

MAY

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Monday, May 1, 2017
(Lec. 273)

- 1) Acts 6:8-15
- 2) John 6:22-29

Or for Memorial (Lec. 559)

- 1) Genesis 1:26—2:3
or Colossians 3:14-15, 17, 23-24
- 2) Matthew 13:54-58*

Gospel related: CCC 495, 500 698, 728, 1296, 1338, 2835 CSDC 259

MONDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Joseph
the Worker)

FOCUS: Faith isn't always easy, but if we follow our calling with passion and courage, the reward will be great.

In the first reading from Acts, we are drawn into the life of Saint Stephen, a deacon in the first century who became the first martyr of the Church. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, he is preaching and teaching the Gospel, and *working great wonders and signs among the people*. He is opposed by those who accuse him of being an enemy of the Law of Moses, and is brought before the Sanhedrin. Saint Stephen ends up paying the ultimate price for his unwavering faith in Jesus.

Stephen faced his trial and martyrdom without fear. He was called to witness to Jesus, and he did so with strength and grace, aided by the Holy Spirit. Today the Church celebrates another person of great faith: Saint Joseph. In celebrating Saint Joseph the Worker today, we recognize Joseph's responsiveness to God's messages and his life of diligent labor. Both men accepted their challenges with faith and courage.

In 1955, Pope Pius XII established the Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker to be celebrated on May 1, which is International Workers' Day in Communist countries. One of the main tenets of Communism is that work is for the state and belongs to the state. The Church believes otherwise. The Church sees work as giving dignity to the worker in fulfilling the commandment God gave to Adam and Eve as they were expelled from the Garden of Eden following their fall. God commanded them to till the earth and care for the wild beasts and animals.

Pope Pius XII was making the point that work is from God and is for God, a point that Saint John Paul II so forcefully made during his pontificate. His close affiliation with the Polish workers in the Solidarity movement led to the downfall of Communism not only in Poland, but in other Eastern European countries as well. Workers and their work belong to their God-given dignity, not to the government.

The Church regards Saint Joseph as the patron of the Universal Church, who watches over the Church as carefully as he watched over Jesus, to protect her and guide her as well. We know that Joseph responded to God's promptings and took Mary and Jesus into Egypt in order to protect them from the wrath of Herod.

One thing we should keep in mind is how sensitive Joseph was to God's messages that came to him – both in angels and in his dreams – and how responsive he was. Similarly, Saint Stephen responded to the promptings of the Spirit, and he became *filled with grace and power* to preach and teach the Gospel. Let's try to be more attentive to those whisperings and messages of God that are within us, too, throughout the course of our busy days.

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Tuesday, May 2, 2017
(Lec. 274)

- 1) Acts 7:51–8:1a
- 2) John 6:30-35

TUESDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER
(OBL MEM
Saint Athanasius,
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 423, 1094

FOCUS: Sometimes the truth is right in front of us, but we don't recognize it.

It is probably safe to say that we have all had an experience like this: we walk into a bookstore, make our way to the right section of the store, and fail to find the book we are looking for. And then a bookseller comes along to help, and pulls the book off the shelf for us: *it was right in front of us the whole time.*

Bookstores were not around in Jesus' time, obviously, and the message found in Scripture today is not to be taken as lightly as when we might experience the situation just mentioned. But the essence of the message is the same: signs of God's presence and interaction in our lives are right there in front of us – if only we pay attention.

Saint Stephen tried to tell the people this truth, but they were infuriated at the idea that they might not be seeing things correctly, or might not be open to the truth. This same reality is evident in today's Gospel as well.

The crowd surrounding Jesus asked for a sign, completely oblivious to the fact that he himself was *the* sign of the life-giving presence and sustenance of God. And when he tried to explain that the Bread of Life was not the manna they sought but the belief in him and his power to redeem the world, the crowd failed to understand.

We, today, have much in common with the people represented in these passages. Like the crowd that Stephen addressed, we are sometimes *stiff necked* and in opposition to the Spirit, because – quite honestly – it can be difficult to separate the life-giving news from that which leads us away from God.

And, like the crowd that surrounded Jesus, we will be pointed to, and offered the opportunity to partake of, the Bread of Life – and we may not always fully comprehend what that means for our day-to-day life.

The point is this: God's presence and interaction in our lives is unceasing, and unending. Our imperfect humanity means that sometimes we don't see that truth, even though it is right in front of us. This is where a gentle nudge – either through God's handiwork, the work of the Spirit, a good friend or sacramental grace – can serve as our metaphorical bookseller who finds that book on the shelf that has been right before our eyes the whole time. And then the gift of the way, the truth and the life become more readily apparent to us once again.

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Wednesday, May 3, 2017
(Lec. 561)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 15:1-8
- 2) John 14:6-14

Gospel related: CCC 74, 459, 470, 516, 1698, 2466, 2614, 2633, 2815 CSDC 1, 28, 555

**SAINTS PHILIP AND JAMES,
APOSTLES
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Hold fast to the word you have received.

In the first Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, Paul reminds his listeners of the Gospel he preached to them. It is good for all of us to hear this summary of the Good News, and reflect on our own belief in all that Jesus did for us. It is important to note that Paul tells his listeners they are saved if they hold fast to the word. He finishes this sentence with the phrase, *unless you believed in vain*. I wonder if any of us, at times, might be guilty of believing in vain and not holding fast to the word preached to us.

What does it mean to us to believe that Christ died for our sins? What does it mean to us that he was buried and was *raised on the third day*? That he appeared to Peter and others? If we truly believe what we have been told – what we have heard proclaimed – our lives will be profoundly impacted. We will see people and the world around us differently. Our hearts, open to the word, will respond in new and varied ways. As our eyes are opened to the truth, we will burst forth with desire to share the Gospel with others.

We cannot stop at the death of Jesus. We must move into the tomb and come forth believing in the Resurrection. If there was no Resurrection, we could not celebrate the good news of salvation that we share as baptized Christians. To believe and hold fast to what has been preached to us reshapes our lives. We love more. We forgive more. We trust God with our lives. Our belief in the paschal mystery changes everything.

Of course, there is much to be done right here, right now, where we stand. If you are wondering what you are called to do, it might be helpful to reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. I would encourage you to look them up and respond in some way to these merciful acts of love that we are each called to frame our life around. Maybe you are called to feed the hungry, or counsel the doubtful or comfort the afflicted. The important thing is that we ask God to guide us. In his Letter to the Corinthians, Paul acknowledged that he is who he is because of the grace of God. That is true for us today as well.

In what way is your belief in the good news of salvation guiding you today?

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Thursday, May 4, 2017
(Lec. 276)

- 1) Acts 8:26-40
- 2) John 6:44-51

Gospel related: CCC 151, 259, 591, 728, 1001, 1355, 1406, 1428, 2837

THURSDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: God wants to nourish us with his word, if only we'll listen and respond.

Jesus, the living bread from heaven and the eternal word of God, nourishes us with the Eucharist and works to draw us closer to himself by speaking directly to us in and through sacred Scripture.

We see an example of this in today's reading from Acts. Philip was instructed by an angel, a messenger from God, to head down a certain road. There's no indication the angel told Philip why. When Philip obeyed, he received further instructions. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Philip approached a certain chariot, where an Ethiopian court official was reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Their encounter gave Philip the opportunity to share the Good News with someone hungering to know the truth that brings salvation. Because Philip responded to the Spirit's promptings, the official placed his faith in Jesus and was baptized, so that he might receive the gift of salvation. No doubt Philip felt enriched, too. There's peace and joy in being God's instrument to others.

In today's Gospel, Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah, saying that God's children will *all be taught by God* (Is 54:13). That doesn't mean we don't need instruction or help on our spiritual journeys. We all have a direct connection to God through prayer and through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. What does it mean to be taught by God? Although God often speaks to us through other people or something we read, he also speaks through that still, small voice within us. Philip heard the angel's instructions because he was listening.

Jesus said that we'd all be taught by God. He didn't say we'd all listen. When our lives are jam-packed with tight schedules or too many distractions, we may not hear what God is trying to teach us. If we're too set on our own agendas, we may not be open enough to respond to those holy nudges. We may think we have more important things to do than follow what the Creator of the Universe has in mind for us.

