

APRIL

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**YEAR A
CYCLE I**

Saturday, April 1, 2017
(Lec. 249)

1) Jeremiah 11:18-20

2) John 7:40-53

Gospel related: CCC 574, 575, 588, 595

SATURDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: No obstacle can defeat us if we are dedicated to doing God's work.

We all face obstacles. The more passionate we are about accomplishing something, the more obstacles we seem to encounter. This makes sense if you think about it: If you have no goal or destination, nothing can get in your way. But history is full of stories of people who persevered in every type of endeavor because they had a goal, and were able to break through the obstacles to achieve their goal and accomplish great things.

Today, in our readings, we hear about two people who broke through in a similar way. These people succeeded in doing God's work, in sharing his word and helping people find salvation. We refer to Jeremiah and Jesus.

Jeremiah accepted the call of the Lord, and served as a prophet during one of the most difficult times in Israel's history. He could have gone along with the thinking of the time and lived a peaceful life. Instead, he accepted God's challenge and preached repentance, faithfulness to the one true God, and the coming destruction of Jerusalem. People did not want to hear what he said. They ridiculed him, ignored him and even plotted to kill him. He turned to God for protection and to open a way for him – to remove the obstacles in front of him.

A very similar situation arose some 600 years later when Jesus began his public ministry. He stepped on people's toes with his claim that religious leaders were not faithfully representing God's desire for his people. Today's Gospel tells us that officers were sent to arrest Jesus and stop his work. But they could not bring themselves to carry out the arrest. Jesus was so persuasive and authentic, they feared obstructing him.

As we know, the plot to stop him did not go away. Eventually, it appeared that the people standing in Jesus' way won and the forces of evil won out – with Jesus being put to death on a cross. However, this apparent defeat was really a victory, as we know, because Jesus through his death won forgiveness for our sins and defeated the power of sin and evil. And then through his resurrection, Jesus restored our life and through his glorious ascension, opened the way to eternal life in heaven.

We can take a lesson from these readings. When our goal is to do God's work, when our hope is eternal life, no obstacles placed in our way by earthly powers can prevail. God may or may not remove the obstacles, but even if they remain, he will give us the strength and wisdom to overcome them. And if we do not give up, regardless of how it may appear to the rest of the world, we will be successful in accomplishing the work God has called us to do.

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SUNDAY, APRIL 2, 2017

(Lec. 34)

1) Ezekiel 37:12-14

2) Romans 8:8-11

3) John 11:1-45 or

11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45

Gospel related: CCC 439, 472, 581, 627, 640, 993, 994, 1001, 2604

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

FOCUS: Jesus frees us from the shackles of the past, and works to continually raise us up to a newer and fuller life in his love.

Our readings today go straight to the heart of our Catholic Christian faith. They speak of death, and new life in Christ. In the first reading from the prophet Ezekiel we heard: *Thus says the Lord God: O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel.*

In the Gospel reading, the stone has been rolled back from the tomb of poor Lazarus. Christ commanded that he be released from all that bound him up, and then set him free.

What does this mean for us, living out our lives as we do in 2017?

It leads us to this question: What guides your approach to life – the defeats of the past or the hope of the future? For thus says the Lord through the prophet Isaiah: *Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not. See, I am doing something new!* (43:18-19). God wants us to see things afresh – not in our usual ways, but rather in ways that are ever-new.

How can we see things anew in our own lives? How can we look at things with a new perspective? One way to begin is to examine those elements in our lives that drag us down, that make us feel defeated.

Extreme pessimism. Endless comparisons of ourselves to others. Passive resignation to our lot in life – our “fate.” These types of attitudes can dominate our thoughts and prevent us from seeing things the way God wants us to see them.

Easter, which we will celebrate in a couple of weeks, is the religious and theological statement that, for the Christian, there is no ultimate defeat. To be sure, we will suffer temporary setbacks. But defeat? No. Because of Christ's Easter resurrection, we can never be totally defeated. All that is required of us is to believe in God's promises, and let our faith in him replace our own lack of faith in ourselves.

Jesus offers us hope today. Christ can roll back the imprisoning stones that entomb our hearts. It's time to let go of our doubts and defeatism and go free because God wants us, like poor Lazarus, to be free, happy and joyous. He wants us to walk in the glorious freedom of the sons and daughters of God. This Easter, let God do something new within you. The Resurrection is God's promise that we can have a new life.

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Monday, April 3, 2017

(Lec 251)

1) Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17,
19-30, 33-62 or 13:41c-62

2) John 8:1-11

Gospel related: CCC 583

MONDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: Christ teaches that mercy triumphs over justice because God's love saves us, if we merely accept his love.

There is a parallel between the first reading and the Gospel. Both tell of women accused of adultery.

Susannah was a beautiful young woman accused by two older men overcome by lust. They threatened her, trying to force her to sin, and then claimed falsely that she had committed adultery.

The woman in the Gospel was actually caught in the act of adultery. Her guilt is not in question. The question is, instead, what punishment she will receive for her sin.

Two women accused of adultery. God rescues the innocent woman from her accusers by the intervention of a youth, Daniel, who has the wisdom of an adult.

Susannah chooses truth and risks death over deceit and violating her marriage covenant. God rewards her with the testimony of a boy who uses wisdom to overcome the deceit. It is a message any of us can accept: God protects the good. And the two lustful liars receive what they deserve. Their perjury is punished with the sentence that their victim would have received if they had been successful in their false testimony.

But Christ, as he so often does, turns the whole idea of sin and how sin is to be punished upside down. It is not that he accepts sin. At the end of the Gospel, he tells the woman to go and sin no more. But he loves the sinner, and wants sinners to be saved. The story is no longer about God protecting an upright woman from evil and lustful accusers. Rather, Christ shows mercy to sinners – that they might turn from their sins and be saved. Similarly, he will freely and generously offer us forgiveness if we simply ask.

The actions of Jesus in today's Gospel leave us with some questions to ponder and answer in our own lives. Like Daniel, Jesus proved himself wiser than the accusers of the woman. But, unlike in the first reading, we do not see the accusers being punished.

Jesus poses a question: If this woman is to be stoned to death, then the one who is without sin should cast the first stone. The accusers slowly drift away at this challenge beginning with the eldest – presumably the wisest. Scholars often question whether, when Christ bends over and draws in the dirt, he was listing the sins of the accusers. This would show they did not have the right to accuse the woman. The wise realized this first. Or was Jesus challenging them to acknowledge that he is the one who is without sin, and the only one with the right to judge?

Applying this to ourselves, we must be mindful that none of us are without sin, and we should leave the judgement of others to the one who lived without sin – Jesus. It is also important to bear in mind that as Jesus freely and generously forgave the woman caught in the act of adultery, he offers us forgiveness for our sins no matter how many times we fall short.

Tuesday, April 4, 2017
(Lec 252)

- 1) Numbers 21:4-9
- 2) John 8:21-30

TUESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF LENT
(Opt. Mem. Saint Isidore,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 211, 603, 653, 1693, 2812, 2824, 2825

FOCUS: Jesus is the foundation of all existence, without which everything would cease to be.

As we continue on our Lenten journey, the Church provides us a selection of readings which focus on the identification of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

Consider the Israelites in the first reading, as they continue wandering the desert after being freed from the snare of the Egyptians. They begin to doubt God's plan, asking, *Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in this desert, where there is no food or water?*

Perhaps they left Egypt assuming that entering the Promised Land would not require any great suffering or tribulation. This is a temptation which we fall prey to ourselves, is it not? We want to be Easter people, but prefer to skip the Lenten season completely. We want to enjoy the beatitude of heaven, but avoid the wood of the cross.

The Israelites repented for doubting God and attempting to take the path of least resistance. It was only by believing in God's message and gazing on the bronze serpent mounted on the pole, as God had instructed, that those who were bitten were able to recover.

We, too, have each been bitten, so to speak, by the serpent of sin which can poison our hearts with doubt and pride, and move us to avoid the suffering demanded of us as partakers in Jesus' passion.

