

OCTOBER

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SUNDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2017

(Lec. 136)

- 1) Ezekiel 18:25-28
- 2) Philippians 2:1-11 or 2:1-5
- 3) Matthew 21:28-32

Gospel related: CCC 535, 546

**TWENTY-SIXTH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Let us have in us *the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus.*

It's not fair! How many times have we heard this from our kids or uttered these words about our boss or, God forbid, felt this way about God?

The Jewish community in Judah and Babylon in the time of the prophet Ezekiel certainly felt that way about God, at least until they came to a greater understanding of God's promises to them through Ezekiel's words of judgment and encouragement. Ezekiel speaks for God when he tells the people that it is because of sin, wickedness and lack of virtue that punishment has befallen them – not that suffering and difficulties have come to them because God is unfair. They learn they are responsible for their own actions: if they do what is right and just, they will live; if they do not, they will die.

This same encouragement – yes, encouragement! – comes to us from Saint Paul in his letter to the Philippians. For as we heard from Ezekiel, the promise of life is not based on things beyond human capability. In fact, it is based on our human free will and capacity to choose that which is good and right and just. And Saint Paul tells us how. He says, and it's quite simple really, *Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others. Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus.*

Have the same attitude of Christ Jesus, who – remember – was fully human even as he was fully divine. This is encouraging because it means it is something we *can do*, with Christ's help. We can, through the practice of virtue and with God's grace, choose that which is good and which is life-giving. Even when our human faults and weaknesses cloud our understanding, we can still choose to follow God's command, as the first son in today's Gospel reading did. We may not know why he initially refused, but we know by his actions that he is the one who had the same attitude as Christ because he did as his father asked.

Let us do the same. Trust in God's promises, rely on Christ's help and allow the grace of the Holy Spirit to work in us – that in all we might do we have the attitude of Christ.

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Monday, October 2, 2017

(Lec. 455)

1) Zechariah 8:1-8

(Lec. 650)

2) Matthew 18:1-5, 10

Gospel related: CCC 329, 336, 526, 2785

MONDAY OF

26TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

The Holy Guardian Angels)

FOCUS: Turn to the Lord as little children.

Our tendency to look at others to determine how we “stack up” in society affects many aspects of our lives, from success at school or work, to our mental and physical health. Jesus offers us a new way to view our lives. Rather than seeing ourselves relative to one another, we need to define ourselves in relation to God.

Today’s Gospel begins with a question from the disciples about who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. This question may have been motivated by the tradition of arranging seating at communal meals according to rank or status in society. Many believed their status there reflected their status in the coming kingdom.

Jesus answers this question by placing a child in the disciples’ midst. He says, *Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* He shows them that greatness is not measured by rank or status, but by being humble and approaching the Lord as children.

This response would have shocked the disciples. Children had no legal rights in society or – in the disciples’ eyes – particular claims to the kingdom. Yet Jesus reveals just how valued children are in the eyes of God by mentioning that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of God. In the Jewish faith, angels were believed to guard nations and intercede for the prayers of people, so this places children closer to God than the disciples would have imagined.

After hearing this message, we are left to ponder another question: how do we become childlike? To make ourselves small, we must be humble. This enables us to turn to the Lord as Father and to serve one another, not considering ourselves superior. As children rely on their parents, we must trust and depend on God. Anything we receive is recognized as a gift rather than an entitlement.

In return, God promised us his protection and participation in his kingdom. We, too, have angels who always look upon the face of the Father. They are his servants and messengers – mighty ones who do his work. Today, on this memorial of the Holy Guardian Angels, we celebrate these spiritual beings. They have been sent to protect and shepherd us as children of the Lord.

As we prepare for the Eucharist, let us be childlike – without concern about status or fear of the unknown, but rather with grateful hearts for all of God’s gifts. Let’s not look to others for approval and protection – let’s turn to God.

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Tuesday, October 3, 2017
(Lec. 456)

- 1) Zechariah 8:20-23
- 2) Luke 9:51-56

Gospel related: CCC 557

TUESDAY OF
26TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus teaches us not to let anger stir us to seek vengeance.

Imagine that you are James or John in today's Gospel. You have been following Jesus, listening to what he has been saying, getting to know him, growing and being strengthened in your belief in him. You were among the first fishermen called — a partner of Simon — and you willingly left your boat on the shore to follow Jesus. You are as "in" as you can be at this time, invested in this man called Jesus. Then you witness the people of Samaria refusing to welcome him.

