

July

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Saturday, July 1, 2017

(Lec. 376)

1) Genesis 18:1-15

2) Matthew 8:5-17

SATURDAY OF

12TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Junipero Serra,

Priest;

Saturday in honor of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 517, 543, 1386, 1505, 2610

FOCUS: We must trust in God's plan for our lives.

The centurion, a member of the conquering and occupying Roman forces, begged Jesus to heal his servant. This Gentile soldier — moved by care and concern for his servant — turned to Jesus trusting that he had the power to heal his servant. For the centurion to turn to Jesus, one of the conquered subjects his nation was ruling over, he must have set aside a number of emotions, such as possibly fear of what other Roman soldiers might think of him.

So despite any fears or misgivings the centurion may have had, he turned in trust and asked Jesus to heal his servant. And his faith was rewarded. Not only was his servant healed, but Jesus said he never found anyone in Israel with faith like this Gentile. No wonder Jesus said that many like this Roman officer, with faith that crossed boundaries of religion, rank and social position, would join the heavenly banquet with Abraham and his descendants.

This is no small thing for Jesus to say. Known as our father in faith, Abraham trusted God's promise that he would have many descendants. As we heard in today's reading, Abraham was promised that his wife, Sarah, would bear him a son, even though both of them were very old. Abraham believed. That didn't mean he and his wife didn't have feelings. Sarah, ninety years old, laughed when she heard God's messenger predict her pregnancy. Although we don't hear about it in today's reading, when God told Abraham he would have a child through Sarah, Abraham also laughed (Gen. 17:17).

Feelings come and go. Abraham and Sarah laughed, but they acted in faith. When Sarah gave birth to Isaac, Abraham must have felt unspeakable joy. Later, when called to sacrifice this long-awaited son, Abraham must have felt unspeakable anguish and sorrow. In spite of what Abraham felt, he obeyed God's call. When he offered his son back to God, God spared Isaac's life (Gen. 22:1-13). God keeps his promises.

In closing, it's important to remember that faith isn't a feeling. It's trusting God, and choosing our actions in spite of our feelings. Abraham did. The centurion did. Can we be like them? Can we base our actions on what we believe God calls us to do no matter how we feel about it? Can we trust that God's plan for us, and those we care about, depends on his love, not our worthiness? If we can, we're in good company.

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SUNDAY, JULY 2, 2017

(Lec. 97)

1) 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a

2) Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

3) Matthew 10:37-42

Gospel related: **CCC** 858, 1506, 2232, **CSDC** 193

**THIRTEENTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Whoever takes up his cross daily will be rewarded with true life.

One word seems to connect all of our readings today — *reward*. From the first reading from second Kings to the words of Jesus in the Gospel, this word resonates throughout — not in the sense of earthly reward but rather a heavenly one.

Our reading from Kings opens with the prophet Elisha rewarding the woman of Shunem with her heart's deepest desire and delight — a child. From what we know, this woman was generous in receiving the prophet. She even went so far as to provide permanent accommodation whenever he came to town. Yet there was equally emptiness in her life, for she and her husband were without children. What a great joy the promise of the prophet, whom she recognized as a holy man, must have meant to her! The promise of a child was the reward for her generosity.

Paul takes this reward to a new and deeper spiritual meaning by reminding us that it is in Christ and the Resurrection that we find the greatest of all rewards — a share in the *newness of life*. For Paul, the whole of the Gospel is built on the promise of the Resurrection. It is the Resurrection that defines the very heart of the believer. Writing to the Romans at a time of great persecution and martyrdom for the early Christian church, Paul reminds them that whatever may befall them, they will always have the promise of this great reward. Consequently, he challenges them and us to live in the hope of this great reward — to consider ourselves as *dead to sin*, and to live in Christ and the promise of new life.

This promise, too, is at the heart of today's Gospel. Matthew shares with us some of Jesus' teaching on the challenges of discipleship. But we also hear that for the one who is faithful to his or her vocation of disciple, there is the reward of new life. In many ways, discipleship becomes the lens through which all of life is viewed and understood.

Jesus knew that some of his disciples found it difficult to be faithful; they often misunderstood what it meant to be his follower, or indeed what it meant for him to be the Messiah. Knowing what would befall him, Jesus uses the symbol of the cross to describe true discipleship. It is not a one-time challenge, but a daily one: the faithful disciple must be ready to let go of all, to lose all so that he or she might receive all. Living out this discipleship on a daily basis calls for us to be generous even in the least of things, like the woman of Shunem welcoming the prophet.

Monday, July 3, 2017

(Lec. 593)

1) Ephesians 2:19-22

2) John 20:24-29

Gospel related: CCC 448, 644, 645, 659 CSDC 491

**SAINT THOMAS,
APOSTLE
-FEAST**

FOCUS: Blessed are those who have *not* seen, and yet still believe.

Today, we celebrate the feast day of Saint Thomas the Apostle – one of the original twelve of Jesus' disciples. He is known mostly for the story we heard in the Gospel, earning himself the nickname “the doubter” or “doubting Thomas.”

Perhaps we might consider his story, and thus our story, from a different angle.

First, the other ten disciples (remember, Judas was already dead) may not have necessarily believed – or at least understood – that Jesus had arisen until they, too, saw him. Already that morning, Mary Magdalene had told them that the tomb was empty (and yet Peter and John had to go and see that for themselves).

Later that same day, Mary Magdalene saw the risen Christ, and told the disciples what she had seen. We do not know what they said to her in return.

But it is in the evening of that first day, when the disciples are locked in a room because they are afraid, that Jesus appears to them and shows them his hands, feet and side. It is at this point that they rejoice in recognizing him.

So perhaps whatever “doubt” is ascribed to Thomas could also be attributed to the other ten disciples. After all, it was a frightening and confusing time, and no one knew what a resurrected person would look like.

Second, we might classify Thomas as a realist, rather than a doubter. After all, he was someone who had followed Jesus all this time, even leading the way sometimes. For example, he was the first to agree to go back to Judea for the raising of Lazarus, amid the real threat of being stoned (John 11:16). And later in John's Gospel, when Jesus spoke of going away to prepare a heavenly home for his followers, Thomas did not doubt that this was true, but merely asked, in truth: *Lord, we do not know where you are going, how will we know the way?*

And in the case of needing to see Jesus, we might see Thomas' realism shining through: in order to understand most fully how he was to follow Jesus, he needed to see the full *cost* of that discipleship. In fully experiencing the risen Christ, wounds and all, Thomas gained a complete understanding of what it meant to profess his belief – and so he professes it.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with seeing Thomas as a man of doubt; certainly Tradition has long held this view. We are all doubters at some point. But Tradition has also never said that is *only*, or *all*, of what Thomas is. And we might take heart in that.

For if we can overcome our doubts, and embrace the realism of what it means to follow Christ, we can live a more authentic and joyful Christian life. We can proclaim with all humility and full consent to the cost of discipleship: I believe. Yes, Lord, I believe. And we may remember that, unlike Thomas, we do not have the physical and literal option of seeing Jesus' wounds. And yet, blessed are we, who – having *not* seen – do indeed believe.

Tuesday, July 4, 2017

(Lec. 378)

1) Genesis 19:15-29

2) Matthew 8:23-27

TUESDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Independence Day
in United States of America)

Note: for Independence Day, any readings from the *Lectionary for Ritual Masses* (vol. IV), the Mass "For the Country or a City," nos. 882-886, or "For Peace and Justice," nos. 887-891

Gospel related: **CCC** 2610

FOCUS: Let us strive to deepen our faith each day.

In the first reading from the book of Genesis, God destroys the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. This action on God's part reminds us that grave sin is abhorrent to God, and that those who remain unrepentant and persist in grave sin will face the prospect of being judged sternly by God. Beyond this, it is important to note in this reading that Lot, an upright and faithful man, is saved. Even though it is obvious in the reading that his faith is weak, two angels help him and his family leave before the destruction occurs. It is an example of a merciful God who recognizes our fidelity, and desires to take us away from the grasp of sin. Sadly, Lot's wife remains in the grip of sin and is not saved.