We need to take time to be still so we can hear and be attuned to God, who speaks to us in the silence of our hearts. It's okay to start small. Just five or ten minutes a day – we can even set a timer if we have to. If we get quiet enough, who knows what we'll hear in the silence? Maybe we'll hear how much God loves us. Maybe we'll hear him prompting us to offer some loving gesture to someone else. It's certainly worth a try, because we sure won't hear anything if we don't at least make an effort.

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Friday, May 5, 2017
(Lec. 277)

- 1) Acts 9:1-20
- 2) John 6:52-59

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

FRIDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: God has a plan and purpose for each of our lives.

God's choice in leaders, prophets and kings has always been mysterious. Moses had a speech impediment, but was called to negotiate with Pharaoh to free the Israelites. David was the baby of his family, but was chosen to be a war hero and king. Jeremiah believed he was too young to be a prophet. Peter was impulsive, Thomas doubted, and today, we meet Saul, who was in the business of killing Christians. As the proverb says, "God writes straight with crooked lines."

When Jesus appears to Saul, he does not ask "Why are you persecuting Christians?" Instead, Jesus unites himself to the suffering of his people and asks, *Why are you persecuting me?* This first encounter with Jesus lays out Saint Paul's understanding of Christ's relationship to his Church. We are the body of Christ. Later, Saint Paul will teach eloquently about what it means for us to be members of Christ's body. But in this first encounter, he learns that to persecute Christians is to persecute Jesus himself.

In John's Gospel, we hear the end of a complex teaching called the bread of life discourse. Earlier in this chapter, the people experience the miracle of the multiplication of loaves where five thousand were fed. They don't understand that Jesus comes to offer something more than brief physical nourishment – that he comes to offer eternal life.

Jesus explains that he is the bread that has come down from heaven, and that in him, they will find eternal life. His flesh and his blood will be sacrificed for the redemption of the world. Jesus uses such graphic words, as he often did throughout his life and ministry, to emphasize the importance of something. Here, Jesus is not only teaching about the great price he would pay to win salvation, but also the importance of what happens at each and every Mass during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Jesus is explaining that through the words spoken by the priest, the prayers of the people and the power of the Holy Spirit, the humble gifts of bread and wine placed upon the altar are truly and really changed into the body and blood of Christ. Therefore, every time we come forward to receive holy Communion, we are nourished and strengthened by Jesus himself so that he may draw us more closely to himself, and so we may have the grace and strength to go, live, be and share what we have received.

Aware of our personal sinfulness and sense of awe at the mysteries of our faith, we may not feel worthy to be God's chosen instruments. Yet like Saint Paul, we are given the gift of guidance from more mature Christians and the Holy Spirit so we may continue to grow in faith and holiness of life. We are also given the graces of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, so we can be strengthened to live in a more Christ-like way – being his instruments of love and service to others.

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Saturday, May 6, 2017
(Lec. 278)

- 1) Acts 9:31-42
- 2) John 6:60-69

Gospel related: CCC 438, 440, 473, 728, 1336, 2766

SATURDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus speaks the words of eternal life.

Do you also want to leave? Jesus posed this question to his disciples in today's Gospel. We, too, must answer it as followers of Christ today.

Our Gospel follows the bread of life discourse in John's Gospel in which Jesus tells his followers that he is the *true bread from heaven* (6:32), and that *whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life* (6:54). It is no wonder that his disciples had a hard time accepting this teaching. Following it would have made them unclean, since it went against the laws of Moses that the Jewish people obeyed their entire lives. Indeed, it sounds like cannibalism!

Jesus knows the human heart. He knew these teachings were difficult, and that some disciples would abandon him. He also knew that there would be greater mysteries to accept later. If his disciples didn't believe he was from God, or what he was saying about the body and blood of Christ, how would they believe in the mysteries of the resurrection and ascension?

The disciples who profess that Jesus is the *Holy One of God*, and recognize that he speaks the words of eternal life, are the loyal followers who decide to stay. Even though his teachings are difficult to accept, they remain with him because they can't fathom any other alternative. These are the words of God!

While it's tempting to focus on those who chose to stay, we should also consider why some disciples decided to leave. It gives us insight into why some people struggle with their faith today. Maybe these disciples didn't recognize Jesus' true identity as the Messiah. They followed him because they thought he was a good teacher, but decided to turn away when he became too radical for them. Or perhaps they accepted his identity, but didn't want to change their lives in the ways his teachings demanded.

In our first reading, we catch a glimpse of what is possible when we follow Christ's teachings. The Church is at peace, and Peter performs miracles (the healing of Aeneas and restoring Tabitha back to life) in Jesus' name. This is a vision for Christianity.

Through holy Communion, we remain in Jesus and he remains in us (6:56). Let the Eucharist strengthen our faith in his word and our will to follow his teachings. Through prayer, we, like Peter, open ourselves to the changes Jesus seeks in our lives. Prayer won't alter God's plan, but it will open us to his transforming grace. When we are open to God's saving grace, we are changed little by little to give a more faithful witness to the Gospel each day in a world that often feels hostile to our faith and values.

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SUNDAY, MAY 7, 2017

(Lec. 49)

1) Acts 2:14a, 36-41

2) 1 Peter 2:20b-25

3) John 10:1-10

Gospel related: CCC 754, 764, 2158 CSDC 1

**FOURTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

FOCUS: In a world of competing voices, listening to Christ takes prayerful effort, patient endurance and courageous discipleship.

John's Gospel has very few parables when compared to the others. But what it does have is a series of I AM statements by Jesus that function almost in the same manner. Where a parable uses an image, like the mustard seed, to teach about the kingdom of God, these I AM statements reveal to us Jesus' truest identity by echoing back to the time when God first revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush as a relational God.

Here we have one of those I AM statements: *I am the gate*. Having restored the blind man to full spiritual and physical health in the previous chapter, Jesus teaches the crowd, including the Pharisees, about the true meaning of faith, and compares the true shepherd with the false one. Unlike the true shepherd whose voice the sheep recognize and follow, the false shepherd, no better than a thief, remains a stranger to them for he lacks any real concern for their well-being.

These are bold words, as Jesus admonishes the Pharisees for their lack of faith. They have become like thieves – misrepresenting the truth of faith and misleading the Lord's flock. Later, Jesus will describe himself as the Good Shepherd, but for now he is content to describe himself as the gate or entry into the sheepfold. As the only gate, Jesus is proclaiming himself as the only means of salvation for the world: *Whoever enters through me will be saved*. Unlike the false shepherd who brings destruction and death, Jesus promises abundant life.

It is this abundant life in Christ which we hear about in the other readings. But let us remember that life here is not merely earthly existence, but life in its fullest meaning: human, emotional, relational and spiritual. Peter after Pentecost is full of the Spirit, and proclaims Christ as the source of this life before a crowd containing many people who only a short time before had called for Jesus' death.

Cut to the heart, they respond not with excuses but genuine remorse and repentance. *What are we to do?*, they ask. This is a good question for us this Easter season: what must our response be to Christ's resurrection: apathy and indifference, or repentance and renewal? Clearly, we are called to ongoing repentance and renewal. Even we who have been baptized and are seasoned Christians share this call. In the ups and downs of life, we are tested in endurance and faith, and yet it is only to the faithful follower that the gift of eternal life is granted.

In our contemporary society, the call of Christ can easily be crowded out by many other voices. How easily we can be enticed away by the must-have shouts of the world, the constant ring of cell phones, or the many inner voices that call us to various addictions and self-serving life decisions. This Easter, let us re-commit ourselves to listen more closely to Christ, and to see in him the one and only gate to an abundant life.

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Monday, May 8, 2017
(Lec. 279)

1) Acts 11:1-18

2) John 10:11-18 (second option)

Gospel related: CCC 60, 553, 606, 609, 614, 649, 754

MONDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: We, too, are called to be good shepherds.

The imagery of the good shepherd that Jesus uses in today's Gospel account is vivid. You see, at the time of Jesus, shepherds built circular stones and herded their sheep into them for the night. These pens were necessary to protect the sheep from the wolves that wanted to devour them.

There was a small portal which the shepherd used to bring the sheep in and out of the pen. At night, the shepherd would sleep at the portal's entrance – his body stretched across the opening. If a wolf tried to enter the sheep pen, it would be over the shepherd's body.

When Jesus identified himself as the shepherd of our souls, he was no doubt thinking of what it means to be a good shepherd, and what would happen to his own body which he would give up for the sake of the souls his Father in heaven put under his protection.