How do you suppose James and John felt about this? They would not be surprised, for Samaritans and Jews were bitterly opposed to one another for ethnic and religious reasons. This may explain the initial response of James and John in wanting to *call down fire from heaven to consume them*. "What was wrong with those Samaritans anyway?" they may have wondered. "Can't they see who Jesus is?"

Of course, their passionate reaction would have been quite natural at the time, considering the cultural circumstances. But Jesus often goes against the prevailing culture, and this is no exception. Jesus is teaching that we are not to let our anger stir us into vengeance.

There certainly could have been other responses to this situation. Note, for instance, that Jesus did not force himself upon the Samaritans, nor did he stay and lecture them in order to convince them to follow him. And, just in case the disciples did not understand, he rebuked them to be sure they got the message. Move on, he tells them: continue journeying to another village when one village does not receive you.

In our own lives, it may not be a village or a town that rejects us, but it may be a family member, friend or co-worker. Sometimes, our passion can be as strong as that of the disciples when others do not see things as we do, or when there is a divide between us. It isn't always so easy to move on in a situation like this. It takes an inner strength to follow Jesus' example, and we can rely on the gifts of the Holy Spirit to help us.

As Pope Paul VI once said, "It is wrong to *impose* the Gospel, but we are called to *propose* the truth of it." Jesus modeled this for us; let us pray for the wisdom and strength to do the same.

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Wednesday, October 4, 2017
(Lec. 457)

- 1) Nehemiah 2:1-8
- 2) Luke 9:57-62

Gospel related: CCC 544

WEDNESDAY OF
26TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Francis of Assisi)

FOCUS: Personal sacrifice is often required of those who answer God's call.

It is fairly unusual to have a reading from Nehemiah as part of our Mass readings. Today, during this Ordinary Time, the Church gives us the opportunity to know a little more about this interesting character from our Church history, and how he connects to a Gospel message of personal sacrifice.

In today's first reading, we hear Nehemiah asking the king, for whom he works as cup bearer, to allow him leave from his duties to go to Jerusalem, the home of his ancestors. He wants to see that the walls of the city can be rebuilt. The king agrees, and even provides the necessary letters that will provide materials and safety for Nehemiah's work.

The account is written in the first person, and biblical scholars are universally convinced the writer actually was Nehemiah. So while many books of Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, are not intended to be historical, this one is. It, along with the Book of Ezra, tells the real history of the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem during the sixth and fifth centuries, B.C.

A cup bearer during the time of Nehemiah was a high rank, given only to those whose loyalty was absolute. His job was to protect the king from poisoning, but in the process, he became a trusted confidante. It was well-paid and provided a nice life. Therefore, Nehemiah's request to leave the king to return to his homeland was a courageous and sacrificial undertaking.

Others had tried to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, but no one had succeeded, since the Persian kings were not in favor of the Israelites gaining the solidarity that having the city intact would provide. Nehemiah changed that by obtaining the blessing of the king on his mission.

Nehemiah's initial mission to Jerusalem took twelve years. During that time, Nehemiah did not profit from the work, but continued to sacrifice for the benefit of the people and for the glory of God. Having the walls restored brought the people together as they had not been for generations. Indeed, Nehemiah's work was a major element in the reclaimed strength of the Jewish nation.

There is more to the story, but this is a good place to stop. Learning our history helps provide context for the Gospel message. Here, we see that the concept of sacrifice – that is, that personal sacrifice is often demanded of those who are dedicated to serving God and humankind – has long been the norm for us. Nehemiah modeled it; Jesus exemplified it; may we embody it.

Thursday, October 5, 2017
(Lec. 458)

- 1) Nehemiah 8:1-4a,
5-6, 7b-12
- 2) Luke 10: 1-12

THURSDAY OF
26TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.

Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 765, 2122, 2611 CSDC 259, 492

FOCUS: Discipleship is a joyful vocation to embrace, trusting that God will provide for our needs.

In today's first reading from Nehemiah, Ezra presents the Law of the Lord to the Hebrew people. Their initial response is one of weeping and sadness. They had just returned from exile, and they likely felt contrition for their past misdeeds.

Ezra stops them from weeping, however, and he, along with Nehemiah, instead encourages them to express joy. For through this law, the Hebrew people received a renewal of their vocation to live as God's people. The law was not intended to reinforce their guilt or to burden them, but rather to give them back their sense of purpose now that the exile was over.

