

# JUNE

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Thursday, June 1, 2017  
(Lec. 300)

- 1) Acts 22:30; 23:6-11
- 2) John 17:20-26

THURSDAY OF  
SEVENTH WEEK  
OF EASTER  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Justin,  
Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 260, 589, 690, 729, 820, 877, 2749, 2750, 2751, 2821 CSDC 34

**FOCUS:** How can we not succeed in our Christian life, when the very Son of God prays for us?

Today's Gospel passage from John is a poetic, heartfelt, petitionary prayer from Jesus to the Father. Jesus says, *I pray not only for these, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one.* Let's hear that again: *I pray not only for these, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one.*

The context of this prayer is Jesus' last night with his disciples. They have not yet traveled to the Garden of Gethsemane, but Jesus has finished telling them everything he needs to about what is to transpire with his arrest and execution. Now he turns from talking *to* them, to praying *for* them.

This is an astounding moment in the Gospel. The prayer itself is full of Trinitarian insight and theological weight, to be sure, but that's not our focus today. Our focus is this beautiful intercessory prayer that Jesus, the Son of God, offers to God the Father on behalf of his disciples. When Jesus refers to "these" in his prayer, he is praying for his disciples, who surround him and can hear him.

As he faces his own arrest, torture, abandonment, humiliation and death, Jesus' thoughts are of his friends – and the work they will do on his behalf after he is gone. Not only that, his prayer is for all of us: everyone who followed directly from his disciples, to believers today, to every believer still to be born.

*I pray not only for these, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.*

Astounding. Humbling. In his last free and painless moments here on earth, Jesus Christ the Son of God thought not of himself, but of his disciples, and of us. He prayed for us!

Many of us may have experienced the joy and humility of someone praying for us when we have been ill, or have faced a particular life challenge. Knowing that others are praying directly for us gives us a sense of unity with other Christians on our life's journey; it centers us, perhaps, with some peace in knowing that someone else "has our back."

How much more so, then, to know that Jesus prayed – and continues to pray – for us. He prays for us to know him – to know we are loved by him, the Father and the Spirit. He intercedes for us so that we may be brought to perfection, and experience everlasting life with him. How can we not succeed in our Christian life, when the very Son of God prays for us?

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Friday, June 2, 2017  
(Lec. 301)

- 1) Acts 25:13b-21
- 2) John 21:15-19

FRIDAY OF  
SEVENTH WEEK  
OF EASTER  
(Opt. Mem  
Saints Marcellinus and Peter,  
Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 553, 618, 645, 881, 1429, 1551

**FOCUS:** Our love for God and for others must be in deed and not in word only.

In the classic movie, *My Fair Lady*, Eliza Doolittle passionately cries out, in the song, "Show Me," of her need to see her boyfriend's love through his actions, rather than just through words. Phrases such as "I love you" can be heartfelt and sincere, but they can also be spoken in a way that is routine and automatic. In the end, what matters more than anything else is the demonstration of this love through concrete care for one's beloved.

In an intimate scene after his seaside breakfast with his Apostles, the risen Jesus seems to be trying to make the same point with Peter. Jesus coaxes Peter to make up for his three denials by declaring his love for Jesus – but the real proof of his love is in Peter's obedience to the commands, *Feed my lambs, Tend my sheep, Feed my sheep*. Anticipating his own ascension into heaven, Jesus is letting Peter know he can prove his love for Jesus by taking care of the people in his charge – the people whom Jesus himself loves. Peter will ultimately show his devotion to Jesus through his own death – as a witness to his faith.

Reflecting on this scene can help us realize Jesus' deep love for us. We, in turn, are called to show our love for Jesus by our own care for those in our lives – our children, our elderly parents, co-workers, friends and people we encounter along the way who need our support or guidance. We might find ourselves on the same day being the sheep, in need of tending by another, as well as the shepherd, who is called to feed another "lamb" in need.

In the next day or two, you might want to find some time to sit alone with Jesus and profess your love for him. Listen to his tender words of love for you and for others. In what ways do you need to accept help from others? Which sheep and lambs does he want you to tend to and feed – and where are you being sent to witness to your faith in the risen Jesus?

Saturday, June 3, 2017  
(Lec. 302)

- 1) Acts 28:16-20, 30-31
- 2) John 21:20-25

SATURDAY OF  
SEVENTH WEEK  
OF EASTER  
(OBL MEM

Saint Charles Lwanga and Companions,  
Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 515, 878

**FOCUS:** Jesus calls us to keep our eyes firmly fixed upon him and live as his faithful disciples.

The exchange between Jesus and Peter in the Gospel of John today is very interesting. It begins: *Peter turned and saw the disciple following whom Jesus loved*, the one who had asked, *Master, who is the one who will betray you?* You can almost picture Peter looking back over his shoulder as he notices him, hand lifted, thumb pointing, as he asks, “What about him?”

Peter is stepping into territory he has no business exploring, and Jesus tells him so quite clearly: *What if I want him to remain until I come? What concern is it of yours?* The message is quite clear: Don't worry about it! But what is most striking is when Jesus tells him, *You follow me.*

*You follow me.* These three little words are so powerful! While we are always called to love our brothers and sisters, and to proclaim the Gospel so that all might hear and accept the Good News, in the end, the relationship between them and Jesus is not something we are to be concerned about. The only thing we are called to do is follow Jesus. Of course, we know that following Jesus is not as easy as it sounds, and there are many layers to being a disciple.

A disciple is one who follows. We are all called to be disciples, but we follow Jesus in different ways, according to the talents and charisms we have been given. Discipleship, as you practice it, will likely look quite different than the way I practice it. We can spend a lifetime learning how to follow Jesus, as we grow in our faith and love for him. The business we should be about is doing what God asks us to do, to the best of our ability. That might look different as we grow and change — as our life circumstances change.

We are called to discipleship our entire life. It will change, as we change, but following Jesus should keep us so busy, we will not ever have time to ask, “What about him?” Or “What about her?” We can, however, ask, “What about me?” What do you want me to do Jesus, today, as I am?

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**SUNDAY, JUNE 4, 2017**

(Lec. 63)

- 1) Acts 2:1-11
- 2) 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13
- 3) John 20:19-23

Gospel related: CCC 575, 643, 645, 659, 730, 788, 858, 976, 1087, 1120, 1287, 1441, 1461, 1485, 2839 CSDC 491

**PENTECOST SUNDAY  
- SOLEMNITY**

**FOCUS:** The Church was born on the first Pentecost, and is reborn every time we are renewed in the Spirit of Pentecost.

The Jewish people celebrated Pentecost for centuries before it became the feast of the descent of the Holy Spirit. It was a celebration of the fiftieth day of Passover, a feast requiring every Jewish man, woman and child to come to the Temple at Jerusalem. This explains the large crowd present there fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead. They used this time to commemorate the giving of the Ten Commandments of the Law to Moses on top of Mount Sinai, where God revealed himself in wind and fire – the same way God reveals his Spirit at Pentecost.

In John's Gospel, Jesus appears in the Upper Room on that first Easter night, breathing his spirit on his Apostles and saying, *Peace be with you*. In that moment, Jesus takes away their fears that his body may have been stolen, and he assures them that he is both risen and glorified. This event draws our minds back to the book of Genesis (2:7) where God created Adam, but he did not have life until God breathed his Spirit into his nostrils. In the Upper Room, the Apostles had long since been charged with the task of preaching and building God's kingdom, but they did not have the capability of fulfilling this mission until Jesus breathed his God-given power upon them.

Just as God created Adam and gave him life, so too, Christ, who is God, created the Church and gives her the Spirit who guides her and protects her. Adam was created to know, love and serve God. He disobeyed and became a mere mortal. The Church was instituted by God to help all human beings to pick up where Adam left off – to make God known, loved and served by all. In as much as she obeys this great commission, the Church leads us back to immortality. In our creed, we profess faith in "the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life." Life is what the Spirit has given to the Church, and through baptism and confirmation, this same gift is given to all who believe.