How, then, will we find healing? How will we find salvation? We hear the answer in today's Gospel, when Jesus explicitly says, *For if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins.*

The salvation we seek comes to those who believe in Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Jesus' identification of himself as *I AM* would have been an unmistakable declaration of his own divinity by first-century Jews. They are the same words used by God the Father who reveals himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14 as, *I am who am.*

In saying, *I AM*, Jesus clearly expresses his identity as God, the Supreme Being over all the earth. Jesus is not just one being among all other beings, he is that being upon which all others depend. Jesus is the foundation of all existence, without which everything would cease to be.

In this context, Jesus is emphasizing the importance of *believing* and *knowing*. It is not by gazing on a bronze statue that we will find salvation, but by believing in Jesus as the Son of God, and responding in charity for love of him. As we continue on our Lenten journey, may our faith be strengthened so we have the courage to follow Christ in his passion.

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Wednesday, April 5, 2017

(Lec 253)

1) Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95

2) John 8:31-42

WEDNESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK OF LENT
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Vincent Ferrer,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 89, 549, 588, 601, 613, 1741, 2466

FOCUS: God helps us in times of trial – when doing his will is difficult.

The three young men in today's first reading have a difficult decision to make. Should they make a mere human the center of their lives, or remain loyal to God by worshipping only him?

These young men choose to make God their highest priority, even though they know this might cause them harm. We see that God sends them help in the form of an angel, who accompanies them during their struggles.

How often do we choose to give something or someone other than God higher priority in our lives? Perhaps we are simply distracted by the pressures of everyday life. Perhaps it isn't even a conscious decision. But we must be intentional. We must make it a priority to put God first.

When we make God the center of our lives, he liberates us from false ideals and pursuits. We might struggle at times, even with God as our focus. But he never abandons us. He accompanies us in all our joys, sorrows and struggles.

Notice in the Gospel how humble Jesus is. He says, *I did not come on my own, but [God the Father] sent me.* When we decide to make God the center of our lives, we come to prefer drawing attention to him rather than seeking honor for ourselves.

Jesus also says to us in today's Gospel, *If God were your Father, you would love me.* We are blessed to know that God is indeed our Father. When we understand who Jesus is – the only begotten Son of God – we can't help but love him. The Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts the fire of his love.

Let us make God the center of our lives. Let's allow ourselves to be nourished and strengthened by the graces of the sacraments, especially holy Communion. Let us feel the comfort of knowing that God is with us no matter what struggles we might have. Let us strive to do our Father's holy and perfect will at all times, even when it's hard. God will never abandon us, because he loves us with an everlasting love.

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Thursday, April 6, 2017
(Lec. 254)

1) Genesis 17:3-9

2) John 8:51-59

Gospel related: CCC 473, 574, 590

THURSDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

FOCUS: The gift of faith in Jesus brings immeasurable blessings to our lives.

In today's Gospel from John, we observe Jesus teaching that he is the Son of God sent by God the Father to bring salvation. He tells his listeners that whoever keeps his word will come to live forever.

This was very difficult for many people of Jesus' time to accept and believe. They did not try to understand the wisdom of Jesus, and were not open to his words and teachings. Rather, they were filled with contempt.

We, however, are different, as we are blessed with the gift of faith. This gift gives us new life in Christ, and the promise and hope of eternal life in heaven. This gift, which God graciously bestows upon us through the sacrament of baptism, imparts upon us a sacred duty and solemn obligation. This gift calls us to share the good news of salvation and help to build up God's kingdom on earth.

Abraham, as we heard in the reading from Genesis, is also a person of great faith. He chose to believe. He believed that his barren wife, Sarah, would have a son. He believed that God would keep his promise and make him the father of many nations. Although doubt may have entered Abraham's mind, he maintained a faithful heart believing that God kept promises, and could do what was impossible for humans.

As we enter the final days of Lent, let's focus on being grateful for the gift of faith by which our lives are immeasurably blessed. Let's demonstrate our faith by trying to follow the teachings of Jesus in all areas of our lives. Let's treat people the way we would want to be treated, and share our faith with others so we are faithful witnesses to the Gospel.

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Friday, April 7, 2017

(Lec. 255)

1) Jeremiah 20:10-13

2) John 10:31-42

FRIDAY OF

FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

(Opt. Mem.

Saint John Baptist de la Salle,

Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 437, 444, 548, 574, 582, 589, 591, 594, 1562

FOCUS: When we experience resistance because of our faith, we should respond in peace.

The prophet Jeremiah knew full well that his faithfulness to God was putting his life in danger. People all around him were plotting against him. But while his enemies, who were once his friends, used cunning to try to prevail over him, Jeremiah relied on God alone for his vindication: *Let me witness the vengeance you take on them, for to you I have entrusted my cause.*

Similarly in today's Gospel reading, when people took up rocks to stone Jesus, he sought no weapon of defense except his words and the good works that his Father in heaven had given him to do. The same would of course be the case in his Passion and death.

The path of peaceful resistance taken by Jeremiah, the other prophets, and Jesus has been imitated through the ages, from Saint Stephen, the first martyr, down to our own day in Blessed Oscar Romero, who was assassinated in El Salvador in 1980 while celebrating Mass.

None of us can expect the kind of fierce persecution that Jeremiah, Jesus and so many martyrs have faced over the centuries. We should pray that this will continue to be the case in all countries, and that the religious liberty of all people of faith will be strengthened.

But if we are true to our faith, we will experience resistance and a subsequent temptation to conform to the prevailing culture. We need to remember and make our own the words that Jesus shared with his disciples on the night before he died, *If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first* (Jn 15:18).

If, like Jeremiah, Jesus and the martyrs, we stay true to God through the grace that he continually offers us, then we can joyfully stand firm in confidence knowing that the ultimate victory of these holy men and women will be ours, too.

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Saturday, April 8 2017

(Lec. 256)

1) Ezekiel 37:21-28

2) John 11:45-56

Gospel related: CCC 58, 60, 548, 596, 706, 2793

SATURDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

FOCUS: Throughout our lives, we are invited to respond to Jesus in faith and renew our commitment to discipleship.

Today, the prophet Ezekiel reminds us that even when we fail him, God keeps his promises. During Lent, we rediscover our need for redemption – for salvation. We come in touch with the ways in which we have wandered from the Lord, and the ways we have turned our backs on him time and again.

We rediscover that we are like the people of Israel to whom Ezekiel prophesies. We, too, have our *transgressions* and our *abominations*. Yes, these are strong words, but the Divine Physician cannot heal us unless we are convinced of our need.

Consider the Pharisees in today's Gospel. They cannot doubt the powerful signs being worked by Jesus: the healings, the casting out of demons, and even the raising of the dead, such as Lazarus, which occurred immediately before this Gospel passage. These signs were so powerful that they were bringing many people to place their faith in Jesus. This caused fear and concern on the part of the Pharisees, and others, that if Jesus was left alone, all the people would come to believe in him as the promised Messiah and Savior. This, in turn, would trigger a strong response from the Romans, who would then move to suppress the freedom of the Jewish people to practice their faith.

Whether this concern on the part of the Pharisees was based on a genuine desire to protect and safeguard the Jewish people, or out of a desire to preserve the status quo and their own position in society, it is of little consequence. For many of them ultimately remained hard-hearted to the saving message that Jesus preached, and were unwilling to go into the new and life-giving direction Jesus was trying to lead them.

What about us? Can't we fall into a similar trap, clinging to what is comfortable and familiar, as opposed to embracing our need for ongoing conversion and spiritual growth? We often resist Jesus, and the differing ways he wants to work in our lives to bring about something new – something that leads us into uncharted territory and brings us graces and blessings we could never have dreamed of or imagined. Given all this, let us do our best to pray daily, and have hearts that are ever-open and receptive to the Holy Spirit, and to the amazing things God wants to accomplish in and through us.