In today's Gospel, Jesus exhorts his disciples in a similar fashion to Ezra and Nehemiah when he instructs them to preach the Good News to all of those in the surrounding country, taking nothing with them. Nothing? The disciples may have had some misgivings. After all, they were being called to depart the relative safety of Jesus' inner circle and go out and do the work of ministry, seemingly on their own. And — they were being sent with little more than the clothes on their backs!

But Jesus' words are actually an assurance that they are *not* on their own: that the kingdom of God is at hand, and that God would meet their needs while they were carrying out their work — even in the face of certain adversity. In the subsequent verses of this chapter, the disciples returned from their work in great joy, having beheld the many wonders God performed through them.

Our call to discipleship is akin to what those first disciples encountered, and what the Hebrews experienced. To contemplate all that the work of discipleship entails can seem like a very daunting order, especially if we think of it stacked against past offenses. But we can take comfort in God's word, for our very purpose as Christians is to love and serve the Lord. This is the very essence of discipleship, and it gives us direction in life.

We know we can trust in God's love to provide what is needed, and in his mercy to lift us when we have fallen into sin. Let us be joyful, therefore, in our firm sense of purpose and in our trust in God.

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Friday, October 6, 2017
(Lec. 459)

- 1 Baruch 1:15-22
- 2) Luke 10:13-16

FRIDAY OF
26TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Bruno, Priest;
Blessed Marie Rose Durocher,
Virgin)

Gospel related: CCC 87, 858

FOCUS: Jesus invites us to turn away from sin and return to God with a grateful heart.

Were it not for the fact that our calendar tells us it is October sixth, we could easily be swayed by our Scripture readings and responsorial psalm into thinking that we are beginning the penitential season of Lent, with its emphasis on sin and repentance. That being said, we know that the command of Jesus to repent and turn our hearts back toward God is timely and appropriate throughout the entire year, not just during Lent.

Today, we are once again reminded of the importance of listening to the voice of God, and of giving and asking forgiveness in order to maintain our spiritual health and deepen our relationship with God and with others.

In our passage from the prophet Baruch, we hear the penitential prayer of the people as it is offered up for the sins of the Israelites. Their expression of shame and remorse takes place during their exile and captivity. The entire passage is their heart-wrenching confession. Three times they repent that they have failed to listen to the voice of God. At times, they did not heed God's commands. Other times they heard, but disregarded, what God asked of them. They believed the evil and misery of their captivity was God's punishment for their sins and those of their ancestors.

Jesus does not mince words about the nature of sin and repentance in today's Gospel passage. He singles out his own people who had failed to believe the signs of the kingdom performed in their midst by the seventy-two disciples he had sent out: the sick were healed; the lame walked; lepers were made whole. And yet, he says, if these signs had been performed in the foreign towns of Tyre and Sidon, the people would have repented. Addressing the disciples, Jesus tells them: *Whoever listens to you, listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.* In other words, it all starts with listening to the voice of God.

The exiles made the right move to reconcile with God. They admitted the wrong they had done and prepared themselves to receive the justice and mercy of the Lord, their God. If only Jesus' own people had repented and turned their hearts and minds away from the evil they had done and back toward God!

The sins of the Israelites are a stark reminder that each of us can stray from the right path when we fail to heed God's voice, or when we hear God's voice and then disregard the message. Their confession is a wonderful example for us that we, too, can receive God's justice and mercy when we admit our sins and return to God.

We have the ability and freedom to do this – we simply must make the choice.

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Saturday, October 7, 2017
(Lec. 460)

- 1) Baruch 4:5-12, 27-29
- 2) Luke 10:17-24

Gospel related: CCC 787, 1083, 2603

SATURDAY OF
26TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Our Lady of the Rosary)

FOCUS: May Our Lady of the Rosary inspire us to a prayerful life of discipleship.

Today, the Church celebrates the memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary. It is a feast of thanksgiving and honor, and commemorates a naval victory by Christian forces in 1571 — a victory that Pope Saint Pius V attributed to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary after he and all Christians of Europe prayed the rosary prior to and during the battle. While most of us are likely familiar with the structure, content and meditative qualities of the rosary, today's feast reminds us of the importance of prayer and the acknowledgement of the sovereignty of God. It also points to the rosary's biblical inspiration, and encourages us to follow Christ by living his joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries in union with Mary.