At Pentecost, God comes to us as Spirit, calling all people to a new way of life. Hundreds of new disciples began that day to live according to the Spirit of God – living in charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faith, mildness and temperance.

Jesus said at Easter, *As the Father has sent me, so I send you* (Jn. 20:21). In word, wind and fire, as in the body and blood, Jesus gives us his Spirit once again, renewing in us that same command he once gave to his first disciples – that we go out to all the world and make disciples. Today, we say with believers throughout time, *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, Come, Holy Spirit – come into our hearts, come into our parishes, come into our homes, and renew the face of the earth.

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Monday, June 5, 2017  
(Lec. 353)

- 1) Tobit 1:3; 2:1b-8
- 2) Mark 12:1-12

MONDAY OF  
NINTH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM Saint Boniface,  
Bishop and Martyr)

FOCUS: Let us turn to the Holy Spirit for the gifts of fortitude and courage.

In the first reading, we hear about Tobit, a righteous Israelite of the tribe of Naphtali, living in Nineveh after an Assyrian king had deported the northern tribes of Israel to Assyria in 721 B.C. Raised by his paternal grandmother, Deborah, Tobit remained loyal to the worship of God at the Temple in Jerusalem, refusing the cult of the golden calves that the king of northern Israel had set up.

Tobit is known for his diligence in attempting to provide proper burials for fallen Israelites, and for his commitment, along with his wife Sarah, to the sanctity of marriage. They saw it as a gift from God. They suffered for their commitment to God and God's ways. Their Jewish friends and neighbors wanted little to do with them.

Although we do not experience anything near this level of suffering for our faith, our beliefs often run counter to the prevailing culture.

The parable we heard today in Mark's Gospel foreshadows all that Jesus would endure to win our salvation. And it's a good reminder for us that we may encounter difficulty and resistance when we live out our faith. But we are not pessimistic; we are people of great faith and hope. Christ was victorious over sin and death, and God is always with us when we make Jesus the cornerstone of our lives.

When we need God's gifts of courage and fortitude, we must turn to the Holy Spirit. These gifts come to us especially in our Daily Bread, not the bread we put on our tables at home but rather the bread that is given us here at the table of the Lord. We need the Bread that sustains us in life – the Bread of Life – which is why we gather here.

So here today, we once again profess our faith and receive the real presence of Jesus Christ, without whom we cannot face life as he would have us live – with zeal for the Gospel.

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Tuesday, June 6, 2017  
(Lec. 354)

- 1) Tobit 2:9-14
- 2) Mark 12:13-17

TUESDAY OF  
NINTH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Norbert, Bishop)

Gospel related: CCC 450 CSDC 379

FOCUS: Giving to God what belongs to God implies that we are to give ourselves to our Creator.

Coins often figure in Gospel stories: the lost coin, the coin Peter finds in the fish, the coins spilled when Jesus cleanses the Temple, and the thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas. The coin in today's Gospel is at the center of a puzzling saying of Jesus. The Roman tax was a bone of contention for the Jewish people. Pharisees and others rebelled against paying their oppressor, Rome. But Herodians, who supported Herod, upheld the tax. The Jewish leaders intended to trap Jesus by sending members of both groups to ask if this tax should be paid. If Jesus said yes, he would alienate many Jewish people. If he answered no, he could be arrested for sedition.

So the Pharisees and Herodians joined forces against a common enemy. They began by flattery, saying that Jesus taught the way of God. Then they asked if they should pay taxes to the emperor. Aware that this was a trick, Jesus asked for a coin, most likely a denarius used for paying the Roman tax. This coin bore Caesar's image and an inscription identifying him as divine. Jewish law forbade both images and idols. Yet, right in the Temple, the hypocrites produced this coin. Then to their amazement Jesus shrewdly evaded giving a direct answer. He replied, *Give to Caesar what is Caesar's but give to God what is God's.*

No one could argue with that statement. But it has been interpreted in various ways. Some say it means to pay taxes. To others it means church and state should be separated. The word "give" or "render" originally meant to give back something that belongs to someone. Because the denarius showed Caesar's image, the coin belonged to him. It should be returned as payment for services Rome provided.

Now, we are made in God's image and likeness. We belong to him and ought to give ourselves back to God. How do we do this? We can do this when we wake each day, by making an offering of ourselves to the Lord to go forward to love and serve as he would have us do.

We also can do this during each Eucharist. Yes, at Mass, Jesus offers himself to us in the Eucharist, but we also are called to unite and offer ourselves back to him as an offering. This is symbolized by the procession of gifts when the bread and wine – the work of our hands – are brought to the altar.

In the answer Jesus gives in the reading today, there is no dichotomy between what should be rendered to Caesar and what should be rendered to God. As Dorothy Day is thought to have said, if we rendered unto God all the things that belong to God, there would be nothing left for Caesar!

Now as this Mass continues, let us consciously offer ourselves to God.

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Wednesday, June 7, 2017  
(Lec. 355)

- 1) Tobit 3:1-11a, 16-17a
- 2) Mark 12:18-27

Gospel related: CCC 993, 1619

WEDNESDAY OF  
NINTH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Let us rejoice in what God has in store for us.

The Sadducees and the Pharisees were Jews who belonged to parties holding differing views about the resurrection from the dead, life after death and the possibilities of returning to life again back here on earth. Both groups strongly disagreed with all that Jesus was teaching. They knew he was undermining their claimed authority.

At the time of Jesus, the Sadducees were aristocrats. They tended to be wealthy and held positions of power, including that of chief priests and high priest. They were more concerned with politics than religion. They were the wealthy upper class, they did not relate well to common people, nor did the people hold them in high regard. Jesus was held in high regard by the common Jews, a fact that infuriated the Sadducees. They wanted to get rid of him.

In today's Gospel account, we find the Sadducees posing a ridiculous question to Jesus. It was their attempt to make Jesus look foolish in the eyes of his listeners. The question was based on Jewish laws designed to keep a deceased brother's family lineage intact by having his widow marry the deceased's eldest brother and have children.

But seven times?

Jesus ignored their silly problem and went on to declare in front of the crowd that the Sadducees didn't know what they were talking about – that they thought life after death would be lived out on this earth, and that living in heaven was simply beyond them. In other words, Jesus was declaring them foolish and ignorant about the things of God.

When you stop and think about it, we are surrounded by what we might call the Sadducees of our day. We hear lots of negative comments about God, about Jesus Christ, about Christianity and about religion in general. We must constantly keep up awareness of what life is all about, why God created us, and what we are doing with the gift of our lives so as not to become discouraged.

God loves us. We are made for him. What this world offers isn't really much at all in comparison to what God has in store for us.

Don't let the modern Sadducees fool you.

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Thursday, June 8, 2017  
(Lec. 356)

1) Tobit 6:10-11; 7:1bcde,  
9-17; 8:4-9a

2) Mark 12:28-34

Gospel related: CCC 129, 202, 228, 575, 2196 CSDC 40, 112

THURSDAY OF  
NINTH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are to love God with our whole being and love our neighbor as ourselves.

In reflecting upon today's passage in the Gospel of Mark when Jesus says that the greatest commandment is to *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength*, and to *Love your neighbor as yourself*, I am reminded of the beginning of the book of Joshua, where Joshua says to the people about the law of Moses: *Do not let this book of the law depart from your lips. Recite it by day and by night, that you may carefully observe all that is written in it; then you will attain your goal; then you will succeed. I command you: be strong and steadfast!* (1:8-9)

We bring these two passages together because the passage from the book of Joshua gives us a sense of how we can go about living out the two great commandments taught by Jesus in today's Gospel — to love God with our whole being and our neighbor as ourselves. It tells us that to live out this call and challenge from Jesus more fully in our lives, we must keep God with us always, day and night, at the ready whenever we speak. We must allow God's law of love to become more deeply engraved on our hearts so that our entire being is centered on God and others. This will make us more free to give of ourselves more fully in love and service to our neighbor — treating others the way we want to be treated.