Being a good shepherd was not an image Jesus applied only to himself. Later in John's Gospel, Jesus lays it as a charge on Peter, when he says:

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He then said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." [Jesus] said to him, "Feed my sheep" (21:15-17).

We are connected to Peter through the Church, and share in his ministry and in the ministry of the Apostles. Throughout the centuries this ministry reaches us through the bishop of Rome, the successor of Peter, and through the bishops who are the successors of the Apostles. We, too, are called to be good shepherds, caring for those around us with the love of Christ.

As you go through your day today, give some thought to who cares for your soul. Who in your life wants to care for and protect your soul? Priests and religious aren't the only ones. Members of your parish staff are working for the care and feeding of your soul as well. Pray for those who love and care for you. They, too, are good shepherds for you.

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Tuesday, May 9, 2017

(Lec. 280)

1) Acts 11:19-26

2) John 10:22-30

Gospel related: CCC 548, 582, 583, 590

TUESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: As Christians, we must not be afraid to proclaim the Gospel courageously.

Today's Gospel tells of our Lord being present in Jerusalem when the feast of the Dedication was taking place. While Jesus was walking about in the Temple area near the Portico of Solomon, a crowd gathered around to question him.

The crowd said, *If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.* Our Lord then responded to the crowd's questions by stating: *The works I do in my Father's name testify to me. But you do not believe, because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish ... My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one.*

This wasn't the answer the crowd was looking for. For in and through these words, Jesus clearly proclaimed himself to not only be the promised Messiah, but also to be the Son of God. This identifying himself as the Son of God only served to antagonize the crowd, who sought to stone him to death for blasphemy; they rejected him and ran him out of Jerusalem.

Like Jesus, our proclamation of the Gospel is frequently met with hostility. For many in the world are comfortable if we proclaim Jesus to be a kind man or an excellent leader. But, like the crowd, many become uncomfortable when Christ is proclaimed to be God. Out of fear of persecution or rejection, we may stay silent regarding Christ. However, this hostility to the Gospel is not a new thing, and our first reading today reminds us of the fruit of proclaiming Christ's word despite persecution.

The reading from the Acts of the Apostles takes place shortly after the stoning of Saint Stephen – the first martyr. Christians fled following the stoning, but did not cease to proclaim the Good News. They dispersed throughout Asia Minor, proclaiming the Gospel to the Jews and Gentiles alike. The author of the sacred text indicates that their preaching did not fall upon deaf ears; many thousands of souls came to baptism because of their fearless preaching.

What would have happened if the Christians stayed silent after Stephen's martyrdom? What if they kept silent out of fear of reprisal? Perhaps the Gospel would never have reached our ears today. Who may not hear the Gospel if we stay silent this day? Let us pray for the courage to resist fear that we might boldly proclaim the Good News.

Wednesday, May 10, 2017
(Lec. 281)

- 1) Acts 12:24–13:5a
- 2) John 12:44-50

WEDNESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Damien de Veuster,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 679, 1039, 2466

FOCUS: Accepting the word of God, we accept its messenger, Jesus, and our Father who sends his word.

There is a bond that exists between a messenger and the one who sends the message. This bond is extended to the one who receives the message and then becomes its messenger to others. They are all united in a common goal: to bring the message to fulfillment.

God sent messengers into the world when he sent the prophets. But in the fullness of time God sent us his son, Jesus, who is the word made flesh. Jesus brought us the good news of salvation. He not only proclaimed the Good News but through his life, death and Resurrection brought it to fulfillment. Fulfilling the promises of God to bring salvation, Jesus is the message of Good News that goes out to the world.

There is a unity between the Father who sends the message, Jesus the messenger and the message that cannot be separated or broken. Jesus proclaims this intimate bond in our Gospel reading today. Accepting Jesus and his message is accepting the one who sends them – the Father. Rejecting Jesus and his message is rejecting the one who sends them – the Father. It is not possible to accept or reject one without the other. Total acceptance leads to salvation. Rejection leads to condemnation.

To accept the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ imposes a mission upon its recipient. Embracing the message makes one its messenger. We see this in the lives of the Apostles in our first reading. We hear about the preachers and teachers of the early Church. We hear how Barnabas and Saul were sent as messengers to proclaim the word of God. People accepted their message and then became messengers themselves of the Good News. Thus, through the Holy Spirit, the message of salvation through Jesus extends throughout the world.

It is important to recognize our place in this mission of the Church. We are recipients of the message of God which comes through Jesus. Our acceptance of this message gives us our mission to be messengers of the Gospel. We can speak and live with confidence knowing that we are not alone, for when we are united with the Gospel message we are united with Jesus and the Father. We don't have to worry whether our message is accepted or rejected. We just have to be responsible messengers who fulfill our mission to proclaim the Good News.

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Thursday, May 11, 2017
(Lec. 282)

- 1) Acts 13:13-25
- 2) John 13:16-20

Gospel related: CCC 858, 1337

THURSDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Go out to all the world and spread the Good News of Jesus, risen from the dead.

Everyone welcomes good news. Be it the birth of a healthy baby, a child's first Communion, an anniversary or a team win. Good news nurtures our spirit. It lifts our hearts and gives us hope. It can even pull us out of the doldrums. On the other hand, we tend to shy away from bad news when we can. But most of the time, that isn't possible. So who do we turn to for strength to carry on, and for hope in the midst of trying times? As Christians, we turn to Jesus who walks with us always, who offers us healing and salvation, helps us shoulder our burdens, and gives us the strength and guidance we need to overcome life's trials and tribulations.

Today's reading from the Gospel of John draws us into a deeper understanding of who Jesus is. Having just washed the feet of his disciples, Jesus speaks to them about himself. In giving insight into who he is, he compares the slave to the master, and the messenger to the sender. Jesus reveals himself as the humble servant who came not to be served, but to serve. Did the disciples understand what Jesus was saying? Do we understand? Jesus said, *If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it.* In other words, he is saying that if they understand what he is doing, they are to go and do the same.

This is what Jesus asked of those disciples who first followed him, and he asks this of us as well. During these Easter days, we share in the joy of Easter by seeking to open ourselves more fully to the risen Lord so he can continue to raise us up to a newer and fuller life in him. But we cannot stop there. Jesus asks us to love not only in words, but in deeds.

We are empowered each time we receive the Eucharist to go forth and share the Good News that Jesus is our Savior, the one sent by the Father who has claimed us as his own. We are filled with hope and grace, and the sure knowledge that Christ redeemed us and won for us the gift of eternal life. Let's go forth, as Saint Paul does in today's reading, and spread this Good News with others.

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Friday, May 12, 2017
(Lec. 283)

- 1) Acts 13:26-33
- 2) John 14:1-6

FRIDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.)

Saints Nereus and Achilleus, Martyrs;
Saint Pancras, Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 74, 151, 459, 661, 1025, 1698, 2466, 2614, 2795 CSDC 1, 555

FOCUS: We can trust in Jesus to show us the way.

Travelers today have so many options for finding their way during a trip – from old-fashioned compasses and maps to GPS systems. But for those of us who are traveling the pathway of life to our final destination in heaven, we can rely on only one person to show us the way: Jesus. Jesus assures his disciples, and us, that we can place our full confidence in him as the way, the truth and the life.

Saint Paul, in his preaching in the first reading, reminds us of why we can put our trust in Jesus: Jesus is the Son of God, cruelly and unjustly put to death by jealous religious leaders – but raised from the dead by God the Father. As we are also reminded, Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises from ancient times – he is the Messiah. All of this is strong confirmation that Jesus has absolute authority and can be trusted to show us the way – in fact, to be the way that leads to life.

But in this busy world of ours, where we are bombarded with so many messages each day, how do we know we are following the true message of Jesus in our daily lives? After all, the earliest disciples were confused at times, and they heard Jesus' words with their own ears. While we don't have that advantage, we can stay close to Jesus by attending Mass regularly, being nourished and strengthened by the graces of the sacraments, and by reading and reflecting upon sacred Scripture. It is also important to listen to the voice of Jesus who speaks in the silence of our hearts by praying daily.

If we do these basic things, we not only stay close to Jesus, but continue to grow in our faith and love for him and keep our feet firmly planted on the path of salvation.

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Saturday, May 13, 2017
(Lec. 284)

- 1) Acts 13:44-52
- 2) John 14:7-14

SATURDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Our Lady of Fatima)

Gospel related: CCC 470, 516, 2614, 2633, 2815 CSDC 28

FOCUS: Jesus reveals the depths of God's love for us.