We see the importance of prayer and the acknowledgement of God's power in both of our readings today. In the first reading, the prophet Baruch's poetic prayer reminds Israel that it went into exile because of its infidelity, and that Jerusalem, the mother of the nations, is filled with grief. Yet the people are also told to *fear not!* — that God will remember them, and when they call out to God in prayer and repent of their sins, he will save them and bring them back *enduring joy*.

In the Gospel, the seventy-two disciples are amazed that *even the demons are subject to [them] because of [Jesus'] name*. Jesus cautions them not to focus on *what* they have been able to accomplish, but *why* they have been able to accomplish it — because they have been chosen to do the work of God. Jesus then turns to his Father and offers a prayer of praise for all that God has revealed to the disciples through him.

The focus in today's passages from Baruch and the Gospel is demonstrated in the life of Mary, the mother of God, Our Lady of the Rosary. She, too, is told to *fear not!* by the angel Gabriel because God has remembered his people, and found favor with her (Luke 1:30). Mary, too, has been chosen to do the work of God, and in response she trusts in God's sovereignty and gives him praise. We also see Mary's embodiment — literally, in the bearing of his son — of God's desire to remember his people and bring them back to enduring joy.

This feast day, then, celebrates not just Mary as our Lady of the Rosary, but the power of prayer itself. By our baptism, we, too, are called to do the work of God, which is discipleship. Praying the rosary enables us to be in union with Mary as a disciple, and to enter the mysteries of Christ more fully. From his Incarnation to the cross to his triumph over death, God has revealed himself to us, and saved us. In thanksgiving and praise for this gift, may our Lady of the Rosary inspire us to a prayerful life of discipleship.

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SUNDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2017

(Lec. 139)

1) Isaiah 5:1-7

2) Philippians 4:6-9

3) Matthew 21:33-43

Gospel related: CCC 443, 755, 756

**TWENTY-SEVENTH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Allow God's peace to *guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

Most of us are familiar with the old pious platitude, "Easier said than done." Saint Paul encourages the Philippians today to *have no anxiety at all.* Right Saint Paul, easier said than done!

Some synonyms for anxiety are concern, unease, apprehension and worry. Another one, though, is disquiet. It is hard for us not to be anxious at times. We become anxious about people – about our children, our spouse, our aging parents. We also become anxious about things – about work, mortgages and car payments.

When we become anxious, we disturb the quiet within, thus we become disquiet. Saint Paul seems to imply today that in order to enter into prayer, into dialogue with God, we need to set aside our anxiousness. This is not easy for us. The distractions of our daily lives often overrun our quiet moments with God, but this we must guard against.

Dialogue with God does not need to be complicated. We tend to overcomplicate things, to excuse ourselves from following through. We might agree that this is true in various aspects of our lives. But prayer does not need to be complicated. We can pray anytime, anywhere.

We can begin our day in the shower, praising the Lord for another day. We can reflect on the day ahead with the Lord while we get dressed. During our commute to work or while running errands, we can invite the Lord into a difficult encounter we keep having. At lunch, we can ask the Lord's blessing on our food and those who gather to share a meal together. Before we fall asleep, we can review the day and give thanks for what went right and ask forgiveness for what went wrong.

In the quietness of our encounter with the Lord, we will know the Lord's peace, and that peace will guard our hearts and minds in Jesus.

So let us not grow anxious about too many things. Instead, try to commit to a rhythm of prayer each day. Then, as Saint Paul teaches us today, *the God of peace* will be with us and we will bear good fruit.

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Monday, October 9, 2017
(Lec. 461)

- 1) Jonah 1:1–2:2, 11
- 2) Luke 10:25-37

MONDAY OF
27TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Denis, Bishop,
and Companions, Martyrs;
Saint John Leonardi, Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 1293, 1825, 2083, 2822 CSDC 112

FOCUS: God has boundless mercy, compassion and love for all people and calls us to have the same.

We experience from these two stories today the unbounded depth of God's compassion and mercy. First, the Lord saved Jonah after Jonah tried to distance himself as far as possible from God and his call for him to preach to the wicked Ninevites. Jonah didn't say "yes" to God's call to him. He didn't try to debate why he was an unworthy prophet. He didn't even say no to God. He just fled! Even when the storm-tossed ship was about to break up, and the sailors cried to their gods for help, Jonah did not turn to God. Only when he had been cast to the depths of the ocean, and was trapped in the bowels of the large fish, did he call out for God's help. And God had compassion for him and came to his aid. Despite the distance Jonah placed between himself and God, God was ready to save him when he asked.