Now, obviously, this is not easy. For with the busyness and demands of life in our world today, our minds and hearts often get distracted and preoccupied. That is why it is so important to take the time each day to pray. If we get thrown off track in one way or another, prayer allows us to refocus on God — loving him with our whole being, and seeking the grace we need to love and serve our neighbor.

Jesus doesn't expect us to be perfect at keeping the two great commandments. But let's try to make progress each and every day.

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Friday, June 9, 2017  
(Lec. 357)

- 1) Tobit 11:5-17
- 2) Mark 12:35-37

FRIDAY OF  
NINTH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Ephrem,  
Deacon and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 202

FOCUS: *Who do you say that I am?*

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all report this exchange between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees. It must have been an important question. Indeed it was. It had to do with the identity of Jesus Christ. It echoes the question Jesus put to Peter: *Who do you say that I am?*

Now every good Jew knew that the Messiah was to be an offspring of David. The scribes and Pharisees certainly knew that. They were using that fact to deny that Jesus Christ was anything other than a son or a descendent of King David.

So Jesus puts the question to them: how and why did David, in the psalms he composed and wrote, refer to the Messiah as his Lord? How could David attribute divinity to the Messiah and call him Lord? Was the Messiah to be merely the son of David, or was he also the Son of God and therefore the Lord of David?

The importance of the question revolves around the issue of who the people are to believe – Jesus the Christ, or the scribes and Pharisees who were threatened with the loss of their total authority and power over the Jewish people. If Jesus was who he claimed to be, then they were out of a job.

We should note that the question Jesus put to the scribes and Pharisees remained unanswered. They could not answer, so they fell silent.

The question is still relevant today. Certainly, it is a question that should be presented to those who are investigating Christianity. But there are also those who claim to be Christian and who regard Jesus as a nice man – a significant person in human history – but do not deal with the question of who he really is. Are divinity and humanity joined together in Jesus Christ? The Catholic Church gives a resounding yes to the question.

Saint Paul, in writing to the Philippians, put it this way:

*Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:5-8).*

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Saturday, June 10, 2017  
(Lec. 358)

- 1) Tobit 12:1, 5-15, 20
- 2) Mark 12:38-44

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

Gospel related: CCC 678, 2444

FOCUS: Sincere generosity begins with gratitude for God's gifts.

Both readings today show us what sincere devotion and generosity look like.

Jesus commended the poor widow's contribution of a few pennies to the Temple treasury more than the large donations made by the rich. Others gave from their surplus – what they might not miss. But the widow recognized all that God had given her, and she offered all she had back to God in return.

In today's first reading, we hear about Tobit, who remained faithful to God and generous to the poor – even though the culture he lived in made it dangerous to do so. He risked his own safety to give the dead a decent burial out of his faithfulness to God's law to bury the dead.

When Raphael brought healing to the family and a successful completion to their undertaking, Tobit and his son generously decided to give Raphael one half of all they had gained – far more than the wages agreed upon.

Even though Tobit and his son already demonstrated goodness and generosity, Raphael reminded them that it's better to be generous to the poor than store up wealth, and better to do good than fall prey to evil. If God's messenger felt the need to remind these good men of what they were already practicing, it's safe to say we all need reminders.

It's easy to fall into a "me first" attitude. It's even easier to become like the religious leaders in today's Gospel and offer charity when it requires little sacrifice from us, or perform good deeds when it gains us approval. To avoid this, it helps to check our motives. Do we give and expect to get something in return? When we serve others, do we feel like they're obligated to us in some way? Or that by doing good, we earn God's favor and that God owes us for our efforts?

Raphael offers us an antidote for this kind of attitude. He told Tobit and his son to *Honor and proclaim God's deeds, and do not be slack in praising him.*

True gratitude is the recognition that God is the giver of all that we have and all that we are. Acknowledging this, and counting our blessings, inspires us to offer God sincere thanks for the gift of our lives, our personal gifts and talents, the love of family and friends, our material wealth and blessings, and especially the gift of new life and salvation through Jesus.

And when we gather here for Eucharist in sincere gratitude for the gift of new life that Jesus gives us through his death and resurrection, we leave with hearts more open to sharing our gifts generously and joyfully with others. Like the poor widow in the Gospel, our gratitude enhances our sense of abundance and inspires us to share our gifts generously, just as Jesus has with us.

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## SUNDAY, JUNE 11, 2017

(Lec. 164)

- 1) Exodus 34:4b-6, 8-9
- 2) 2 Corinthians 13:11-13
- 3) John 3:16-18

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

## THE MOST HOLY TRINITY - SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: The mysteries of the Most Holy Trinity are woven into the mysteries of humankind.

In seminary in the days of old, classes were taught in Latin. The professor spent an entire year teaching a class on the doctrine of the Most Holy Trinity. The students were lost – between the language and the intense amount of material they were forced to consume. On the last day of class before exams, the professor promised a summary review for the exam. The students were anxious to hear it since they were lost on how to prepare so much material. He stood before them at the podium, and said, in reference to the course material about the Most Holy Trinity, *Mysterium est*. In other words, “It’s a mystery.” Thus ended the summary and the class.

Yes, no matter how many biblical scholars and writers have tried to define and explain the One God in Three Persons, it remains a mystery beyond our ability to comprehend. And yet, belief in God as Father, Son and Spirit is the most essential doctrine of the Catholic Christian faith. There have been many false teachings and misunderstandings about the Trinity down through the centuries – those who suggested there are three gods forming a “Council of Deities,” and others who embraced Modalism, or the idea that God acted as different persons at different times, morphing from one to the next interchangeably. The truth is more mysterious – our God is always and everywhere, always has been and always will be, the One in Three.

In the reading from the Book of Exodus, God renews his covenant with Moses. His chosen people had broken the first of the Ten Commandments by worshipping the golden calf. In an earlier verse, Moses had smashed the tablets in anger. But God revealed himself as being full of mercy, slow to anger and abounding in faithfulness. He did not withdraw his covenant, instead he renewed it – the tablets were struck again, and the people were forgiven.

God the Father has renewed his covenant with us, his Church – forgiving us our sins – by the saving actions of his Son acting through the power of the Holy Spirit. God’s love reveals itself as a Trinitarian love, with all three persons of the one God acting in concert to assist us in this life and help us to one day experience eternal life – God’s great design and destiny for us all.

God shows himself as a Father of Mercy, in his only Son as a savior, and in his Spirit as a redeemer who is forever renewing his love for us, and allowing us to do the same for him and for each other. Indeed, the mysteries of the Most Holy Trinity are woven into the mysteries of the human person. Only when we know who God is are we truly capable of knowing ourselves and each other. Made in the image and likeness of God, we are made in the image and likeness of the Most Holy Trinity. The love we have for one another should then be modeled on the love shared by God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Today, Saint Paul concludes his second letter to the Corinthians, wishing that newly formed Christian enclaves all the blessings of the Triune God. We begin each Mass with the words the Apostle used to conclude his reflections: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” May the Triune God’s great love for us help us to mend our ways, encourage one another and greet each other in holy peace.

Monday, June 12, 2017

(Lec. 359)

1) 2 Corinthians 1:1-7

2) Matthew 5:1-12

Gospel related: CCC 520, 544, 581, 764, 1716, 1720, 2305, 2330, 2518, 2546, 2763 CSDC 492

MONDAY OF  
TENTH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

**FOCUS:** In the beatitudes, Jesus presents us with guidelines for living as his disciples, with the assurance that the kingdom of heaven awaits us if we but follow him.