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. These are words we hear from Jesus in today's Gospel. They are words that summarize much of the mission of Jesus. He came to save us, but he also came to reveal to us the Father's love and plan of salvation. Jesus did this first and foremost by humble obedience to the will of his Father, and out of love for us by emptying himself and becoming one of us. Jesus did this by being born not in some grand palace, but in a manger in Bethlehem. Jesus did this by leading his life in perfect obedience to his Father's will – by preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God, by working miracles that showed forth God's love and care for us, and by offering his life on the cross to win our salvation.

Now to gain deeper insight into how Jesus revealed the Father's love for us, let us turn to today's Gospel, which is set in the midst of the Last Supper. Jesus would not be with his disciples much longer. It makes sense that he would want to leave them with some fundamental teachings which they could look back on after his death, Resurrection and Ascension, and begin to understand in a new light, at a deeper level.

So, the lesson continued. Jesus did his best to help the disciples understand the intimate relationship between him and his Father. That he was in the Father and that the Father was in him. And that whatever his disciples asked in his name would be granted by the Father.

What does this mean for us? Does this mean that every prayer is answered exactly how we think it should be answered? Most likely not. Many things are asked for with varying results. Sickness is not always cured, lottery tickets are not won, jobs are not saved, and so on. Because we trust in Jesus, though, we believe that our prayers are answered in spite of what we see, in ways we may not understand, for our greatest good.

For Jesus, who revealed to us the love of the Father, now sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven, continually interceding on our behalf so that what we most truly need will be provided for, and so we may continue to grow in holiness. When we pray in Jesus' name for the grace and strength to share the Gospel with others and help build up the kingdom of God, we are doing what he asked of us. As Jesus says at the end of this Gospel passage: *If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it.*

* * *

SUNDAY, MAY 14, 2017

(Lec. 52)

- 1) Acts 6:1-7
- 2) 1 Peter 2:4-9
- 3) John 14:1-12

Gospel related: CCC 74, 151, 459, 470, 516, 661, 1025, 1698, 2466, 2614, 2795 CSDC 1, 28, 555

**FIFTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

FOCUS: God comes to us through his son, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Is religion all about how we get to God or all about how God comes to us? Catholics believe God reaches us through Jesus Christ who gives us the way to God, the truth that comes from God, and life with God.

Christ, then, is the key. He is not just another religious figure in human history. He is central in answering the question "How do we get to God?" But he is central in a way we do not often recognize.

Today's Gospel account puts us in the proper setting. In it, we find Jesus at the Last Supper giving final thoughts to his Apostles just before he is about to suffer and die. He is saying goodbye to them and they are confused and upset. In the passage just before today's Gospel, Peter asks, *Master, where are you going?* (13:36) and Jesus replies, *Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places ... I am going to prepare a place for you.*

Thomas pipes up with, *How can we know the way?* Jesus' reply is, *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him.*

That's the big clue, and it tells us that we're asking the wrong question when we ask, "How do we get to God? How do we find God?" The truth is that *God finds us!* In Christ, he is among us, searching for us, calling us to himself.

God has come looking for us in his son, Jesus Christ. It's not we who figure out how to get to God. God is already here.

Back in the Book of Genesis, in the eleventh chapter, we learn of the tower of Babel. Do you remember the story? It was all about a tower we humans tried to build in order to reach heaven. God knocked it down. He knocked it down because it was of our making, fitting our specifications. It was built on human arrogance, and that is exactly the reverse of reality. The reality is that God comes to us, we do not get to God. We do not pridefully achieve heaven; all we can do is humbly receive it.

To receive Christ is to receive the Father. To receive Christ one must be moved by his Spirit. But do we know exactly who has received him or precisely how they have received him? Jesus says, *In my Father's house there are many dwelling places*, which means there's room for anyone. God decides who abides there; we don't.

So it's not a question of how we get to heaven. It's a question, rather, of how we receive and accept God's presence in us.

Now let us go to him in his sacraments. Where he now lives, there are many dwelling places, plenty of room for us all, in all of our diversities. The question, "How do we get to God?" has been answered. The only unanswered question is, "Will we accept him and then share his love with others?"

* * *

Monday, May 15, 2017
(Lec. 285)

- 1) Acts 14:5-18
- 2) John 14:21-26

MONDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Isidore)

Gospel related: CCC 243, 244, 260, 263, 647, 692, 729, 1099, 2466, 2615, 2623 CSDC 70, 104

FOCUS: The Holy Spirit is sent to teach us and remind us of all that Jesus said and did.

As most of you know, the Easter season is a fifty-day period which ends with Pentecost, when Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to the Church. Our Lord refers to the Holy Spirit in our Gospel today when he calls him *the Advocate* who will teach and remind us of everything that he taught.

The Greek word used here is *parakletos*, which means “advocate” or “counselor.” This word is used five times in John’s writings, and in common language, is used as a legal term for an attorney who defends the cause of the accused in the courtroom. In Jesus’ usage, we should understand the Holy Spirit to be the person called to our side, to offer strength and support. Since we are all in need of heavenly assistance, the Holy Spirit truly is a *paraclete*, who stands by our side in Jesus’ absence.

But the Holy Spirit acts as much more than a defense lawyer. As Jesus says in today’s Gospel, the Holy Spirit *will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you*. Everything that Jesus revealed is contained in what theologians call the deposit of faith. If Jesus saw fit to offer the message of salvation to the Apostles, he would also see fit to guarantee that this message would be preserved and protected throughout history. Jesus accomplishes this by sending the Holy Spirit to protect that deposit of faith as it has been handed down by the Apostles. This is our guarantee that the faith which the Church professes in 2017 is the same faith first taught by the Apostles.

Let us give thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit today, who ensures that the sacred deposit of faith — the truths of salvation — are preserved and protected. This same Holy Spirit, who represents the continued presence of Jesus on earth today, guides us in the way of all truth if we are open and responsive to its promptings.

* * *

Tuesday, May 16, 2017
(Lec. 286)

- 1) Acts 14:19-28
- 2) John 14:27-31a

Gospel related: CCC 606, 1851, 2853 CSDC 491, 516

TUESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus Christ gives us a peace which the world cannot give.

The head of even the most seasoned traveler has to spin when considering the cities Saint Paul visited today in Acts – some of them twice – and this was just the end of his first of three missionary journeys. And then there was the part where he was stoned, dragged out of the city and left for dead. It doesn't sound like Paul benefited from the peace Jesus gave his disciples during the Last Supper.

But what exactly is peace? The first definition given in the dictionary is “a state of tranquility or quiet.” Between the frenzied travel and the near-death stoning, it doesn't sound like Paul had much of that. But the second definition of peace is “freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions.” Paul completely understood that hardships are an integral part of a true journey of faith. He returned to the cities wherein his preaching was fruitful in helping to bring many to place their faith and trust in Jesus, including ones in which he had not been welcomed.

Paul strengthened the new disciples he had helped lead to Jesus with the peace of knowing that the path to the kingdom of God, while difficult, was truly found in the footsteps of Jesus. But as persuasive as we know Paul was, he did not do this alone. Not only was Barnabas with him in his tour of the Asia Minor cities, but some of the disciples themselves gathered around Paul after he had been left for dead, giving him the strength to get up and re-enter the city.

And that leads us to the third definition of peace, “harmony in personal relations.” Paul and Barnabas and the disciples accompanying them were in harmony with each other. They worked together, they prayed together, they persevered together. They made known, by their peaceful relationship, the glorious splendor of the kingdom of God.

The peace Jesus gave his disciples – the peace he gives us – is not peace as defined by the world, but a peace of the mind and heart subject only to the power of God. A peace that works to free us from oppressive thoughts of fear, because fear is the opposite of love. A peace in which we have the harmony of a loving relationship with our God, and with our brothers and sisters in Christ who walk with us on our journey of faith.

This peace might involve some travel out of our comfort zones, and we may get beat up here and there, but like Paul and Barnabas we will have much to report about what God has done with us. Peace be with us all.

* * *

Wednesday, May 17, 2017
(Lec. 287)

- 1) Acts 15:1-6
- 2) John 15:1-8

Gospel related: CCC 308, 517, 737, 755, 787, 859, 864, 1108, 1694, 1988, 2074, 2615, 2732 CSDC 39

WEDNESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus, the true vine, is always working to draw us closer to himself so we may bear good fruit for God and be with him in heaven.