In contrast, the scholar questioning Jesus in the Gospel today is trying to demonstrate how *close* he is to God. He knows the commandments and what he needs to do to have eternal life. But the question he asks in an effort to justify himself has a surprise answer that challenges his understanding of the commandments. Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan to explain God's idea of what it means to be a neighbor. The Jewish people knew they had a responsibility to help those in need among their own people. But by making the Samaritan the good neighbor in this story, Jesus expands the definition of neighbor to include all people, even enemies, and those who have turned away from God.

With this parable, Jesus challenges the scholar to understand that in order to be close to God, he must reflect God's compassion in the way he treats all others, regardless of their background or behavior. He is to show mercy, and respond with care and concern, to all who call for his help, as God does.

The message of God's boundless mercy is both hopeful and challenging for us today. We can be assured that God will be with us, even when we have distanced ourselves from him. We need only to bridge that distance and ask for his help. Our challenge is to do as God does and respond with love when we are called upon. We are called to be good neighbors to all, even those we consider enemies, or perhaps unworthy of our help. God has boundless mercy, compassion and love for all people. With his grace, we are called to have the same.

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Tuesday, October 10, 2017
(Lec. 462)

- 1) Jonah 3:1-10
 - 2) Luke 10:38-42
- Gospel related: **CSDC** 260

TUESDAY OF
27TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We each respond to God's call in different ways, at different times

Our passages from Scripture today are a study in contrasts. Our first reading, from Jonah, is full of busyness and interaction. It takes place in Nineveh, described as *an enormously large city*, and has several different actors: God, Jonah, the many people of Nineveh and the king of Nineveh. The story and scene evoke a sense of urgency.

Jonah is very active – traveling *to* Nineveh, and then *through* the confines of the city, proclaiming God's time-sensitive message. The inhabitants and the king also have a dynamic role, heeding Jonah's message and changing their behavior. And finally, God has the last step in this choreographed dance, as he refrains from carrying out the evil he had threatened.

Our Gospel passage takes place on the other end of the spectrum. It is a much calmer environment, with far fewer interactions. It takes place in a *village* – a word that indicates a small geographic area – and names only two other individuals, Mary and Martha. This story and scene evoke a sense of calm.

Jesus has traveled to the village, but it was not a long journey. Upon his arrival, he stays in one place and speaks from there. Martha is the full-speed actor in this slow-motion scene, while Mary sits peacefully at the feet of Jesus, listening to his words. It is *Jesus* who has the last word in this passage, as he praises Mary for her choice to be still.

Two stories – two events – evoking two different sensations. And yet, both provide the same essential lesson for us today: we should pay attention when God speaks to us, and that what is required from us in response may be its own study in contrasts.

Different times and seasons in our lives will contribute to how we answer God's call. Perhaps we are at a time and place in our life where we can metaphorically walk those city streets, doing the Lord's bidding, like Jonah, with a sense of urgency. We may be living a life of busyness and multiple interactions, all while preaching a message of God's promise and call to repentance.

Or perhaps, for whatever reason, our story for a time encompasses a smaller space, either physically or mentally. Our circumstances keep us still, while our heart is open to the message of the Gospel. We may be asked to sit at the feet of the Master and absorb this message, while serving simply as an example of faithful witness.

God speaks to us, and there is no particular response better than another, as long as it is the one most faithful to God's time and choosing.

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Wednesday, October 11, 2017
(Lec. 463)

- 1) Jonah 4:1-11
- 2) Luke 11:1-4

WEDNESDAY OF
27TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint John XXIII,
Pope)

Gospel related: CCC 520, 1425, 2601, 2632, 2759, 2773, 2845

FOCUS: Imitate the Lord's mercy and compassion.

We all can think of people in our lives who have angered or hurt us. It's not easy to forgive these individuals; there may even be a part of us that wishes them pain for what they have done. In our minds, this is justice. But as we know, the Lord does not act within the narrow confines of human thinking.