In the Old Testament, Moses went up the mountain and returned with two tablets engraved with the ten rules or “commandments” the Israelites needed to follow in order to be God’s people. The rules addressed everything from the worship of God, to the treatment of others, to morality. The Old Testament also was filled with promises and predictions for God’s “chosen people,” especially the promise of a Messiah who would save his people from destruction.

Fast-forward about one thousand years and we find that promised Savior, Jesus of Nazareth, preaching from a mountaintop and giving a new set of rules – the rules to enter the kingdom of God. As we read in the catechism: “In Jesus, the same word of God that had resounded on Mt. Sinai to give the written law to Moses made itself heard anew on the mount of the Beatitudes” (CCC 581). God’s kingdom belongs to the poor and the lowly, and he asks us to humble ourselves to enter (CCC 544).

For the faithful Jews of Jesus’ time, there was a widely held belief that the Messiah would come in a blaze of glory and fanfare to conquer their oppressors and free them from slavery. Instead, they got Jesus, born into a poor family in a poverty-stricken village where people barely had enough to eat. His life was lived in that same state. In his ministry, he reached out to those who were the most vulnerable members of society – prostitutes, children, tax collectors, lepers – the ones shunned by their communities. He preached, he healed, he never put himself above anyone else, and he sacrificed his life for their souls, as he did for us all. He identifies with the poor from the cradle to the cross and “makes active love for them the condition for entering his kingdom” (CCC 544).

In the beatitudes, Jesus presents himself as our model, and invites us to follow him by showing mercy, compassion and consideration to the poor, the marginalized, the vulnerable, the suffering. And by sharing in that suffering, as Saint Paul tells us, we also share in the encouragement – the opportunity to comfort others.

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Tuesday, June 13, 2017  
(Lec. 360)

- 1) 2 Corinthians 1:18-22
- 2) Matthew 5:13-16

TUESDAY OF  
TENTH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM

Saint Anthony of Padua,  
Priest and doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 326, 782, 1243, 2821

FOCUS: Jesus tells us we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Jesus told us we are the *salt of the earth*. In our modern time, when we say someone is the salt of the earth we usually mean they are down-to-earth, a good and humble person, someone to imitate in our own actions. Jesus probably meant it in somewhat the same way as he gave his Sermon on the Mount. He added a different dimension, though. He suggested that salt might lose its flavor and become useless. People hearing this might have been as puzzled as we are about exactly what he meant. Jesus did this often, saying things that made his listeners think – putting images in their minds that turned conventional wisdom on its ear.

So, when Jesus suggested that salt, and we as that salt, might lose its flavor, what was he saying? Like the people sitting on that mountainside two thousand years ago, we have to come up with our own interpretation. One way of looking at it might be that salt is a basic element and remains constant in almost all environments. It is nearly impossible for salt to lose its flavor. That is good news for us. If we are the salt of the earth, we are unlikely to lose our usefulness and have no value but to be trampled underfoot. This is because we are important, precious and valuable to God. He loves us unconditionally, and works in and through us to move his plan of salvation toward its fulfillment. This means we need to see ourselves as playing an important and utterly unique role in God's plan of salvation which nobody else but us can fulfill. Those who are faithful to God's call and plan for their lives are, indeed, the salt of the earth.

Next, Jesus tells us we are the light of the world. This one seems a little more straightforward. We can easily see that the point of lighting a lamp is to bring brightness to the people around it. If we are the light of the world, our job is to show forth God's light. This light comes from our words and actions. If we live according to God's law, we will show others the way, lighting their path. As we each show forth God's light, the world becomes a brighter place. This is an encouraging thought as we see the negative and dark outlook that pervades many people's lives today.

So, today's Gospel holds up a positive mirror to us. Jesus shows us that we are an integral part of God's plan for the salvation of the world. Our words and actions have real and serious impacts on our own future and that of our neighbors. Let us take hope from this, and resolve to consciously remember that every word we say and every action we take is part of our identity as the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

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Wednesday, June 14, 2017  
(Lec. 361)

- 1) 2 Corinthians 3:4-11
- 2) Matthew 5:17-19

Gospel related: CCC 577, 592, 1967, 2053

WEDNESDAY OF  
TENTH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

**FOCUS:** When we live according to the teachings of Jesus, we grow in our faith and love for the Lord.

Today's reading from Paul's second Letter to the Corinthians is a defense of his credentials and his ministry within the community in Corinth. He states that any credit for what he has achieved comes not from himself, but from God through Jesus Christ. It is a new covenant which is not written in law, but comes from the Spirit. Paul has lived it with integrity and fidelity. He also notes that the written law can bring a certain kind of death, while the Spirit gives life.

In an effort to develop what he is saying, he continues to contrast the letter of the law with the Spirit. His point is that those who only appeal to the beauty of the Mosaic law fail to perceive the magnificence in his life as an Apostle as well as in the truth of the Gospel he preaches. He goes so far as to say that Christians have a glory that far surpasses that of Moses. Some of the people who were listening to him understood his message. Others were so obsessive about living every single detail of the Mosaic law that they could not comprehend or accept his words.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is also concerned about the Mosaic law. He says that he has come not to abolish the law but to fulfill it. At first glance, it seems that fulfilling it means a literal observance in even the smallest of details. But what he means is that his death and resurrection are its fulfillment. Those who believe in Jesus live this new covenant, trusting in his promise of what is to come. His followers understand that the purpose of the law is to strengthen their love for God, and help them live in a Spirit-filled manner for the sake of others.

As Christians today, we can respond in the same way. We can trust the promise of Jesus and commit to living according to the commandments. Our commitment to following Jesus' example of devotion to living the law will draw us closer to understanding God's love for us, and help us become more loving to others. And as we grow in understanding of his love for us, our confidence in his promise of knowing his love completely in the kingdom of heaven will become a hope that sustains us in both joyful and difficult times.

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Thursday, June 15, 2017

(Lec. 362)

1) 2 Corinthians 3:15–4:1, 3-6

2) Matthew 5:20-26

Gospel related: CCC 678, 1034, 1424, 2054, 2257, 2262, 2302, 2608, 2792, 2841, 2845

THURSDAY OF  
TENTH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: As we gaze on the Lord, we are transformed into his image.

The words in today's Gospel give us pause in that they remind us that there is more to being a true Christian than obedience to the Ten Commandments. Jesus "unfolds all the demands of the Commandment," such as "thou shall not kill" (CCC 2054), teaching that obeying the Laws of God goes further than the letter of the law. Jesus insists on "conversion of the heart" (CCC 2608), requiring the reconciliation and forgiveness with those whom we hate, or who have hurt us, who we are angry with. He asks, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (CCC 2303). This, Jesus says, is necessary to avoid *fiery Gehenna*.

The "crucial requirement of the covenant mystery" brings us to reflect upon the words of the Lord's Prayer: "as we forgive those who trespass against us." Jesus knows that, on our own, this is "impossible for man" (CCC 2841). Thus, by his presence on earth, he has taken away the "veil" that we may gaze upon the face of God through whom "all things are possible" (CCC 2841).

It is daunting to imagine trying to live each day without getting angry or vengeful, not using abusive language, and having to forgive someone who acts in a hurtful way toward us. After all, we are only human. In our first reading, Paul entreats the people to *gaze* on the face of Jesus when their life becomes difficult and their faith wanes. God is no longer hidden, but alive, pouring out his transforming glory through the Gospel. He calls us to come and gaze upon his face, in the *light of the Gospel*, and he will transform us, making us more like him.

