falls on rocky ground. When it grows, it withers for lack of moisture. Some of it falls on thorns. The thorns choke it. Some of it falls on good soil and when it grows, it produces fruit a hundredfold.

When Jesus finished this parable, he invited his listeners to hear his words. He wanted them to notice that even though some seeds will wither and die, some will find fertile soil and flourish. The same thing happens when they hear the words of sacred Scripture. They have to make a choice about whether or not they will listen.

In the same way, Jesus asks us to carefully listen to the words of Scripture. He wants us to be transformed by what we hear. He expects us to implement his message by the way we live our lives. When we are open to hearing the word and accepting it fully, the word takes root in us and overflows into good works.

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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2016

(Lec. 135)

- 1) Amos 8:4-7
- 2) 1 Timothy 2:1-8
- 3) Luke 16:1-13 or
16:10-13

Gospel related: **CCC** 952, 2424 **CSDC** 181, 453

**TWENTY-FIFTH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: The one who is trustworthy in small things will be trustworthy in greater ones.

It is always interesting to reflect on the kind of people Jesus hung around with in the Gospels. Although we might wish to see him with the socially acceptable people of his day, the Gospels tell otherwise. More often than not, Jesus is found hanging out and even dining with sinners and outcasts. In fact, he usually avoided the acceptable people for they had no real use for his message, and certainly resented his influence and ability to connect with the poor, the sinner and the outcast on a real level.

Over and over again, it's the socially acceptable who question his authority to speak on behalf of God, and even accuse him of being in league with the devil when he healed the sick and forgave the sinners. Why was this? Was it because they could never see their real and life-changing need for God and so they resented him and his message?

Today's Gospel tells a parable of sharp dealing and shady practices – of one who is out to seize any opportunity to improve his lot in life. Jesus uses it to explore human nature and our response to the Gospel. This Gospel is not really about moral advice; instead it tells of how we should live our lives in the hope of eternity. It is presented to us so that we might stop and reflect on this central life-or-death decision.

It's hard not to notice that in Luke's Gospel, Jesus tends to speak a lot about money and how to understand the bounty of this world. Scholars tell us that Luke's Gospel was written for a money-conscious, urban, Greek, Gentile community, one built on a web of social relationships between the rich and the poor. The rich were expected to spread their largesse among the poor, and in return, the poor accepted that the rich were the natural leaders of society. It was a give-give relationship.

Luke uses Jesus' parable to speak to this community. The steward has failed to perform his primary duty of caring for his master's wealth. Realizing that his security is at risk, he seizes the initiative and reduces the loans of two merchants indebted to his master. By doing this, he is taking the master's role upon himself, and entangling his master's clients in his own web of deceit, making them dependent upon him. He is establishing a new order of mutual responsibility and dependence. Perhaps this is what most of Jesus' audience would have done in the same circumstances.

Aware of this pattern of social obligation, Jesus uses the image of the steward to teach about the kingdom. We are to be as cunning in our pursuit of the kingdom of God as this steward. The kingdom demands the same devious response, for we are just as needy, if not as desperate, as the steward. But our need is not for material security, but spiritual security, the kind that comes with having a deep, intimate relationship with Christ. We are asked, therefore, to bring to our faith all the cunning, preparation, perseverance and energy that we often reserve for our major earthly needs. Strip off the laziness that characterizes the steward in the first part of the parable and put on the energy and enthusiasm that he shows in the latter part – but do so for the kingdom of God!

Monday, September 19, 2016
(Lec. 449)

- 1) Proverbs 3:27-34
- 2) Luke 8:16-18

MONDAY OF
25TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Januarius,
Bishop and Martyr)

FOCUS: Maturing in the ways of Christ always takes one's neighbor into consideration.

Proverbs is a collection of sayings and instructions. Its primary purpose is to teach wisdom to the young and inexperienced, as well as the advanced. It is designed to be very practical. Ultimately, such wisdom or sound guidance aims at forming good character. Seeking wisdom is a way of life. The quest is filled with obstacles because people all too often try to offer a substitute for the real thing. One makes oneself ready to receive it through discipline.