We see similar themes in today's Gospel. The disciples get in a boat with Jesus to cross to the other side of the sea. This action is part of their ongoing journey of discipleship. A violent storm comes up suddenly, and fear overtakes them. They call upon Jesus for help. Even though Jesus recognizes that their faith is weak, he saves them by calming the stormy sea. Upon witnessing this, the disciples are filled with awe and come to realize more fully who Jesus is, although they still have a long way to go.

In both of these situations, the faith of those in the readings is not as strong as it could be. But Jesus is the perfect embodiment of God's gracious love for us. He is the standard of divine mercy. Therefore, he provides the model that all Christians must follow. In his mercy toward us, he is compassionate and sympathetic. We need to look at the moments in our lives when we have experienced him in this way. They may have occurred with family members or with friends. Perhaps they transpired when we were joyful or during times of struggles. Regardless of when they happened, those times call us to deepen our faith in a new way.

We can learn a lot about our faith by reflecting upon the story of Lot in the first reading and the disciples in today's Gospel. For example, like Lot, how many times have we second-guessed God even after he's shown us a solution to a problem? Or similar to the disciples, how often have we thrown up our arms from fear, not convinced of God's power to save us?

Through his Son, God teaches us to trust him in all things. Just have faith.

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Wednesday, July 5, 2017

(Lec. 379)

1) Genesis 21:5, 8-20a

2) Matthew 8:28-34

WEDNESDAY OF

13TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt Mem.

Saint Anthony Zaccaria,

Priest,

USA: Saint Elizabeth of Portugal)

FOCUS: God works in our lives quietly, letting us know he is with us.

Today's readings are dramatic, with vivid images that can prevent us from seeing the less dramatic — but more relevant — components. The Gospel depicts a scene worthy of Hollywood for its drama: a whole herd of demon-crazed swine rushing headlong over a cliff — and the appearance of the swine herders, who scold Jesus and try to drive him out of their city as he drove out the demons.

Many readers might find this scene to be disturbing as they contemplate the fate of these innocent pigs. After all, they had done nothing to deserve being suddenly possessed by demons and sent to their deaths. Today's readers might also feel for the swine herders, who have suddenly lost their livelihood. But in Jesus' day — and in our day as well — people of the Jewish faith saw pigs as unclean animals, and swine herders as people who were delving into an unclean line of work. The scene takes place outside of Israel, in a Gentile territory where herding pigs was acceptable, so Jesus' actions would have seemed wrong.

In the controversy over the fate of the pigs, perhaps we're overlooking something more important: the men who were suddenly free of the demons who had tormented them for so long. Jesus' mission was all about forgiving sinners, healing the sick, and in every way restoring life to the way God intends it to be. Jesus not only freed these men from the hands of the demons, but by placing them in the bodies of the pigs — who ran to their deaths out of confusion — he put the evil forces of the demons out of commission, at least temporarily.

God doesn't usually work in our lives quite so dramatically. Often, rather, God will come to us quietly, in our times of grief or confusion, simply to let us know that he is with us and will remain with us. That is certainly how God worked in the first reading: appearing to Hagar and Ishmael in their time of exile, when they were perhaps on the brink of starvation and death, to give them a word of encouragement and keep them moving forward. God lovingly approached a mother and son who had been expelled by Sarah — and let them know he would be with them at all times. Often, that silent assurance from God — and from the people we love — is enough to keep us going in the right direction.

How has God been working in your life lately?

Thursday, July 6, 2017

(Lec. 380)

- 1) Genesis 22:1b-19
- 2) Matthew 9:1-8

THURSDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Maria Goretti,
Virgin and Martyr)

FOCUS: Our confidence in God brings us to trust in his divine will.

The event recalled in the Book of Genesis today, known as “The Testing of Abraham,” has many interesting elements. We can look at these in a few minutes. As we heard, Abraham takes his son Isaac *to the land of Moriah* where he builds an altar on which to sacrifice Isaac. Before he makes the sacrifice, a messenger of God speaks to him, preventing him from acting, and *a ram caught by its horns in the thicket* replaces Isaac as the sacrificial lamb. Let’s look a little closer at this whole event.

At first, our human sensitivity questions the incomprehensible request by God for Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. To help us understand such a request, we need to consider the unwavering confidence in, and obedience to God, that Abraham holds. Abraham knows that God will uphold his earlier promise to him, so he is willing to do whatever God asks of him.

The consequence of his trust in God is revealed through his son Isaac, in whom the covenant promise of God to make Abraham a great nation, to bless him, and to make him a blessing to all, will be fulfilled. Remember, Isaac was the unexpected son of Abraham and Sarah in their old age, and was now to be given as a burnt offering for sin. This is a huge sacrifice God is asking!

We cannot miss the similarity between this story of Isaac and the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. Both Isaac and Jesus are willing victims. The *land of Moriah* for Isaac was later known as Jerusalem for Jesus. It is notable that the sacrificial ram that replaces Isaac is stuck in a thorny thicket, and Jesus, our sacrificial lamb, wore a crown of thorns. Jesus, as well, was a sacrificial offering for sin.

But beyond these interesting connections that provide a foreshadowing of Jesus, this passage raises deep questions for us to consider.

How great is my own confidence in God? Am I obedient to his divine will, even when it does not seem to make sense to me? Do I have faith, like Abraham, to move forward in trust, believing that God loves me and desires only the best for me? Do I have the courage to do whatever God asks so as to live with him in eternity? We should never take lightly this passage about the sacrifice of Isaac, but pray that if we are called to the test, that we, too, may be found worthy of so great a sacrifice.

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Friday, July 7, 2017

(Lec. 381)

1) Genesis 23:1-4, 19;
24:1-8, 62-67

2) Matthew 9:9-13

Gospel related: CCC 581, 589, 2100

FRIDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God does not call the righteous, but sinners. It is sinners who are in need of the healing physician.

Today's Gospel describes for us the call of Matthew, the tax collector, who was sitting at his customs post when Jesus passed by. Jesus told Matthew to follow him, and Matthew got up and did so. It is important to note that as a tax collector, Matthew was likely among a number of people who were known to extort money. Whatever they could collect over and above what was due, they would keep for themselves. Let's just say they were not the upper crust of society.

In fact, if Jesus were to dine at table with the tax collectors and sinners – which Scripture says he did – it would cause him to become ritually impure. Knowing this, the Pharisees questioned the disciples of Jesus about why he would eat with them. Overhearing them, Jesus said, *Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do.* We can equate "sick" here, with "sinner." These words pack a powerful punch toward the Pharisees' standards of perfection, which put great burdens upon the people. Then Jesus continued by saying, *Go and learn the meaning of the words, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.*

If the righteous Pharisees cannot acknowledge their need for the mercy Jesus offers to all sinners, then they have essentially placed themselves outside the scope of mercy. Jesus indicates to them through these few sentences that the mercy of God is greater than any ritual sacrifice to which they are attached. God's mercy is open to everyone, and it is not conditional, but the Pharisees could not see this. The truth is, we are all sinners and in need of God's mercy. God's mercy is his love and forgiveness. It is not earned by our sacrifices, but is freely given. If we feel called to sacrifice for others, it should be out of our love of God and neighbor, not an effort to earn our way to heaven.

Whenever we reflect on our own sinfulness, we must be sure to reflect also on God's mercy, which knows no limits or bounds. It is from this place of gratitude that we rise in generous charity toward our neighbor. For in seeing and experiencing ourselves as loved and forgiven by Jesus the Divine Physician, we can humbly show patience when others sin. It is a sign of growing in holiness when we act out of love and compassion, not judgment.

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Saturday, July 8, 2017

(Lec. 382)

1) Genesis 27:1-5, 15-29

2) Matthew 9:14-17

SATURDAY OF

13TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: Preserve the wine of the new covenant.