Though it may be hard to believe, each time we see, read or hear holy Scripture, we are *gazing ... on the glory of the Lord ... and being transformed into the same image*. Each time we receive the holy Eucharist, his gaze is upon us, and we truly gaze at his real presence in the host. Our transformation is unceasing – that we may reflect Jesus in our thoughts and behavior, reflecting his love to all we meet.

The Lord wants to remove those burdens caused by sin, worry and the challenges of life, which take up space in our hearts and minds. God wants to pour his blessings into those spaces, that we may feel the refreshing peace and joy that comes from forgiveness, and be uplifted in our hope that God is aware and involved in all that burdens us. In the sacrament of reconciliation, Jesus waits to listen to us and gaze upon us as he pours out his merciful love and frees us from our burdens. Let us go to him for the strength to be faithful.

\* \* \*



Friday, June 16, 2017

(Lec. 363)

1) 2 Corinthians 4:7-15

2) Matthew 5:27-32

Gospel related: CCC 226, 1034, 1456, 2330, 2336, 2380, 2382, 2513, 2528

FRIDAY OF  
TENTH WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are thankful for the resurrection of the dead and look forward to glorifying God forever.

Saint Paul, in today's first reading, offers us words of great assurance. He says, *The one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus.*

What a consolation it is, knowing that no matter what hardship we might experience during our earthly pilgrimage, we can look forward to spending eternity with God. We strive to do God's will, and hope for good results. Even when life doesn't go as we'd like, though, we know that in eternity all wrongs will be righted, all suffering will cease for those admitted to the heavenly banquet, all glory will be given to God forever.

The words of Jesus in today's Gospel remind us that the four last things — death, judgment, heaven and hell — help to keep our earthly struggles in perspective. *It is better for you to lose one of your members* Jesus says, meaning a part of our own body, *than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna*, meaning the eternal punishment of hell.

This may sound like a fire-and-brimstone preacher. But it's Jesus using strong language and images to get our attention as he speaks the truth in love.

Jesus loves us so much that the last thing he would want to see is any of us missing out on the perfect happiness of heaven. He doesn't want to scare us. But he does want us to know the truth. The truth and hope of our coming to share eternal life in heaven if we follow in his ways. The truth of our opportunity to spend eternity in heaven praising God with all the angels and saints. And yes, the truth that for those who ultimately reject God's love, ultimate separation from God is a sad possibility.

Let's be thankful for every blessing that God gives us. Let's be grateful for the gift of life, and the opportunity to spend eternity with God. Let's appreciate that Jesus loves us enough to help us gain heaven and avoid hell. He gives us the truth of sacred Scripture. He offers the teaching of his Church to guide us on our earthly journey. He gives himself to us in the Eucharist — the fountain of grace for a holy life and blessed eternity.

Let us thank God for all his gifts, especially the resurrection of the dead. Let us look forward to praising God forever in the joy of heaven.

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Saturday, June 17, 2017  
(Lec. 364)

- 1) 2 Corinthians 5:14-21
- 2) Matthew 5:33-37

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

Gospel related: CCC 581, 592, 2141, 2153, 2338, 2463, 2466

**FOCUS:** When we truly love both God and neighbor, living our faith becomes intentional and not just a set of obligations.

“Keep it simple” is a common piece of advice, and we seem to see an example of that in today’s Gospel reading regarding oaths and promises. Human nature being what it is, we often fail to keep promises – sometimes deliberately, and sometimes even when we promise something with sincere intentions. Despite our best efforts, our actions simply don’t always match our words. Jesus simplifies things for us. He tells us to let our “Yes” mean “Yes,” and our “No” mean “No.”

Although living out this call from Jesus to be people of our word may seem like a tall order, it becomes easier the more we embrace Christ in our lives. As we grow in our understanding of his love for us, the more open we are to responding to his love and following his teachings. It becomes much easier to let our “Yes” mean “Yes” and our “No” mean “No.”

As we grow in our desire to show our love for Jesus in return, living our Catholic faith becomes more intentional, and our actions become motivated by a sincere love for God and belief in Jesus. We attend Mass in thanksgiving for God’s love, not out of obligation. Recognizing and truly regretting our faults leads us to reconciliation, not because we fear the punishment of hell, but because we seek to repair our relationship with God. Treating others with kindness and compassion becomes easier because we seek to share God’s love, not because we are following the rules.

For the sake of our neighbors as well as to deepen our relationship with God, let’s try to keep promises. Let your Catholic faith become a compelling force in your life that you truly love, and not just a “set of rules” that you have to follow. Prefer nothing to the love of Christ, so that you can always lovingly say “no” to anything that pulls you away from him, and “yes” to that which draws you near to him.

Let us pray for ourselves and for one another – that we may be people who keep their word, who have hearts open and ready to receive the abundant graces God wishes to bestow upon us in and through Christ.

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**SUNDAY, JUNE 18, 2017**

(Lec. 167)

- 1) Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a
- 2) 1 Corinthians 10:16-17
- 3) John 6:51-58

Gospel related: CCC 728, 787, 994, 1001, 1355, 1384, 1391, 1406, 1509, 1524, 2837

**THE MOST HOLY  
BODY AND BLOOD  
OF CHRIST  
(Corpus Christi)  
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: Jesus says, *I am the living bread that came down from heaven.*

How can the greatest sign of unity always seem to create the greatest amount of discord among the followers of Jesus? It is troublesome that disharmony exists even within congregations and denominations, all of whom profess to follow the same risen Christ.

The belief in the body and blood of Jesus has created controversy, even going back to the time of Jesus himself, as reflected in our Gospel reading today. Some who had followed Jesus up to this point will now walk away because this is simply too much to comprehend or believe.

There is no question this is a matter of deep faith. As for believers, it is rather simple. If we believe Jesus turned water into wine and fed the five thousand, if we believe Jesus raised the dead to life and rose up from the tomb himself, why would it be so hard for us, or anyone, to believe that Jesus himself is really and truly present in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup?

Perhaps Jesus made it too easy for us. Perhaps he should have required anyone who wanted to receive him in Communion to first walk down the aisle barefoot across burning coals or broken glass, thus experiencing great pain and proving their worthiness and true belief. This would appear, then, to make our effort match the gift received.

My dear friends, this is not how Jesus operates. He does exact a price, however, and that is the cost of discipleship. There will be pain and suffering involved — not caused by him, but caused by the world in which we live.

What Jesus offers us is incredible food for the journey. Jesus offers to come literally into our very being through the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. This is a most awesome gift never to be disrespected by lack of interest or lack of belief on our part.

Either we take Jesus at his word or we do not. The most eloquent preacher in the world cannot make anyone believe Jesus meant what he said when he uttered these words: *I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.* As believers, we take him at his word.

\* \* \*

Monday, June 19, 2017

(Lec. 365)

- 1) 2 Corinthians 6:1-10
- 2) Matthew 5:38-42

MONDAY OF  
11<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Romuald,  
Abbot)

Gospel related: CCC 2443

**FOCUS:** The grace of God enables us to choose our attitudes and responses in spite of outward challenges.

Today we heard these words: *We appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.* In other words, “Don’t let God’s grace be wasted.” Saint Paul catalogs what he and his companions have gone through as they spread the Gospel: beatings, jail, riots and sleepless nights. Paul contrasts external appearances with inner disposition: although considered liars, they’re honest; although materially poor, they’re really rich; in spite of challenges, they rejoice. How could Paul maintain this attitude without the grace of God?

In today’s Gospel, Jesus invites his followers – including us – to “go the extra mile,” literally and figuratively. In that culture, Roman occupying forces were entitled to demand the property and services of the residents. Jesus suggests voluntarily doing more than we’re asked to do, and offering more than we’re asked to give. If hit on one cheek, offer the other. Does Jesus expect us to be masochists or gluttons for punishment? Of course not. We have the right and responsibility to defend ourselves and remove ourselves from abusive situations.

