

AUGUST

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Tuesday, August 1, 2017

(Lec. 402)

1) Exodus 33:7-11; 34:5b-9, 28

2) Matthew 13:36-43

TUESDAY OF

17TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

Saint Alphonsus Liguori,

Bishop and Doctor

of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 1034

FOCUS: God is patient, and gives us every opportunity to repent and bear good fruit for him.

The parable of the wheat and the weeds is difficult for modern gardeners. We pull out the weeds in our garden as quickly as we can because it is easy to tell the difference between a young dandelion and a young lettuce plant, for example. But in Christ's time, and in certain areas of the world today, farming can be much more complex. A type of weed, often called darnel in older translations of the Gospels, is not just a weed but a grass that grows very much like wheat. In fact, one often cannot tell the two plants apart until the grain matures. Wheat is a golden color and darnel seed has more of a purplish shade.

Does it matter that there is little bit of purplish seed in my flour? It gives the food a nice color. Unfortunately, darnel seed is mildly poisonous. It can make you nauseated. It can cause hallucinations. Today, in some countries where there is still a problem with darnel contaminating wheat, poor farmers will inspect and remove the purplish seed by hand.

People in a first-century agricultural society should have easily understood Christ's parable.

But the parable is not trying to teach us how to care for a field of grain. The question is, how does God act toward a world that contains sinners? We would like to assume that it is "everyone else" who are the sinners. We would like to assume that God could make our life so much easier if those sinners were just thrown into the fiery furnace.

Am I without sin, however? No. So, since we are all sinners, this parable and the judgment that comes at the harvest offers great hope. Plants have a predetermined DNA, a certain genetic code. A plant is either a weed that needs to be burned or wheat that is saved at the harvest. We have predetermined genetic codes for our bodies as well.

But our spirit, our souls, do not. They develop through the exercise of free will in cooperation with God's grace. In effect, we play a large role in determining the makeup of our spiritual DNA. Are we wheat choosing to lead lives which bear good fruit for God, or are we weeds choosing to lead lives which are focused on satisfying our own selfish needs and desires?

This parable tells us that God is patient with us, giving us every opportunity to repent so that we might lead lives which bear good fruit for him.

And yet, each of us has only a limited time on this earth, and we don't know when our time will come to stand before the Lord to give an account of our lives. Therefore, it is especially important, each and every day, to give our best for the Lord and go where he leads us so our lives are holy and pleasing to God. And then, one day, when our time comes to stand before the Lord, he may say, "well done, my good and faithful servant, come and enter into the place I have prepared for you."

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Wednesday, August 2, 2017

(Lec. 403)

- 1) Exodus 34:29-35
- 2) Matthew 13:44-46

WEDNESDAY OF

17TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Eusebius of Vercelli,

Bishop;

Saint Peter Julian Eymard,

Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 546

FOCUS: The kingdom of God is a treasure beyond telling, available and present to all who seek it.

Jesus spoke frequently about the kingdom of heaven, an image denoting God's lordship, his dominion and his intended presence in all our relationships with others. All that has been created is a part of God's dominion. All that exists is for God. We humans exist to be loved by God, and to love him in return. To love God is to realize, to make real, his purposes in bringing us into life – to realize the truth that all we think, say and do is for him.

The kingdom of God is a concept used extensively in the Old Testament, and is carried over by Jesus into the New Testament. God's presence, power and love are much closer to us than we can even imagine. We are called by God to realize this – to make this reality present and active in our lives, and in the lives of those around us.

The enormity of it, the immensity of it, is expressed in the preface the Church uses in the Mass of Christ the King, the Mass we celebrate at the conclusion of the Church's liturgical year on the Sunday that precedes the first Sunday of Advent. That preface proclaims:

“For you anointed your Only Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, with the oil of gladness as eternal Priest and King of all creation, so that, by offering himself on the altar of the Cross as a spotless sacrifice to bring us peace, he might accomplish the mysteries of human redemption; and, making all created things subject to his rule, he might present to your majesty an eternal and universal kingdom, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace.”

Truly, God's kingdom is not a political entity or a human institution. It is found and made real in our relationships with those around us. Your vocation, and mine along with yours, is to treat others with God's tender mercy, to relate to others in fairness, to recognize that they are children of God, and to love our family members as Jesus would love them.

This calls us to be reflective, to take time to see others as God sees them, and to consider how we are treating others. If we live routine and unreflective lives, we will trample on and hurt others.

So when we pray the Lord's Prayer, let's pay closer attention to what we are praying for when we say: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

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Thursday, August 3, 2017

(Lec. 404)

1) Exodus 40:16-21, 34-38

2) Matthew 13:47-53

Gospel related: **CCC** 1034, 1117, **CSDC** 12

THURSDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God gives everyone the opportunity to come to him time and again.

Today's first reading from Exodus portrays how God revealed a glimpse of his infinite glory to Moses and the Israelites when he descended during the day in a cloud upon the tent that held the ark of the covenant, and in a fire-filled cloud at night.

Although the experience of the closeness of God to his creation has varied in different places and times, it has been a universal, human experience nonetheless — one through which he seeks to draw us to himself. Earlier in the Book of Exodus, God established a covenant with the Israelites when he said, *I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God* (6:7).

In our Gospel today, Jesus speaks about the heavenly kingdom, assuring his disciples through parables that the faithful will have a place in the kingdom. He uses a fishing analogy, an easy-to-understand image, to help explain the kingdom of heaven. God spreads his nets wide, and gives everyone the opportunity to come to him. It is up to us to decide where we wish to land. Even if we make bad choices and feel we have squandered our chance, God always gives us the opportunity to repent.

Faith is always available to us, and to our loved ones, as a gift from God. So if you have a friend or relative who is far away from the faith, never give up hope and always keep them close in prayer.

At the end of our own lives, we will stand before God to give an account of our lives. The question is, will we be put into buckets with the good fish and know perfect happiness and peace in heaven, or be bad fish that will be cast away and eternally separated from God?

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Friday, August 4, 2017

(Lec. 405)

- 1) Leviticus 23:1, 4-11,
15-16, 27, 34b-37
- 2) Matthew 13:54-58

FRIDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint John Vianney,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 495, 500, **CSDC** 259

FOCUS: Do we fail to recognize Jesus in our midst, in our everyday lives?

How familiar are you with Jesus? What do you know about him and how does that shape the way you see him? In the Gospel today, we witness the people of Nazareth rejecting Jesus. They do so after hearing him preach in their synagogue. One would think that they disagreed with his message or thought it false, but just the opposite appears true; they attest to his *wisdom and mighty deeds*. They seem to recognize something remarkable in his character, his words and his actions. So why did they reject him?

Jesus gives us some idea when he says that a prophet will have no honor in his own hometown. Surely one thing that contributes to this is the level of familiarity people have when they grow up with someone. People tend to think they really know who someone is and what they are capable of because they have known them since their youth. In truth, they know *of* the person but they don't necessarily *know* the person. This leads to forming ideas about that person, putting them "into a box," as we say.

The people of Nazareth seem to make this mistake with Jesus. He is too familiar to them. They have Jesus in a box which doesn't have any room for wisdom and mighty works. It doesn't have room for the possibility that the Messiah God promised to send could come from such humble origins as Nazareth. What is really happening is that their view of Jesus is incomplete. Their vision is blocked by blinders so they only see what they want to see – what fits according to their preconceived ideas about Jesus based on simple interactions.

This is a danger for us today, too. We can fail to recognize Jesus in our everyday lives, and close ourselves off from receiving his many gifts. How often do we fail to recognize Jesus when he is in our midst?

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Saturday, August 5, 2017
(Lec. 406)

- 1) Leviticus 25:1, 8-17
- 2) Matthew 14:1-12

SATURDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
The Dedication of
the Basilica of Saint Mary Major;
Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: True faith in God means we follow his way, even in the face of fear and uncertainty.