Some of us may be old enough to remember the song “Turn, Turn, Turn” performed by The Byrds. Even if you aren’t, you’ve probably heard this iconic tune in advertising or films. Its lyrics are adapted from the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, a passage that identifies the *appointed time for everything*, and as songwriter Pete Seeger adds, *a time to every purpose under heaven*.

Today’s readings teach us how everything happens at an appointed time, according to God’s plan. In Genesis, Jacob tricks his father, Isaac, into giving him a blessing intended for his brother, Esau. His deception has an impact on all of eternity, as it’s the lineage from Isaac to Jacob that leads to the birth of Jesus (Mt. 1:2). Our Lord works in mysterious ways, even in our weakest moments.

Like Esau, the Israelites were originally intended to be the recipients of the Lord’s salvation through the Old Covenant. Jesus observed this limitation early in his ministry. When asked for help, Jesus tells a Canaanite woman, *I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Mt. 15: 24). This changes when Jesus reveals that the Old Covenant based on bloodlines is replaced by a New Covenant based on faith.

In our Gospel, Jesus is asked by John’s disciples why *his* disciples do not fast. He answers their immediate question, then offers context to address their underlying concern. Jesus tells them that, as wedding guests wouldn’t mourn when the bridegroom is present, it wouldn’t be appropriate for his disciples to fast while he is with them. He warns that a day will come when he, the bridegroom, will be taken away; *then they will fast*. A time to feast, a time to fast.

The next part of Jesus’ response addresses the underlying concern: Why are his actions sometimes inconsistent with the actions of the Pharisees? Jesus uses images of ineffective patches and old wineskins to illustrate how combining old and new often doesn’t work; his ministry cannot be contained within the limits of the Old Covenant. The fresh wine Jesus offers needs a new wineskin to preserve it – a new covenant.

On a personal level, Jesus challenges each of us with his message. We must become new wineskins. We need to shed our old ways and allow the Holy Spirit to transform our lives – to replace our vices with virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, faith, hope and love. Through prayer and the sacraments, God’s grace helps us to turn away from the old and turn toward the new. Embrace this new covenant. Become fresh wineskins into which our Lord’s heavenly wine can be poured.

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SUNDAY, JULY 9, 2017

(Lec. 100)

- 1) Zechariah 9:9-10
- 2) Romans 8:9, 11-13
- 3) Matthew 11:25-30

Gospel related: CCC 151, 153, 240, 443, 459, 473, 544, 1615, 1658, 2603, 2701, 2779, 2785

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Let us strive to live according to the Spirit, not the flesh.

Have you ever noticed what occupies our minds and what guides our life? Perhaps it is the latest commercial for a new car. Perhaps it is the quest for the latest technological gadget. Perhaps our moods are affected by the wins and losses of our favorite team. We can be so easily swayed by a powerful speaker, a recent social movement or by what's trending on social media.

Rarely will we find fulfillment in any of these. The tech gadget will become obsolete, the fashions will change, the news will be forgotten, the great athlete will age and the topic of the hour will fade into history.

In what, then, should we place our trust and our energy? Saint Paul reminds us not to live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. And where does that Spirit always lead us? To Christ. And where does Christ always lead us? To the Father.

What occupied Christ's life? Did he come into this world seeking fame and authority? No. Zechariah noted that this great king would be meek, entering his reign on a simple donkey. This king would banish the sword and the chariot and proclaim peace to the nations; as a result, his dominion would be *from sea to sea ... to the ends of the earth*. Christ came to bring peace. He came to proclaim the message of God's love and mercy. He sought to challenge the ideals of the Pharisees, to reach out to sinners and to love the outcast. Such attributes can only find their fulfillment in a heart that is humble.

What occupied Christ's prayer? First and foremost, he gave praise to the *Lord of heaven and earth*. He acknowledged all that God had done, and his authority over all his creation. This was sincere, vocal prayer – a model for all his disciples to follow.

What occupied Christ's message? Even in his term of address, Christ made clear that he was a son to his Father – obedient to the Father's will and caretaker of his message. And that message was dominated by inclusion, peace, forgiveness and love.

So what, then, should occupy our life, our prayer and our own life's message? How will we be remembered by our family and friends? How will we be judged by our God? Are our days spent preoccupied with the minutiae of life, or are they occupied with seeking peace and showing mercy? Is our prayer dominated by words of praise or petitions for favors? Do our words echo the Gospel message or do we abandon that Gospel in our speech and actions?

If, in all meekness and humility, we place our trust in the Lord, then truly we will find that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. In him, we will find peace.

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Monday, July 10, 2017

(Lec. 383)

1) Genesis 28: 10-22a

2) Matthew 9:18-26

MONDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God's merciful love is freely given to all who call upon him.

There are two beautiful miracle events described in today's Gospel of Matthew. As an official comes to Jesus and asks him to bring his daughter to life, a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years touches his cloak, hoping for a cure. Jesus responds to both petitions – the one a verbal request, the other a quiet whisper. Arriving at the house of the official, Jesus was ridiculed by the crowd who had been making quite a stir around the dead girl. Jesus commanded them all to leave as he brought the girl back to life. He tells the crowd, *The girl is not dead but sleeping.*

Today, let's focus a little more on the woman with the hemorrhages. Isn't it fascinating that this simple turning toward Jesus was enough to have him respond to her need? How many of us think we have to use lofty words of prayer, or do great works, to draw close to Christ? How hard is it for us to imagine that simply reaching out is all it takes? God loves us so much that a mere glance in his direction is enough to enable us to enjoy great blessings poured out on us. This is a message that must be heard today – that God loves us – each one of us.

And Jesus is never too busy for us. Look in today's passage how he stopped right on the road while he was traveling, in order to help the woman, one of his children in need. We, too, can be confident in the power of God to be present to us in our time of need. Jesus makes it very clear that turning toward him, touching him, was a great act of faith. Our faith in him is necessary for our salvation. It is available to all, and freely given, if we simply reach out to him.

All too often today, there is the notion that we are saved through our own efforts. The idea that our eternal destiny depends solely on us, apart from our Creator, is taking hold. This is a myth. Sometimes people believe that if they are independent enough, strong enough, determined enough, they can save themselves. But the truth is, like the power going out from Jesus when the woman with the hemorrhages touches his cloak, it is God's merciful love that saves us, as we open ourselves to receive his unmerited gift.

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Tuesday, July 11, 2017

(Lec. 384)

1) Genesis 32:23-33

2) Matthew 9:32-38

TUESDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Benedict,
Abbot)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2611, **CSDC** 259

FOCUS: By virtue of our baptism, we are called to be laborers for Jesus, and bring in the harvest.

How many people did Jesus cure during his years of public ministry? Hundreds? Thousands? The Gospels offer specific stories of healing, like the cure of the mute man we just heard. But today we are also told that Jesus went to all the cities and villages, curing every disease and sickness. His heart was moved with pity not only for individuals, but for the crowds.

In our day and age, people still suffer, and some suffer terribly. There are the sick at heart. These include the discouraged, the frightened, the grieving, and the searching who need to hear the Good News. They need to know that there is more to life than this world. There is a heaven and a God who created them, and loves them so much that he became a man and died to save them. Then there are those who are suffering physically: the homeless, victims of human trafficking and abuse, the hungry and the sick. They are all in need of healing.

Jesus continues to love and care for these suffering people through his followers. Long ago, Jesus observed that laborers were scarce, and he would say the same today. His statement exhorting us to pray for more laborers is often interpreted to mean praying for more priests and men and women religious. But actually every baptized person, everyone here, is responsible for working in the fields and bringing in the harvest.

This is because, at our baptism, we were given new life in Christ, and called to do our part to carry on Jesus' work and mission. How do we do this? Perhaps we pass on his teachings to our family members, or teach religious education at our parish. We hold firm and live according to the teachings and commands of Jesus, even when they are unpopular. We help bring comfort to the sick and ease their burden by visiting them or by providing meals. We help bring comfort and strength to those who are struggling emotionally and spiritually by taking the time to visit or call, and lend a listening ear.