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SUNDAY, APRIL 9, 2017

**PALM SUNDAY
OF THE PASSION
OF THE LORD**

Procession with Palms: (Lec.37)

1) Matthew 21:1-11

Mass Readings: (Lec.38)

1) Isaiah 50:4-7

2) Philippians 2:6-11

3) Matthew 26:14–27:66
or 27:11-54

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 363, 441, 443, 500, 515, 536, 545, 585, 586, 591, 596, 597, 600, 609, 610, 612, 613, 633, 764, 1328, 1329, 1339, 1365, 1403, 1846, 2262, 2719, 2733, 2839, 2846, 2849 **CSDC** 454

FOCUS: There is no escaping the way of the cross.

How quickly things can change, and how fickle people can become! We begin our worship today with the joyous arrival of Jesus in the holy city of Jerusalem on the back of a colt with palm branches waving and the crowd chanting words forever enshrined in our Eucharistic celebrations: *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*

We end our readings from Scripture today with Jesus having been betrayed and tortured, denied, mocked and crucified. Some folks are uncomfortable with the fact that we hang large crosses with the lifeless body of our Savior on them in our churches, and have smaller versions in our homes. They tell us they feel as if we are trying to crucify Jesus all over again, as if we don't know about or believe in the resurrection.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Our reality is that we are in unquestioned awe of our God, and the lengths to which our Creator was willing to go to prove his love for every last person who ever has, or ever will, walk the face of the earth. From the greatest saint, Mary, the mother of Jesus, to the greatest sinner, salvation is ours for the taking.

We fully believe in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. We fully understand his life did not end on the cross. We live the paschal mystery each day of our lives, fully embracing the passion, the death and the resurrection of Jesus. In fact, that is why we come here. We come to intentionally relive, in no uncertain terms, this mystery every time we celebrate Eucharist with one another. We also understand there is no resurrection without first embracing the cross of salvation.

When difficulties emerge in our lives, we need only look toward the nearest crucifix. For in that glance we realize we are never alone in our adversity. Jesus is ever present to us, proving every day his undying love for us.

That is the message we have to share with our fractured world – Jesus is the way, the truth and the life for all. If all of us who profess to follow Christ crucified live our faith with joy, and live our lives pleasing unto the Lord, the world in which we live could be healed of much of its pain and suffering.

The cross can and will lead to the empty tomb, but it is not the end. Our lives must proclaim that we trust the promise that Jesus' way is the way that leads to everlasting life.

Monday, April 10, 2017
(Lec. 257)

1) Isaiah 42:1-7

2) John 12:1-11

Gospel related: CCC 2449 CSDC 183

MONDAY OF
HOLY WEEK

FOCUS: Jesus won our salvation through his perfect sacrifice of love on the cross.

On this Monday of Holy Week, we hear from the prophet Isaiah in the first reading. This prophecy announces a servant with whom God is well-pleased, bringing justice to the nations. It foretells of a servant, filled with God's spirit, who will teach and establish peace – not by shouting or harshness, but by healing and goodness. God the Creator sends him as a light to the world, as a covenant with the people to bring salvation. He sends him to raise people up, give sight to the blind, release prisoners and bring life to those who live in darkness.

In today's Gospel, we listen to the story of a dinner at Bethany. We see the prophecy of Isaiah being fulfilled in our hearing. Martha is serving dinner; Lazarus, who Jesus raised from the dead, is there; and so is Judas Iscariot. Mary begins anointing the feet of Jesus. She uses a very expensive perfumed oil to anoint the feet of Jesus and then dries his feet using her hair. The beautiful fragrance fills the occasion.

Then we hear Judas castigating Mary for using expensive oil, saying that the oil should have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus defends and upholds Mary by telling Judas to leave Mary alone and by instructing that the oil be kept for his own burial. In and through these words, Jesus was also foretelling the day of his own burial.

Mary is a good example for us of humble servanthood. She loved Jesus, and was trying to make him comfortable in his last days. As we enter into this Holy Week, let's try to learn from the example of Mary and become servants for one another. On Holy Thursday, we will learn again from Jesus what it means to be a servant to others when he washes the feet of his disciples.

Let's ask ourselves some questions as we think about being servant to one another. Are we like Mary in serving Jesus? Do we follow in the footsteps and example of Christ in proclaiming justice and goodness to the world? Do we seek to help and aid those who are oppressed and persecuted? Are we striving to be light in a world often filled with darkness?

These are not easy questions. But if we have any reservations about their importance or urgency, let us fix our gaze once again on Jesus, the perfect fulfillment of God's servant. Let's ask God for the grace to be willing to take risks and give more fully of ourselves to one another.

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Tuesday, April 11, 2017

(Lec. 258)

1) Isaiah 49:1-6

2) John 13:21-33, 36-38

TUESDAY OF

HOLY WEEK

FOCUS: Let us keep in rhythm to the beat of Christ's heart as he leads us to Calvary.

Many scholars believe that the beloved disciple in today's Gospel is meant to be any one of Christ's disciples. Some scholars also understand this title to include all who follow Jesus. This means that the beloved disciple could be you or me. Let's take a moment to imagine ourselves as the beloved disciple in this scene.

We are at the Passover meal with Jesus and our other friends. We are reclining at table, as was the custom at this time. As the beloved disciple, we lay with our back to Jesus. He is reclining behind us. All we need to do to hear Jesus speak is to lean back into him and lay our head upon his chest. This is exactly what the beloved disciple does when Peter nods at him after hearing Jesus mention that one of their band would betray him. The beloved disciple leans back upon Christ's chest.

Throughout Lent, we have been fasting, giving alms and praying. We have been traveling with Jesus to Jerusalem. Now it is Holy Week and as Christ's beloved disciples, we are invited to walk with him through the events by which we are saved and redeemed – namely Christ's passion, death and resurrection. It is time to lay our head on Christ's chest and listen to his heart.

What will we be listening for in Christ's heartbeat? Will we hear the beat of our own heart in sync with his? Benedictine Fr. Gueric DeBona wrote in *Give us This Day*, June 27, 2016, that "God's heart is always beating for our conversion." Is that what we hear? Do we hear the telltale signs that we have been transformed this Lenten season, through our prayer and sacrifices, into a new creation?

It is important to take the time to really listen to Christ's heartbeat. The sound of it will allow us to follow the pace of his steps to Golgotha, and endure our time with him at the foot of the cross. By listening to him, we will be able to hear that Mary is our mother and we are to care for her – and she for us. Spending time listening to Christ's heartbeat will help us recognize Christ more easily as we encounter him in situations, and through those whom we meet daily. Yes, this week, lay your head back and rest on Christ's chest and listen – listen to his heart beating for you.

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Wednesday, April 12, 2017
(Lec. 259)

- 1) Isaiah 50:4-9a
 - 2) Matthew 26:14-25
- Gospel related: CCC 610, 1339

WEDNESDAY OF
HOLY WEEK

FOCUS: Humbly recognizing that we are sinners continually in need of God's love and forgiveness helps us grow in holiness.

In today's Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples to prepare the Passover meal for him, and then reclines with them at table. Jesus then begins to prepare them for what will happen to him, revealing that one of them will betray him.

As we would expect, this is very distressing to the Twelve joining him for this last meal, and we hear their reaction, which is probably not unlike our own would have been. Who, me? *Surely it is not I?* I am not the one, am I Lord? Even Judas, the guilty one, joins in the chorus of questioning.

We learn that the action – the betrayal – is a fulfillment of what has already been written. It will bring *woe* to the one who acts. But notice, it is not a sentence pronounced by Jesus, but more of a warning of the consequence of such a betrayal. Justice will be the necessary response owed the one who turns away from Christ. In the forewarning of Christ, we can see a true act of love. Even in the words of Jesus, in response to Judas' questioning if it will be him, Jesus says, *You have said so*. In this, we understand that Judas' undoing is entirely his own, if he continues to act.

We have certainly heard this sort of exchange before in the Gospels. Remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke's Gospel? The rich man in torment begs for Abraham to warn his brothers. Abraham says, *If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead* (16:31). As the event unfolds in today's Gospel, it is clear that Judas is not listening.