The challenge for us is to truly be free, to exercise our free will in spite of other people’s conduct. Unfortunately, due to sin and human weakness, it is all too easy to repay insult with insult, rudeness with rudeness. When we do, we’re allowing other people to control our behavior. True freedom is choosing our responses apart from other people’s choices. If someone snaps at us, we may feel like snapping back, but we have a choice. We don’t have to let their poor behavior dictate ours.

It’s surprising what a little kindness can do. This brings to mind a story I heard recently. Linda and her daughter, Heather, went through a stormy time in their relationship when Heather was a teenager. Often, Heather was rude to her mother. Linda usually responded by yelling, which never helped. One day, Linda complained to a friend about the situation. Her friend asked, “What if Heather’s acting that way because she’s so down on herself she thinks she doesn’t deserve better treatment? What if she’s provoking the reaction from you that she thinks she deserves?”

The next time Heather made a nasty comment, Linda didn’t yell. Instead, after a quick prayer, she gently said, “You can’t make me stop loving you.” Heather’s jaw dropped. She knew very well she was being obnoxious. Her mom’s response took her by surprise. “Why do you love me?” Heather asked, bewildered. “Because you’re mine,” Linda answered. That turning point marked the beginning of healing in their relationship.

While there’s no guarantee that a gentle answer will cause other people to change, we safeguard our freedom to choose our attitudes and our responses. In other words, we don’t let the grace of God go to waste.

\* \* \*

Tuesday, June 20, 2017  
(Lec. 366)

- 1) 2 Corinthians 8:1-9
- 2) Matthew 5:43-48

Gospel related: CCC 443, 1693, 1825, 1933, 1968, 2013, 2054, 2262, 2303, 2608, 2828, 2842, 2844 CSDC 40

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

FOCUS: Generosity and mercy are key building blocks of the Christian life.

Today's readings present us with an example of altruistic Christian generosity coupled with a message to love our enemies. On its face, these may seem as simple morals to which we have long become accustomed. However, there is more to be found here than simple rules to live by. Rather, these give us the first building blocks to holiness.

The first reading recounts Saint Paul's recollection of the generosity of the Macedonians who, while poor themselves, gave joyfully of what they had to the Church. They did not do so grudgingly out of obligation, or with fear of the consequences of being generous. They gave because it was what God wanted them to do, and in that they found joy. Paul was not interested in bottom-line amounts, but what was in their hearts as they performed good works.

Turning to the Gospel, Jesus asks that we also be generous in the way of mercy. Like the Macedonians, we must give generously of our hearts to others. — not just reserving our love for those who love us. In so doing, we may actually be able to reconcile with a once-bitter enemy. Even if such an outcome does not occur, we will feel the peace and joy that comes from doing God's will, as the ancient Macedonians experienced in the first reading as they generously gave of themselves for the Church.

The key to this is combining emotions with actions. Each act of generosity must be done with pureness of heart — not for worldly rewards or positive reinforcement, which you may or may not receive, but with the fullness of Christ's love.

When we succeed in acting in this way, we begin to form patterns of virtue in our lives which help us grow — both in love for God and love for your neighbor, from which all of the commandments spring. With perseverance, we can build a life of solid virtue and personal sanctity. Finally, when the day arrives when we must face Jesus, he will look on us with love, and say "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

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Wednesday, June 21, 2017  
(Lec. 367)

- 1) 2 Corinthians 9:6-11
- 2) Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

WEDNESDAY OF  
11<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM)

Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, Religious)

Gospel related: CCC 575, 1063, 1430, 1434, 1693, 1753, 1969, 2447, 2608, 2655, 2691

FOCUS: Proper motive is important when we perform righteous deeds.

Today's readings remind us that external actions are only a part of the picture. To be a good Christian, we must try to meet the expectations of a follower of Jesus with a sincere heart and for the right reasons: to please God rather than to impress others.

In the first reading, Paul reminds the Corinthians, and his present-day readers, of the importance not only of generosity, but of giving *without sadness or compulsion*, and with a cheerful attitude. You probably know from experience the difference between receiving from someone who gives or serves solely out of a sense of obligation, and someone who does so joyfully and with a loving heart. When someone begrudges doing you a favor, you almost wish that he or she didn't do so at all. But when someone helps you with a sense of joy and love, you're doubly blessed with the sense that you're adding joy to the heart of your generous friend. When you are called upon to serve another, you might then be more inclined to do so out of a generous, loving and joyful heart – giving a double-blessing to the person who receives from you.

Jesus also goes to the heart of the practices of almsgiving, prayer and fasting. These are not the times to call attention to yourself so that others can be impressed and think highly of you. Rather, they are opportunities to perform good deeds to serve others quietly and to be pleasing to God. The reward you get from God will not be tangible – such as a pat on the back for being such a good person. Perhaps God is giving you the gift of building up the virtues of generosity, piety and self-control within your spirit, and a deeper bond with your generous God. These rewards may very well spur you on to a lifetime of pleasing God and serving others, as well as a place with God for all eternity.

As you go about spreading goodness and blessings to others, it also helps to remember that every material donation or act of love comes from a storehouse provided by God. You are, in effect, passing on the goods that you have first received from God. As Paul reminds us, *God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work*. In your good deeds – particularly acts of generous giving or service – you are simply a link in a chain from God to the recipient of your generosity.

Thursday, June 22, 2017

(Lec. 368)

1) 2 Corinthians 11:1-11

2) Matthew 6:7-15

THURSDAY OF

11<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Paulinus of Nola, Bishop;

Saints John Fisher, Bishop,

and Thomas More, Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 268, 443, 1165, 1969, 2608, 2632, 2659, 2668, 2736, 2759, 2776, 2792, 2841, 2845 CSDC 492

**FOCUS:** We are to be steadfast in faith and strive to do the will of God in all things.

In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches the disciples the Our Father as a model for how they, and believers of every day, were to pray. This most beautiful of prayers summarizes the whole Gospel, and is the quintessential prayer of the Church (CCC 2761). It is an integral part of the prayer and worship of the Church, such as in the major hours of the Divine Office, and in each and every Mass (CCC 2768). This prayer also plays an integral role in our daily lives — to focus our minds on God and living as he calls us to live.

So given the importance of this prayer, let's lift up one petition from the Our Father — Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. In thinking about the meaning of this petition for our lives, it is important to remember that Jesus' commandment that we love one another as he has loved us summarizes all the rest of the commandments, and makes it explicitly clear what it means to do the will of God. But we know this isn't easy to do with all the distractions of our daily lives.

We honor two saints today, who are examples for us of standing firm in their faith and in their determination to do the will of God. Saint Thomas More was the first layperson to serve as chancellor of England, which is equivalent to prime minister today. Yet he gave up his power and prestige when King Henry VIII, in 1532, claimed leadership of the Church in England as his own. Later, More was beheaded when he remained silent after the king demanded he take an oath affirming his control of the Church.

Saint John Fisher, likewise, tried to be faithful and obedient to the will of God come what may. He adhered to the Church's teaching that the Church was the ultimate authority given to Saint Peter and his successors in the sixteenth century. Sadly, he was the only bishop in England at the time to remain firm in his faith and obedience to the will of God. Like More, he lost his life because of his fidelity to God.

None of us may be faced with the threats Saint Thomas Moore and Saint John Fisher confronted. But their prayers and example can give us additional strength and inspiration as we strive to stand steadfast in faith and do God's will — on earth as it is in heaven.

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Friday, June 23, 2017  
(Lec. 170)

- 1) Deuteronomy 7:6-11
- 2) 1 John 4:7-16
- 3) Matthew 11:25-30

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

**THE MOST  
SACRED HEART  
OF JESUS  
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: Anyone who loves is *of* God, and anyone who does not love is *not* of God.

Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. This devotion represents not only the physical heart of Jesus, which sustained him as a human being like us, but more importantly the metaphorical heart of Jesus, in his love for all mankind.

It is a devotion full of symbolism, where presentations in art give expression to the invisible wound of love. The wound stems from both his total outpouring of self, but also from our human ingratitude for what he has given us. We celebrate the mysteries of Jesus' gift of self, in the incarnation, passion, and Eucharist.

It is no surprise, then, that our Scripture passages today stress the concept, and the commandment, of love.

In our first reading, Moses reminds the tired, complaining and argumentative Hebrews that they are a people sacred to the Lord their God, not because of any particular trait or effort on their part, but simply because God loves them. They were chosen from all nations on the face of the earth not as a reward, but simply because the Lord set his heart upon them. They are a chosen, sacred people simply because God is love – and love must beget love.

In our second reading, Saint John provides an authoritative, and yet poetic, treatise on God's love: God loves us, not because we have earned it, or deserve it, or competed for it, or even asked for it. God loves us because God is God – and God is love. Thus, since God loves us, we must also love one another. Anyone who loves is *of* God, and anyone who does not love is *not* of God.

So how do we follow this example, and this command, to love? Jesus provides us an answer in today's passage from Matthew. *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me ... For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.* Jesus invites us to trade the yokes of whatever worldly concerns press down upon us for the one he has crafted for us: a yoke of sacrificial love that does not pinch or force us in the wrong direction, but gently leads along the proper path in cultivating God's kingdom.

In practical terms, this means trusting that God's love for us, exemplified in the life and death of Jesus Christ, is because of who God is, not because of who we are; and it will never be withdrawn. It means that God's love for us naturally begets love, and that we are both created for, and empowered, through grace, to embody love.

So on this solemnity, may we, who glory in the heart of God's beloved Son and recall the wonders of his love for us, be fonts of that same love to one another.

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Saturday, June 24, 2017  
(Lec. 587)

- 1) Isaiah 49:1-6
- 2) Acts 13:22-26
- 3) Luke 1:57-66, 80

**THE NATIVITY  
OF SAINT JOHN  
THE BAPTIST  
- SOLEMNITY**

**FOCUS:** God forms and fashions each of us within our mother's womb to fulfill a unique role within his unfolding plan of salvation.

Today, the Church throughout the world celebrates the Solemnity of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist. We celebrate John the Baptist's birth year after year because of the important and utterly unique role John played in helping bring God's plan of salvation to fulfillment.

With regard to this unique role, the first reading from the prophet Isaiah makes it clear that John was formed and fashioned within his mother's womb to be a prophet. But unlike the prophets who came before him, John was especially chosen by God to be the prophet who would herald and prepare the way for Jesus. This special calling is evident because John's birth was announced to his father, Zechariah, by the angel Gabriel.

Gabriel told Zechariah that his wife, Elizabeth, although advanced in years, would conceive and bear a son and that they were to name him John. Gabriel also told Zechariah that John would be great in the sight of the Lord, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and would turn many people's hearts back to the Lord (Luke 1). So even though this was a lot to take in, and even though Zechariah and Elizabeth most likely did not understand all that the message meant, they trusted in the message, as we heard in today's Gospel, and did as the angel instructed them in naming their son John when he was born.

Once John was born, the Gospel of Luke makes clear that he continued to grow in faith and holiness throughout his life. John continued to grow until the appointed time came for him to begin his mission of preparing the way for Jesus — by preaching that the kingdom of God was at hand and by proclaiming a baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

Similarly, each of us has been formed and fashioned within our mother's womb by God to fulfill a special role. The challenge for each of us is to continue to pray and discern what this unique role is, and then strive to be faithful to God and his plan for our lives. Although our names may never be remembered and enshrined in Church history like Saint John the Baptist, let's remember that our contributions are no less important or significant. And they are uniquely ours.

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## SUNDAY, JUNE 25, 2017

(Lec. 94)

- 1) Jeremiah 20:10-13
- 2) Romans 5:12-15
- 3) Matthew 10:26-33

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

## TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are called at our baptism to bear witness to the faith.

In every age, Christ and his Church have been persecuted. Despite his message of love and compassion (or perhaps because of it), Jesus was taunted by leaders and ordinary people alike. Even his death on a cross and his victorious Resurrection did not convince every person that he was the Son of God, the promised Messiah. Some of his followers abandoned him. His Apostles faced ridicule and death. Countless early Christians were martyred for their faith. Religious communities have split apart over doctrine and liturgical practices. Wars have been fought, crusades have been waged and earthly kingdoms have been torn apart – all over differences in religion or political ideologies.

Today we encounter the prophet Jeremiah who, in his youth, had been called by the Lord to be a prophet during times of great political upheaval. He says, *I have committed my cause* to the Lord. Despite imprisonment, scourging, threats from enemies and former friends, and his own interior crises, Jeremiah remained steadfast because he knew the Lord was with him *like a mighty warrior*.

Saint Paul reminds the Romans that Adam brought sin and death into the world *and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned*. He compares the effect of Adam's disobedience to God's will to Christ's total obedience to the Father's will – and the effect that each had on the human race. One is the cause of the human condition – the other, the source of our salvation.

For the past several Sundays, we have been hearing the Gospel accounts of how Christ called his Apostles. He carefully shared the Father's message of love and mercy with each of them. But at the same time, Jesus acknowledged that they would encounter a world that was hostile to that message. In today's Gospel, Jesus continues his instruction to them, cautioning them to *fear no one ... speak in the light ... proclaim on the housetops*. They would be protected by the same Father who cares for sparrows. Most of all, they should never deny Christ before others.

Like Jeremiah and the Apostles, Jesus has called us, too. At our baptism, we became his followers, and through the grace of the sacraments and the support of our Christian community, we have been called to share that same message of mercy, love and salvation through Christ. We, too, face a world that can be hostile to Christianity and is indifferent to its message. So, how are we doing? Have we ever been too silent, too weak, too uninformed, too docile? Do we stand up to what the culture is proclaiming or do we capitulate to its temptations? Have we ever gone so far as to deny Christ before others? Let us continue to pray that God's grace will sustain us, and that we will give better witness to the truth of the Gospel and salvation to a world in need of hearing it.

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Monday, June 26, 2017  
(Lec. 371)

- 1) Genesis 12: 1-9
- 2) Matthew 7:1-5

Gospel related: CCC 678

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

**FOCUS:** Jesus teaches us to refrain from judging others and focus on removing that which blinds us to our own faults.

The story of Abram, eventually called Abraham, is a story of great faith and trust in God. He abandons his home and all he knows to travel to a distant land and start life over, just because God directed him. Abram answers God's call to move away from what is familiar and comfortable to venture into unknown territory. This must have been frightening and difficult. Thus begins the story that will unfold this week in our readings of a man who repeatedly believes in God's goodness and righteousness, and trusts in the blessings God promises to him.

In the Gospel reading today, Jesus asks us to have the same kind of faith and trust in God that Abraham had. His direct and abrupt words remind us that it is God who judges, not us. His words challenge us to not only refrain from judging others, but to take a good hard look at ourselves to see how we need to change. This is not an easy thing to do. It is easier to point out the faults of others than to admit our own.

But Jesus wants us to abandon the comfortable place we are in – that of looking for the faults of others and passing judgement on them – and move to a place where we can have mercy and offer forgiveness to others because we know our own faults. In moving as Jesus directs us, we will see more clearly the blessings God provides.

Saint Augustine offers this advice: "Try to acquire the virtues you believe lacking in your brothers. Then, you will no longer see their defects, for you will no longer have them yourself."

May God help us respond sincerely to Jesus' words, and let's try to live in such a way that we bring God's mercy, love and forgiveness to others and help bring healing to our world.