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of himself as being the true vine. There are many branches on the vine. Some of them are bearing much fruit. Others may not be producing anything. Every single branch will be pruned so that it will produce more fruit. In other words, Christ is saying that he is the source of all life. And when we are separated from him, we cannot bear good fruit for God.

The good news is that when we turn our backs on Jesus, intentionally or unintentionally, and veer off the path to life, he never gives up on us. He continually strives to work by the power of the Holy Spirit to draw us back to himself and so we can get our lives back on track. Jesus also works through the sacrament of penance to forgive our sins so we might be more fully reconciled to God.

Jesus works in a host of different ways so we may continue to grow in our love for him and bear good fruit for God. Every time we read and reflect on sacred Scripture, Jesus speaks to us so we can grow in our understanding of what it means to live as one of his followers and come to have a greater awareness of the things in our life that need to be changed so we may serve him more wholeheartedly. By praying to the Holy Spirit each day and being attentive to the Spirit's promptings, we receive the gifts, guidance and strength we need to meet the challenges of each new day as it unfolds.

So as we go forth this day, let's try to remember that we need to pray and be open to the many different ways Jesus is working to draw us closer to himself. The more we pray, the more we are open, and the more we will grow in our love for him and lead lives which bear good fruit for God.

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Thursday, May 18, 2017
(Lec. 288)

- 1) Acts 15:7-21
- 2) John 15:9-11

THURSDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint John I,
Pope and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 1108, 1823, 1824 CSDC 39

FOCUS: The love of God in Jesus radiates from the first celebration of the Eucharist into the present day.

As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Could there be a greater consolation during our earthly journey? The greatest desire of the human heart — the desire for love — is fulfilled in the love Jesus has for us. How great is that love? It is as great, vast and deep as the love of God himself.

To more fully appreciate God's great love for us, we need only place ourselves within today's Gospel reading. Imagine being one of the Apostles and hearing the words of farewell and final instruction spoken by Jesus. Powerful words were spoken during the Last Supper. Next imagine hearing those words spoken out loud to you, as Jesus looks you in the eye.

Based upon such reflection, it is evident that a very similar type of drama is played out before us when we gather here for the Eucharist. We gather to encounter again the greatest love the world has ever known: the love of Jesus Christ — God become man — for us, for you, for me.

But how do we know that this love is extended to us and not only to the Apostles in the Upper Room, or only to the Jews gathered in Jerusalem at the time of the Last Supper? How do we know that this great love is not stuck in the past, spoken by Jesus and then gone as quickly as it came? The Acts of the Apostles gives us the answer.

Those same Apostles who heard Jesus' words in the Upper Room preached his love far and wide, indeed, *to the ends of the earth* as we hear at the very beginning of the Book of Acts (1:8). In today's reading from Acts, we hear how the Apostles gathered in the Church's first council to determine whether the Gentiles needed to be circumcised. In that discussion, Peter reminds us of the Gospel's reach — how the Holy Spirit has come upon the Gentiles, and how God has worked signs and wonders among them.

After Pentecost, the good news of salvation — of God's saving and healing love made manifest in Christ — was preached and radiated out to all the world from Jerusalem by the power of the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus foretold. It radiated to the ends of the earth, and it continues to radiate through the ages and up through our own day. The love of God in Christ Jesus is so powerful that it reaches us now, in this place, in the celebration of the Eucharist, just as it reached the Apostles some two thousand years ago when Jesus instituted the Eucharist during the Last Supper.

As we enter into this celebration of the Eucharist, let us respond in generosity to the love we have received. Let us remain in this love; let us follow wherever this love leads, so that we may one day be judged worthy of entering into eternal life in heaven.

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Friday, May 19, 2017
(Lec. 289)

- 1) Acts 15:22-31
- 2) John 15:12-17

Gospel related: CCC 363, 434, 459, 609, 614, 737, 1108, 1823, 1970, 1972, 2074, 2347, 2615, 2745, 2815 CSDC 13, 29, 580

FRIDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Our love for one another is a testimony to our commitment to living as a disciple of Jesus.

We heard in yesterday's first reading about the Church in the first generation after Jesus' resurrection and ascension deciding a question crucial for the Church's future: how much of the Jewish law must be required of non-Jews seeking Christian baptism?

At this gathering, which we now recognize and refer to as the first Church council — the Council of Jerusalem — it was decided to erect as few barriers as possible for new followers of Jesus. This meant that all members of the Church in every day and age are to share the good news of salvation by example with all people they encounter. In other words, God's gift of salvation is offered to all people without exception who place their faith in Jesus, are baptized and lead their lives according to his teachings.

Today's first reading, in the same chapter of Acts, tells of the council's decision being communicated to the Church at Antioch. When the letter from Jerusalem was read out in Antioch, we heard the people *were delighted* with what it contained.

In the same way that the early Church members were delighted to hear that the Church's mission is to preach and share the Good News with everyone, without exception, we are inspired by Jesus' words today that we are no longer slaves or servants, but friends. Nothing is hidden if we follow his commandments.

Jesus' twice-repeated command in today's Gospel, to *love one another*, is especially important in this connection. Too often, we create unnecessary divisions amongst ourselves — divisions that have no place in the great family of God which we call the Catholic Church. We are all brothers and sisters; all equally daughters and sons of our heavenly Father.

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Saturday, May 20, 2017
(Lec. 290)

- 1) Acts 16:1-10
- 2) John 15:18-21

SATURDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Bernardine of Siena,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 530, 675, 765

FOCUS: The Holy Spirit gives us strength to persevere in our mission of being Christ's presence in the world.

In our Gospel, Jesus speaks clearly to the reason his persecutors hate him: *They do not know the one who sent me*. His words prepare his disciples, as well as us, for the rejection we may face as his followers (CCC #530).

Although the world is much different today, and most of us are not facing persecution because of our faith in the same sense as Jesus' followers, it is not always easy to live a Christian life. Jesus' message can sometimes feel counter-cultural in our world today. For example, we are called to love one another as Jesus loves us, and to respect the sanctity of all life. Jesus challenges us to be his voice in the world today. We may be met with criticism or scorn. But we can take heart because, as the Gospel teaches; we are chosen *out of the world* and God has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit to fortify us. God will use all means to manifest his love for us by guiding us to his perfect plan for our life.

In our first reading, consider the passion of the disciple Paul for preaching the good news of salvation. He allows no danger or change of plans to frustrate or prevent him from carrying out his mission. Consider also that he was once known as Saul, a persecutor of Jesus and of the disciples, one who *was trying to destroy the church* (Acts 8:3). It is God who set the plan for the conversion of Saul, *as a chosen instrument*, to carry out his work (Acts 9:15). It is the very same God who expresses his love for us, pouring out the graces we need to change our hearts and minds, so that we may not only believe in his love, but want to return that love.

Scripture reveals who God is and shows us that God loves, knows and cares about everything in our life. Let us choose to spend some time to purposefully get to know him, and ask the Lord to help us be open to the Holy Spirit, to grow in our awareness of his great love for us, and to be assured of his guidance in our lives so we are fortified for our task of discipleship.

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SUNDAY, MAY 21, 2017

(Lec. 55)

1) Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

2) 1 Peter 3:15-18

3) John 14:15-21

Gospel related: CCC 243, 687, 692, 729, 788, 2466, 2615, 2671 CSDC 70, 104

**SIXTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

FOCUS: Hope is a gift that flows from God and breaks through life's challenges.

One of the concerns raised in the first Letter of Peter to the Christian communities is that of suffering. Encouraging its readers to stay committed to living the Christian life even in the midst of trial, the passage today from the third chapter gives the charge to *Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope*. The second part of this verse is also important: *Do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear*.

Why do we focus on the second part of this verse today? Because it speaks to the heart of evangelization. To be an evangelizer is to be a disciple who shares the faith with others. It does not mean being pushy and forcing faith upon people you know or briefly encounter. As we just heard, we need to be ready to explain why we have hope, and second, we must to do it gently, or with respect for the other person. This, then, assumes that we have hope and that our expression of it is carried out properly.

Are you a person of hope? As Christians, in what do we hope? To be able to answer that question is the heart of evangelization. The reason for our hope is Jesus Christ! It gives us hope when we believe in his promise of eternal life. It gives us hope when we trust in God's love and mercy. We have hope because we are witnesses to all that God has done for us. The second part of the equation is our ability to express this hope in a way that respects the dignity of the person with whom we are talking.