Today's reading looks at relating to one's neighbor. In the Old Testament, neighbor originally meant someone who was close to a person in some way, such as through friendship or association. It also included those who had a similar culture and religion. However, Proverbs begins to broaden the concept. Through his command to love everyone, even enemies, Jesus gives it universal meaning.

Proverbs says we should extend help to any brother or sister who has a genuine need. The passage also states that we are never to make evil plans against another unsuspecting person. We should not pick a quarrel with someone who has done nothing against us. Never imitate violent people. Immoral behavior is never condoned by God. In all of these sayings, the reading indicates that the truly good and humble person will always experience an inner peace and strength that no adversity can take away.

Today's reading from the Gospel of Luke focuses on light. In the ancient world, lamps served an important function just as they do today. They enabled people to see and work in the dark without falling down or stumbling. Jews also understood light as being a way of knowing the inner beauty and truth of God. God's grace not only illuminates the darkness in our lives, it provides us with spiritual light and peace.

Jesus uses the image of a lamp to make it clear how his disciples are to live in the marvelous light of his truth, justice and love. Our mission is to be bearers of the light of Christ so that others may see the truth contained in the Gospel. When they are freed of their own blindness, they can also live in the light of Christ. Great freedom and joy abound for those who live in God's light and seek his truth.

The passage ends with Jesus indicating that we should be careful about how we hear. It needs to be a kind of listening that understands, accepts, assimilates and puts into practice. If we are not constantly growing, our life with Christ and others will not bear fruit.

Tuesday, September 20, 2016
(Lec. 450)

- 1) Proverbs 21:1-6, 10-13
- 2) Luke 8:19-21

TUESDAY OF
25TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM)

Saints Andrew Kim Tae-gŏn, Priest
And Paul Chŏng Ha-sang,
and Companions, Martyrs)

FOCUS: Blessed are those who hear the word of God and act on it.

Jesus' mother and his brother come to visit him, our Gospel tells us. His brothers? The word which Luke uses means "relatives" or "kinsmen." From antiquity, Catholics have believed that Mary had no other children but Jesus. Why was that? Having given herself completely to God, she responded to the angel's message that she was to be mother of God's son with the words, *Be it done to me according to your word.* (Lk 1:38) It was inconceivable that Mary could give herself to another. This is why she is called "Mary ever virgin."

Jesus' mother and his other relatives are unable to get to him, we heard, *because of the crowd.* Those four words give us a glimpse of what life was like for the Lord on most days of his public ministry. He was constantly hemmed in by people shoving, pushing, shouting, trying to get his attention. This explains why Jesus retreated, whenever he could, to what the Gospels call "a deserted place" – where he could be alone with his heavenly Father.

When Jesus is told that his mother and other relatives are trying to get to him through the crowd, he responds with words that sound like a put-down: *My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it.* In reality, however, the words are not dismissive. Can there be any doubt that Mary truly listened to God's word and acted on it? Jesus' words are instructive because they extend the limits of his family to anyone who truly listens to his teaching and acts on it – ourselves included.

God's word comes to us in many ways: through holy Scripture – read out here in church, or pondered over as we read the Bible for ourselves. God's word comes to us also through the teaching of his Church, and through the still, small, but powerful voice of conscience.

How better, then, could we respond to Jesus' words in today's Gospel than with the simple prayer of the boy Samuel, when he heard his name being called as he was sleeping in the Temple: *Speak, for your servant is listening.* (1 Sam 3:10)

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Wednesday, September 21, 2016
(Lec. 643)

- 1) Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13
- 2) Matthew 9:9-13

Gospel related: CCC 581, 589, 2100

**SAINT MATTHEW,
APOSTLE AND
EVANGELIST
– FEAST**

FOCUS: God chooses the simple, and even the sinful, to do small things with great love, all for his glory, honor and praise.

Time and again, the Bible shows evidence of the unlikeliest of people being called to do great things for the glory of God. Abram was too old, but God chose him anyway. Moses was a murderer, but God still spoke to him at the burning bush. Jacob stole his brother's birthright. David was an adulterer. Many of the prophets felt themselves unwilling and unworthy of a calling into the Lord's service in the Old Testament, as did Jesus' Apostles centuries later. The Bible serves as a lasting reminder to us of two essential truths: One, God chooses whomever he wills to do whatever he wills, and two, God is not looking for perfection – just potential.