Today we honor Saint Benedict, who brought us *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, which provides rules for monks living in community. According to tradition, Benedict gave his monks the motto, *Ora et labora*, which means pray and work. This is a good motto for all Christians. It is not enough to pray. We are expected to enter the fray, to get busy and go about doing the Father's business. We are to do our part in helping build up God's kingdom in the world.

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Wednesday, July 12, 2017
(Lec. 385)

- 1) Genesis 41:55-57;
42:5-7a, 17-24a
 - 2) Matthew 10:1-7
- Gospel related: **CCC** 543

WEDNESDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We help to make God's kingdom present when we live as Jesus taught us to live.

Today's first reading gives us an example of someone helping to make God's kingdom present on earth. Joseph forgives the brothers who betrayed him. He gives them a chance to repent of their wrongdoing, and in later verses we learn that he eventually reconciles with them.

Offering forgiveness and treating others with mercy is an essential way of bringing God's love into the world – because love is the foundation of God's kingdom.

In the Gospel, we hear what Jesus told the Apostles to do and say, and the name of each of the Apostles. They are not just a bunch of followers. They are individuals sent to do God's work. They have names and histories and families. They have personal strengths and weaknesses, but they are each sent on the same mission: to proclaim the Good News.

An important factor to consider as Jesus sends the Apostles out is that he not only gives them instructions about what to do, he clearly defines where they are to go. They are not to take their healing power to distant and foreign lands, but *rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*.

By our baptisms, we are each called and sent, also with our own unique talents and abilities, our own faults and shortcomings, to proclaim that *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. The instruction Jesus gave to the Apostles about where to start provides wise guidance for us today as we participate in the work of evangelization in our parishes. While it may be exciting to travel to far-off places to share the Good News, the healing needs to begin at home.

We each have opportunities within our families and among our friends to bring hope and healing to those who are lost in some way. Even if we have been abandoned or harmed by those we love, we can, like Joseph, offer forgiveness and mercy to those responsible. When we reach out with mercy and forgiveness, we become the loving face of Christ at work in the world.

As we prepare to be renewed by receiving Jesus today, let us ask the Holy Spirit to reveal who in our lives is most in need of God's hope and healing. And let us rely on him for the wisdom to choose the right words and actions to help us lovingly proclaim to them, *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*.

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Thursday, July 13, 2017

(Lec. 386)

1) Genesis 44:18-21,
23b-29; 45:1-5

2) Matthew 10:7-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 543, 1509, 2121, 2122, 2443, **CSDC** 184

THURSDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Henry)

FOCUS: *It was really for the sake of saving lives that God sent me here ahead of you.*

Pain, loss, financial trials, rejection — all are part of the human condition. We know God loves us, but there are times we have to ask the age-old question — why do such trials and difficulties happen to us? While it is very hard to find the answer, we can look at Joseph and his reunion with his brothers to gain new insights and understanding regarding the answer to this question.

Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers because they were jealous that Joseph was their father's favorite son. Beginning in chapter thirty-seven, the Book of Genesis details how Joseph ended up in Egypt, served his master and was eventually appointed second in command by Pharaoh because he correctly interpreted dreams about a great famine that was going to engulf Egypt and the region. Joseph saved the people of Egypt from starvation because he had them store up grains before the famine. This is where our reading today begins — Joseph's brothers came down from their land to get some grain so that the family would survive.

Joseph was now second only to the Pharaoh in position and authority in Egypt. The brothers did not recognize him because they thought he was long dead. Joseph didn't tell them who he was at first, and put them through a test. Joseph then revealed who he was and told his brothers not to be distressed because it was *to save lives* that God had sent him to Egypt. God used Joseph to save all of his family. They came to Egypt and survived, eventually beginning the nation of Israel, which was part of God's plan for salvation.

How do we tie this narrative to our lives? God has a plan for each and every one of us. We travel upon the road of our daily journey, not always seeing the big picture. It is likely that Joseph did not see the big picture when he was separated from his family, or when he was sold into slavery and later jailed. God used him there to rescue his family as well as his adopted country, Egypt.

By daily prayer and reflection upon the events of our lives, we grow in our faith and love for the Lord. We receive the grace and strength needed to bear our daily crosses and burdens, trusting they are part of God's plan for our lives. We also come to see and recognize how the Lord is working and has worked — all the while keeping our minds and hearts open to the new and perhaps unexpected ways he seeks to work in and through us.

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Friday, July 14, 2017

(Lec. 387)

1) Genesis 46:1-7, 28-30

2) Matthew 10:16-23

FRIDAY OF

14TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

USA: Saint Kateri Tekakwitha,
Virgin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 161, 728, 764, 1821

FOCUS: Disciples of Jesus must be strong and persevere through hardship.

Wolves. Serpents. Scourging. Persecution. Jesus isn't exactly portraying the life of a disciple as easy in today's Gospel.

Brother will hand brother over to death, he says. You will be hated by all because of my name, says Jesus. Why would anyone want to be a disciple of Jesus if the road is so rocky and rough?

The answer lies in the assurance of Jesus. *Do not worry, he says, whoever endures to the end will be saved.*

What must heaven be like, to make all of our struggles for the sake of Jesus worth it? Can you imagine how wonderful it must be?

In today's first reading, we get a glimpse of the joy that heaven will bring to those who persevere in faith. Jacob had been separated from his son, Joseph, for a long time. In fact, Jacob was told that Joseph was dead; he mourned like only a parent mourns who has lost a child.

Joseph, all the while, endured the pain of separation from his family, including betrayal by his own brothers. He lived with the image of his poor father, wondering what had become of his son, never far from the forefront of his imagination.

Then comes the long-awaited reunion. Joseph rides out to meet his father. *As soon as Joseph saw him, we heard moments ago, he flung himself on his neck and wept a long time in his arms.* Jacob, in turn, says, *At last I can die, now that I have seen for myself that Joseph is still alive.*

Can you imagine the joy that Joseph and Jacob felt when they entered each other's presence? Tears of joy streamed down Joseph's face. Jacob's arms embraced the son he thought he had lost long ago.

A similar reception awaits those who persevere in faith, who take to heart the words of Jesus: *Whoever endures to the end will be saved.* The joy you'll feel upon arrival in heaven will make that of Joseph pale in comparison. And Jesus will wrap his loving arms around you – you who could have been lost because of sin, but who was saved by your faith in the saving power of Jesus.

The Spirit of your Father, to whom Jesus refers in the Gospel, is the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promises to his disciples. The Spirit of comfort. The Spirit of truth. The Spirit of love. Let the Holy Spirit, who draws us together today so we can experience Jesus in word and sacrament, encourage us to persevere on our journey of faith so that we may one day come to share eternal life in heaven

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Saturday, July 15, 2017

(Lec. 388)

- 1) Genesis 49:29-32;
50:15-26a
- 2) Matthew 10:24-33

SATURDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Bonaventure
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 14, 305, 363, 765, 1034, 1816, 2145

FOCUS: Do not be afraid to proclaim the Gospel boldly.

Jesus sets up a challenge in today's Gospel, and offers courage for his disciples to take up the challenge. He warns the disciples that taking on his mission will be difficult. Just as he will face persecution and hardship, they will too. It's not a glamorous road, but they know they are not alone.

He commands us three times in this Gospel to not be afraid. Christ knows better than anyone how difficult it is for us to be faithful. Through our baptism, we have been called to be witnesses for Christ. We are set apart, and this means the world may reject us.

But Jesus comforts his disciples and he wants to comfort us, too. He knows the journey of discipleship will be difficult, and so he reminds us of the Father's unconditional love and providential care for us. God is concerned when a sparrow falls to the ground; and since we *are worth more than many sparrows*, we cannot even fathom how much God loves us.

Today we remember Saint Bonaventure, a medieval theologian and philosopher, and doctor of the Church. He is known for writing the biography of another famous Franciscan, Saint Francis of Assisi. Saints such as Bonaventure and Francis were convinced of the immense love Christ had for them, and it propelled them forward to witness to their faith. Let us recommit ourselves today to doing the same.