In our first reading, Jonah is angry that the people of Nineveh were not punished as the Lord had threatened. While he waits outside the city to see what will happen to it, the Lord sends a plant to shade him. A worm destroys the plant the next day, which upsets Jonah. The Lord teaches him a lesson by comparing his feelings about the plant to his concern over Nineveh.

In this story, we witness the mercy and compassion of the Lord. Rather than destroy Nineveh, he accepts the people's repentance and shows them mercy. We also see the Lord's compassion toward Jonah. He doesn't abandon or punish him for his feelings or reluctant obedience. Instead, he does what a loving Father does: he uses it as a teachable moment. The lesson helps Jonah, and us, better understand the actions of the Lord and how we are to imitate his love in our actions toward one another.

We find our Lord acting again as teacher in today's Gospel as Jesus teaches his disciples to pray in communion with one another. The prayer is a shorter version of the Our Father that we find in Matthew. In this moment, Jesus shows us how to deepen our relationship with the Father through prayer, and instructs us on how to live in imitation of his love. This is most clear when he prays, *forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us.*

We are all debtors. For the Father to forgive our debts (our sins), we must forgive those in debt to us – those who we feel owe us for something they have done. This is not easy, and as Jesus shows us, it's something we must continue to pray about. Through our forgiveness of others, we imitate the mercy and compassion on earth that we seek from our Lord in heaven, *your kingdom come.*

We unite ourselves with the Holy Trinity through prayer, and above all, in the Eucharist. As we approach the altar, then, let us pray for the grace to be a community that offers of itself "peace, brotherly concord, and a people made one in the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (CCC 2845).

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Thursday, October 12, 2017
(Lec. 464)

- 1) Malachi 3:13-20b
- 2) Luke 11:5-13

Gospel related: CCC 443, 728, 2613, 2623, 2671, 2761 CSDC 453

THURSDAY OF
27TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Humility is a virtue that leads to the greatest success of all: becoming a saint.

It is common for us to be encouraged to pray more often; Jesus does this in today's Gospel reading. We can enter more deeply into prayer, though, and be ready to be drawn closer to God through it, if we consider an essential attitude we should have when we go to pray. That attitude is the virtue of humility.

Both readings in today's Mass touch upon this key virtue. The prophet Malachi, speaking for the Lord, condemns the proud evildoers who see no good in humbly keeping God's commands and being sorry for their sins. On the other hand, he praises and promises divine protection to the humble who fear the Lord and place their trust in him.

And Jesus is speaking of humility when he tells his disciples, *Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.* The proud see themselves as self-sufficient. Why should they need to ask, seek and knock in prayer to God? The humble, on the other hand, recognize the reality of the human condition and their need to call upon God frequently in their poverty.

Humility is an often misunderstood virtue in our world today. In the popular mind, it is portrayed as groveling, seeing oneself as the lowest of the low. We may be told that's not the way to get ahead in life. Instead, we must be assertive and look out for Number One.

Even if such a proud attitude can bring about worldly success, it only hinders one from achieving the most important success of all: becoming a saint.

How do you and I become saints? By being the person God wants us to be. By striving for holiness, and working toward eternal life with God. Seen in this light, everything else must be trivial.

When we can be humbly honest about ourselves and make daily choices in humility, we'll nurture the awe-filled awareness of the Lord that Malachi spoke of. We'll place our trust in the Lord and seek to follow his commands with the help of his grace.

This humility will also lead us to place our needs several times a day before the Lord, knowing that only he can fulfill them. Prayers made from this attitude will truly come from our hearts, and God will be sure to answer them according to his will.

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Friday, October 13, 2017
(Lec. 465)

- 1) Joel 1:13-15; 2:1-2
- 2) Luke 11:15-26

Gospel related: CCC 385, 700

FRIDAY OF
27TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are called to lament the ways in which we have disappointed God, and to repent of our sins and return to God.

A lament is defined as a “passionate expression of grief or sorrow.” As a verb, to lament is to actively mourn or grieve – often with wailing or sobbing. In biblical times “lament,” as a noun, had an even more important meaning – it was a prayer for divine help, arising out of a place of pain, and it relied on elements of sorrow and repentance. The role of lament is illustrated in both of our readings today.

In the first reading from Joel, the people are faced with dire circumstances they do not quite recognize, and the prophet Joel is urging them to demonstrate their repentance and throw themselves on God’s mercy to avert the approaching disaster. He tells them to *Gird yourselves and weep ... spend the night in sackcloth ... proclaim a fast*. There is urgency in Joel’s tone: he offers the people specific ways to express their sorrow and repentance because he knows that *the day of the Lord is coming* when God’s judgment will arrive.