One way we can share our faith with others is by living in hope. Even on our darkest days, when things seem all but lost, even in deep grief or sadness, we can dare to hope. Hope is not something we create, but it comes from God. It is not of human origin, but divine. That is one reason why it continues to exist even when we suffer tragedies. Hope is what has enabled martyrs over the centuries to endure their trials. The witness of hope in the midst of life's challenges can be a powerful message.

When we come together like we are doing today, to listen to God's word and to celebrate the Eucharist, we are renewed in hope, we are refreshed in spirit and we are able to give thanks to the One from whom our reason to hope flows. Let us pray that each of us, as we go out today, is able to celebrate the hope within, which is a gift received, and share it with those with whom we come in contact, so that our reason for hope is attractive and draws others to Christ.

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Monday, May 22, 2017
(Lec. 291)

- 1) Acts 16:11-15
- 2) John 15:26–16:4a

MONDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Rita of Cascia,
Religious)

Gospel related: CCC 244, 248, 263, 692, 719, 729, 1433, 2671

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

From the day of Christ's resurrection when Mary Magdalene first shared the good news of his victory over death with the Apostles to the present, God has advanced his kingdom in this world through the witness of many holy women, two of whom we focus on today.

Today's first reading bears witness to this important reality in recalling how Lydia, a merchant in Thyatira in Greece, became a believer through the preaching of Saint Paul. She then went on to help him and his companions as they began to bring the Gospel into what is now Europe for the first time.

We also celebrate the feast of Saint Rita of Cascia today. She lived in late medieval Italy and is a tremendous example of Gospel values — living patiently with a difficult husband for eighteen years and later working to convince her sons not to take vengeance when their father was murdered, and praying they would not do so. Her sons died of natural causes and did not take revenge on their father's murderers, which Saint Rita considered a blessing.

Rita later became an Augustinian nun and worked to foster peace in the divided Italy of her day. She is popularly known as a patron saint of impossible causes because of the way she remained faithful to God in so many difficult situations.

It is this kind of faith that Jesus in today's Gospel exhorts his Apostles to have, telling them that they will be severely persecuted because of their faith in him. He shares this difficult message at the same time he tells them that the Holy Spirit will help them to remain faithful and to be good witnesses to the Gospel.

So many saints have shown the truth of Jesus' words and teaching throughout Church history. Saint Paul, in his missionary journeys, experienced countless hardships, yet the Holy Spirit provided him with the grace and strength to remain faithful and to become one of the greatest evangelists the Church has ever known.

The same Holy Spirit gave strength to Saint Rita when she carried the cross of a difficult marriage, the violent death of her husband and the challenging work of convincing her sons to remain at peace and not take revenge. Yet because of the grace, guidance and strength that she received from the Holy Spirit, she remained faithful to Christ and the truths of the Gospel in the turbulent times of late medieval Italy.

The challenges we face in our daily life might not be as difficult as those faced by Saint Paul and Saint Rita. But God will surely be as pleased with us as he was with those saints if we rely upon the Holy Spirit to provide the grace and strength we need to remain faithful to him.

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Tuesday, May 23, 2017

(Lec. 292)

1) Acts 16:22-34

2) John 16:5-11

Gospel related: CCC 385, 388, 692, 729, 1287, 1433

TUESDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Let us rejoice and place the needs of others ahead of our own, that others may come to believe.

In our reading from Acts, we have the story of the jailing of Paul and Silas. They were imprisoned for sharing the Gospel. While in chains, they worshiped God. Do we worship God in the midst of those trials and tribulations that bind us?

Their worship of God while in chains is a sign of the great faith and trust they had in God in all circumstances. Do we trust God in all circumstances? According to Philippians, we are all called to *rejoice in the Lord always* (4:4). In the midst of Paul and Silas' imprisonment, God intervenes to save them. And then because of their concern for the well-being of the guard, the guard comes to believe. What follows the passage in Philippians 4 that says *rejoice in the Lord always*, are these words: *Your kindness should be known to all* (5). And so it is in Acts. Because of the kindness and concern of Paul and Silas, the guard came to believe and be baptized, along with his whole family: *Then he and all his family were baptized at once. He brought them up into his house and provided a meal and with his household rejoiced at having come to faith in God.*

In our Gospel reading, Jesus assures his disciples that when he leaves them he will send them an Advocate – the Holy Spirit – who will assist them in showing and proving wrong those who refuse to believe in Jesus as the way to salvation.

And so we see in our reading in Acts the work of the Holy Spirit. But pay close attention. When the Holy Spirit acts, it is our response that either will serve to condemn us or bring us to God's saving grace.

Those who imprisoned Paul and Silas do not come to believe, so they remain in condemnation. The guard comes to believe, and he and his household believe and are baptized.

How do we receive God's grace? Do we receive God's grace in the same way as this guard? Even more, do we receive it as Paul and Silas did? Do we rejoice in all circumstances that others may come to believe? Do we worry more about ourselves or do we focus on the well-being of others?

This day, let us join Paul and Silas. Let us be always open to the work of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, in our hearts and minds. Let us rejoice and place the needs of others ahead of our own. We do this so that we may know the joy of the Lord, and that others may come to believe.

* * *

Wednesday, May 24, 2017
(Lec. 293)

- 1) Acts 17:15, 22–18:1
- 2) John 16:12-15

Gospel related: CCC 91, 243, 244, 485, 687, 690, 692, 729, 1117, 1287, 2466, 2615, 2671 CSDC 29, 104

WEDNESDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The Holy Spirit guides us to the truth so we may live as more faithful disciples of Jesus.

In this latter part of the Easter season, we hear Jesus preparing his disciples for the day he will depart from them and ascend into heaven to take his seat at the right hand of the Father. Jesus knows his disciples need extra words of encouragement and instruction in order to go out into the world to preach the Gospel message.

During the Easter season, we are blessed to hear readings from the Acts of the Apostles, especially the actions of the Apostles Peter and Paul. Early in the Easter season, we heard about Peter and how he spread the faith and worked miracles in the name of Jesus. We have heard about the conversion of Paul and how he has become a great spokesman for the Lord. He has been arrested a number of times, and yet continues to preach the Gospel without fear. It is only through the Holy Spirit that all this could have happened.

Today, we hear about Paul traveling to the city of Athens, where he discovers an altar dedicated to an *unknown God*. Paul discusses the God they had previously worshipped in ignorance. He especially gets their attention when he makes reference to Jesus rising from the dead. Although this is a difficult concept for most of them to grasp, some tell Paul they wish to hear more about this later.

Yesterday's Gospel reading comes from the same chapter in John. In it, Jesus tells his disciples that he will be going away to his heavenly kingdom very soon. This is why today's passage starts with the words, *I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now*. Jesus does tell them the Spirit will come to them to guide them to all truth. They will receive the faith, knowledge, wisdom and understanding they need to preach and proclaim the Gospel.

Likewise, we need the Holy Spirit in our lives so we can live according to the teachings of Jesus. Some days, it feels it is becoming more and more difficult for Christians to live out their faith in the public square. Around the world, we see Christians being persecuted for this same faith. Like the martyrs of old, we need the Holy Spirit to help us persevere in the face of hardship. May we always be open and receptive to the Holy Spirit in our lives and live according to the teachings given to us by Jesus Christ.

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NOTE: Regarding the Ascension of the Lord, the ecclesiastical provinces of Boston, Hartford, New York, Newark, Omaha, and Philadelphia have retained its celebration on the proper Thursday, while all other provinces have transferred this Solemnity to the Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 28. If transferred, Thursday, May 25, is observed as an Easter Weekday or as one of the following Optional Memorials: Saint Bede the Venerable, Priest and Doctor of the Church, Saint Gregory VII, Pope, or Saint Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi, Virgin. The following readings are used: Acts 18:1-8/John 16:16-20(294)

Thursday, May 25, 2017

(Lec. 58)

- 1) Acts 1:1-11
- 2) Ephesians 1:17-23
- 3) Matthew 28:16-20

Gospel related: CCC 2, 80, 189, 232, 543, 644, 645, 691, 730, 767, 788, 831, 849, 857, 860, 1120, 1122, 1223, 1257, 1276, 1444, 2156, 2743 CSDC 52

**THE ASCENSION
OF THE LORD
- SOLEMNITY**
(Holy Day of Obligation)

FOCUS: Jesus has sent us the Holy Spirit, as he promised, to ease our doubt and strengthen our faith.