The question for us today is: Are we listening? Will we walk with Jesus to the cross? Will we enter into the paschal mystery of our Lord? Will we resist the temptations that come our way? As Christians, we will try, knowing that God's mercy and love are always present to us in the struggle, but unlike Judas, we are hopeful we will not deny our sinfulness but give our sins over to Christ to heal and forgive. It seems that even Judas was allowed to remain at the table and share in the Lord's Supper, but he was still unwilling to turn away from sin after having done so. From these forty days of Lent, we are hopeful that we have learned the path to follow, and we may truly be raised up to a newer and fuller life in Christ at Easter.

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Thursday, April 13, 2017

(Lec. 39)

1) Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

2) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

3) John 13:1-15

Gospel related: CCC 423, 447, 520, 557, 609, 616, 622, 730, 1085, 1269, 1337, 1380, 1524, 1694, 1823, 2843 CSDC 484

**THURSDAY OF
HOLY WEEK
(HOLY THURSDAY)**

FOCUS: The institution of the Eucharist is inextricably linked to caring for our sisters and brothers, as modeled by the Lord on the night he was handed over.

Our feet are some of the most taken-for-granted parts of our body. They bear our weight and take us wherever we choose to go, yet we are more concerned with how we cover them than the feet themselves. But interestingly enough, washing the feet of another person is one of the more intimate acts we can undertake. This may be one of the reasons some people commented when Pope Francis washed the feet of a wide array of people on his first Holy Thursday.

God and humans have at certain points in the history of our faith washed each other's feet. When the Lord appeared to Abraham by Mamre with his messengers, the first thing our father in faith did was request water to be brought so he could bathe the feet of his visitors (Gen. 18). Again, a few thousand years later, the Lord, on the night he was handed over, washed the feet of his disciples, even those of Judas the Iscariot, whom he knew was about to betray him.

Saint Paul, who was not present when Jesus taught that all who followed him should also do what he had just done, understood that intimately caring for one another was inextricably linked to the Lord's Supper. His Letter to the Corinthians contains the earliest written account of the institution of the Eucharist, which he shared with that faith community immediately after admonishing them harshly for ignoring the needs of the less fortunate during the Lord's Supper itself. The well-heeled among them who had leisure time were eating and drinking so that by the time those wearing sandals worn out from endless work had arrived, nothing was left. By creating divisions, they were showing contempt for the Eucharistic meal.

Tonight's celebration of the Lord's Supper calls us to give thanks to Jesus for instituting the Eucharist. By doing this, Jesus ensured he would always be present to the Church until the end of time. Jesus nourishes us with the very gift of himself so we may grow in our faith and love for him. The second reading from Corinthians reminds us that receiving the Eucharist is meant to bring us to live in greater love and unity with God and one another.

Let's wash the feet of the Lord, as did Abraham, by tending to our sisters and brothers with great intimacy. We must remember that the Eucharist itself can have no true meaning if it is not connected in a real way to tying a towel around our waists and actively caring for even those society tries hardest to cover up. We must always realize what our Lord has done for us and so do that for others, even those by whom we may feel betrayed. We must love as we have been loved. Let us do this in remembrance of him.

* * *

Friday, April 14, 2017

(Lec. 40)

1) Isaiah 52:13–53:12

2) Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

3) John 18:1–19:42

Gospel related: CCC 217, 440, 478, 495, 501, 544, 549, 559, 575, 586, 595, 596, 600, 6007, 608, 609, 624, 641, 694, 726, 730, 964, 1225, 1432, 2471, 2561, 2605, 2618, 2677, 2679

**FRIDAY
OF THE PASSION
OF THE LORD
(GOOD FRIDAY)**

FOCUS: Some call the cross folly, we choose to glory in it.

“In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.” [Note to homilist: Do not make the sign of the cross] As I look around the church today, several folks instinctively just made the sign of the cross. To paraphrase Saint Paul, ‘Some see the cross as great folly or a stumbling block; we, however, glory in it!’

Every time the consecrated or blessed oils of the Church are used sacramentally, we are anointed in the form of a cross. We begin almost every liturgy with the sign of the cross. We cross our foreheads, lips and hearts before the Gospel is proclaimed. The priest makes the sign of the cross over the bread and wine as God is called upon to miraculously change them into the body and blood of Jesus. Before sending us out each weekend to proclaim the Good News, we are blessed with the sign of the cross.

It is in our Catholic DNA.

We hang crosses in our homes; we bless ourselves before meals and when we say our daily prayers. Some parents have the custom of blessing each of their children whenever they leave the house by making the sign of the cross on their forehead. Even after they have become adults – whenever they visit, they never leave without that very special and holy moment of blessing.

We absolutely do not see the cross as folly, rather we glory in the cross every day of our lives. We praise God for such unconditional and unrivaled love that would allow for his Only Begotten Son to die, so that we might live.

Make no mistake, the passion of Christ just proclaimed from John’s Gospel is a most gruesome and horrifying event. The scourging and crowning with thorns was real. The nails were real. Being spit upon and jeered at was real. Jesus’ suffocating death was real. Being laid in the arms of his grieving mother was real. Being locked in a stone cold tomb was real.

When sin entered the world through our rebellious stupidity, God’s divine plan for us was disrupted and death became a reality. God could have left us alone – shattered, broken and evicted from paradise. But to do so would be to betray the truth of who God is. For as we hear in the first Letter of John, *God is love* (1 John 4:8).

Out of love, Jesus endured all he endured so that paradise to the fallen would be restored. It will always be our choice whether to accept or reject salvation. As for me, I try every day to set my own stupidity aside and accept the Lord’s loving embrace of forgiveness. And whenever I become a little weak-kneed in my faith, I look for the nearest cross and recall God’s unconditional and unwavering love for me, his prodigal son. Let’s all try to recognize the love and accept the grace that will allow us to do the same.

Saturday, April 15, 2017
(Lec. 41)

**HOLY SATURDAY
- EASTER VIGIL**

Nine readings are assigned to the Easter Vigil: seven from the Old Testament, and two from the New. If circumstances demand in individual cases, the number of prescribed readings may be reduced. Three selections from the Old Testament, both from the Law and Prophets, should be read before the Epistle and Gospel. In any case, the reading from Exodus about the escape through the Red Sea (reading 3) should never be omitted.

- 1) Genesis 1:1—2:2 or 1:1, 26-31a
- 2) Genesis 22:1-18 or 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18
- 3) Exodus 14:15—15:1
- 4) Isaiah 54:5-14
- 5) Isaiah 55:1-11
- 6) Baruch 3:9-15, 32—4:4
- 7) Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28

New Testament Readings

- 8) Romans 6:3-11
- 9) Matthew 28:1-10

Gospel related: CCC 626, 640, 641, 643, 652, 2174

FOCUS: Our belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ challenges and inspires us to live as people of promise and joy.

My dear friends, we gather here on this holiest of nights to keep vigil. We gather to unfold once again the greatest love story ever told. We gather to tell the story of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

It is a story that dates back to the beginning of the human race. It is a story about God's promise to never abandon his children. It is a story of grit and determination; of bondage and freedom; of sin and forgiveness.

From the ancient stories of creation to the incredible sacrifice by a father being asked to offer up his son; from seas parting and prophets hoping, to the Apostle Paul preaching and Jesus coming forth from that cold, dark tomb of death – we gather to give witness to God's unconditional and never-ending love for us.

As the messenger of God tells the women at the tomb, so has been God's message down through the ages: *Do not be afraid*. Through our pain and sacrifices, through our hopes and dreams, God has been ever present and always at our side, seeing us through to joy and triumph.

It is on this holy night we profess with a profoundness of heart our creed with the newest members of our faith family, who profess this creed among us for the very first time. It is on this holy night where we lay down our fears, heartaches and sufferings at the entrance of the empty tomb and run with great joy to tell all who will listen that Jesus is not dead; that God's promise to us is real; and sin has been swallowed up in the victory of the resurrection of the Lord.

It is on this holy night we are called to remember that we never walk alone. Just as Jesus met the women rushing back to the Apostles, so does Jesus meet us along the way of our journey home and keep us company.

Our challenge as we go forth from here remains the same – it never changes. Our challenge is to live as people of promise and joy, and not as people with cold, stone tombs for hearts.