It comes as no surprise that the Pharisees outside Matthew's house despise him, and are shocked and angered by Jesus choosing Matthew to leave his customs post and take on new responsibilities. Tax collectors were viewed as traitors and turncoats, because they raised money for the oppressive Roman regime, which had conquered Israel and Judah in 63 B.C. Real Jewish men were supposed to work to overthrow the imperial legions, not raise funds to fill the coffers of Rome. Tax collectors made great money at their jobs, often at the expense of the blood, sweat and tears of people who were already very poor.

What stands out about Matthew is his immediate response when Jesus says *Follow me*. He didn't take time to deposit his savings, nor did he refuse or delay. He left that customs post as if it never meant anything to him. Matthew's work as an Apostle, and later as a Gospel writer, more than made up for his sins and the shortcomings of his previous profession. Matthew's experience of being chosen for the Lord's service despite his own sinfulness gave him a particular sympathy for the outcast. May our experience of God's mercy, lifting us up when we are down, help us to share that gift with others, especially those most in need of it.

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Thursday, September 22, 2016
(Lec. 452)

- 1) Ecclesiastes 1:2-11
- 2) Luke 9:7-9

THURSDAY OF
25TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus makes all things new, including our hearts.

Vanity of vanities, all things are vanity, we hear in our first reading. What's the use? Why bother? Ever feel like that? The author of today's first reading paints a pretty gloomy picture of life. The fact that such a dismal reflection is included in Scripture demonstrates the Bible's understanding of the human condition. Who hasn't felt dragged down by the daily grind at one time or another? But notice that the things mentioned in this passage from Ecclesiastes – winds blowing, rivers flowing, our work, our earthly life span – are things limited to this world, things literally under the sun.

As Catholic Christians, we believe there's much more to life than just this earthly existence. This world – and everything in it – will pass away. When it does, we look forward to Christ coming in glory. We affirm it every time we say the Nicene Creed when we proclaim together: "I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." There may be nothing new under the sun, that is, in this present world, but as we're told in Revelation, *Behold, I make all things new.* (21:5)

If we look for contentment in material things, we're going to be disappointed. That type of satisfaction doesn't last long. That's why we keep having to buy more, eat more, drink more. Relying on things that don't truly satisfy doesn't work. We were made for something better. Sometimes we yearn for something we can't put our finger on. What we're yearning for is God, and the unconditional love he offers us. As Saint Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." (*Confessions of Saint Augustine*)

In today's Gospel, we hear about Herod's perplexity concerning who Jesus might be. Herod wanted to see Jesus, to know more about him. So did many others. Some wanted Jesus to heal them. Some wanted the wisdom his teaching offered. Some were just curious.

How about us? What do we want from Jesus? At different times we might look to him for his wisdom, or his mercy, or his healing power. Those are all good reasons. But even when we're just feeling worn down by the daily grind, or like there's nothing new under the sun, we can look to him, too. He makes all things new – including our hearts.

Friday, September 23, 2016
(Lec. 453)

- 1) Ecclesiastes 3:1-11
- 2) Luke 9:18-22

FRIDAY OF
25TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Pius of Pietrelcina,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 2600

FOCUS: Christ asks Peter, and each of us, *Who do you say that I am?*

How do we act on our faith? Peter makes a declaration of faith in today's Gospel, but it would take many stops and starts before his faith would be firm.

In Rome, the Scavi tour takes one several stories below the main altar in Saint Peter's Basilica. The area was excavated beginning in 1939, because Pope Pius XII wanted to find the tomb of Saint Peter. After eleven years of careful digging and many more years of archeological sleuthing, a grave was discovered in the ancient cemetery under the basilica. This cemetery was next to the Circus Nero, where Peter had been martyred in approximately A.D. 65. The final stop on the Scavi tour is the "graffiti wall" in front of the marble-lined resting place described as the spot of Saint Peter's tomb. The bones are those of a heavyset man of Mediterranean origin, someone who had worked hard. Perhaps a fisherman? He died around A.D. 65, and was in his mid-sixties. The skeleton shows the marks of someone who had been crucified upside down.