Today's readings focus on two aspects of faith. The reading from Leviticus provides instruction on how the ancient Israelites were to celebrate their fifty-year sabbatical or "jubilee year." The Lord makes clear this time is to be treated as *sacred*, and that the Israelites are to treat each other with compassion and fairness: *Do not deal unfairly, then; but stand in fear of your God. I, the Lord, am your God.* Certainly, God is giving a directive here – treat each other with mercy and kindness.

The Gospel reading from Matthew recounts the death of John the Baptist. The prophet had been imprisoned by King Herod because John had spoken against Herod taking up with his brother's widow, Herodias. Herod was reluctant to execute him, however, because he felt that God was working in a powerful way through John; and the people considered John a prophet. Herodias had her revenge, however.

Her daughter danced for Herod and his guests at a celebration, and Herod was so pleased that he vowed to deliver to her whatever she desired. Prompted by her mother, Herodias, the girl asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod was distressed, but because of the oaths he had made, he ordered John's execution. Later, the disciples returned to retrieve John's remains and bury them, and then reported the death to Jesus.

Among his faults, Herod clearly seemed to have no ability to change course once he had settled on a direction. According to Matthew, Herod was uneasy about executing the Baptist, but was more anxious about appearing to back down from his pledge to give the daughter whatever she wanted. His pride seems to have clearly gotten in the way and sealed John the Baptist's fate.

The problem with Herod is that he did not follow his instincts, and seemingly made the contrary choice to allow his selfish desires and his fear guide his decision-making in eliminating those he perceived as a threat in some way. Herod's life and the choices he made remind us that we are each confronted with choices about the direction we want to walk in life. Are we going to choose to let our sinful and selfish desires, and our fears, guide and direct our choices? Or are we going to choose to walk along the narrow way, leading our lives according to the teachings of Jesus?

Most likely, we all strive to walk along the narrow path each day, but we often stumble along the way. The good news is that God is ever-willing to forgive, and Jesus is always by our side to help us get back up and back on track.

The challenge set before us is to make the conscious and intentional choice day in and day out to walk the narrow path, to lead our lives according to the teachings of Jesus, and persevere in fighting the good fight. Let us pray for the strength to choose God, and love, over fear.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 6, 2017

(Lec. 614)

1) Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

2) 2 Peter 1:16-19

3) Matthew 17:1-9

Gospel related: **CCC** 444, 554

THE TRANSFIGURATION

OF THE LORD

-FEAST

FOCUS: Let the Lord work in and through us to bring healing and peace to our world.

“Touched By an Angel” was a television drama from the mid-90s in which an angel came to earth and changed the person being ministered to. The episodes always ended with the message of God’s love. But what if someone was touched by Jesus himself, such as the Apostles Peter, James and John in today’s Gospel? After being led up a mountain by Jesus, they witnessed him being changed and transfigured before them, with Jesus’ face shining like the sun and his clothes becoming white as light. This is something we would certainly want to hear about.

More specifically, the Apostles Peter, James and John witnessed something that few people will ever see or hear: the glory of God as Jesus was transfigured before them, and the voice of God which from a cloud declared, *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.* That would shake anyone up. But more importantly, it changes them.

Upon seeing Jesus transfigured and hearing the voice of God, Peter, James and John became terrified. They fell to the ground in fear. But then they were touched by Jesus, who said to them the words we hear often from him in Scripture: *Do not be afraid.* Because fear is the opposite of love. And this touch of the Lord, this message of love, transformed these Apostles so that when the time came, they could share the prophetic message of the glory and honor of the beloved Son of God with the world.

Some of you may be thinking, this is all very nice to hear but we will likely never to be touched by an angel, much less by the Lord Jesus Christ. Except that angels are purely spiritual beings who can work through others to offer care and intercession. How about the angel who works through your co-worker who puts aside her work to listen when she sees the sadness in your eyes? Or the angel who acts by means of your neighbor who brings over dinner when your spouse is in the hospital? Or the angel who delivers the message of God’s infinite love in your newborn baby who turns your world upside down with joy?

Those angels change us and bring us the message of God’s love. But we are also touched by Jesus himself. We are touched by the Lord every time we come to Mass, every time we are attentive to the word of God preached and proclaimed, every time we come forward to receive Holy Communion and are nourished and strengthened by Jesus himself. We are touched by Jesus and we are changed. We are transformed. We are made to be like a lamp that shines and brings Christ’s light and love to those living in the darkness of fear, doubt and discouragement.

The more we open ourselves to being transformed by Jesus, the more he will work in and through us as instruments of his love to bring healing and peace to our world.

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Monday, August 7, 2017

(Lec. 407)

1) Numbers 11:4b-15

2) Matthew 14:13-21

MONDAY OF
18TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt Mem.
Saint Sixtus II, Pope,
and companions, Martyrs;
Saint Cajetan, Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 1329, 1335

FOCUS: Our loving Father knows our needs and gives us what we truly need.

We can see from our first reading today from the Book of Numbers that the people were longing for days gone by, when they had meat to eat. It grieved Moses to hear the families crying in their tents. They complained to Moses, so Moses complained to the Lord. All the people had was manna, which was like coriander seed. They gathered it up and used it, but still, they missed meat. It is good for us to hear Moses' complaint to the Lord, because it is a reminder to us that we, too, are free to take our needs to our Father. We do not have to do this in formal language, but, like Moses, we can express ourselves genuinely and directly.

For Moses, the concern about the meat burdened him. He had a great responsibility for so many people. The people had demands; they said, "Give us meat for our food." Moses questioned God: *Where can I get meat to give to all this people?* He tells the Lord he would rather be killed than face the distress he was experiencing. I would bet that there are a number of us gathered here today who can relate in some way to the frustration Moses was experiencing. Maybe we have even had our own conversation with God that was laced with discouragement and a sense of desperation. That is okay. As we see in Scripture, God hears us.

Today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew easily relates to the first reading from the book of Numbers, as we learn about the miracle of Jesus' multiplication of the five loaves and two fish. The people were hungry, and the disciples of Jesus questioned him about what to do. Should the people be sent away so they can buy themselves food? *There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves*, Jesus tells them. Can you imagine the questioning look on their faces when they look at the amount of bread and fish they have and the sizable crowd — about five thousand — that is gathered?

After blessing the food and having it distributed, there is not only enough for the crowd, but enough fragments left over to fill twelve wicker baskets! This was a true miracle, performed by Jesus, out of his loving concern for the people. It is also a very clear sign for us today that God hears our prayers. Trusting in God can be hard sometimes, as we turn to him with our needs and wait in hopeful expectation, but as we can see in today's Gospel, our loving Father knows our needs and gives us what we truly need.

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Tuesday, August 8, 2017

(Lec. 408)

- 1) Numbers 12:1-13
- 2) Matthew 14:22-36 or
15:1-2, 10-14

TUESDAY OF
18TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Dominic,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 448, **CSDC** 453

FOCUS: Trust that God is with us always.

In today's Gospel, Jesus has the disciples get into a boat and go ahead of him to the other side of the sea, as he remains behind and dismisses the crowds. He then goes up the mountain to pray, and when evening comes he finds himself alone. All the while the disciples, whose boat was already a few miles offshore, were being tossed about by the waves. During the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came toward the disciples walking on the sea. Their first reaction upon seeing Jesus walking upon the water was to feel terrified, for they thought he was a ghost.

At this point, Jesus gives them words of comfort: *Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid*. Seemingly confident, Peter asks, *Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water*. Jesus responds by saying, *Come*. Peter then got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. Frightened by the strong wind, Peter begins to sink and cries out for Jesus to save him – which he does. Jesus questions Peter's faith, and the passage ends with an acknowledgement by the disciples that Jesus is the Son of God. I wonder how many of us have, at one time or another, confidently stepped out in what we thought was strong faith, only to realize our own weakness?

We, like Peter, may say we are "all in," only to realize that "drinking from the same cup as Jesus" can be frightening. It is important to remember that Jesus never leaves us alone when our lives look like that boat being tossed around in the sea. In fact, as was true with the disciples, he is aware of what is happening and comes to meet us, even before we can call out to him. And when we become frightened, Jesus stretches out his hand and catches us, too.