This is not an easy task. But we have Abraham, the prophets and all of our ancestors in faith at our side cheering us on to victory. Above all else, we are yoked to the risen Christ. Oh, we may become a little weak-kneed from time to time, but with the risen Lord resting upon our hearts, we need never be afraid.

SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 2017

(Lec. 42)

- 1) Acts 10:34a, 37-43
- 2) Colossians 3:1-4
or 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8
- 3) John 20:1-9
or Matthew 28:1-10 (Lec.41)
or Luke 24:13-35 (Lec.46)

Gospel related: **CCC** 112, 439, 500, 515, 552, 555, 572, 601, 640, 641, 643, 645, 652, 654, 659, 710, 1094, 1166, 1329, 1347, 2174, 2625 **CSDC** 454

EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD - SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: The resurrection of Jesus is not some past event in history, but the very heart of our Christian faith.

Saint John places Mary Magdalene at the center of his Resurrection Gospel today. Alone, she sets out early on that first day to complete the burial rites for her slain friend. What must have gone through her head as she hurried to the tomb, determined to complete her task before the world awoke? John does not want us to miss the rich symbolism of this early hour, for it is a time when Mary is still in the embrace of the darkness of unbelief.

As she approaches the tomb, she sees the rolled-away stone, not as good news, but proof that someone has broken in and stolen the body of Jesus. Before the dawn of Resurrection faith, her response is to run away from the place of Christ's victory and hide with the others. Here, perhaps, she symbolizes every human being who has lost something precious in life through death, or a broken relationship, or an unfulfilled dream, and finds it hard to glory in the hope of the Resurrection.

In the end, Mary does what we would all do – she seeks the help of others. Returning to the tomb, she brings with her Peter, whose own journey stumbles between blindness of denial and the light of faith, and John, the beloved disciple. Yet they, too, are still blind to what has occurred.

As the drama unfolds, John arrives first, but waits for Peter before entering the tomb. As they behold the burial cloths, what they see is no longer mere physical perception – instead it is a moment of faith! While in the darkened tomb, John's faith in the Resurrection is still not complete, but he recalls the words of Jesus and understands that his body has not been stolen, but that Jesus himself has snatched life from the very jaws of death.

Over the Triduum, we have traveled a great way and today we stand at the empty tomb, not in the blindness of unbelief, but in the light of faith. The Christ we celebrate today is not only the Christ of the cross, but the risen Christ. To have remained on Calvary would have been to run away from the life-giving power of the Resurrection and the reconciliation that it offers to all. For the Resurrection is the victory of love and self-giving over the blindness of hatred and sin. Even the once insurmountable obstacle of death is no more; its power is smashed in the Father's action of raising Jesus from the dead.

As we gather around the Easter candle, we do so in the renewed faith that we can once again face all that life can throw at us. Having commemorated the paschal mystery, today we proclaim to the world our belief that Christ is the Lord of the living. He walks with us, renewing us with his grace so that we can confidently live life and celebrate the hope of eternal life in the here and now.

* * *

Monday, April 17, 2017

(Lec. 261)

1) Acts 2:14, 22-33

2) Matthew 28:8-15

Gospel related: CCC 640, 641, 645, 654

MONDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The Good News is too good to keep to ourselves.

In the first reading today, Peter, surrounded by the disciples right after they had received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, addresses a large crowd of faithful Jews from many nations. They had just heard the disciples' testimonies spoken in their own languages and are understandably amazed, asking how it is possible.

Peter clarifies to his Jewish audience what this outpouring of the Holy Spirit means in terms of Jewish tradition. He then continues to teach how Jesus is the Son of God and long-promised Messiah and Savior of the world who, according to the set plan of God, was put to death on a cross to win forgiveness of sin. He was then raised by God from the dead to restore humankind to life, and ascended into heaven where he now sits at the right hand of God the Father. The reading concludes with Peter proclaiming that he and the other disciples gathered with him were witnesses to all of these things.

In today's Gospel, we find Mary Magdalene and *the other Mary* on their way away from the empty tomb, just after the resurrection, when they encounter Jesus. He tells them, *do not be afraid*, and sends the women to tell the disciples to go to Galilee where they will see him.

Now Peter and the two women highlighted in today's Gospel shared the same common experience. They encountered the risen Lord after he had been put to death on the cross. This encounter changed everything for them as they came to realize that Jesus, in and through being raised from the dead, restored humankind to life, meaning that all those who put their faith and trust in Jesus were given the promise and hope of eternal life in heaven. This was indeed good news that all humanity longed to hear, because death no longer had the final word. Light and life had the final word. This was good news that Peter and the women couldn't keep to themselves; it had to be shared because Jesus' resurrection changed everything.

Through our baptism we, too, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and are called to share the Good News. As we grow in faith, we come to discover that the joy we know because of God's saving power is too good to keep to ourselves.

But how do we share this joyous Good News? We don't have to witness with frothy emotion or eloquent speeches. Peter and the women we hear about today simply shared their own personal experiences about what they heard and saw and how Jesus changed their lives. We need only follow their example and share how Christ's resurrection makes a difference in our own lives. And we can trust that the Holy Spirit will provide us the right words for sharing the joy we know because we believe in our risen Lord.

* * *

Tuesday, April 18, 2017

(Lec. 262)

1) Acts 2:36-41

2) John 20:11-18

Gospel related: CCC 443, 640, 641, 645, 659, 660, 2795

TUESDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The faithful witness of our lives is essential in helping others grow in faith and know the joy we have found in Jesus.

Today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles is a continuation of what we have heard in previous days. Saint Peter is boldly preaching the Gospel to a large crowd on the day of Pentecost, having just received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The end result of his courageous preaching, as we heard, was that approximately three thousand among that gathered crowd came to believe in Jesus and be baptized. This reading reminds us of the truth that for others to come to place their faith and trust in Jesus, they must have someone who is willing to share the Gospel with them.

This same truth is emphasized in today's Gospel reading. As we heard, Mary Magdalene was confused, taken aback, and grief-stricken as she stood outside the empty tomb of Jesus, weeping. This grief and confusion wouldn't last, as Mary was soon greeted by the risen Lord Jesus. He revealed himself to Mary, and then commissioned her to go and share the news that he had risen with the rest of his disciples. Her willingness to go and share the Good News strengthened the other disciples, who were trying to make sense of all they had seen and experienced. Their minds and hearts would soon be put at rest and changed when the risen Lord would appear to them later that same day.

The gift of faith we have is precisely that – a gift. It is a gift from God which was planted in our hearts through the sacrament of baptism. This gift was nurtured and strengthened within most of us as a result of the love and care of many over the years. People such as our parents and grandparents who shared their faith and understanding of what it means to live as a follower of Christ. People such as catechists and teachers who patiently worked with us over the years to help us grow in our faith and love for Jesus. Had others not been willing to take the time and effort to share their faith, pray for us and teach us, the flame of faith that was kindled in our hearts at baptism might have been quickly put out.

As recipients of this precious gift of faith, we are charged with the sacred duty and responsibility of taking the time and effort to nurture that same gift in our families, and in the lives of those we love. We are also charged with sharing the Gospel message with others by the witness and example of our lives.

Wednesday, April 19, 2017
(Lec. 263)

- 1) Acts 3:1-10
- 2) Luke 24:13-35

Gospel related: CCC 112, 439, 552, 555, 572, 601, 640, 641, 643, 645, 652, 659, 710, 1094, 1166, 1329, 1347, 2625

WEDNESDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: During Mass, we are nourished by Jesus in word and sacrament so we may give a faithful witness to the Gospel.

Today's Gospel reading is one of the best known and loved Resurrection stories found in the four Gospels. The story is appealing because it shows Jesus coming to his friends in the two ways he has always come: through word and sacrament. After Jesus' disappearance, his two friends recall that their hearts had been *burning within us while he spoke to us ... and opened the Scriptures to us*. More than once, the Gospels record that *he spoke with authority*, and not like other religious teachers (Matt. 7:29).