Luke’s Gospel, targeting the audience of the Greeks and other Gentiles of his time, often echoes the messages of Old Testament prophets such as Joel. It is filled with calls to his audience of non-Jews to repent and follow the Lord. In Jesus, the day of the Lord has arrived, and those who are faithful will not suffer God’s wrath in judgment.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus makes this point very clearly: there is no middle ground. He says, *Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters*. Jesus is driving out demons and responding to challenges put forth by onlookers who question whether his power is good or evil. Jesus’ answer is that the kingdom of God is stronger than evil, but that even those who follow God must remain watchful that they don’t fall prey to evil.

Joel’s message, and Jesus’ words, are relevant for us today: we are called to remember the times we have failed to trust God and follow his way, and to repent and return to God. Throughout the Old Testament, in the psalms and words of prophets, we are told the Lord is merciful. Jesus is the living word of God’s mercy – let us not be afraid to spend the night in proverbial sackcloth, so that we might spend eternity with Jesus.

* * *

Saturday, October 14, 2017
(Lec. 466)

- 1) Joel 4:12-21
- 2) Luke 11:27-28

SATURDAY OF
27TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Callistus I,
Pope and Martyr;
Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: Living our faith, and repenting when we go astray, makes us blessed.

How odd and seemingly disrespectful that Jesus would not acknowledge the sanctity of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the woman who called out to him from the crowd: Mary, who carried him in her womb and nursed him at her breast. She was the first disciple of her son, who gently encouraged him to perform his first miracle in Cana and followed him all the way to the foot of the cross. She was the most devoted of mothers. She was the most devoted to God.

But she was the most devoted of mothers *because* she was the most devoted to God, not the other way around. She was not blessed because she gave birth to the Lord Jesus Christ. Mary was blessed because she heard the word of God and observed it.

The prophet Joel offers us this same truth in his short book of the Old Testament. The book begins with a catastrophic invasion of locusts on the kingdom of Judah, a symbol of the coming day of the Lord. Joel summons the people to repent, and they do. They heed the words of the prophet. They call a solemn assembly. They fast and they weep. Their priests cry out to God, praying for deliverance.

And on the Day of Judgment, heaven and earth quake when the Lord raises his voice in response. The sun and moon are darkened for the nations who inflict injury, but Zion is blessed with mountains dripping with wine and hills flowing with milk. Israel was not blessed because she had a special relationship with God. She was blessed because she heard the word of God and observed it.

We who are members of the Catholic Church claim that faith on documents and forms. We announce that faith by attending Mass. But that alone does not make us blessed. It is in living that faith in all that we do, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, that we are blessed. It is in repenting when we go astray of that faith, like the children of Israel, that we are blessed.

Light dawns for the just, proclaims the psalmist. Let us live justly, with upright hearts, giving thanks always to the holy name of our Lord, so we, too, may dwell forever on the holy mountain of our God.

* * *

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2017

(Lec. 142)

1) Isaiah 25:6-10a

2) Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

3) Matthew 22:1-14 or 22:1-10

Gospel related: CCC 546, 796

**TWENTY-EIGHTH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: We are invited to the banquet. Are we prepared to respond?

Invitations with RSVPs. We all send them out. Seldom do we receive them all back. Sometimes those who don't respond show up anyway. Other times, people respond that they will attend our event and then don't. Occasionally, people come to an event not having read all the information and arrive at the wrong time, or in the wrong attire. In any case, not responding properly to the RSVP can have financial implications for the hosts, or other costs (social or professional, for example) for us if we come unprepared for the event.

Today's readings may not literally involve invitations with RSVPs, but the analogy serves to highlight some messages found within them. Three times we are told how God will provide for us. Isaiah says, *On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines ... he will destroy death forever.* Here, God is reminding the Israelites that he will be faithful to their covenant. The invitation and response that were exchanged in Exodus (6:7) will come to pass.

In Saint Paul's Letter to the Philippians, Paul tells the community, *God will fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.* At this point in human history, what Isaiah has prophesied has come to pass: (through Jesus), death has been destroyed forever. So Saint Paul is reminding them that they can be content with whatever circumstances come their way, because the banquet has begun. The invitation was extended, and for those who have actively responded (in baptism), the feast is plenty.