This is not simply a nice little account about the miracle of walking on water, or Peter's seeming lack of faith. If we sit with this passage for a while we can see that it – like all of Scripture – is God's self-revelation. He is revealing himself to us. Who is this God that we believe in? Can we trust him to be with us when we are sinking? When we are overconfident, is he there to help us? Yes, for sure. He is a loving Father who can be trusted in our time of need, or when we misjudge our own abilities. Don't you have to love Peter's zeal? Can't we see his overconfidence in ourselves sometimes? We should not be too hard on ourselves when we, like Peter, become frightened as we step out in faith and find ourselves on shaky ground. God is with us always.

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Wednesday, August 9, 2017

(Lec. 409)

- 1) Numbers 13:1-2, 25-14:1, 26-29a, 34-35
- 2) Matthew 15:21-28

WEDNESDAY OF

18TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Teresa Benedicta

of the Cross,

Virgin and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 439, 448, 2610

FOCUS: Do we reject or accept God's gifts and mercy?

Today's readings give us two stories that revolve around the land of Canaan – the Promised Land of the early Old Testament – and they are wonderful to explore in their contrast with each other.

In our first reading from the Book of Numbers, the Lord has instructed Moses to send one person from each ancestral tribe – all of them princes – into Canaan in order to sort of check it out – to survey its resources, its inhabitants, its geography. This is, after all, where the Israelites – God's chosen people – will live forever, and it is their first actual glimpse of the promise that has been held before them since their escape from Egypt.

The men return, excited about the bounty the land produces, but despondent and discouraged over the strength of its inhabitants and the expected difficulty the Israelites will experience in moving into the land as a result. They complain about Canaan and spread lies about it, making it sound like a terrible place to be, not worthy of their effort. As a result, the rest of the people, who have been plodding through the desert toward the hope of this great Promised Land, fall into despair and essentially wish they'd never followed God to this place. In essence, they lack faith.

And God responds by telling them that they will then die there in the desert where they sit; those who have rejected the gift of the Promised Land will no longer have access to it.

Contrast that with our second story, found in Matthew's Gospel. Here we have a lowly Canaanite woman (versus the princes in Numbers) – that is, a non-Jew, probably Greek, from the original land promised to the Israelites. She is in the crowd surrounding Jesus, and seems to know not only of his ability to heal others, but who he really is: the woman calls to him with the term *Lord, Son of David*. These are titles for a Messiah; of a Jewish king. How would she, a Greek Canaanite woman, know these things?

The woman pleads with Jesus to cure her daughter. The Jewish disciples tell Jesus to send her away, and Jesus initially responds to her cries by saying his mission is meant only for the Israelites. But she persists, insisting that he can help her. Despite her Gentile background, she has great faith.

And Jesus responds by telling the woman that her daughter is healed; she who has accepted the gifts and promises of God will benefit from them.

So we might ask: Who are we in these stories? Do we complain and reject the gifts God gives us? Or do we have faith in God's mercy and loving promises?

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Thursday, August 10, 2017

(Lec. 618)

1) 2 Corinthians 9:6-10

2) John 12:24-26

Gospel related: **CCC** 2731, **CSDC** 570

**SAINT LAWRENCE,
DEACON AND MARTYR
- FEAST**

FOCUS: As God's servants, we must always go where Jesus goes.

Many parishes invite the children to come up and place their offering in a basket often held by the priest or deacon. On one such occasion, a little girl about four years old came up holding a one dollar bill. She stood there for awhile holding the dollar over the basket and then she finally let go of it.

On another occasion, a young boy about the same age came up and dropped a few coins into the basket. "That's all I have," he sighed. Now which child images *the cheerful giver* Saint Paul speaks of today? Hopefully, we choose the little boy who gave all he had over the little girl who was quite reluctant to let go of that one dollar bill.

Saint Paul is talking about more than financial support here. He presses us to realize the value of our time and talent as well. To paraphrase Saint Paul: give a little, get a little; give a lot and get a lot. In one sense, supporting our parish or favorite charity is the easy part. Sharing our particular talents by donating our time is of greater value.

Jesus appears to say something odd today when he says: *Whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life*. Does this mean I need to hate my life to get to heaven? No, not at all.

For Jesus, it is not about hate of self. It is about loving ourselves less than we love God. If we are to be God's servants, if we are to be faithful disciples, we must go where Jesus goes. His priorities need to become our priorities, and not the other way around.

Saint Lawrence, whose feast day we celebrate today, is said to have made light of his martyrdom. In paying the ultimate price for being a servant of Jesus, of being a witness of his faith in Jesus, Saint Lawrence is reported to have said as he was being roasted to death: "Turn me over, I am done on this side."

We do not have to lose our life in the literal sense to lose our life for the sake of the Gospel. Losing ourselves by letting go of our time, talent and treasure with a smile on our face works too. For the Lord does love cheerful givers.

Friday, August 11, 2017

(Lec. 411)

1) Deuteronomy 4:32-40

2) Matthew 16:24-28

FRIDAY OF
18TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Clare,
Virgin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 226, 363, 618, 736, 1021, 2029, 2232

FOCUS: God works in wonderful and mysterious ways.

Today marks the first of many days where we will hear readings from the book of Deuteronomy. This book contains discourses from Moses, his blessings, his last days and the mission of Joshua. It is also a code of civil and religious laws. However, it presents the information in a way that is filled with compassion and love. Indeed, Jesus appreciates the value of this book, and quotes from it during his temptation in the desert earlier in the Gospel of Matthew (chapter four).

The discourse from Moses in today's first reading speaks about privileged moments in the life of the Israelites. They are asked if any other people have ever had such extraordinary experiences of their gods. In contrast to these other gods, the God of the Israelites has acted right before their very eyes in very dramatic and convincing ways. As a result, it is strikingly clear that he is the one true God. Therefore, he clearly asserts the non-existence of other gods that people worshipped during this period of time. Based on these experiences, he calls them to believe in him, the one true God. He also instructs them to keep God's statutes and commandments so that they and their children may prosper and experience the blessings that come from being faithful to God.

The Gospel message develops the first reading by indicating how believers are to follow Jesus, the second person of the Most Blessed Trinity. He has previously startled his disciples by telling them what is going to happen to him as the Messiah. Now, he adds to his statements by indicating to them that they will have a part in his experience. Like him, they are called to take up their own cross. For some, it might mean martyrdom. For others, it will mean something else. The important part of their mission is to discover what cross they are asked to carry and to accept it.

There are numerous ways we can live the reality of these readings. In our own experience, we may not have had the dramatic signs like the Israelites. However, if we reflect on our lives, we will soon realize that God has also done wonders for us through our family, friends and the events of our lifetime. We need to give thanks for those moments, for they allow us to see God's work in our lives.

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Saturday, August 12, 2017

(Lec. 412)

1) Deuteronomy 6:4-13

2) Matthew 17:14-20

SATURDAY OF

18TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Jane Frances De Chantal,

Religious;

Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: Love the Lord with all your heart, soul and strength.

In today's reading from the Book of Deuteronomy, the greatest of the Ten Commandments is given by Moses to the people: *Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.*

The words of the greatest commandment, repeated by Moses, show us that responding to God's call requires a total gift of self. It requires belief and love, which are two attributes of those who are disciples of God.

The lack of belief, the lack of faith, is what frustrates Jesus in today's Gospel. Jesus cures a young boy whom the disciples could not cure, and they wonder why. Jesus tells them that their lack of faith made it impossible. Then he calls upon them to have just the smallest seed of belief, and that nothing will be impossible for them.

God wants us to be happy. He freely made us to share in his divine goodness. He knows that if we follow what he has put forth and love him with every ounce of our being, we will find great blessings. Disciples recognize that the Ten Commandments are the pathway to peace. They are freedom. To love God with heart, soul and strength means leaving nothing in this earthly world that is *good* outside the scope of what we are to love. These words remind us that we are at once intimately united to God. We give over everything and quickly discover God in our midst.