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SUNDAY, JULY 16, 2017

(Lec. 103)

1) Isaiah 55:10-11

2) Romans 8:18-23

3) Matthew 13:1-23 or 13:1-9

Gospel related: CCC 29, 546, 787, 1724, CSDC 325

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Let us be extravagant in sharing the word of God with others.

Two images dominate our Scriptures this Sunday, both from the world of nature — rain and the sowing of seeds. Together they are used to describe not just the kingdom of God, but more importantly, how that kingdom is part of who we are as disciples of Christ. In our reading from Isaiah, the Word of God is compared to the rain from heavens, pouring down, soaking the earth, softening it and nourishing it so that it produces its many fruits. Rain is essential to growth; without it, the land is unable to release its potential. So, too, for the Christian! The Word is essential for our spiritual growth. Like the rain, the meaning, imagery and teachings of God's word are meant to soak in to our hearts, permeate our lives and so release our spiritual potential to be faithful disciples and heirs to the kingdom.

This word of God, contained in both the New and Old Testaments, is the story of the Church and God's faithful interaction with his people. Like a family gathered around the table to celebrate a joyful occasion, so the Church invites us to hear the telling of that interaction and God's promises to all. So when God promises in our first reading that his word shall not return void but will achieve its end, that promise is as real for us as it was for the people at the time of Isaiah. So what is that promise? This is where today's passage from Romans is so helpful, for here Paul sets out the promise, once the unique preserve of Israel but now open to all nations, namely, that we shall be liberated from *slavery to corruption* and we will share *in the glorious freedom of the children of God*.

The power of the word of God is equally laid out for us in the parable Jesus tells in the Gospel, using the imagery of sowing seed. Like all parables, it teaches by means of what is common and known. On the face of it, Jesus is telling the story of a farmer sowing seeds — very familiar and very simple. Yet beneath this ordinary story is a metaphor of the Christian vocation — a story that Jesus hopes will provoke some response in his audience and some personal application in each of our lives.

This parable is not simply about the soil on which the seed falls — it is about the process of growing in our faith, for it is here that we truly find the kingdom. Responding to and faithfully living out the Gospel message are key here. In the same way that the farmer can never expect a 100 percent yield, so we are not able to choose the time and place in which we are to bear witness to the Gospel in a generous and faithful way. But we must be ready. What is important is that like the sower in today's Gospel parable, we are extravagant in sowing that seed and sharing that word.

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Monday, July 17, 2017

MONDAY OF

(Lec.

389) 15TH WEEK

1) Exodus 1:8-14, 22

IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Matthew 10:34–11:1

Gospel related: **CCC** 858, 1506, 2232, **CSDC** 193

FOCUS: Discipleship, as described by Jesus, requires great love and significant sacrifice.

As Jesus speaks about the conditions of discipleship, he gives us a detailed picture that describes the commitment necessary for this relationship. As much as we love those closest to us, loving Jesus will require even greater love and significant sacrifice. Following Jesus as disciples means voluntarily bearing the crosses of our own burdens.

With that kind of job description, we have to wonder, “Who would sign up for this?” The answer, of course, is us! Why? Because, what Jesus offers – salvation – is something we know is greater than anything we can receive from our earthly existence. We hear at the beginning of today’s Gospel passage that choosing Christ is not going to be easy. He describes a separation by sword, a lack of peace.

We must be careful, though, not to take from this that Jesus somehow enjoys division. We know this is not the case because a few chapters before this, we hear in the Beatitudes the exhortation, *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God* (Mt. 5:9).

While these two passages seem contradictory at first, in today’s Gospel Jesus is simply preparing his followers for the reality of taking up their cross and following him. A righteous life, set apart for Christ, looks decidedly different from one that is anchored to earthly desires. Because of this, the divine reward afforded disciples is greater than anything earthy attachments can provide.

The danger for us, of course, is to think that following Jesus means we must abandon our home and family to run off and do great things. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We give up our lives and take up our cross whenever we choose to love others and turn away from sin and selfishness. Right here, where we are planted, is where our lives can be transformed, as we intentionally keep Christ at the center and consistently open ourselves to receiving him.

This is an essential act of discipleship, especially for families today. To put Christ first above everything is not easy, and it can require hard choices. This is what Jesus described as division by sword. Are we ready to love so deeply and give of ourselves so intensely, that we can be counted among the disciples? Let us pray that we are.

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Tuesday, July 18, 2017

(Lec. 390)

- 1) Exodus 2:1-15a
- 2) Matthew 11:20-24

TUESDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem. USA
Saint Camillus de Lellis
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC 678**

FOCUS: God calls Moses and transforms him into a great leader.

No question about it, in this passage from the Book of Exodus, Moses was caught. Raised as an Egyptian, but a Hebrew by birth, when he saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. Moses did not think anyone saw him, but as it turns out, when he later tried to break up a fight between two Hebrew men, one of them said to him, *Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?* This brought fear to Moses, as he realized that others would probably know about what he did, so he ran away to another land, away from Pharaoh.

Eventually, God called Moses back to the land of Egypt and gave him his mission to free those enslaved by Pharaoh. This flight of the people is the great Exodus out of Egypt. Isn't it interesting that Moses is the one God used to deliver his people to freedom? Moses knew he was not very eloquent with words, and described himself in a later chapter of Exodus as *slow of speech and tongue* (4:10). That didn't make any difference to God, who simply provided him an assistant in his brother Aaron. This is a good passage for us to remember whenever we feel God is calling us to do something we don't feel very capable of doing.

We are never left to our own devices when it comes time to act. As in the case of Moses, whatever God calls us to do can be accomplished with his help. We cannot do such things on our own. This recognition of our need for God – and our own inability to act independent of him – is important to our relationship with him.

We know, as we have heard it said, there is nothing we can do apart from God, but with God, all things are possible. Of course, our willingness to trust this and move forward without knowing what the result will be requires us to let go of our need to try to control situations and outcomes. If God can make Moses a great leader, knowing that he may not have the appearance of one, then we should be confident that when God calls us to love and serve others in new and different ways, our efforts will bear good fruit, perhaps in ways not always evident to us.

One question that is important to ask ourselves on a regular basis is: What is God calling us to do? Take this question to God in prayer each day and listen carefully.

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Wednesday, July 19, 2017

(Lec. 391)

1) Exodus 3:1-6, 9-12

2) Matthew 11:25-27

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 153, 240, 443, 473, 544, 2603, 2701, 2779, 2785

WEDNESDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Listen to God's voice and heed his call.

Many a parent has expressed exasperation when at Christmas or a birthday, their children have abandoned a specific gift and resorted to playing with the box that it has come in instead. How could the ordinary hold more excitement for a child than the gift purchased, sometimes at great expense, or the one that had taken the parent all night to put together? Perhaps it is a hidden wisdom that children have for what is important; a wisdom that Jesus exhorts us to re-examine for ourselves.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel that it is the childlike to whom God reveals his greatest truths. The first reading gives us a glimpse of this. Moses is going about ordinary tasks that he has done every day for years, when he receives a surprise. In the ordinary, he is made aware of something extraordinary – a burning bush that is not consumed. Both the bush and the fire, in themselves, are ordinary, but God has put them together in an extraordinary way. Moses is drawn to it and hears God's call – which he answers. God has his attention. As he listens to God, he is made aware that God is listening to him and to the people God has chosen to be his own. Then Moses is sent to accomplish God's will to change the plight of God's people – to lead them to the Promised Land.

This is the same *gracious will* of God that Jesus praises and give thanks for in the Gospel. Jesus, always with us in our ordinary tasks of daily life, shares surprises with us. If we, like Moses, are open to those surprises, God will have our attention and be able to speak to us about what it is he wants us to do in order to accomplish his mission on earth. Like Moses we may tell God, "Who am I to do this work?" And the response is always the same: God answers, *I will be with you*.