Jesus is still speaking with authority today, and our hearts, too, can burn within us, as we ponder his word. For that to happen, however, we must spend time alone with the Lord, in silence. The sixteenth-century Spanish Carmelite, Saint John of the Cross, once said "The Father spoke one Word, which is his Son, and this word he speaks always in eternal silence; and in silence it must be heard by the soul."

Though the two friends of Jesus in today's Gospel feel their hearts burning within them as they listen to the Lord's words, they recognize him only *in the breaking of the bread* – the first post-Easter celebration of Mass.

Jesus' swift disappearance at Emmaus shows also that Jesus did not come to these friends of his so they could luxuriate in a great spiritual experience. He came to empower them to carry the good news of his resurrection to others. Every encounter with God in Scripture is for the sake of others.

Thursday, April 20, 2017
(Lec. 264)

- 1) Acts 3:11-26
- 2) Luke 24:35-48

Gospel related: CCC 108, 112, 491, 572, 601, 627, 641, 644, 645, 652, 702, 730, 981, 999, 1120, 1122, 1304, 2605, 2625, 2763
CSDC 52, 491

THURSDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The Holy Spirit will give us the courage to proclaim the Resurrection.

Our Gospel today has Jesus addressing the doubts and questions still troubling the disciples about his death and supposed resurrection. Their first reaction when Jesus appears is that they are seeing a ghost. This idea is still more believable for them than to believe that Jesus is risen!

Jesus appears to them to give them proof – through having them touch his wounds and eating with them – that he is indeed alive. He then reminds them of all that he had told them, as well as Scripture that had prophesied about him. Finally, Jesus announces that they will be the witnesses to tell the world that it is he that fulfilled these prophesies about his death and resurrection.

Moving forward in time to the scene described in Acts today, Peter now stands before the community of the Jews. Having cured a crippled man, he is bold and confident proclaiming Jesus' resurrection, having no trace of the fear or doubt that he exhibited at previous times in his life. Peter has been gifted with fortitude by the power of the Holy Spirit, which frees him to act and to speak as a witness to the Resurrection.

As Christians, we can become doubtful and fearful just as Peter and the other disciples were at different times and occasions. But we believe that the Holy Spirit will give us the fortitude, or moral courage, to act and speak in proclaiming the Resurrection, as with the disciples. When we feel doubt or fear preventing us from sharing what we believe about Jesus, we can find reassurance and courage in the words of Jesus in Scripture and the support of his community, still guided by the Holy Spirit.

Most of all, we can find a renewed sense of strength and commitment to our belief in Jesus and his resurrection, when we remember and open ourselves to Jesus' total gift of himself in the Eucharist, as we will shortly. When we confidently respond, "Amen" upon receiving his body and blood, our "Amen" says we believe in God's love for us, Jesus' life for us and the Holy Spirit's power in us. Let us now turn to him confidently, knowing his Spirit will help us overcome any fear or doubts that keep us from being his witnesses.

* * *

Friday, April 21, 2017

(Lec. 265)

1) Acts 4:1-12

2) John 21:1-14

Gospel related: CCC 448, 645, 659, 1166

FRIDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: As he renewed his call to the disciples after the resurrection, Jesus continues to call us today.

Imagine being one of the disciples, sitting in a little fishing boat, drifting on the sea, your nets dragging empty, and nothing to show for a long night of work. Suddenly, an unfamiliar figure directs you to throw your nets over the right side of the boat. You heed his advice and fill your nets with fish. You now recognize the stranger as Jesus. In today's Gospel, Jesus calls to his disciples just as he did when he began his ministry (Matt. 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20 and Luke 5:1-11). He again calls the disciples to be fishers of men, and through today's Gospel reading from John, he also calls us.

In 1995, well-known Catholic composer David Haas penned, "We Are Called," a tune that echoes the mission of Christ we are called to fulfill with the lyrics, "We are called to act with justice, we are called to love tenderly. We are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God." Saint Peter and his fellow Apostles lived with Jesus, they saw the risen Christ, they ate and drank with him, they loved him and they were willing to lay down their lives for his kingdom. In today's Gospel, they heeded his call once more, and were once more filled with his presence: *Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them and in a like manner the fish.*

Similarly, every time we gather for Mass, we come forward to receive holy Communion, by which we are nourished and strengthened by Jesus himself so that we might have the grace and strength needed to share his love. Then, at the end of Mass, we are called to go out and share Christ's love with others by treating everyone with respect, kindness and compassion. We know from the stories of early Christians that this journey was not an easy one for them. Our journey will not be without its challenges, either.

In today's reading from Acts, Peter and John are preaching about the death and resurrection of Jesus, and encouraging people to repent. They are taken before the Sanhedrin and questioned. When asked under whose authority they are preaching, Peter tells them it is in the name of Jesus, *the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.*

The message from both readings today underscores our own responsibilities in answering the call of Jesus to live as his faithful disciples. We must hear and act because, as Peter tells the Sanhedrin, *There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.*

* * *

Saturday, April 22, 2017

(Lec. 266)

1) Acts 4:13-21

2) Mark 16:9-15

Gospel related: CCC 643, 645, 659, 977, 888, 1223

SATURDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Proclaim the Gospel!

Less than a week ago, we celebrated the greatest of all Sundays – Easter. Our Christian faith flows from our belief in Christ’s resurrection. This incredible event fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament, and brings us joy in the hope of glorified life, triumphant over death. As believers, how can we not speak of this to others?

Today’s Gospel causes us to reflect on our belief in Christ’s resurrection, and to share this Good News. The disciples, those who were closest to Jesus, did not initially believe that he had conquered death. After all, it defied human reason! But once they believed, the disciples could not be stopped from living out our Lord’s instructions that told them: *Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature*. Like the disciples, once we believe, we are obligated to share our gift of faith with others.

In our first reading, members of the Sanhedrin were amazed at the boldness of Peter and John – *uneducated, ordinary men*. They performed remarkable signs, causing the people to praise God. The leaders ordered the men to no longer speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Peter and John responded by saying that it would *be* impossible for them to not speak about what they have seen and heard. They dedicated their lives to proclaiming the Gospel – to evangelization.

As disciples of Christ, we evangelize when we live our faith and share it with those around us. The sacraments of baptism, reconciliation and the Eucharist unite, reconcile and strengthen our relationship with Christ. We imitate him when we show mercy and charity to others, offering our sacrifice of self in the name of love.

While evangelization is not new to us as Christians, the developing concept of the New Evangelization we hear about so often today challenges us to be bold and embrace our vocation as modern believers – to bring the Good News to people in all situations. Wherever people are, the Church must be present. It is not enough for us to practice our faith in seclusion; we need to invite others to Christ – nonbelievers as well as believers who have fallen away from the faith.

Christ entrusts us with the mission of proclaiming the Gospel; we must embrace this great responsibility. Perhaps the Holy Spirit guides you to share a faith-inspired social media post or invite a friend to Mass. Or maybe you are given the opportunity to reveal your own belief in Jesus during an intimate conversation. These gestures require no extraordinary training or education – simply openness and the desire to share our greatest gift with others.

* * *

SUNDAY, APRIL 23, 2017

(Lec. 43)

1) Acts 2:42-47

2) 1 Peter 1:3-9

3) John 20:19-31

Gospel related: CCC 515, 618, 878

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER or DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

FOCUS: Jesus raises us above our human frailties and, through his mercy, brings us into communion with the Father.

Happy Easter! It is true that Easter Sunday was last week, but the season of Easter continues for seven weeks, until Pentecost. Throughout those weeks, we are encouraged to bask in the glow of the resurrection – to rejoice in the mystery of Christ's life, death and resurrection that brought our salvation. Since 2000, the Church has combined the Easter celebration with the acknowledgment of the mercy of God that restored our right relationship with him and allowed us entry into everlasting life. Thus, we have the Sunday after Easter celebrated throughout the Church as Divine Mercy Sunday.

Today's readings fit this theme. Both the first and second readings tell how people lived peaceful and blessed lives as they rejoiced in the Lord. In our reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear how the early Christians lived together – worshiping, sharing meals and living in community. There appears to be a spiritual shield protecting them from the rest of the world. Under this shield, God adds to their numbers and strengthens their faith. This shield is God's mercy.