To reach this area, one travels down poorly lit, warm, humid narrow passageways. The conditions are meant to maintain the artifacts. For a small group of twelve on a tour, it creates a sense that you have traveled back some two thousand years. A seminarian guides the tour. Standing in front of the bones of Peter, he repeats the words of today's Gospel: *Who do you say that I am?* As you look just over the seminarian's shoulder, you can see the jawbone of Peter, who spoke these words in reply: *the Messiah of God*. That jawbone, and that young seminarian who is dedicating himself to God, provide a bridge to one of the first witnesses to Christ.

Today, we celebrate the feast of another great witness to Christ, Saint Pio of Pietrelcina or Padre Pio. He lived for 81 years and, for almost 57 of those years, he experienced some evidence of the stigmata – the wounds of Christ. He lived a simple life as a Capuchin friar saying Mass, hearing confession, providing spiritual direction and praying.

Padre Pio accepted the pain of Christ's suffering, but was humiliated by the presence of the visible wounds. Padre Pio's body became a visible witness of the crucifixion.

It is said that Peter was crucified upside down because he did not feel worthy to be crucified in the same manner as Christ.

Both men shared their humility, their faith and their special connection with the crucifixion. Peter and Padre Pio did not just say the words, *You are the Messiah*. Their lives bore witness to their faith. When we come to receive the Eucharist, the minister will say the words, "The body of Christ." We will say "Amen," and then receive our Lord in holy Communion. Let us, having professed our faith in the Lord Jesus and been nourished and strengthened through the Eucharist, seek to give a faithful and effective witness to the Gospel in all we say and do.

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Saturday, September 24, 2016
(Lec. 454)

- 1) Ecclesiastes 11:9—12:8
- 2) Luke 9:43b-45

Gospel related: CCC 554

SATURDAY OF
25TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: Our Creator has given us life, a life to be treasured and celebrated.

Put together, the Old Testament reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes and the Gospel reading from Luke point us to a time beyond the present. Ecclesiastes completes this section with the famous *Vanity of vanities – all things are vanity* reference, and the Gospel points to a time in the near future when Jesus will be *handed over to men*. The message, between both of these readings, is clear: Do not overemphasize today, for it will pass away. Look to the time when all of this is gone and *the life breath returns to God who gave it*.

Every time a baptism is celebrated, “life breath” is given. Every time we celebrate a funeral, “life breath” is returned. What happens in between those life and death moments is dependent upon one’s ability to *rejoice* and *ward off grief* by following the *ways* of our heart and the *vision* of our eyes.

Our vision will eventually fade, as the Book of Ecclesiastes tells us so vividly: ... *they who look through the windows grow blind*. Likewise, we are warned, *the years approach of which you will say, I have no pleasure in them*. But these strong words should not instill fear in us. Clearly, we are being told to resist the temptation to believe that we can live forever in our youth. This does not mean our worldly existence is unimportant, however, or something to be taken lightly or simply dismissed.

What can we do in order to *rejoice* and *ward off grief* – to live as joyful children of God? First, we must remember our Creator, because this puts us in right relationship with God. And we must remember that it is the joy of the Gospel that gives us cause for hope. It is the love of God and his mercy offered that is the reason for our very being. It would be a “wrong reading” of this book to think that all is darkness in this world, especially when we consider that the Father himself created it! The call to *remember your Creator* is a call to look around and appreciate all that God has done for us, and be thankful for all the blessings he bestows.

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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2016

(Lec. 138)

- 1) Amos 6:1a, 4-7
- 2) 1 Timothy 6:11-16
- 3) Luke 16:19-31

Gospel related: **CCC** 336, 633, 1021, 1859, 2831

**TWENTY-SIXTH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Let us keep the end in mind, and live our life witnessing to the Gospel.