In the prayer attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, we ask God to grant that where there is doubt, we may sow faith. But the two are not mutually exclusive. They tend to co-exist in us because we are, after all, only human. We can't eliminate doubt from our minds completely, nor can we always live in complete faith.

It is comforting in a way, then, to hear that the disciples continued to doubt, even after the risen Christ appeared to them many times, broke bread with them and spoke to them. Even at the moment of his ascension, when Jesus commissions them to go into the world and *make disciples of all nations*, we are told that *they worshiped, but they doubted*. They witness the exaltation of Christ in all his glory, returning to sit at the right hand of the Father, and still they harbored doubts.

We may be tempted to think that it was easier for the disciples to believe, because they lived with Jesus and saw him face to face, even after the resurrection. But the Gospel reading today reminds us that even they had difficulty maintaining a strong faith in Christ. The key, however, is that even though they doubted, they continued to worship. We can't wait for our minds to be completely satisfied before committing ourselves to Christ. After all, isn't that what faith is: Giving ourselves to something, or someone, despite our doubts? If we were absolutely certain, we wouldn't need faith.

In a way, we are more fortunate than the disciples. As he promised at the ascension, Christ is with us continually in the Church, which is his body. He promised to send us the Holy Spirit, a *Spirit of wisdom and revelation* as we heard in the second reading, to guide and strengthen us in our faith. We have each other to lean on and to share our faith – and even our doubts. Most important, we have the sacraments. What a gift it is to have the opportunity to receive the Body of Christ daily to nourish and sustain us. He truly is with us, until the end of time.

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***Optional Homily for May 25, 2017**

Thursday, May 25, 2017
(Lec. 294)

THURSDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK OF EASTER

- 1) Acts 18:1-8
- 2) John 16:16-20

FOCUS: Jesus knows what we need to hold fast to our faith in him and so live in joy.

A little while and you will no longer see me, and again a little while later and you will see me. These words first spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper must have really hit home to the disciples after the crushing despair of the crucifixion, the overwhelming joy of the resurrection and the comforting peace of the Easter appearances. And, of course, in a few days we will celebrate the Ascension of the Lord, where once again, Jesus is taken from the disciples' sight and they are left to wonder if they will ever see him again. Is it any wonder they were more than a bit confused?

But Jesus knew what they needed to hear – that despite all the mystery of his comings and goings, they will be filled with joy because they continue to believe that he is the Christ. And Jesus knew what Paul needed, Paul – who never even saw the physical Jesus with his own eyes. Not only did Christ bring about Saul's conversion – transforming Saul, the persecutor of Christians, to Paul, an Apostle and champion for the Gospel – but Jesus also provided what was needed to sustain and strengthen Paul amidst his travels and work preaching and teaching the Gospel far and wide.

And Jesus knows what we need, amidst our own confusion and despair – in all of our many worries.

We are blessed in that Jesus provides for us, too. He guides and strengthens us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, on every step of our life's journey. Jesus speaks to us in daily prayer and through sacred Scripture so we may have a clear understanding of what is essential to leading lives of faithful discipleship. He also gives us the graces of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, to draw us closer to himself.

As we near the end of the Easter season, let us, like Paul, hold fast to our faith that Jesus is the Christ, no matter how much the trials of everyday life try to remove that from our vision. Let us, like the disciples, listen to the words of comfort from Jesus – that faith in him will always bring us joy. Most of all, let's avail ourselves of what God knows we need more than anything – God's very self in word and sacrament – so we will never lose sight that he is all we most truly need, and are to love above all things.

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Friday, May 26, 2017
(Lec. 295)

- 1) Acts 18:9-18
- 2) John 16:20-23

FRIDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(OBL MEM
Saint Philip Neri, Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 2615

FOCUS: In Jesus, we find joy and fulfillment.

In the Gospel from John, Jesus consoles his followers who are anxious about him leaving. He explains that while they will encounter pain and suffering in his absence, they will rejoice at seeing him again. He compares the experience to childbirth – intense pain followed by intense love. He leaves his followers with a powerful tool – a new dimension of prayer. He says, *Whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you.*

As followers of Christ living in 2017, we, too, can find comfort and strength in Jesus' words. He doesn't tell us life will be easy, but he does promise that we will experience joy that transcends any temporary pain and suffering we encounter. In the meantime, we need to pray. Through the Holy Spirit, our prayer becomes a "communion of love with the Father, not only through Christ but also in him" (CCC 2615). Prayer places us in the Lord's presence, and it's in the Lord's presence that we will find joy.

In our reading from Acts, Paul has a vision. The Lord tells him not to be afraid and to keep speaking. He promises to be with him. Paul sets out to fulfill this mission. He suffers a temporary setback when brought before the tribunal, then resumes preaching after his release.

Today we celebrate the feast of Saint Philip Neri. The Lord had a special plan and purpose for his life, too. At the age of eighteen, Philip set out for Rome with no money in order to begin intense religious study and dedicate himself to God and his Church.

During the 1500s, the church faced indifference and a preference for luxury. Where Paul's call and mission was evangelization, Philip's call and mission was re-evangelization. Philip used his gifts to engage followers in dialogue (sometimes even humorously), then lead them to action – usually prayer or performing an act of mercy. He founded the Oratory, a community of believers committed to discussion, prayer and action. Oratorian vocations still exist today.

As with Paul and Saint Philip Neri, the Lord has a unique call, plan and mission for our lives. As you prepare to encounter Christ's presence in the Eucharist, think about the mission our Lord has given to you. Thank him for the gifts and talents he gives you to fulfill this purpose. As Jesus promises, and the lives of Saint Paul and Saint Philip reveal, anything is possible in Christ's name.

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Saturday, May 27, 2017
(Lec. 296)

- 1) Acts 18:23-28
- 2) John 16:23b-28

SATURDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Augustine of Canterbury,
Bishop)

Gospel related: CCC 661, 2615, 2795, 2815

FOCUS: *Whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you.*

Today's Gospel continues on with Jesus' words of farewell and final instruction to the Apostles as recounted within the Gospel of John: *The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have come to believe that I came from God.*

Saint Augustine wrote, "His object in loving us was to enable us to love one another." Love is something that must be given to us from without. And the first one to bestow his love on us was our heavenly Father and Creator. It is important to know that the love Jesus is talking about in today's Gospel reading is not primarily a matter of *feelings*. It is an attitude of *concern*. Feelings come and go, influenced by the weather, the state of our mental and physical health, our changing moods.

None of those things matter for God. God cannot change. He is always the same. From the moment of our conception in our mother's womb, God wanted the very best for us. God loves us, Augustine writes, "so that we may be brothers of his only Son . . . His object in loving us was to enable us to love each other. By loving us himself, our mighty head has linked us all together as members of his own body, bound to one another by the tender bond of love" (*Office of Readings*, Thursday of the Fourth week of Easter).

The love God has for us, his creatures, enables us to approach him with *confidence*. We hear Jesus' words today: *Whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you . . . ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.*

How sad that so many of Jesus' disciples show little evidence of joy. To have it, you must cultivate *thanksgiving*. Let no day pass without thanking your heavenly Father for all the blessings he showers upon you. How do you do that? One way is to tell the Lord every day, not just once, but repeatedly as you go through the day: "Lord, you're so good to me; and I'm so grateful." Do that, and you will discover one of life's simple but great truths: Thankful people are happy people and joyful people – no exceptions!

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NOTE: In those places where the observance of the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord has been transferred to this day, the Mass and readings of the Ascension are used: Acts 1:1-11/Ephesians 1:17-23/Matthew 28:16-20(58)

SUNDAY, MAY 28, 2017

**SEVENTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

(Lec. 59)

- 1) Acts 1:12-14
- 2) 1 Peter 4:13-16
- 3) John 17:1-11a

Gospel related: CCC 217, 589, 684, 730, 1069, 1085, 1721, 1996, 2474, 2604, 2746, 2749, 2750, 2751, 2758, 2765, 2812, 2815, 2849 CSDC 122

FOCUS: Jesus prepares his Apostles for his pending departure, knowing they will need courage.