But, concretely, how do we love this way? Whenever we love our neighbor – that is, whomever we may encounter along life's journey – and offer them deep, abiding love, we are loving God. When we see the face of God in the face of our brothers and sisters, we are loving God. When our heart pours out to others, when our compassion is great and without judgment, and when in our weakness we are given God's strength, we have the tools to put into practice the Greatest Commandment. While we may not accomplish this perfectly, if we keep the law "on our lips," we have a greater chance of successfully embracing the Greatest Commandment. And nothing will be impossible.

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 13, 2017

(Lec. 115)

1) 1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a

2) Romans 9:1-5

3) Matthew 14:22-33

Gospel related: **CCC** 448, **CSDC** 453

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus calls us to leave behind the false security of this world and come to him when we are most afraid.

Why did Peter get out of the boat? As a fisherman who had worked the Sea of Galilee his entire life, that is the last thing he would have done. He would never have even considered it under normal circumstances, let alone when the boat was being buffeted by strong winds and high waves. In a storm, the boat was the safest place to be. He would have felt protected and secure. The sensible thing to do was to stay put and ride out the storm, right?

So why did he leave the boat? Was he frightened by the angry sea, driven to do something senseless and foolish? No, most likely not. For he had sailed and fished these waters his entire life, and would have experienced bad weather before. It was part of his world. Did he think that Jesus' walking on water was a "neat trick" and he wanted to try it himself? "I can do that!" No, most likely not. Was he trying to prove himself in front of the other disciples? No, most likely not.

Peter, as we have seen him act in other parts of the Gospel, was bold and straightforward at times – speaking or acting before thinking. He had a sincere heart that was not held back by cool, rational logic. Of course, he knew you can't walk on water. All of his life experience as a fisherman must have been straining to hold him back as he took that first step onto the waves as they pounded against the hull. But he did not let his mind get in the way. Peter saw the Lord and wanted to be with him. That was all that mattered.

When we are battered by the storms in our lives, we may seek safety, sheltered from the winds and waves, and hunker down in whatever "boat" we can find – turning inward, trying to close out the world. But Jesus is always there, even in the midst of our storms. Often, we will call for him, beg him to come to us, to save us from peril.

Perhaps we need to be like Peter and climb out of our comfort zones. In order to genuinely move forward, we must step out onto the stormy sea of uncharted territory and go to Jesus, trusting where he may lead us. Although it may be rough at times, he will lend a hand and, in his time, lead us to the light of a new and brighter day.

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Monday, August 14, 2017

(Lec. 413)

1) Deuteronomy 10:12-22

2) Matthew 17:22-27

MONDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Maximilian Kolbe,
Priest and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 554, 586

FOCUS: Jesus is present to and for us in our daily needs, and for eternity.

In today's Gospel passage, we have two brief, and completely separate, stories. The first takes place in a non-specified area in the political region of Galilee: here, Jesus tells the disciples, for the second time in Matthew, that he is to be handed over to the authorities and killed – and then raised on the third day. It is not a detailed description, but the disciples seem to grasp the enormity and the truth of Jesus' words, for scripture tells us *they were overwhelmed with grief*.

The second narrative in today's passage takes place a bit later, specifically in the small fishing village of Capernaum, located on the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum was near the hometown of Peter, James, John, Andrew and Matthew the tax collector. This narrative account includes a discussion – first between a tax collector and Peter, and then between Peter and Jesus – about the Temple tax. The issue at hand is whether Jesus and his followers should pay it.

In the days of Jesus' ministry, many of the Jewish religious authorities attempted to justify their condemnation of Jesus by casting him as a lawbreaker. If Jesus, and therefore his followers, refused to pay the Temple tax, they would be breaking the law and subject to religious and Roman punishment. As history as shown, the Romans severely punished lawbreakers – most often crucifying them.

But Jesus does not refuse to pay the Temple tax. He tells Peter to go fishing, take the first fish he catches and open its mouth. In the fish's mouth he will find a coin that will pay the Temple tax, as he says, *for me and for you*.

The connection between the two stories may seem a bit hard to find, at first. But it's actually quite inspired. In both stories, Jesus *predicts* the miracle at hand – his death and resurrection, and the valuable coin – it does not take place in the moment. And in both stories, the authorities have demanded payment and Jesus provides that payment: in the first with his life for all, and in the second, with a coin worth enough to cover all debt.

The significance of these two stories together lies in this fact: Jesus' redemption of all creation did not occur in a vacuum, like some celestial physics experiment. It occurred, and continues to occur, in our lived, human experience: with all its daily joys and sorrows; its successes and challenges; and its credits and debts. Jesus is present to and for us in our daily needs, and for eternity. At times, we too may be overwhelmed with grief in life, as the Apostles were, but we take heart and have hope in the promise of Jesus's death and resurrection: eternal life with God.

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Tuesday, August 15, 2017

(Lec. 622)

1) Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab

2) 1 Corinthians 15:20-27

3) Luke 1:39-56

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

**THE ASSUMPTION
OF THE BLESSED
VIRGIN MARY
-SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: Our holy Mother is a loving advocate who resides at the side of Christ.

On this holy Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary's Assumption into heaven, we call to mind how God prepared our Blessed Mother for her special role in our salvation. Due to her Immaculate Conception, and her eventual bringing forth of Jesus into the world, her lifelong participation in God's divine plan ultimately leads to her Assumption; an event we celebrate as the foundation and model of our own future resurrection.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains it this way: "when the course of her earthly life was finished, [she] was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things . . ." Mary's Assumption is considered a "singular participation in her Son's resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians" (966).

This singular participation in Christ's resurrection, and anticipation of our resurrection, says something very important about our holy Mother. She is not a mother who is disengaged from her children. She is not a mother who does not understand our pain and suffering. She is a mother to whom we can turn in our time of need. As "Queen over all things," our holy Mother continues to be our advocate at the side of Christ.

Set apart by God, Mary's everlasting love for her children continues to help in the unfolding of God's presence in our own earthly lives, as we are inspired to consecrate our days to God. While our human comprehension of this divine plan may come up a little short, it is our faith in the practice and teaching office of the Church that calls us to assent to the Assumption of Mary as reality.

It is more than just a comfort for us to ponder Mary's role in salvation history. It is not simply a nice idea that Mary, due to her special grace, was assumed into heaven. It is a powerful truth. We can speak of it as an imitation of Christ's ascension, but even more so, we enjoy the benefit of the relationship between Mary and her son, Jesus. We recall that, even at the foot of the cross, Jesus turned to his beloved disciple and said, *Behold, your mother*. And to Mary, *Behold your son*. Through this interaction, we can see that Mary, our Blessed Mother, the holy Virgin, is a gift of Christ, and what a beautiful gift indeed!

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Wednesday, August 16, 2017
(Lec. 415)

- 1) Deuteronomy 34:1-12
- 2) Matthew 18:15-20

WEDNESDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Stephen of Hungary)

Gospel related: **CCC** 553, 1088, 1373, 1444, 2472 **CSDC** 52

FOCUS: Jesus bestowed the power to bind and loose upon the Apostles.

We are all aware of the fact that Jesus gave “the power of the keys” to Saint Peter, but tend to overlook the fact that Jesus gave that same power to the College of the Apostles. Peter was one of them, but had the special duty to preside over them in peace, charity and unity. Today’s Gospel account gives us the bestowal of that power, the power to bind and loose, upon the Apostles.

It is a beautiful gift, and one that we all need. Otherwise, as individuals we can drift away from the support and direction we need. Keys are wonderful things. They can lock up and restrain our baser impulses, those things that can harm others and ourselves as well. Keys can also unlock and free up those gifts and talents that are all locked up within our timid and fearful hearts and souls. Let’s face it; we all need direction from time to time. And we all need to be challenged and freed up from time to time.