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Tuesday, June 27, 2017

(Lec. 372)

- 1) Genesis 13:2, 5-18
- 2) Matthew 7:6, 12-14

TUESDAY OF  
12<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria,  
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 1036, 1696, 1789, 1970, 2609, 2821 CSDC 20

**FOCUS:** Entering through the narrow gate requires us to take up our cross each day and follow Jesus.

How many times have we heard the phrase “life is not fair” as a response to one of the many problems we encounter in day-to-day living? It is rarely a helpful response. It falls into the category of other unhelpful replies, such as “tough break,” which don’t help us cope with our problems.

Jesus didn’t offer these types of glib sayings. Instead, he empathized with people. He invited them to bring their heavy burdens and find rest in him. He offered compassion and mercy to the broken-hearted, as he did in John’s Gospel when he comforted Martha and Mary upon the death of their brother, Lazarus (11). So the question arises: how would we like to be treated and how should we treat others?

The story of Abram, who eventually was known as Abraham, our father in faith, offers us a model. It is a simple story of the beginnings of God’s relationship with his chosen people, the Israelites. Today’s passage finds Abram following God’s call to migrate to the land of Canaan along with his nephew, Lot. Both Abram and Lot had all kinds of possessions, including many animals. Abram knew that there was not enough land to support all of their animals, so in his wisdom, he generously offered Lot his choice of lands to possess. Lot could take possession of Canaan or choose a new location. The wise Uncle Abram treated Lot the way he himself would have wanted to be treated – with dignity and compassion. Because of Abram’s respectful and unselfish approach to Lot, they were able to live in harmony and peace.

Similarly, in today’s Gospel Jesus teaches all those who aspire to live as one of his disciples that they must love their neighbor as themselves. Jesus then goes on to further challenge those who aspire to live as one of his disciples with the metaphor of the narrow gate and the constricted road.

Now what does this mean for us? It means that being a disciple can be difficult and challenging. It means that we must take up our cross each day and follow Jesus. It means we must treat everyone the way we would want to be treated. “Everyone” includes even those we don’t understand or may not approve of. It means trying to put ourselves in the place of the “least of these.”

Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel echo the message of today’s psalmist: *He who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.* Let’s consider today how to seek the narrow gate that leads us to life – life in the presence of the Lord.

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Wednesday, June 28, 2017  
(Lec. 373)

- 1) Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18
- 2) Matthew 7:15-20

WEDNESDAY OF  
12<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Irenaeus,  
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 2005, 2285

FOCUS: Let us always strive to bear good fruit for God.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that it is by their good fruits that we will know true prophets. Who are these true prophets today and what are their good fruits? True prophets are those people who, by their authentic witness and wisdom, inspire us to grow closer to God and strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ.

True prophets inspire us to want a closer relationship with God. Their joyful commitment to prayer prompts us to make time with God a priority in our lives. Their love of Scripture encourages us to learn more about the teachings of Jesus. Their lives of service inspire us to live with love, forgiveness and mercy. Their attitudes of humility and gratitude help us to see and appreciate the countless blessings that God provides. Their commitment to speak out and to work for justice challenges us to consider the needs of the poor and left-behind of our world.

The fruits of those people who live prophetic lives are the effect their words and deeds have on those they inspire. People who call others to grow in their love for God and each other are the true prophets in our world today.

An illustration of this comes from the life of Saint Irenaeus. At the end of the first century, the Church was wracked with many controversies and false teachings which confused many believers. One of these heresies was called Gnosticism, the belief that a secret "knowledge" was given by Jesus to just a few disciples. Irenaeus challenged the tenants of this heresy, and the conclusions that one came to if one believed in them, with the authentic teaching of the Apostles and the text of Scripture. In doing so, he developed a system of theology that refuted the heresy and has stood the test of time.

We may not have the opportunity to challenge the false prophets in the same way Saint Irenaeus did. But by our baptism, we are all called to give prophetic witness to the love of God and Jesus Christ. Let others who hear our words be inspired to grow closer to God. May our acts of forgiveness and mercy help others understand God's great love for them. May our humble and grateful appreciation of God's blessings in our lives encourage others to become aware of God's countless blessings in their own lives. May the actions we take to promote justice in our world cause others to join in defending the poor and forgotten. In these ways, we will be known as prophets who bear good fruit.

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Thursday, June 29, 2017  
(Lec. 591)

- 1) Acts 12:1-11
- 2) 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18
- 3) Matthew 16:13-19

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

**SAINTS PETER  
AND PAUL, APOSTLES  
- SOLEMNITY**

**FOCUS:** Believing in God means giving up our assumptions about him and expecting greater things than we can imagine.

The exchange between Jesus and Saint Peter reported in today's Gospel account is significant. Peter was a Jew, and the Jews believed that their Messiah would come to them in great power and glory while vanquishing their enemies. Jesus was about to reveal to Peter and the Apostles that he was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die in degradation and rejection. How, then, could Peter possibly believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah? This was the challenge he faced. He would have to deal with his assumptions.

This raises questions about our own assumptions with regard to God. Do we have specific expectations of what God should do? Some people refuse to believe in God because he didn't make the world the way they would have made it. How can God allow evil to exist? Why did God do this and why did God do that? Many people do not believe in God because he doesn't act according to their assumptions.

When it comes to assumptions, perhaps we should take a long look at the way we treat other people. How do we relate to them if they do not behave according to our expectations? Do we assume they think the way we think? Do we make improper or inaccurate assumptions about what is going on inside them? Do they feel the way we feel? If not, do we reject them?

Peter had his doubts and his difficulties, and even abandoned Jesus during his passion and death. But Jesus knew what was in his heart.

The same can be said of Saint Paul. Eventually, he cast aside all his own assumptions about Jesus and became the Apostle to the Gentiles. Tradition tells us that he and Peter both suffered martyrdom in Rome and became founders of the Church, which was built on the solid rock of their faith.

Let's make an effort to set aside our own assumptions about God and follow him where he leads us, even when the path he chooses for us is not what we are expecting or hoping for.

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Friday, June 30, 2017  
(Lec. 375)

- 1) Genesis 17:1, 9-10, 15-22
- 2) Matthew 8:1-4

FRIDAY OF  
12<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.

The First Martyrs of the Holy Roman Church)

Gospel related: CCC 448, 586, 1386

FOCUS: God will never break his covenant with his people.

It is wonderful today to have the opportunity to speak about God's covenant with Abram in our reading from the Book of Genesis. It identifies God's relationship with his people, and the response called for from them. This covenant speaks of trust in God, especially when things seem impossible. One of the beautiful aspects of this covenant is that it will never be broken by God, even when his people forget or reject him. We, too, are participants in this covenant between God and humans, made so many centuries ago.

As participants in this covenant with God, we have a responsibility to be faithful. To Abraham, God required a physical, symbolic mark as evidence of this shared covenant. What is interesting, and often overlooked, is the fact that the actual covenant was made with Abram *before* this requirement of circumcision was established. Knowing this helps us to see that the Gentiles, those who were not Jewish and of whom circumcision would not have normally been required, can also be admitted to the covenant.

Clearly, Abraham is the father of all nations. Through him all nations will gather and a worldwide blessing will be given. This promise becomes an important element later on, as the Apostles who followed Jesus came to understand that *all* those desiring are to be admitted to fellowship with Christ.

It is important to differentiate between a contract and a covenant as described in Genesis. In a contract, we sign an agreement with someone for an exchange. If the contract is broken by one of the parties, it is no longer in effect. But with a covenant, such as God's covenant with Abraham, if one of the parties walks away from it, it does not terminate.

The fact is, God has never, nor will ever, walk away from his covenant with us, although many times throughout history humans have walked away and rejected it. But even when we do, God remains faithful to the covenant. Let's work to keep this covenant in our own lives by being faithful and obedient to Jesus' teachings.

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