The catechism notes that “death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ.” (CCC 1021) In our brief time on Earth, how should we seize the opportunities to act charitably, to give generously or to ease the suffering of another? Today’s readings provide some real-life scenarios.

The prophet Amos cries *woe to the complacent* who enjoy comfort, rich foods and music while ignoring *the collapse of Joseph*. They give priority to leisure and *wanton revelry*.

Jesus tells the Pharisees the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Each day, the rich man ignores Lazarus, who is surely within plain sight since he is lying at his door! After Lazarus dies, he is carried to the *bosom of Abraham*, a term used to describe the netherworld for the just before Christ descended into hell to raise them up. (CCC 633) The rich man, however, is condemned to eternal torment and flames. Finally, the rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to speak to his brothers who are still alive. Abraham responds, *if they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead*.

How can we avoid the fate of this proverbial rich man? How can we behave better than the revelers of Amos’ day? Perhaps Paul’s words to Timothy provide the answer. Paul exhorts Timothy to *lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called when you made the noble confession*. He reminds him to pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience and gentleness, and to *keep the commandment ... until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

We, too, are called to “lay hold of eternal life” at the moment of our baptism. We, too, are called to holiness. We, too, are called to pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience and gentleness. We, too, are called to keep Christ’s commands to love God and our neighbor – all the time, every day, at every opportunity. Too often, we limit ourselves to the Sunday collection plate or an annual Christmas appeal. These are fine, but what other opportunities have we missed to express our Christian faith – with a kind word, a shared meal, a handout to a beggar or a hand up to someone seeking work? Can we forgo a meal at a nice restaurant and instead give the money to a soup kitchen? Can we volunteer at a charitable organization?

And when we are called from this brief life, how will we answer to God’s judgment? While we are still walking this Earth, let us heed the words of Jesus. Let us keep the end in mind.

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Monday, September 26, 2016
(Lec. 455)

- 1) Job 1:6-22
- 2) Luke 9:46-50

MONDAY OF
26TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saints Cosmas and Damian,
Martyrs)

FOCUS: We have been called, like Job, to be humble servants of God – to be one of the least among others, not the greatest.

Have you ever had a day, a week, a month or longer where it seemed like everything that happened in your life was for the worst? One thing after another was going wrong until you felt that you were at the breaking point, and ready to yell out that you could not take it anymore? Well, imagine what was happening to Job in today's first reading, and then ask yourself if you have ever been in his shoes. And God allowed Satan to do all this to him!

This was a test of sorts for Job – but he did not know that. One can only picture the beginning of the reading where the angels presented themselves before the Lord and Satan was among them. The Lord and Satan then engage in a conversation in which the Lord talks about Job and his faithfulness. God allows Satan to tempt Job in any way except harming his person. Satan takes away everything Job has – family, possessions and cattle. Yet Job does not sin against God. How many of us would have the patience of Job against all odds? Very few of us.

Compare this reading to our Gospel today and see what Jesus does. His disciples are arguing among themselves as to who is the greatest, and Jesus takes the opportunity to make a point. He places a child by his side, and tells them that whoever receives this child in his name also receives Christ. Jesus tells them that *the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest.*

Job never claimed to be great – he knew he was a humble servant of the Lord. And that is our calling as well. We may never have the patience of Job, but we can see in this story that when life gets us down – instead of cursing everything around us – this is the time to turn to God in prayer and ask him to give us the grace to see things through. Although the devil may work to take us away from God, let us be confident that our prayers will bring us closer to God. May we always be people of prayer, looking to grow closer to Christ each day of our lives, even in the hardest of times.

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Tuesday, September 27, 2016
(Lec. 456)

- 1) Job 3:1-3, 11-17,
20-23
- 2) Luke 9:51-56

TUESDAY OF
26TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Vincent de Paul,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC 557**

FOCUS: God can use all of our experiences in life to bring us closer to him and others if we cooperate with his grace.

How many of us have heard about good people who have had bad things happen to them: for instance, the man who never smoked but developed lung cancer; the young couple whose baby was born with a terrible disease; or, the promising, hardworking high school student who was gunned down in a drive-by shooting? These people seemed to have lived their lives doing all the right things to stay healthy and safe, yet these terrible things have happened to them and we immediately wonder why. Perhaps that is the wrong question to ask.