Just as children sometimes gravitate toward the ordinary and use their imaginations in play rather than playing with a toy that perhaps doesn't need much imagination, so, too, are we called to seek God in the ordinary parts of our lives and look for God's extraordinary pairings of the ordinary. God speaks to us in surprising ways. Listen to God's whisperings. God is revealing his truth to you. When he sends you forward, remember: Jesus is always with you.

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Thursday, July 20, 2017
(Lec. 392)
1) Exodus 3:13-20
2) Matthew 11:28-30

THURSDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Apollinaris,
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 459, 1615, 1658

FOCUS: God loves us enough to walk with us and share our burdens

How does it feel when someone says to us, “I am concerned about you”? We may feel relief because it removes a burden from us; we may also feel a bit anxious or frightened because it might require us to do something new. It might challenge us, make us uncomfortable, make us grow.

It depends on from where the concern stems. Is the concern coming from a place of selfless love? Or from a selfish agenda? Is that concern manifested in a loving presence and listening ear? Or a pushy agenda and manipulative behavior?

Today’s Scripture passages offer us a way to explore these questions.

In the first reading from Exodus, God instructs Moses to tell the Israelites: *I am concerned about you and about the way you are being treated in Egypt; so I have decided to lead you up out of the misery of Egypt into the land of the Canaanites ... a land flowing with milk and honey.*

How astounding that God, who reigns over the entire universe, is not only concerned about the treatment of a relatively small group of people, but he vows to do something about it! From his selfless love, loving presence and listening ear arises a genuine concern and respite from the burden of slavery. This is a great relief to the people of Israel.

Embedded in that relief, however, is the Israelites’ knowledge of what will be required of them for this respite to come to pass: they will travel, on long days and long nights, across many miles through an arid desert to reach their destination. While the Promised Land awaits, the journey itself will be difficult. Yet God will be with them

Today’s Gospel passage picks up on this same element of concern: Jesus acknowledges those who labor and are burdened, and invites us to trade our yoke for his. He understands our fears, but his own passion, death and resurrection overcome all fear. Overcome all death. Thus, uniting ourselves to him will make the journey easier, because we, too, will overcome.

These two stories are model examples for our own lives today. Life and its burdens are not easy. But the difficulties of the journey – the long days and nights of our travels through hardships, and the arid deserts of our experiences – still lead to the Promised Land. God’s concern for us – his selfless love for us – may require us to do something new; it may challenge us; make us uncomfortable; make us grow.

Yet when we in faith yoke ourselves to the promise of Christ, we find that we can be relieved, not frightened, about these moments. In him and with him, our burdens become light, and we are promised eternal life.

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Friday, July 21, 2017

(Lec. 393)

1) Exodus 11:10–12:14

2) Matthew 12:1-8

FRIDAY OF

15TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Lawrence of Brindisi,

Priest and Doctor

of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 581, 582, 586, 590, 2100, 2173

FOCUS: At every Mass, we enter into the one, eternal sacrifice of Christ.

Today's first reading comes from the book of Exodus. In it, we hear the circumstances surrounding, and the command instituting, the Passover event for the Jewish people.

At first glance, we might not feel this event is relevant to us. After all, how many of us have a lamb that we can readily slaughter, or refer to doorposts or lintels when talking about our houses? We probably do not eat with *loins girt* and a staff in our hand, ready for flight!

Although the details of this Passover ritual may seem very distant to us, in reality it is foundational to the Christianity we live. This Jewish Passover became central to the Jewish faith. It was – and still is – celebrated to recall and give thanks to God for preserving them from the hand of Pharaoh, whom we know was not allowing them to leave Egypt.

Jesus was likely celebrating the Passover meal when he brought his Apostles close to him on the night before he died. Within this Jewish tradition, and by his sacrificial offering of himself, Jesus instituted a new covenant with his people, one which we commemorate to this day. As the Eucharistic prayer commands us, we do, in fact, “Behold, the Lamb of God...who takes away the sin of the world.”

We can see the connection, now, to the Jewish Passover ritual, as Jesus died on the cross for our sins – his blood pouring out on behalf of us. He is the great sacrificial Lamb of God, who atones for our sins. Unlike in Jewish practice, however, there is no need for Jesus to make his sacrifice over and over again. That is not what happens during Mass.

Instead, at every Mass, we enter into the one, eternal sacrifice of Christ. Because God is not constrained by human time, we are at the Last Supper, and standing at the cross on Calvary, at each Eucharistic sacrifice. What a gift God has given!

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Saturday, July 22, 2017
(Lec.603)

**SAINT MARY MAGDALENE
-FEAST**

1) Songs 3:1-4b or
2 Corinthians 5:14-17

2) John 20:1-2, 11-18

Gospel related: **CCC** 443, 640, 641, 645, 654, 659, 660, 2795

FOCUS: Proclaim, like Mary Magdalene, what the resurrection of Jesus Christ means for us.

It wasn't Saint Peter or Saint John or any of the other Apostles, and it wasn't Mary, Jesus' mother, who announced the wonderful news that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead. That Christ is risen from the dead is the best news of all – death no longer can claim our humanity. The power of death over us has been forever broken. Christ is risen hallelujah, hallelujah. He calls us to share now in his destiny. This is the greatest of the Good News about Jesus Christ. This is the reason we are Christians.

The first to announce this was Saint Mary Magdalene. She, a woman, was the first evangelist. She preached the first Good News to Peter and the Apostles. Her role in the history of our celebration is of supreme importance. That is why the Church celebrates today a feast, a celebration – the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene.

In the past, Mary Magdalene was presented as a reformed prostitute, a woman of loose morals. Modern discoveries of ancient writings, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, have given us an entirely different picture of who she was and her importance in the early Christian community. She was much more important than we've been led to believe.

We should reflect also on our own calling to present the Good News of what Jesus Christ has done for us as a result of his resurrection from the dead. In today's world, filled as it is with death and destruction, it's good for us to remind people that death is not the end of life, and like Mary Magdalene, proclaim what the resurrection of Jesus Christ means for all of us.

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SUNDAY, JULY 23, 2017

(Lec. 106)

- 1) Wisdom 12:13, 16-19
- 2) Romans 8:26-27
- 3) Matthew 13:24-43 or
13:24-30

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 827, 1034

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Choose to be the wheat in building up the kingdom of God on earth, not the weeds.

A number of you are gardeners. Why, you are probably wondering, does the man in this story tell his workers not to pull up the weeds in his field? There will be a time for that later, he says: at harvest time. Until then, he orders, *let them grow together*.

That is how I am acting, Jesus is saying. That is how God acts – like this farmer. This is in contrast to the widely held belief on the part of many faithful Jews of Jesus' time who believed that when the promised Messiah came, he would render judgement on people. Yet, as we know, when Jesus came, he did not judge. He ate with sinners. He proclaimed God's love for all. Jesus healed people, without investigating whether they had repented of their sins or not.

Most often when Jesus did speak of judgment, he made it clear that this would come later. And it would be based largely on how people responded to God's freely given love.

Jesus' message – proclaiming God's love first, and reserving judgment for a later time – is important for all of us.

It reminds us to leave the judgment to God, for only God can see people's hearts. If God chooses to delay his work of final judgment, it is for the reason given in our first reading: God's *mastery over all things* makes him *lenient to all*. God can afford to be merciful because he is all powerful.

Today's Gospel parable of the weeds and the seeds tells us of God's patience. It warns us not to be less patient than God. Jesus says to let the weeds and wheat grow side by side until the harvest day. Yes, that means that good and evil will continue to exist side by side in our world. The kingdom of God that Jesus proclaims today reflects God's patient desire that we repent and turn to him so we may be saved.

In other words, God never gives up on us. He is ever-willing to forgive and is always seeking to draw us back to himself. It reminds us also that just as God freely and generously loves and forgives us, so we must be patient, gentle and loving to those we encounter throughout our daily lives.

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Monday, July 24, 2017

(Lec. 395)

- 1) Exodus 14:5-18
- 2) Matthew 12:38-42

MONDAY OF
16TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Sharbel Makhluḥ,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 590, 627, 635, 678, 994

FOCUS: We have only to be still and have faith.