The power of the keys is Christ's gift to us – a gift that unites us and allows us to live together in unity and harmony. It should come as no surprise, then, that we refer to the successor of Saint Peter as our Holy Father, and that we address our priests as “Father” and members of religious orders as “Sister” and “Mother” and “Brother.” Without the power of keys, we would not be able to live together in peace, in unity and in harmony as God’s family.

Freedom is not license to do whatever one wants to do to other people. Freedom is a common good that we all share, a good that is fragile and yet essential in order that we might live as God our Father would have us live as members of his family. Freedom of choice is God’s gift to us. What we choose can be our gift to God. It’s what we choose that matters. Choices can have eternal consequences. This is why prayer is of critical importance. Prayer keeps us “keyed” into God’s love for us and guides us in making choices that please him. And that is the key to eternal life with him.

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Thursday, August 17, 2017

(Lec. 416)

1) Joshua 3:7-10a, 11, 13-17

2) Matthew 18:21–19:1

Gospel related: CCC 982, 2227, 2364, 2843, 2845

THURSDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: In gratitude for God's forgiveness, let us strive with all our heart to forgive others.

What is God asking of us in today's Scripture readings as well as in the words of the Mass? God is asking us to be loving and forgiving people. He asks that we practice mercy. Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus gives us the greatest commandment when he reminds us that we are to love God with our whole heart and our neighbor as ourself. How do we become loving people? One condition of love is forgiveness. Love is achieved by first sincerely forgiving others as well as ourselves.

Forgiveness is something learned. It doesn't come naturally. Just look around and we'll see all sorts of people, including ourselves, in need of forgiveness. Think of a world in which all of us practiced forgiveness. Our families would be happy places. Siblings and friends would enjoy each other. Grudges would be replaced by invitations to hang out. Sounds good, but where do we begin? We begin by listening to God each and every day so we can hear what it is he is asking of us. Just maybe the answer will be "forgive others as I forgive you."

Joshua was a listener. He listened to God and responded to God's instructions to cross the Jordan River into Jericho. He trusted and believed God's word that he and the Israelites would enter the Promised Land. Belief, like forgiveness, is an expression of love and, like love, is an identifying attribute of the children of God. Joshua and the Israelites expressed their love of God through their obedience. God's forgiveness of the Israelites entered into the picture time and time again prior to their crossing of the Jordan. How many times did God forgive their unfaithfulness? God forgave them more times than we can count.

This, of course, is the God we are called to imitate by our unlimited forgiveness of others. Jesus makes this clear in his response to Peter's question about how many times he must forgive his brother. In essence, Jesus' response, *not seven times but seventy-seven times*, means that we are to try to be as forgiving as God. No limits. Don't count the times. Just do it. Forgive. Over and over, just like God forgave the Israelites and just like God has forgiven each of us. If we pray as Jesus taught us, "Father...forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," we will have the strength, wisdom and courage to do so.

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Friday, August 18, 2017
(Lec. 417)

- 1) Joshua 24:1-13
- 2) Matthew 19:3-12

Gospel related: **CCC** 796, 922, 1579, 1605, 1610, 1614, 1615, 1618, 1620, 1644, 1652, 2053, 2336, 2364, 2380, 2382, **CSDC** 209, 210, 217, 219

FRIDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God's commitment to us throughout history is a model for our commitment to one another.

"Why aren't there more young men entering the priesthood these days?" "Why does it seem like more and more couples are divorcing?" Does this mean there is a vocations crisis, or a marriage crisis? Or perhaps do we simply face a commitment crisis?

Stop and think for a moment how much in our world is disposable. Everything from computers to cell phones to cars are disposable. This seems to have a carry-over effect to the way people lead their lives. The only commitment many people in today's world seem to want to adhere to is to keep their options open — in jobs, in relationships, in life in general.

The first reading reminds us that God has been patiently at work in and through our history as his beloved people. Joshua is retelling what we call salvation history. It's no accident that his words sound reminiscent of the Liturgy of the Word during the Easter Vigil, when we spend much time hearing the sacred story of our salvation, from the time of creation down to our own day. It is the story of how God created, sought and summoned a people uniquely his own, a people to love and jealously protect — a people for whom God would ultimately give his life in order to give them life.

Joshua's retelling of salvation history is his way of reminding the people of his time that God has been fiercely and lovingly committed to them. God has made a commitment to his people and has chosen to live out that commitment.

God's commitment to us through the ages is a model of the commitments we are called to make to one another. This doesn't mean that from our human perspective all will be easy or have a storybook ending. Sometimes marriages do encounter difficulties that cannot be resolved. Sometimes we do not see the path God is calling us to.

But as we gather around the altar and celebrate the Eucharist, we enter into the most important relationship we have. When we say "Amen," we are acknowledging Jesus' commitment to walk with us, especially when life is difficult or seems filled with insurmountable challenges. In the Eucharist, Jesus is sharing with us his own steadfast love — an enduring love that will see us through the most challenging experiences in our lives. Let's renew our commitment to living as faithful disciples, and in turn honor and stay true to the commitments we have made in our lives.

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Saturday, August 19, 2017

(Lec. 418)

- 1) Joshua 24:14-29
- 2) Matthew 19:13-15

SATURDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint John Eudes,
Priest;
Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: *Decide today whom you will serve.*

Decide today whom you will serve. Joshua challenged the Israelites to make a conscious decision whether to serve God — who freed them from slavery in Egypt and led them to the Promised Land — or to serve other gods or idols.

Like the Israelites, we need to make a conscious choice about who we will serve. It's easy to slip into attitudes and actions that undermine our faith. Drifting along the path of least resistance, we might not consciously decide to turn our backs on God, but still end up that way. We might not even realize we're serving modern-day idols.

In Colossians, Saint Paul said that greed is a form of idol worship (3:5). What are we greedy for? Money? Status? Or maybe we're greedy for the approval of others, so we go along with the crowd against our better judgment. Maybe we're greedy for achievement, so we cut corners, cheat a little, or engage in gossip to get ahead. If we're greedy for control, we might intimidate or manipulate the people around us — even our loved ones — to get our own way.

Many self-defeating behaviors promise happiness, but let us down. We might not notice that we're paying attention to false promises that are as useless as the false gods that tempted the Israelites. If owning things really gave us lasting happiness, we wouldn't have to keep buying more stuff. Acceptance by others because we consistently go along with their ideas at the expense of our own can't make us feel accepted for who we really are. Doing less than our best — no matter what external achievements we acquire — will never earn us true self-esteem.

We worship these idols by sacrificing our relationships, our integrity and any true sense of accomplishment. What a contrast to the scene painted in today's Gospel.

When his disciples were shooing the little children away, Jesus opened his arms wide to embrace them. He opens his arms wide to embrace us, too. Following God's plan for us may not guarantee round-the-clock happiness, but it offers something better — the deep joy that comes from being welcomed, accepted and loved unconditionally as children of our loving Father. What more do we need or want?

Who or what would you rather serve? Let's think about our actions today and what they say about our choices.

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 20, 2017

(Lec. 118)

- 1) Isaiah 56:1, 6-7
 - 2) Romans 11:13-15, 29-32
 - 3) Matthew 15:21-28
- Gospel related: CCC 439, 448, 2610

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus came to save us all, not just a chosen few.

God's chosen people in Israel and Judah believed that anyone who was not Jewish was a lesser human being and could not be saved. Associating with Gentiles was forbidden. You were not to do business with them or even pass through their towns. Jesus' frequent association with Gentiles was one of many strikes against him by the time he was led out to the cross, but it was also a fulfillment of prophecy.

Nearly eight centuries before Jesus was born, Isaiah prophesied that the coming of the Messiah would bring about the hope of salvation for all, even for *foreigners who join themselves to the Lord*. Whereas the Temple at Jerusalem was a house of worship only for the Jewish people, the Church to be founded on Peter would be *a house of prayer for all peoples*, especially and including the Gentiles and all those who previously did not know the one God or his son, Jesus Christ.