The First Letter of Peter also speaks of the blessings the early Christians experienced. Peter names the source of this grace when he says, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.* It is God's mercy that Peter celebrates and acknowledges as the source of our salvation.

The Gospel shows this mercy in action. Jesus appears to the disciples for the first time after his resurrection. He wishes them peace, and assures them he has truly died and been raised from the dead. He has fulfilled his promise to them, and his presence among them solidifies all the teachings he had given them as they did the Father's work together. Then, through his own breath, Jesus passes on to the Apostles the Holy Spirit, granting them – mere mortals – the ability to forgive sins. In this way, he commissions them to take an active role in imparting divine mercy on those they serve in God's name.

Finally, we hear the story of Thomas. This gives us a concrete example of divine mercy. Thomas could not believe in the Resurrection unless he saw evidence. Jesus accepts this weakness of faith, and accommodates Thomas' unbelief. This loving acceptance is an integral part of divine mercy. Thomas represents us and our various weaknesses. As he did with Thomas, Jesus strengthens us when we have doubts, and raises each of us above our human frailties and, through his mercy, brings us into communion with the Father.

What love this is – what mercy he showers on us! As we contemplate the wonder of such mercy, let us show our gratitude by living as Jesus taught us, loving one another and showing mercy to those we encounter each day.

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Monday, April 24, 2017
(Lec. 267)

- 1) Acts 4:23-31
- 2) John 3:1-8

MONDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Fidelis of Sigmaringen,
Priest and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 432, 526, 581, 591, 691, 720, 728, 782, 1215, 1225, 1238, 1257, 1262, 1287, 2790 CSDC: 50, 484

FOCUS: Through baptism, we were given new life in Christ by water and the Holy Spirit, and called to help build up the kingdom of God.

A beginning is impressed in our minds. We remember the beginning of a marriage, a job or a new home. Above all, there is nothing as memorable as a day of birth when a new life comes into the world. At birth, everything is new.

The Easter season is a time to recall the newness of life that came upon us on the day of baptism. Only birth can describe the newness of life in Christ that comes through baptism in water and the Holy Spirit. Jesus called Nicodemus to understand that this is the only way one could be *born from above*, which is a prerequisite to entering the kingdom of God. A person had to begin anew – be born again. This comes about when a person is baptized, whereby through water and the Holy Spirit they are cleansed of the stain of original sin and become new creations in Christ.

The catechism beautifully describes this new life that comes on the day of baptism when one becomes part of the Church, the “People of God.” United to the People of God, we belong to God in a unique way through our faith in Christ, who is its head. We have a status: “dignity and freedom of the sons of God.” We have a law: “to love as Christ loves us.” We have a mission: “to be salt of the earth and light of the world.” We have a destiny: the “Kingdom of God.” Born again, we begin to live a new existence as a child of God in the Church (CCC 782).

We hear about this new life in action in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles. We hear how Peter and John were persecuted by the chief priests and elders for preaching the Gospel message. We hear how the Church, the People of God, responded in prayers of praise to God, who fulfilled the passages of Scripture through Jesus. They were all strengthened by the Holy Spirit to continue to boldly live out their new life in the Lord.

These Easter readings recall for us the significance of our own baptism in that we were born again. Many of us do not remember the day of our rebirth through baptism. This does not negate the significant reality of change that took place that day. The Easter season and readings can become the catalysts by which we more deeply understand who we are, and what we are to do, with the new life we have been given in Christ.

Easter proclaims the newness of life, our newness of life in the Lord. Take courage and know that the Spirit is as alive in us today as it was in the early Church.

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Tuesday, April 25, 2017
(Lec. 555)

- 1) Peter 5:5b-14
- 2) Mark 16:15-20

Gospel related: CCC 2, 156, 161, 183, 434, 659, 699, 670, 888, 977, 1223, 1253, 1256, 1257, 1507, 1673

**SAINT MARK,
EVANGELIST
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Share the Good News of Jesus Christ in a world that longs to hear it.

Each of the four Gospel accounts gives a unique portrait of Jesus – his life, his mission, his teaching. Among the four Gospels, Mark's account is distinct in many ways. Saint Mark was not one of the Apostles, but he was Peter's close companion. It is the shortest account, and is thought to have been written the earliest. Since Mark the Evangelist was a close associate of Peter, he likely wrote his Gospel in Rome where Peter was based. Mark wrote it in Greek. It was likely written for Gentile readers in general, and for the Christians at Rome in particular.

Mark, like the Greek evangelist Luke, was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the Gospel account even though he wasn't one of the Twelve Apostles. Saint Augustine, in his *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*, explains: "For the Holy Spirit willed to choose for the writing of the Gospel two [Mark and Luke] who were not even from those who made up the Twelve, so that it might not be thought that the grace of evangelization had come only to the Apostles and that in them the fountain of grace had dried up."

Evangelization is all about what Jesus has done for us, and how he has blessed our lives. We can give witness to that Good News by the way we live our lives, by our values and what we stand for. Pope Francis is a shining example of that witnessing – constantly revealing the love of God in his life, and calling us to do likewise.

Essentially, evangelization is sharing good news in a world filled with bad news. We are saturated with bad news. Our hearts long for good news about who we are and what God had in mind for us when he created us. Too often, God is seen in a negative light, particularly by secularists and atheists. Our calling is to witness to the goodness of God along with his care and concern for us. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ are all about that.

Allow me to challenge you by suggesting that you read the Gospel of Mark straight through in one sitting. It won't take you very long. It's the shortest of the four Gospels, and can be read in about an hour. When you finish, you will have a very good picture of Jesus.

This will equip you to be a good bearer of Good News, an evangelist who is special to God. You and Saint Mark will share the same task. You will be blessed.

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Wednesday, April 26, 2017
(Lec. 269)

1) Acts 5:17-26

2) John 3:16-21

Gospel related: CCC 219, 444, 454, 458, 678, 679, 706 CSDC 3, 64

WEDNESDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: If we are open to it, the Holy Spirit continually raises us up to a fuller life in Christ.

What was it that drove and enabled the Apostles, as we heard about in today's first reading, to continue their mission of spreading the Good News of Jesus, knowing they would be arrested? The answer can be found in today's Gospel.

In the second part of the Gospel, we heard: *The light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light.* Now if we pause a moment and consider the world in which we live, we can see this statement remains true today. Many people prefer to remain in the darkness, and refuse to allow the light and love of Christ to penetrate their hearts and transform their lives. We sin and turn away from Christ's saving and transforming love when we compromise our faith, or when we water down some aspect of Church teaching in order to make things easier.

Let's think back to the first question posed. What motivated the Apostles to spread the news of Jesus, under the risk of being arrested? We can probably list quite a few reasons, but ultimately it was the fact that they had experienced Christ's saving and transforming love, and were continually being raised up to a newer and fuller life in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, once we know and experience Christ's saving love and allow ourselves to be open to the Holy Spirit, it is hard to turn away.

Not only is it hard to turn away, but the more we open ourselves to Christ's love and to the Holy Spirit, we will find our faith growing stronger each day so that our works *may be clearly seen as done in God*, as John wrote in the last verse of today's Gospel.

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Thursday, April 27, 2017

(Lec. 270)

1) Acts 5:27-33

2) John 3:31-36

Gospel related: CCC 161, 504, 690, 1286

THURSDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The Holy Spirit enables us to see beyond our present circumstances and to act on what we know is truth.

Short-sightedness, self-will and pride can keep us from the peace God wants to give us. We often feel like our current problems are going to last forever. We're tempted to give up when reaching a solution takes longer than we hoped, or when unexpected obstacles pop up. We feel weighed down by burdens when we think the answers and outcomes are all up to us. No wonder we end up feeling overwhelmed.

In today's reading from Acts, we see another way. When the Apostles' preaching and miracles began attracting numerous followers, the Jewish religious leaders, seemingly out of jealousy, tried to stop them. After being imprisoned by the Jewish authorities, the Apostles were led out of prison miraculously – but not for their own benefit and safety. God's messenger told them to go right back to the Temple and continue preaching. They obeyed.