Have you ever changed your mind at the last minute? You were feeling pretty good about your decision, but then at the end, when the decision is being put into action, you pause and think, no, wait, what am I doing? We have all had one of these moments.

It seems the Pharaoh had one of those moments regarding his decision to let the Israelites go free. Meanwhile, the Israelites, being led by Moses, really didn't know how this all was going to play out, but with blind faith, they headed out into the desert. Soon, with Pharaoh hot on their trail, they cried to Moses, "What have you done to us?"

It seems their fear overcame them, and they wanted to go back. It was safer to them to be in slavery than to die out in the desert. They needed tangible assurance from Moses that all would be well. Moses told them, *The Lord himself will fight for you; you have only to keep still.*

Some days, we all feel like we need proof – tangible evidence of what we are asked to believe. We need to see, touch and smell what we are supposed to have faith in. But that is not the way God works. Our God is a God of love, and faith is a gift that comes from opening our minds and hearts to the gift of his love. Many times, it is through the love of another person that we are able to experience God's love and care for us.

Moses was that person for the Israelites, a human totally in touch with God to lead them to their new home, the Promised Land. But they needed to have faith and trust him, and it wasn't easy; in fact, it was scary with Pharaoh on their heels. But as they stood in one mass of people, they all heard the same message from Moses. Be still and know that the Lord will fight for you. The Lord did, and in such an amazing way.

We need to be reminded of God's love for us in our daily lives. No, we will not see the Red Sea divided, nor can we ask Jesus, in person, to give us a sign. But each and every time we come to Mass and come forward to receive holy Communion, we are nourished and strengthened by Jesus to live our faith with greater courage and zeal.

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Tuesday, July 25, 2017

(Lec. 605)

1) 2 Corinthians 4:7-15

2) Matthew 20:20-28

Gospel related: CCC 440, 601, 605, 622, 786, 2235, CSDC 193, 379

**SAINT JAMES
APOSTLE
-FEAST**

FOCUS: The Apostles are called to be servants of the word, who lead by example.

Saint James bears many titles: Apostle, Martyr, Son of Zebedee, James the Greater, Boanerges, Son of Thunder – he was all these things, and much more. His life began as a simple fisherman of Galilee, working alongside his father and brother. He did not hesitate for a moment to get out of that boat when Jesus said, “Come, follow me.” His life would never be the same.

In his second Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul speaks of the traits needed to be an Apostle. Notice that being perfect is not one of the criteria. Instead, Saint Paul admits that we are all *earthen vessels*, complete with faults and failings, but thanks to the mercy and power of God, we have the potential to overcome our sins and become the saints of God.

Death is at work in us, Paul says. A sober reminder that our time here on earth is limited, and we must make the most of it. This world and everything in it is passing away, but we hope to pass from death to eternal life, entrust ourselves to the Lord so that the life of Jesus may be *manifested in our body*. The sure and certain hope of new and eternal life helped Paul, James and so many other Apostles endure a martyr’s death, keeping their faith until the end, knowing that they could be *struck down, but not destroyed*.

Our earthly suffering is the *chalice you will indeed drink* that Jesus promises to James in the Gospel. Those who wish to sit at Jesus’ right and left in his kingdom must never abandon him here on earth. We cannot expect to spend eternity with Christ if we find ourselves unwilling to undergo suffering, service and sacrifice in this life.

The Gospel concludes with Jesus giving us a working definition of servant leadership, telling us that the greatest leaders are those who serve others. Jesus is a King of Kings and Prince of Peace, but he chose to live as a pauper. He did not associate with the worldly, the wealthy or the wise, choosing instead to surround himself with the least among us – the last, the lowest, the leper and the lame.

James the Apostle, along with his brother John and Saint Peter, were present for Jesus’ greatest miracles. Each spent the rest of their life preaching and teaching about the life of Jesus so that, as we heard in the first reading, *the grace bestowed in abundance on more and more people may cause the thanksgiving to overflow for the glory of God*.

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Wednesday, July 26, 2017
(Lec. 397)

- 1) Exodus 16:1-5, 9-15
- 2) Matthew 13:1-9

WEDNESDAY OF
16TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM)

Saints Joachim and Anne,
Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary)

Gospel related: **CCC** 546, 1724

FOCUS: Which type of ground in the parable of the sower describes your life?

The parable of the sower in Matthew, chapter thirteen, is the first of a series of parables in the Gospel of Matthew regarding the kingdom of God. The explanation of this parable is given in the following paragraphs, but before its meaning unfolds, let's look closely at the ground on which the seed fell and, as in a mirror, let it reflect to us the truth about our own life, the depth of our faith, and the consequences that grow out of it all. Let's imagine the scene Matthew lays out for us together.

Jesus, the master teacher, was sitting by the sea, with a crowd gathering around him. As the crowd grew, he got into a boat and sat down to teach them. Can you see the people all lined up along the shore? We can safely assume Jesus did not have a bullhorn, so perhaps he did not set out too far away from them. They are standing there, waiting for him to speak, desiring to hear what he has to say. It is interesting to note that the end of this introductory paragraph of Matthew concludes with Jesus saying, *Whoever has ears ought to hear.*

This parable was meant to be heard. How did Jesus sound as he spoke about the seed and the ground? Did he place emphasis on certain words? Did he deliver it with the sound of warning in his voice? Concern over those seeds that did not take root? Could they hear the love in his voice? If you are one of those who are standing on the shore, what did this parable mean to you? The sower is God, and the seeds are those of God's word. The soil is our hearts. Jesus wants the seed of God's word to take root in rich soil and flourish. How can we ensure it does? What can we do?

Jesus, in this parable, is talking about our openness to accepting and acting upon God's word. Although God sows seeds on all types of ground – indeed he offers his gift of salvation to everyone, to *whoever has ears* – it is up to us to make our hearts fertile ground for God's blessings and gifts, to allow his love to transform us.

Meditate on this parable. Step into it. Look into the mirror of your life. Are you growing? Are you providing nourishment to those around you? What needs to change?

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Thursday, July 27, 2017

(Lec. 398)

1) Exodus 19:1-2, 9-11,
16-20b

2) Matthew 13:10-17

Gospel related: CCC 546, 787

THURSDAY OF
16TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Hear, and really listen to, the word of the Lord.

People love stories. Whether we're watching a blockbuster film or reading a bestselling novel, we are fascinated by characters, settings and plots unfolding around us. Stories can evoke such powerful reactions that we sometimes remember them for our entire lives.

Jesus understood the relevance of stories to the human experience. He used them to teach complex moral and spiritual lessons. These types of stories are called parables. They often incorporate examples taken from nature or everyday life to convey something unfamiliar about our faith.

In today's Gospel, Jesus' disciples ask why he speaks to the crowd in parables. He responds by saying that knowledge of the kingdom of heaven is granted to them, but not to everyone. Many *look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand*.

The Old Testament describes several instances when God communicates with his people. In today's first reading, the Lord uses majestic displays of nature to prepare the Israelites for the revealing of the Ten Commandments. It lets them know what he's about to reveal is important, and that they should listen to Moses.

Through the parables of Jesus, the Lord reveals important messages to us, his followers, in a new way. They challenge us to look beyond the immediate interpretation of his words so we may discover their meaning for ourselves.

To do this, we must first understand what is going on in the parable. Then, we need to reflect and meditate on the words: to realize the connections between the example in the story and what it conveys about our Lord and the kingdom of heaven. Then, we must listen to what the Lord is saying to us through the parable. The parable becomes a mirror that helps us to see ourselves and how we ought to live.

For example, in the parable about the prodigal son, some of us will identify with the son who leaves and then returns home, while others will identify with the son who stayed. Regardless of which son we identify with, both help us to realize the love and mercy of the father – our Father – and how to better love and serve him.