Saul of Tarsus was an unlikely choice to become an Apostle, let alone one who would pursue the conversion primarily of Gentiles. As a Pharisee, Saul would have considered Gentiles to be unclean, and would have condemned them. Now as an Apostle, Paul seeks their conversion. Israel's rejection of Jesus opened the door of the Gospel to the Gentiles, and Paul is anxious for their inclusion in the newly formed Church.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus rewards the Canaanite woman for her great faith by healing her daughter. For a moment, it seems as if Jesus is agreeing with the Pharisees with whom he had been debating earlier in this same chapter of the Gospel. He refers to the Gentiles as "dogs," a common reference used for them by the Pharisees. Jesus does this only to test her faith, and she shows that she believes that even she — a non-Jew, a Canaanite, a Gentile — is intended to share in the *scraps that fall from the table of their masters*, meaning she believes she, too, can be saved by the King of the Jews.

The people in Jesus' day spent too much time highlighting differences among people and emphasizing the things that divide them. We do the same today. Looking through the new eyes of faith, we are called to see that all are called to faith — to be children of God. Even though we may all be sinners, we can all be saved. Let us try to see one another with the eyes of faith — with the eyes of Jesus.

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Monday, August 21, 2017

(Lec. 419)

1) Judges 2:11-19

2) Matthew 19:16-22

MONDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Pius X, Pope)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2052, 2053, 2075, 2400, **CSDC** 22, 181

FOCUS: We need to set our priorities to match God's priorities for us.

This Gospel always gives me pause. The young man talking with Jesus is probably sincere in his desire to get to heaven. He is doing the right things, but he has not yet set his priorities to match God's priorities. He goes away sad, probably disappointed that there are things being asked of him that he feels he is unable to do.

For those of us who like happy endings, we can think that maybe later in his life, this young man decided to change his priorities and give his possessions away so he could follow Jesus. We believe that Jesus never closed the door on him. It was the young man who walked away. And we believe he could turn and walk back any time he chose to do so.

Whatever happened later with the young man, his exchange with Jesus gives us important insight into how we are to live so that we might be judged worthy of entering into eternal life in heaven. Jesus was very specific with this young man. What he demanded of him, he may not demand of us. We each have our unique personal path to eternity to walk, and we would be wise to ask Jesus ourselves what we need to do to gain eternal life. Then, of course, it is vital to follow his directions.

There are the basics, of course, that all of us must do. We must keep the commandments. But the details of *how* we keep them, and what else we are called to do, are revealed to us through prayer and by the power of the Holy Spirit working in our daily lives. For example, often there are people and situations in our lives that open the way for us to grow in our love for Jesus and be of greater service to others. It may be a difficult relative we are called to love and help. It may be an illness we are asked to suffer with. It may be the invitation to serve the parish in a new way. It may be financial loss, or even gain, that prods us to look anew at our priorities and make sure they are aligned with Christ's, and how he is calling us to live.

It seems safe to say that everyone here today is sincerely striving to do the things necessary to stay on the path that leads to salvation, otherwise you probably wouldn't be here on a Monday in August. But the reality is that, despite our faith, and our best efforts to love and serve Jesus, we each have our blind spots. So let's make an effort to check in with the Lord frequently, ask him what he is asking of us at this particular time in our lives, and then be willing to put our own priorities aside and do what he is asking us to do.

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Tuesday, August 22, 2017
(Lec. 420)

- 1) Judges 6:11-24a
- 2) Matthew 19:23-30

TUESDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
(The Queenship of the
Blessed Virgin Mary)

Gospel related: **CCC** 226, 276, 308, 765, 1058, 2053, **CSDC** 181

FOCUS: God sometimes surprises us in his providence; with him all things are possible.

Today we celebrate the Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Wherever Mass is celebrated today, Catholics are reminded of Mary's special role in salvation history and her great love for us as she intercedes on our behalf before the throne of heaven.

In our first reading, we hear about lowly Gideon, becoming the champion who saves Israel from the powerful kingdom of Midian. *My family is the lowliest in Manasseh*, says our hero, *and I am the most insignificant in my father's house*. Our heavenly Father thought otherwise, and manifested his plans for Gideon.

In today's Gospel, Jesus offers messages that surprise his disciples. First, he implies that wealth isn't always a blessing, which astonishes the disciples. Then Jesus says, nonetheless, although it will be hard, the rich can enter the kingdom of God, because *for God all things are possible*.

Peter, questioning the cost of his choice to follow him, says to Jesus, *We have given up everything and followed you. What will there be for us?* Jesus then points out a surprising irony. Those who have sacrificed much in this life for the sake of his name will receive more than they could ever imagine in the afterlife.

Just to make sure the disciples don't become complacent in their knowledge, Jesus reminds them again that our God is sometimes a God of surprises. Jesus points out, *But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first*.

That brings us back to the Blessed Virgin Mary. She wasn't powerful or influential, nor were her parents. But Mary said "yes" to God when given the opportunity to bear his only begotten Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Mary collaborated with God throughout her earthly life, and as a result is one of the most famous women in history. She possesses what no fortune can buy: eternal life in heaven with Jesus. Mary intercedes on our behalf to God himself when she prays for you and me.

The lowly are elevated. The handmaid is queen of heaven and earth. She who once focused her love on the Holy Family now broadens her mantle of love and protection for every person ever born. For God all things are possible.

Wednesday, August 23, 2017

(Lec. 421)

1) Judges 9:6-15

2) Matthew 20:1-16

WEDNESDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Rose of Lima,
Virgin)

Gospel related: **CSDC** 541

FOCUS: Are you a bargainer with God – or a beggar?

It seems terribly unfair, doesn't it? To understand the story we must know that it is not about social justice. It is about God's generosity. Here's how it might go today. A rancher in one of the "salad factories" of California's San Fernando Valley is eager to harvest his crop before a threatened change in the weather. So at dawn he's off to the hiring hall in town. The men he finds there bargain about the conditions of work, and their wages.

At intervals during the day, the foreman tells the rancher that more workers will be needed. So the rancher makes repeated trips to town to hire more help. Each time the workers he encounters are less promising. There is no bargaining with these workers. "Get into the truck," he says. "There's work for you out at my place."

At quitting time, those hired last are first in the pay line. The first worker rips open his pay envelope – and can't believe his eyes. It contains a whole day's pay! Meanwhile, news of what the first workers in line are receiving is being passed back to those in the rear. They calculate how much *they* will receive at the same hourly rate. Imagine their indignation when they receive exactly what they had bargained for in the early morning.

We are left with the injustice. The story begins to make sense only when we ask: Who was happy? Who was disappointed? And why? Those who were happy were the men hired last. They had not bargained. They were little better than beggars. It was these beggars, however, who went away happy, while the bargainers were unhappy.

So which are you with God – a bargainer, or a beggar? If you want to experience God's *justice*, be a bargainer. He'll never short-change you. When you discover, however, how little you deserve on any strict accounting, you'll probably be disappointed, perhaps even shocked.

So perhaps you'd rather experience God's *generosity*. Then learn to be, before God, a beggar. Then you will be bowled over with the Lord's generosity. Ask the Lord, who bestows his gifts not according to our deserving but according to his boundless generosity, to give you that hunger which longs to be fed; that emptiness which yearns to be filled. Stand beneath his cross and say, in the words of the old evangelical hymn:

Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to your cross I cling.

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Thursday, August 24, 2017

(Lec. 629)

1) Revelation 21:9b-14

2) John 1:45-51

SAINT BARTHOLOMEW,

APOSTLE

- FEAST

FOCUS: Let us follow the example of Jesus and invite our loved ones to know him.

Today, we celebrate the feast of Saint Bartholomew, whom scholars have traditionally identified as the Nathanael who meets Jesus in the Gospel reading from John that we heard today.