As humans, we are not very good at saying goodbye. This is especially true when that goodbye is a final one. For some, that final farewell is the most difficult as they seek to cling to life ferociously, often filled with anxiety and fear about what lies beyond this life, or how those who are left behind will cope without them. For others, death comes quietly and with a firm resignation and peaceful acceptance. But despite its inevitability, it is never something we readily embrace.

John has several chapters in his Gospel dedicated to Jesus saying goodbye to his disciples just before his passion. Today's Gospel is part of that final discourse, and it summarizes his teaching while also expressing his concern that they be prepared for his absence. Jesus' aim is to convince the disciples that his going is for the best, and that in his wake they will receive the Spirit who will empower them to continue his mission on earth.

As we heard in today's Gospel, part of Jesus' farewell is in the form of a long prayer that at once gives thanks for the work he has done to glorify his Father, and looks forward to that moment of his own glorification which he will freely share with his disciples. Here, John returns to the language of the prologue – if Jesus sets aside his eternal glory, it was to make it known to the world so that when he took it up again in the resurrection, that glory would be shared with his disciples.

So what is his glory? It is the eternal life he shares with the Father and that he now offers to his disciples – it is life in abundance. In reading this passage, one gets a deep sense of both accomplishment and great excitement, even as Jesus prays and looks forward to his return to the Father.

As we gather on this Seventh Sunday of Easter, how does this passage speak to us? As Christ's disciples in the world today, we can take comfort in our relationship with Christ. Just as he speaks of the original disciples with great affection and care, he has the same love and care for us. There is no playing down the importance of that relationship, then or now. Yes, as the second reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter reminds us, we may have to struggle and even suffer in this world, but the glory of the next life is what keeps us focused and faithful.

Above and beyond this, today's second reading challenges us to see our sufferings as a share in the sufferings of Christ. And as Christ's sufferings lead to the glory of the resurrection, so, too, our sufferings will lead to a share in the glory of the risen Christ.

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Monday, May 29, 2017

(Lec. 297)

1) Acts 19:1-8

2) John 16:29-33

Gospel related: CCC 1808

MONDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: As Christians, we can stand firm in the face of trials because we know God will sustain us.

Today's readings have a common thread – understanding what it means to be a Christian. In the passage from Acts, Luke recounts Paul's journey to Ephesus. Paul arrives in this port city dedicated to the goddess Artemis, and meets twelve disciples baptized by John, with a *baptism of repentance*. After some discussion, Paul lays hands on them and baptizes them in the name of Jesus.

The passage tells us the disciples were filled with the Spirit, and began to speak in tongues and prophesy. Paul then enters the synagogue and for three months debates *boldly with persuasive arguments about the Kingdom of God*. Clearly, Paul not only understands what it means to be a Christian, but wants to tell the world.

Today's reading from the Gospel of John is part of a four-chapter discourse that precedes Jesus' arrest in Chapter eighteen. It is referred to as the farewell discourse because Jesus speaks words of farewell and final instruction to prepare his disciples for his impending passion and death. The short passage of today's reading reveals that the disciples now understand who Jesus is, and that he comes *from God*. It also indicates that even when the disciples are on their own, and faced with difficulties as they preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, they will find peace in Jesus for he has overcome the world.

Taken together, Paul's actions and example in the first reading and Jesus' words in today's Gospel can strengthen us in our own faith journey, reminding us that even when we are faced with trials and tribulations in our daily lives, God will sustain us, not abandon us. As Jesus says, *In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world*.

We are reminded through the words of Jesus and the preaching of Paul that we can stand firm in the face of difficulties because we have fortitude, one of the gifts from the Holy Spirit we received at our confirmation. Fortitude is a virtue which "strengthens the resolve to resist temptation and overcome obstacles in the moral life" (CCC 1808). Like Paul, we are called to walk by faith – to trust God to give us all we need to live a just and moral life.

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Tuesday, May 30, 2017
(Lec. 298)

- 1) Acts 20:17-27
- 2) John 17:1-11a

Gospel related: CCC 217, 589, 684, 730, 1069, 1085, 1721, 1996, 2604, 2746, 2747, 2749, 2750, 2751, 2758, 2765, 2812, 2815, 2849 CSDC 122

TUESDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: We give glory to God by sharing the Gospel with others and helping to build up God's kingdom on earth.

Today's Gospel places us at one of the most pivotal moments in Jesus' life – his transition from earthly ministry to the Passion. After celebrating the Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus raises his eyes to heaven and prays. These words, known in Christian tradition as the "priestly prayer," embrace "the whole economy" of creation and salvation as well as [Jesus'] death and Resurrection (CCC 2746).

While Jesus often prayed during his ministry, this passage is unique because it reveals what he says. Jesus starts by addressing the Father, similar to how he begins the "Our Father" when he teaches the disciples how to pray. He asks the Father to glorify him, not because he is seeking personal fame, but because he knows this will glorify God.

Then Jesus intercedes for his disciples – those who believe and keep the Lord's word. He makes a distinction between those the Lord has given him and the world. He doesn't pray for the world, but asks that his followers may remain in his name so they may be one, just as Jesus and the Father are one.

We might not think it unusual that Jesus prays at this time of his life. What makes this prayer extraordinary, however, is that Jesus' words become "inseparable from his sacrifice," as it says in our catechism (2747). They reveal how we are to approach God – humble and obedient to his plan – and unite his followers by establishing the Church.

Now that Jesus is no longer physically present in the world the way he was during his earthly life and ministry, we must glorify God by accomplishing his work. Jesus' prayer isn't restricted to those present at the Last Supper; it transcends time to include all who belong to the Lord – past, present and future. Jesus prays for us!

During his farewell speech, Paul shares that he suffered many trials, yet never shrunk from speaking the truth. His work glorified God, and helped bear witness to the Gospel of God's grace. While we may not have been given the same work as Paul, we discover what we must do to glorify God in our own way.

Reflecting on this prayer, Pope-emeritus Benedict XVI reminds us that we, too, can ask God to help us "enter more fully into the plan that he has for each one of us ... that we may love others more ... and always be able to open our prayer to the dimensions of the world, not closing it in to the request for help for our own problems, but remembering our neighbor before the Lord and learning the beauty of interceding for others" (Gen. Aud., Jan. 25, 2012).

This is how we unite ourselves to Christ's priestly mission.

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Wednesday, May 31, 2017
(Lec. 572)

**THE VISITATION OF THE
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
- FEAST**

1) Zephaniah 3:14-18a
or Romans 12:9-16

2) Luke 1:39-56

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

FOCUS: *The Lord is in your midst.*

Mary visiting Elizabeth – it is a scene rich with anticipation, hope and rejoicing.

Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cries out that Mary is *blessed among women* and *blessed is the fruit of your womb*. She marvels that the *mother of my Lord should come to me*. She entertains Mary for three months. Can you imagine their continued conversations?

Elizabeth's unborn baby leaps for joy – inaugurating the Gospel from his mother's womb. This child, John the Baptist, will become the precursor of Christ, will offer a baptism of repentance, and will announce that Christ is *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world* (Jn 1:29).

And, of course, there is Mary, the young girl from Nazareth who has been chosen to be the mother of God. As a daughter of Zion and a child of the new covenant, she stands at the center of salvation history. Fully faithful and obedient to God's will, she has conceived, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Son of God. Yet her words to Elizabeth are not about herself. Instead, she notes that all generations will call her blessed because *the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name*.

In her great canticle of praise, the Magnificat, she elaborates on all the great things which God has done: shown mercy to those who fear him, shown strength in victory, cast down the mighty, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things, come to the help of the Israelites, remembered his promise of mercy, and fulfilled the promise he made to Abraham and his descendants.

But what of the other person in the scene? Was he not the cause and source of all this hope and rejoicing? Christ, the savior of the world, the incarnate Son of God was present! This was not only about Mary visiting Elizabeth, this was about God visiting his people. Here, in this scene, we witness the effects of such divine presence – a people who profusely give thanks to God for fulfilling his promise of salvation.

Now, more than two thousand years later, God is still in our midst. He is present in his word, in his sacraments, in his priests and whenever the Church prays and sings. He is present in our homes, our schools and in our places of work. He is present in the most expensive penthouse and in the slums of the world's poorest villages. He is present in our happiest moments and our darkest hours. Are we too caught up in other things to notice?

But when we do, when we are silent and humble enough to recognize his presence, the only words we can utter will be words of thanks and praise. *That* is what our worship is all about.

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