An example of this is in today's first reading. We hear the story of a man who had everything and who followed the law. He prospered. Then, in a short period of time, he lost everything due to no fault of his own. He knew that he had lived according to the law, and he asked why this could happen to him. His friends were convinced that he had sinned and just wasn't admitting it to himself, to them or to God. Why else would God allow such adversity to happen to a just man? Job eventually came to see that "why" could not be answered. The correct question was, "How will I get through this?" And the answer was, "with God's help."

In today's Gospel, Jesus shows us that God helps us face the obstacles that we encounter throughout life. In doing the will of his Father, Jesus would face certain death. As he approached that moment in his life, he did not take out his frustrations on the people who rejected him, as his disciples wanted him to do. How many times have we reacted in a similar way? Things do not go as we had envisioned, and so we lash out. Jesus does not blame, does not feel sorry for himself. He moves on doing his Father's will, with resolute determination to accomplish the saving mission his Father had sent him to accomplish.

The saint whose feast we celebrate today, Vincent de Paul, was born into an extremely poor family. Vincent and his parents thought a vocation to the priesthood would serve as a good escape from his life of severe poverty. Initially, Vincent accepted his call to the priesthood for material reasons and shunned his former life. Vincent even refused to accept his shabbily dressed father once as a visitor because he was ashamed of him. But Vincent's eyes were opened after hearing the confession of a dying peasant. He realized that God sustains and strengthens all of us, rich and poor alike – in whatever circumstances we happen to find ourselves. Like Saint Vincent de Paul, let us be open to the needs of those around us, and see Jesus in the face of all those we meet and encounter throughout our daily lives.

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Wednesday, September 28, 2016
(Lec. 457)

- 1) Job 9:1-12, 14-16
- 2) Luke 9:57-62

WEDNESDAY OF
26TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Wenceslaus, Martyr;
Saint Lawrence Ruiz
and Companions, Martyrs)

Gospel related: **CCC** 544

FOCUS: Jesus calls us to go wherever he leads, and to love God above all people and things.

Jesus uses hyperbole and exaggerated speech in today's Gospel to spell out what is required of those who wish to follow him. Living as a disciple of Jesus requires a radical and total commitment of our lives and hearts to Jesus. We strive to love God above all things and go wherever Jesus might lead us regardless of the cost, even if it means leaving behind the people and things we care about the most.

There are seminaries with young men who have left father, mother and brothers in order to give Christ this time of their life to discern if they are called to the priesthood. There are women who are responding to the call to consecrate their lives to Christ, while also taking on vows of celibacy, obedience and poverty. These men and women are responding to Christ's call, which is the polar opposite of the messages we receive in the secular world, where self and material success reign supreme.

In today's first reading, we hear from Job, who had everything taken from him. Responding to questions put to him by his friends, he points out the power and might of God – the God who gives and takes away. Job holds fast to his faith. He shares his certainty that God hears his prayers, but in his humility he says, *I could not believe that [God] would hearken to my words.*

God the Father sent his son Jesus to save and redeem us, so that our sins might be forgiven and we might come to share eternal life in heaven. This is a great gift God the Father freely offers us. However, receiving it requires a response on our part. First and foremost, we must place our faith and trust in Jesus. It requires continually striving to love God above all things, going where Jesus leads regardless of the cost, and bearing our share of hardship for the sake of the Gospel.

Understanding this, may we make the effort to spend quality time in prayer each day and be strengthened by the graces of the sacraments. Keeping our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, may we continue to grow in our love for him, receive the grace and strength to persevere in faith, and be more attentive and responsive to the promptings of the Spirit.

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Thursday, September 29, 2016
(Lec. 647)

- 1) Daniel 7:9-10 13-14 or
Revelation 12:7-12a
- 2) John 1:47-51

SAINTS MICHAEL,
GABRIEL AND RAPHAEL,
ARCHANGELS
– FEAST

FOCUS: Angels represent the active power of God in our lives.