Nathanael's first response to Philip's invitation, to meet *the one about whom Moses wrote in the law*, seems skeptical. But he accepts Philip's insistent invitation to *come and see*.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus saw Nathanael *coming toward him*. And then, before he even approaches him, Jesus identifies Nathanael as *a true child of Israel*. Jesus then compliments him, saying *there is no duplicity in him*, meaning that he is honest, sincere and a man of his word.

This initial interaction with Jesus evokes a curious and positive response from Nathanael. He declares that Jesus is *the Son of God ... the King of Israel*. This is quite a dramatic testimony from someone who doubted Jesus' identity such a short time before.

Perhaps we can take a lesson from Jesus as we seek to share the Good News with those we care about. Jesus looked for and identified what was good in Nathanael. He welcomed his curiosity and affirmed his good qualities. Finally, he offers Nathanael something greater than what he has seen. He offers him a place in heaven where he will witness *the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man*.

As we consider those loved ones we long to introduce to Jesus, let us follow the example of Jesus. Let us continue to invite them, affirming their good qualities and welcoming their curiosity, even when it may seem skeptical. And let us be confident that in inviting them to a relationship with Jesus, we offer them something greater than what they have without him in their lives.

But let us most importantly be inspired by the same motivation that Jesus had as he invited Nathanael. Love. Jesus came to invite us, because, as we read in the third chapter of John's Gospel, *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life* (16). Let us invite our friends and family members, because of our love for them, to *come and see* Jesus, and join us in experiencing and making known the glorious splendor of God's kingdom.

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Friday, August 25, 2017

(Lec. 423)

1) Ruth 1:1, 3-6, 14b-16, 22

2) Matthew 22:34-40

FRIDAY OF
20TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Louis;

Saint Joseph Calasanz,

Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 581, 1824, 2055, 2083, **CSDC** 112, 580

FOCUS: We can always count on God's unfailing and loving fidelity.

What would lead a young widow to leave behind the land of her family when she has already lost the security of having a husband? We might be tempted to ask that after hearing today's first reading. Rather than turning back to the familiar, as her sister-in-law Orpah did, Ruth, the Moabite, movingly assures her mother-in-law that she will stay with her as she travels to her own home, Bethlehem. She refuses to desert Naomi in her time of great need.

We know that Ruth's story leads to great joy and fulfillment in her life, as she eventually marries Boaz and continues a line of descendants leading to David and, ultimately, to Jesus himself. Through her generosity of heart and fidelity to Naomi, Ruth played a key role in our salvation history. We can say, in fact, that God used the goodness of Ruth to work through the line of ancestors that led to Jesus, Son of God and son of Mary.

In Ruth, we see a wonderful model of fidelity and friendship – a concern for others in their time of need that we are called to imitate. But, perhaps even more importantly, Ruth gives us just a hint of the never-tiring fidelity of God in our lives. Can you hear God saying to you, as Ruth did to Naomi, *Do not ask me to abandon or forsake you! For wherever you go, I shall go, wherever you lodge, I will lodge?* Like Ruth, God will not abandon the people he loves – any of us – in our time of need. In the Eucharist, in fact, God not only lodges where we lodge, but makes his home within us – closer to us at every moment than we can even dare to hope.

Our God who is ever-present to us, perhaps most notably at times when we are most in need, calls forth from us a generous response. Jesus calls us to that response in the Gospel, when he declares that the first and greatest commandment is to *love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.* And the second is like it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

As we go forth today, let's ponder that God loves us more than we could ever dream or imagine. And we are called to respond to God's great love for us by loving him with our whole being, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. With this in mind, let's come forward to receive the Lord Jesus in holy Communion with humble and grateful hearts, so we may be drawn closer to our Lord and strengthened to go and be his presence in the world.

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Saturday, August 26, 2017

(Lec. 424)

1) Ruth 2:1-3, 8-11;
4:13-17

2) Matthew 23:1-12

Gospel related: CCC 526, 2367

SATURDAY OF

20TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: *Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*

The message of today's readings call to mind a few modern sayings linking words and behavior: "if you are going to talk the talk, you need to walk the walk." Or, perhaps more familiar, "practice what you preach."

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a gathered crowd and his disciples that the scribes and the Pharisees *have taken their seat on the chair of Moses*. They were to do and observe all the things that the scribes and Pharisees instructed them to do. Jesus follows this, however, with the statement that the people were not to follow the *example* of the scribes and the Pharisees in their behavior because they failed to practice what they preached. They tied up heavy burdens and placed them on the shoulders of others without putting forth any effort to lessen them, and their conduct was motivated to win praise and recognition from others.

We might ask ourselves: How often do we lead our lives like the scribes and Pharisees? Do we fail to practice what we preach? How often do we pose and posture or seek recognition? If we are honest, the number of times is more than we might think or like. So how do we change that?

Our first reading, the story of Ruth, provides some insight into an answer. Her behavior is in stark contrast to the selfishness of the scribes and Pharisees. Ruth was a foreigner in the land of Israel, but stayed with her mother-in-law to help her after their husbands died. Ruth was faithful and humble. Her desire to do what was right and good was more important to her than her personal gain. God rewarded Ruth for her goodness and generous heart, and provided food for her and Naomi, and eventually a good husband for Ruth – Boaz.

The difference in the two stories is the reliance on God, and not self-promotion or self-interest. God has the ability to do amazing things when we do not stand in his way! Let us go forth today and strive to be more like generous Ruth, and less like a proud Pharisee. Let us humble ourselves before God, and let him be exalted.

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 27, 2017

(Lec. 121)

1) Isaiah 22:19-23

2) Romans 11:33-36

3) Matthew 16:13-20

Gospel related: **CCC** 153, 424, 440, 442, 552, 553, 586, 869, 881, 1444, 1969

**TWENTY-FIRST
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: We are entrusted with keys to our own portion of building the kingdom of God.

Handing over a set of keys is a symbolic gesture, even in our world today. Handing over the car keys to a new driver expresses trust in them, even though they are inexperienced and it may be frightening to do so. Handing over the keys to your home may mean you trust someone else to care for it responsibly for a short time, or that you are ready to relinquish ownership of it to them completely.

The symbolism of keys and authority guides our readings today. In the first reading, we hear Isaiah proclaiming God's judgement on Shebna's poor leadership. Shebna was King Hezekiah's chief of staff, and was taking advantage of his position to build an impressive tomb for himself. He also encouraged the king to rely on human wisdom rather than trusting God's wisdom. Shebna personified the behavior of the wealthier people of his time: conspicuous consumption, while ignoring the needs of the poor. So God fires Shebna, and chooses Eliakim to replace him. He places the *key of the House of David [Jesus' lineage] on Eliakim's shoulder*.

Isaiah's message to him, and to the Jewish people, is clear: God gives authority to those who lead according to his commandments. God removes authority from those who put their own interests first, while neglecting and exploiting the needs of the most vulnerable.

In the Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples, *Who do people say that the Son of Man is?* Simon Peter proclaims, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*. Jesus blesses him and reveals that Peter's awareness of who Jesus is comes from his Father. Jesus tells him that he will be the rock on which his Church is built, and says, *I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven*.

When Jesus blesses Peter for acknowledging that he is the *Christ, the Son of the living God*, he is not only elevating Peter, but the whole community of disciples, as the "rock-solid" foundation of the Church that will carry on his mission. Like God with Eliakim, he is entrusting them with the keys that ensure God will be the source of wisdom for their decisions.

We too are entrusted with keys – keys to one another's hearts; keys to one another's vulnerabilities; and by the grace of God and our baptism, keys to our portion of building the kingdom of God. Let us be worthy of and faithful to that trust.

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Monday, August 28, 2017

(Lec. 425)

- 1) 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5,
8b-10
- 2) Matthew 23:13-22

MONDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Augustine,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 586, 2111

FOCUS: Faith, hope and prayer are the hallmarks of a Christian life.

Today is the feast day of Saint Augustine. His story is an amazing story of faith, love and hope. His mother, Saint Monica, demonstrated her deep faith through her prayers for both her son, Augustine, and husband, Patricius. Her faith gave her hope that her son and husband would eventually place their faith and trust in Jesus. Both men did convert, but it was Augustine whose life who was most dramatically changed and transformed.