Discipleship is a blessing and privilege which is accompanied by responsibility. As Jesus said to his disciples in today's Gospel, *many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it*. So although we have received the gift of faith and have come to experience God's love for us in so many ways, we must continue to strive to live as his faithful disciples, and allow Jesus to work through us to accomplish wonderful things.

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Friday, July 28, 2017

(Lec. 399)

1) Exodus 20:1-17

2) Matthew 13:18-23

Gospel related: **CCC** 29, 1724, **CSDC** 325

FRIDAY OF
16TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are called to live as Christ's disciples, producing fruit that will last.

In today's Gospel, we hear the parable of the sower. Jesus is the sower, who sows the word of God's kingdom through his teaching and preaching. The soil refers to the different ways that people may respond to Jesus' message of salvation, and the way we ourselves, often at different times and places, respond to Christ's message of salvation.

Sometimes, Jesus' message sown on the path falls on the ears of those who do not accept it. The seed, his word and preaching, is trampled on the path and cannot grow. Some of the seeds fall on rocky ground. Today we heard Jesus say, *The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away.*

If we don't pay attention to Christ's message of salvation, we can easily fall into the trap of being distracted by worldly influences. We must try to recognize when this is happening so we can remove the thorns and let Jesus' word grow in us.

Hopefully, most of the seed falls on rich, fertile soil. May we be the soil that is open to the word of God. May we be the ones who understand the word of God and grow firmly in it. If we welcome the seed of the kingdom, plant it in our hearts, and let it transform our actions according to what it asks of us, the Gospel gives us the assurance that it will grow within us and bear good fruit.

When we are the rich soil, we see clearly that we are from God, and one day will return to God. Everything in between, then, becomes an opportunity to love and care for those whom God gives to us along this life's journey.

The question we must ask ourselves today is: Will we nurture the seed of God's kingdom found within us?

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Saturday, July 29, 2017
(Lec. 400)
1) Exodus 24:3-8
(Lec. 607)
2) John 11:19-27 or
Luke 10: 38-42

SATURDAY OF
16TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Martha)

Gospel related: **CCC** 439, 993, 994, 1001, **CSDC** 260

FOCUS: Let us, like Saint Martha, confidently proclaim the words, *Yes, Lord*.

The Church offers two Gospel options for celebrating the feast of Saint Martha today. In the Gospel from Luke, we hear of a time when Martha appeals to Jesus because she is doing all the work and her sister, Mary, is just sitting listening to Jesus. Let's face it – she is complaining, and complaining specifically about her sister.

The other option for the Gospel reading is from John. In it, Martha approaches Jesus in another way following the death of her brother, Lazarus. When she hears that Jesus is finally coming, she doesn't wait for him to arrive, she goes to meet him. She confronts him, *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died*. She unleashes her grief – and maybe anger – on him.

What both of these encounters reveal is the strong relationship Martha has with Jesus. We don't complain to a guest about all the work we are doing to provide hospitality for him or her. That wouldn't be polite or very gracious. But we can confide that to a trusted friend.

We don't lament to a casual acquaintance in our grief; we turn and pour out our sorrow and anger to those closest to us – those we trust to love us even at our worst.

Martha's deep trust in Jesus is revealed in her words following her reproach, *But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you*.

In the time she has spent with Jesus, Martha has grown to know that he is more than a teacher or prophet. And now, in this darkest hour, grieving the death of her brother, Martha is able to confidently proclaim, *Yes, Lord, when her friend, Jesus, asks her if she believes he is the resurrection and the life*.

Martha has come to believe that Jesus is *the Christ, the Son of God*. We don't know, but perhaps her trust and faith in Jesus grew into this confident belief in him because she consciously decided to heed his earlier words: *there is need of only one thing*. Perhaps she began, like her sister, Mary, to choose *the better part*, and made time to spend listening to and learning from Jesus.

Our conscious effort to heed his words and spend time with him will have the same results. We will grow, not only in our ability to trust in Jesus as our friend, but also in our belief that he is *the resurrection and the life*. As we remember Saint Martha today, let us all decide to choose *the better part*.

SUNDAY, JULY 30, 2017

(Lec. 109)

- 1) 1 Kings 3:5, 7-12
- 2) Romans 8:28-30
- 3) Matthew 13:44-52 or
13:44-46

Gospel related: **CCC** 546, 1034, 1117, **CSDC** 12

**SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Let us demonstrate the joy of Christian discipleship.

The British writer C.S. Lewis titled his only autobiographical work, *Surprised by Joy*. The title was a tribute to his wife, Joy Gresham, whom Lewis, a confirmed bachelor most of his life, married in 1956 when he was fifty-eight.

Both of the men in today's Gospel were "surprised by joy." In this, the man discovering buried treasure, and the merchant finding a *pearl of great price*, were alike. In other respects, the two men were quite different.

The first man is a day laborer plowing his employer's field. One day the plow catches on what he at first takes for a rock. Investigation shows it to be a pottery jar filled with gold and silver coins. He realizes that this unexpected find can change his life, giving him the first financial security he has ever known.

He realizes also that he has a problem. The law of the day said that buried treasure belonged to the person on whose property it was found. Rather than carrying off the treasure at once, the man carefully buries the jar again and finishes his day's work. Later, he makes his employer an offer for the field. When his offer is accepted, the man is overjoyed. The purchase has cost everything he has. The treasure which is now his, however, is worth far more.

The merchant is different. He is *looking* for treasure. Years of buying and selling have sharpened his eye, and refined his taste. One day, walking through the bazaar, he sees a pearl so large and flawless, that it takes his breath away. Buying it will mean the sacrifice of all he owns. But no matter. When you have found perfection, no price is too high to pay.

"God's kingdom is like that," Jesus is saying. Neither of these two men thinks for a minute of the sacrifice he is making. Both think only of the joy of their new possession.

Must we pay a price to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ? Of course. Sometimes that price is high. But when we think only of the cost of discipleship, we make our religion grim and forbidding. In these two little parables, Jesus is emphasizing not the cost, but the infinitely greater reward. From the great chorus of Christian disciples who, like the men in these two stories, have been "surprised by joy," let's quote one voice: Saint Augustine.

All through his twenties, the intellectually brilliant Augustine wanted to be a Christian. But he was unable to give up his life of indulgence. After God granted him the grace of conversion, Augustine wrote that what he had sacrificed for Jesus Christ was nothing compared to the treasure he had gained.

"How sweet did it become to me all at once to be without those trifles!" Augustine writes in his *Confessions*. "What I previously feared to lose, it was now a joy to be without. For you cast them away from me, you true and highest sweetness. You cast them out and entered in yourself, sweeter than all pleasure" (ix.1).

As followers of Jesus Christ, we know that discipleship can have its costs. But we know also that it brings joy.

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Monday, July 31, 2017

(Lec. 401)

1) Exodus 32:15-24, 30-34

2) Matthew 13:31-35

MONDAY OF

17TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

Saint Ignatius of Loyola,

Priest)

FOCUS: The kingdom of heaven is like the tiniest of seeds that grows into a very large plant.

Today's reading from the Book of Exodus shows how easy it is to lose track of our relationship with God when we are overtaken by the lures of the world. In the case of the Israelites, the temptation was to fall back on old habits of idol worship. The gleaming idol they could see was more appealing than the invisible God of their fathers.

For us today, we can easily be drawn into replacing God with the idols the world throws at our feet. The constant message we hear is to be slim, trim, rich, powerful and famous no matter what the cost to us or our neighbor. Our idols may not be fashioned in gold, but like the calf they can take the place of God if we're not careful.

Jesus provides us with two parables in today's Gospel so we might develop a better understanding of our part in the building of God's kingdom here on earth. God's presence is like the tiny mustard seed. We must tend the seed so that it grows and flourishes. God's presence is like the yeast in the flour. Our job is to mix and blend the yeast so that it permeates the flour and greatly expands the dough.

The kingdom of heaven is made known when we acknowledge God as number one in our lives and then act accordingly. If we are absorbed with other gods, we will not have time to do our part in the kingdom work of the one true God. Today, let us build the kingdom of God.

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