Each Sunday we profess our belief in God, "... maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen." Angels are part of that unseen world. But while most of us will never actually see an angel, we can be assured that they are present, and in fact are closely involved in our lives. The Church teaches us that "from infancy to death human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession." (CCC 336)

But what is an angel? What do they do? Pope Benedict XVI delivered a homily in 2007 that is worth reflecting on today. Speaking at the ordination of six new bishops, he said, "... the angel is a creature who stands before God, oriented to God with his whole being. All three names of the Archangels end with the word 'El,' which means 'God.' God is inscribed in their names, in their nature. Their true nature is existing in his sight and for him. In this very way the second aspect that characterizes angels is also explained: they are God's messengers. They bring God to men"

So when we speak of angels, we speak of the presence of God. Jacob dreamed of angels going up and down a stairway to heaven. When he awoke, he said, *Truly, the Lord is in this place and I did not know it!* (Gen. 28:16) In today's Gospel, Jesus refers to this story, but instead of a stairway, the angels ascend and descend on *the Son of Man*, meaning himself. This is a sign of God's most perfect presence in his son, Jesus.

The Feast of the Archangels focuses on three specific angels who are named in the Bible: Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. Michael is a warrior. He leads God's armies against Satan and defeats him. Gabriel is the bearer of good news. He announces the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary. Raphael protects Tobiah on his long journey and heals his father, Tobit, of his blindness.

Their stories do more than remind us of God's presence in our lives – they represent God's active power. The power of God to help us overcome temptation and "deliver us from evil," as we pray in the Our Father. The power of the word of God in our lives, most perfectly realized in his Son, the Word-made-Flesh. And the power of healing and protection that we experience in so many ways and pray for, on behalf of ourselves and those we love.

So when you think of angels, don't think of chubby little cherubs or gentle, white-robed beings with long graceful wings. Think, instead, of the power of God at work in your life. He is always present, ready to defend, protect, heal and strengthen you with his word.

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Friday, September 30, 2016
(Lec. 459)

- 1) Job 38:1, 12-21;
40:3-5
- 2) Luke 10:13-16

FRIDAY OF
26TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Jerome,
Priest and Doctor
Of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 87, 858

FOCUS: We must be open to seeing the events of our lives within the more encompassing plan of God.

The book of Job is a story about an utterly righteous man who loses everything he cherishes. His family, his profession, his wealth and his health are gone. In the wake of such a terrible disaster, his three friends try to convince him that he must have sinned to warrant such harsh punishment. Job knows that he is innocent. With unprecedented boldness, he calls upon God and challenges him to explain himself. Job wants to know why he has been treated so unjustly.

Today's passage describes some of the most dramatic scenes in sacred Scripture. God speaks out of a desert whirlwind to Job. It is a traditional way of describing the magnificent power of the Divine Presence. He begins his response to Job by asking a series of questions that are filled with poetic images. Indeed, the Creator takes him on a tour of the cosmos. He shows him mystery after mystery and wonder after wonder. He compares his own mighty power and divine providence with the limited vision of Job.

In the last part of the reading, Job responds to God. For all practical purposes he is basically speechless. He will no longer complain because his grasp of the situation was so weak and limited. The overall point is that any event that transpires in our life must be seen within the context of the infinite plan of God throughout all of space and time. It takes prayer, reflection and time to understand what God is doing.

Another way to grasp this concept is to stand very close to a picture. If we look at it from only an inch away, we only see a collection of meaningless points. However, when we step back, the various points blend together. Now we can see people, objects or patterns. Only when we view it from far away are we able to appreciate its magnificence. Whenever we look at the events in our lives, we need to view them from the proper vantage point so that we understand how God sees them.

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks strong words against towns where he had preached. Why? He had done mighty works to show the presence of God, and they had responded with indifference. Jesus reprimands them for doing nothing. He wanted them to change their hearts and walk in the way of his truth and merciful love. However, they could not comprehend what he was doing. Similar to Job, they were unable to see the Divine Presence working in their lives. God works in our lives, too. Let us pray that we can open our eyes, and our hearts, to his plan for our lives.

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