After being baptized in his early thirties, Saint Augustine was ordained a priest approximately three years later, and ordained a bishop a mere five years later. During his life and ministry both as a priest and bishop, Augustine used his tremendous intellect to write numerous books on the spiritual life and theological treatises, causing him to be recognized as a doctor of the Church.

But during his dark days prior to his conversion, Saint Augustine lived a life of pleasure and selfishness, not unlike the scribes and Pharisees chastised by Jesus in today's Gospel. Although these religious leaders knew the law inside and out, they often interpreted it in such a way that placed heavy burdens upon people, and in ways that served their own advantage. As we know, Augustine eventually opened his heart to God's grace and had his life transformed, but the scribes and Pharisees remained hard-hearted and stubbornly clung to their ways.

In contrast to the scribes and Pharisees the Thessalonians, as we heard in today's first reading, turned from worshipping idols to placing their faith and trust in Christ upon hearing the preaching of Paul and his companions. They steadily grew in their faith, becoming genuine imitators of Christ and making them models to the Church as a whole and to those in nearby areas.

My friends, each of us can be teachers — living examples of God's love and providence — and like Saint Augustine and the Thessalonians, we can show others around us what faith and hope look like as we live our lives in prayer and love for God, modeling this love for one another. Finally, the example of Saint Augustine reminds us that there are never any lost causes. God can change the hardest of hearts. Thus, for our friends and those members of our families who are no longer actively practicing their faith, let us never stop praying, trusting it can and does make a difference.

Tuesday, August 29, 2017

(Lec. 426)

1) 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

(Lec. 634)

2) Mark 6:17-29

TUESDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
The Passion of
Saint John the Baptist)

Gospel related: **CCC 523**

FOCUS: There is a cost to living as faithful disciples of Jesus, but the reward is great.

The executioner beheaded him in the prison. He brought in the head on a platter and gave it to [Herodias' daughter]. The girl in turn gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

This is how the life of John the Baptist ended. A life that began with such promise for greatness.

We first hear of John, before he was born, in the first chapter of Luke's Gospel, leaping in his mother's womb upon being graced with the Messiah's presence. With his birth, his father regains his voice and shares the prophecy proclaimed to him by the angel Gabriel about John: *You, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God.*

John, upon reaching adulthood, fulfilled this prophecy of being the one who was sent to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. He did this by preaching in the desert a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; by proclaiming that one mightier than him was coming; by baptizing Jesus in the river Jordan and pointing others to Jesus as the Lamb of God; and by being a person who was faithful to God and who courageously spoke the truth regardless of the cost to himself.

Today's feast of the passion of Saint John the Baptist reminds us that there is a cost to living as a faithful disciple of Jesus. This cost is borne out first and foremost in that the way Jesus calls us to live is at odds with the way many people in today's world live. Instead of leading one's life according to sinful and selfish desires, we are called to love God above all things. We are called to go where the Lord Jesus leads us, and to lead our lives in accord with his teachings regardless of the consequences. Some of the consequences of our love may be quite difficult. We may experience division within our families, loss of a friendship or even rejection.

Regardless of the personal cost of striving to live as faithful disciples of Jesus, however, we needn't fear. For just as God gave Saint John the Baptist the grace to fulfill the appointed work he was sent to do, and to courageously speak the truth no matter the consequences, so God will give us the grace and strength to deal with whatever comes our way as a result of being faithful to Jesus. He has assured us that our sufferings for the sake of the Gospel are small compared to the reward that awaits us in heaven.

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Wednesday, August 30, 2017

(Lec. 427)

1) 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13

2) Matthew 23:27-32

WEDNESDAY OF

21ST WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God loves us unconditionally, and can use us despite our faults and failings to accomplish wonders.

Supposedly, when a certain preacher was accused of not practicing what he preached, he retorted, "At least I don't preach what I practice." At the time of Jesus, some religious leaders were notorious for not practicing what they preached. In today's Gospel, Jesus roundly scolds them for being hypocrites.

Originally the word *hypocrite* was a Greek term that simply meant an actor. The word acquired negative overtones and came to mean a person who only pretended to be good. Hypocrites are on stage all the time, putting on a show for others. They thrive on others' admiration. Worse, hypocrites are those who point fingers at other people but consider themselves righteous. Apparently they never heard the saying that when you point at others, three fingers are pointed back at you!

No one likes a hypocrite. To Jesus, hypocrisy is abhorrent. He repeatedly warned against it. In Luke, chapter eighteen, Jesus told a parable about hypocrisy. In it, a Pharisee boasts to God about his good deeds and gives thanks that he isn't like others. At the same time, a tax collector asks God for mercy for his sins. The humble sinner was the better man in God's sight. Another time, in Matthew's Gospel, chapter seven, Jesus warned about seeing the speck in someone else's eye but ignoring the plank in our own eye.

Jesus had harsh words for the Pharisees. He criticized them for wearing ostentatious clothing and sitting in the highest places. Today we heard how Jesus called them whitewashed tombs with filth and dead people's bones inside. Jewish people believed that contact with the dead made you unclean. For this reason, they painted tombs white to prevent people from touching them by accident. The tomb metaphor mirrors the Pharisees' outward show of holiness and their inner evil.

Jesus also provided a good example of their hypocrisy. The Pharisees decorated the prophets' tombs and declared that they wouldn't have killed the prophets as their fathers did. But Jesus knew they would be just like their fathers. They would join other Jewish leaders in conspiring against him, which would lead to Jesus being put to death.

One of the main reasons Jesus chastised the hypocrisy of the Pharisees is because their hypocritical behavior often led other Jewish people astray who sincerely sought to be faithful to God. If we wish to avoid falling into the trap of hypocrisy, let's remember we are sinners continually in need of God's grace, mercy and forgiveness. Let's turn to God each day and ask for forgiveness for our faults and failings, and seek the grace we need to give our best for the Lord. We must trust that God loves us just as we are, and can use us just as we are to accomplish great things.

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Thursday, August 31, 2017

(Lec. 428)

1) 1 Thessalonians 3:7-13

2) Matthew 24:42-51

Gospel related: **CCC 673, CSDC 28**

THURSDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Faithful servants faithfully perform their duties in anticipation of the return of the Master.

In today's readings, the Church presents for our reflection the importance of remaining faithful in our daily life and routine. Think for a moment about what it means to be faithful. This fruit of the Holy Spirit, on a practical level, has to do with keeping commitments. The faithful husband and wife are those men and women who keep the commitments made to each other on the day of their wedding. The faithful priest never tires of keeping the commitments which he promised on his ordination day.

What commitments have we made by virtue of our baptism and participation in the Church? Have we remained faithful in the "rejection of Satan and all his empty promises?" Have we remained faithful in our belief in Jesus Christ the Son of God? Have we remained faithful in our belief in God the Father and God the Holy Spirit? Have we remained committed to the holy Catholic Church founded by Jesus himself? For those of us who were baptized as infants, our parents consented to these commitments on our behalf. We, however, recommit to them every Easter Sunday during Mass when we renew our baptismal promises.

On a deeper spiritual level, faithfulness involves the habit of entrusting ourselves to God. For those who do not have love in their hearts, faithfulness can seem like an obligation. It's been said before that for the Catholic who loves God there is no such thing as the Sunday "obligation" because faithfulness is the natural expression of love.

Let's take a look at today's Gospel. We read the story of the faithful or the unfaithful servant. *Who, then, is the faithful and prudent servant?* asks Jesus. It's important to note that this parable comes directly after our Lord's teaching on keeping vigilant and prepared, *for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.* Today's Gospel is actually the second half, or the continuation on the teaching about being prepared for the end times.

The blessed servant is the person whom the master finds fulfilling the duties that are expected of him or her; blessed servants are faithful in the commitments they made to God. Let's go forth this day and try to do the same.

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