Again, the religious authorities challenged the Apostles for defying their order not to preach in Jesus' name. Peter then proceeded to testify about Jesus' death and resurrection to the Jewish leaders themselves, who became enraged. These authorities had the power to imprison the Apostles and hand them over to the Romans to be executed for blasphemy. What gave Peter and the others the courage to stand up to them in obedience to God? They were empowered by the Holy Spirit. Prior to receiving the Holy Spirit, you recall, the Apostles huddled together in fear in the Upper Room. That all changed at Pentecost, when they received the Holy Spirit.

Our Catholic faith tells us the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord. With wisdom and understanding, the Apostles were able to see past their immediate situation and take the long view. With fortitude and with awe and respect for God's power, they were able to persevere. In spite of opposition, they were able to hold to God's plan for them.

As today's Gospel tells us, God is generous with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through baptism, God generously pours out his Spirit on us, too. And through the sacrament of confirmation we are sealed and strengthened in the Holy Spirit so that these gifts may be more fully manifest and present in our lives. What gifts of the Holy Spirit do you and I need today? Maybe wisdom, to enable us to see beyond our immediate circumstances. Maybe fortitude, to keep us putting one foot in front of the other until God leads us through whatever challenge we're facing. Maybe a little awe – a reminder that there is a God, and we're not him.

Take a moment to consider what gift of the Holy Spirit you most need in your circumstances today. Then take another moment to ask God to increase the Holy Spirit within you.

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Friday, April 28, 2017
(Lec. 271)
1) Acts 5:34-42
2) John 6:1-15

FRIDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Peter Chanel,
Priest and Martyr;
Saint Louis Grignon de Montfort,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 439, 549, 559, 1338

FOCUS: Use your God-given gifts for the benefit of others, no matter how insignificant they may seem.

Have you ever thought to yourself, "I'm not really that good at anything in particular, what would I have to offer God?" One of the great challenges we have today is recognizing the gifts we have been given by God, and the proper use of those gifts. If we, in false humility, do not acknowledge our talents, then it becomes more difficult for God to bless them and use them for others. Any gift we have that is particular to us is given to benefit ourselves and others. We need to acknowledge what we are good at and use it as God intends.

Let's say, after some reflection, you discover that the best thing about you is that you listen well. That is a gift! Maybe you enjoy digging around in the dirt and garden. That is a gift! Maybe you have a natural talent for writing. Again, a gift! The question becomes, how can you know the best use of your gift, once you recognize it? We may best begin, when we recognize a gift, by thanking God for it. Prayer is the next step. Asking God how he wants to use it, and then quietly listening. Our awareness of his purpose for our gift may not – probably will not – happen instantaneously, but can very well take many hours of prayer over a long period of time.

That can be the difficult part – the listening and waiting part. When we do have a sense of how to use our gift, then we can move forward in confidence that we are following God's will and trying to participate in it. Referring to today's Gospel and the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, it is helpful to reflect on the two-fold nature of that miracle. The offering – significantly small – of the people, and the ability of God to use it. Our gift, which we come to recognize in prayer, is like that little offering of bread and fish. It may not seem like enough, but God can make sure it is plenty.

There is a saying that God does not call the equipped, but he equips the called. In other words, we do not come to him fully prepared, possessing all that is needed. Rather, we offer what we have, and, because we are open to the power of God, anticipate it will be adequate for his purpose. Let us praise God for the gifts he has given us, and trust that in offering them for his glory, we participate in sharing his goodness.

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Saturday, April 29, 2017
(Lec. 272)

- 1) Acts 6:1-7
- 2) John 6:16-21

SATURDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER
(OBL MEM
Saint Catherine of Siena,
Virgin and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: **CSDC**: 453

FOCUS: Our faith in Jesus and commitment to sharing his message can give us the courage to speak up for truth and justice.

The story of Jesus walking on water can become too familiar to us. As we hear the opening sentences about the disciples embarking in a boat to cross the sea, we begin thinking ahead. Oh, yes. This is the one about Peter walking on the water toward Jesus.

But it isn't. Today we hear John's version of this event, and it is different than Matthew's telling of this encounter with Jesus. Yes, it is dark and the wind is blowing. The sea is stormy and the disciples had rowed a long way off the shore. But there is no mention of Peter, and Jesus doesn't get into the boat.

The details don't really matter. The essential message is consistent in all three of the Gospels that include this event. When Jesus sees how frightened and confused his disciples are, he assures them, *It is I. Do not be afraid.*

Confidence in the message of Jesus gave the Hellenists in the first reading the courage to speak up when they felt they weren't being treated fairly. The Twelve Apostles were firmly committed to their role in proclaiming the Gospel, but responded to the needs the new converts expressed. They appointed and ordained Stephen and six other men as deacons to assist them in ministering to those within the growing and diverse Church. By listening to those with the courage to speak up, they were able to calm the seas of the early Church. And the Church continued to grow.

Faith in Jesus also inspired Saint Catherine of Siena, who the Church celebrates today, to dedicate her life to Jesus, despite resistance from her family. She served Christ in the poor and sick before answering the call to help calm the storms buffeting the Church in the fourteenth century. Not yet thirty, and at a time when women had little or no power, Catherine wrote hundreds of letters to government and Church leaders, calling them to find peaceful resolution to their differences. Inspired by her deep faith and love for her Lord and his Church, she boldly confronted and challenged Church leaders to make peace and restore unity.

Saint Catherine and the early Christians are models for us today. Like them, let our trust in Jesus give us the courage to stand up for truth and justice, and help to build up the kingdom of God here on earth. For this is what we are called to do as disciples of Jesus.

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SUNDAY, APRIL 30, 2017

(Lec. 46)

1) Acts 2:14, 22-33

2) 1 Peter 1:17-21

3) Luke 24:13-35

Gospel related: CCC 112, 439, 552, 555, 572, 601, 640, 641, 643, 645, 652, 659, 710, 1094, 1166, 1329, 1347, 2625

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

FOCUS: Let us strive to recognize Jesus in the people and events of our everyday lives.

Take a look around the church and see the other people with whom you are worshipping – we as Jesus' followers come in a variety of ages and experiences, races and languages. If you look below the surface, you might find even greater differences – such as various depths of understanding of Jesus, and varying abilities to see Jesus in their daily lives. Today's readings give us a variety of ways to understand Jesus – the resurrected Lord.

In our readings today, we hear of what could be seen as competing images of Jesus: both the long-awaited Messiah, ready to take the throne of David, and as the unblemished lamb who shed his blood for our sake. In Acts, Peter says that Jesus was *delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God* to suffer crucifixion and a horrible death to win our salvation – then to rise from the dead to restore our life, and ascend into heaven where he now sits at the right hand of the Father.

Turning to the Gospel, we see a compassionate and loving Jesus, walking with two of his despondent disciples as they describe their state of mind and the events of the past days. Jesus accepts them where they are, and helps them to understand that he is the fulfillment of the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures. Then Jesus fully revealed himself through *the breaking of the bread*.

Jesus' great love for the two disciples shines forth in his patience and understanding. Jesus brings them around in the way that they need to be taught – with a lengthy explanation of Scripture and a reminder of his actions during the Last Supper. Most importantly, Jesus shows a willingness to walk with the disciples, to let them tell their own story, and to teach them at their level, in the way that they will best understand.

Let us take some time today to ponder Christ's passion, death and resurrection by which we are saved and redeemed, and given the promise and hope of eternal life. Let's focus on appreciating more fully God's gift of salvation, and try to live more fully in the power of the Resurrection so we can give a more faithful witness to the Gospel. Let's also do our best to imitate the actions of Jesus in today's Gospel by being willing to walk along with people we encounter in our daily lives – especially making an effort to listen to their stories with patience and gentleness. We just might be able to help them better understand what Jesus means in their lives.

At the same time, let us walk with open hearts and minds, knowing that for us, the people we encounter might be Jesus, walking with us to give us hope and to lead us on our way.

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