In the portion of Matthew's Gospel we heard a moment ago, Jesus tells the parable of the wedding feast hosted by the king. The wedding feast serves as an image of the kingdom of God: a benevolent king has prepared a lavish banquet in celebration of his son, and sent out many invitations for people to come and enjoy the feast, free of charge. For the third time today, we have heard how God provides for us. And yet, there is something very different about this example.

In this story, all who are initially invited – the *worthy* – refuse to attend, including some who literally kill the king's messengers! So the king widens his invitation to *all they [the servants] found, bad and good alike, and the hall was filled with guests.* In telling this parable, Jesus is highlighting the rejection many of the Jewish people have shown to him and the prophets who preceded him. Jesus is telling the Jewish elite around him that what they refuse to accept will again be offered to the Gentiles, who will readily accept the invitation to salvation and be thankful for it.

Bad and good alike are invited to the wedding feast. This is all of us. We, the Church, are not a club where we gather to celebrate our successes and revel in how much better we are than everyone else. Rather, the Church is what Pope Francis called a *field hospital* where we come for healing, hope and help, believing, as Paul said to the newly baptized at Philippi: *I can do all things in him who strengthens me.* Our responsibility is to honor carefully this invitation and to RSVP with conviction and love – and then prepare, through living a sacramental life, to partake of the feast for eternity.

Monday, October 16, 2017
(Lec. 467)

- 1) Romans 1:1-7
- 2) Luke 11:29-32

MONDAY OF
28TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Hedwig,
Religious;
Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque,
Virgin)

FOCUS: Our faith is not based on signs and wonders, but on the presence of Jesus in our lives.

When we think of the story of Jonah, we immediately recall that he was swallowed by a whale. In fact, that is about all most people know about him. But there is much more to the story. Jonah was called by God to travel to Nineveh and preach to the people there. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, the powerful enemy of Israel. To the Jewish people, it was the symbol of all wickedness and godlessness. Jonah walked the streets, preaching repentance and threatening God's destruction of the city. To Jonah's amazement, the people of Nineveh took his words to heart and repented immediately, including the king.

In today's Gospel, Jesus compares the people of Nineveh to the crowd in front of him, whom he calls *an evil generation*. The crowd seeks a sign. They insist that Jesus prove who he is before they will listen to him. Their stubbornness is in stark contrast to the people of Nineveh who accepted God's word immediately. God's word was preached to them by a weak and reluctant prophet. But the crowd is in the presence of God's own son, the Word itself, and they refuse to see.

They refuse to see that Jesus himself is the sign — the sign of God's love and mercy. We are called to accept him. Not merely believe in what he teaches, or believe only because of the miracles he performed. We are called to believe and accept because, as Saint Paul says, Jesus Christ our Lord *descended from David according to the flesh, but [was] established as Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead.*

In our own lives, we may sometimes challenge God to show us a sign. We pray for something to happen: a job opportunity, a relationship, healing of an illness, financial security. But what happens when he does not bend to our will? Do we reject him? Do we really expect God to be subservient to us? As hard as it is, we are called to know, love and believe in him without any additional outward signs, other than Jesus Christ.

* * *

Tuesday, October 17, 2017
(Lec. 468)

- 1) Romans 1:16-25
- 2) Luke 11:37-41

TUESDAY OF
28TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Ignatius of Antioch,
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 579, 588, 2447

FOCUS: Let us choose to invite Jesus into our lives.

There is a lot going on in our readings today, and there are many lessons we can learn. Our focus will be on what these Scripture passages tell us about who Jesus is.

By some standards, if we wanted to inject a little humor into the storyline, one could assert that Jesus was not always the best houseguest! He seemed to have a habit of accepting invitations to share a meal with people, only to chastise his hosts for his hypocrisy or his legalism or some other fault. Even so, people like the Pharisees in today's Gospel continued to invite him and he continued to accept (*Lk 7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-24*).

They continued to invite him. After all, Jesus was a celebrity, of sorts. He had crowds following him, sometimes numbering in the thousands. Who would not want to say such a popular figure had dined at his house? Additionally, the Pharisees must have realized there was something compelling about what this itinerant preacher had to say, and they were both interested in his words, and wary of the threat his words carried.

And he continued to accept their invitations. Jesus seems to have never turned down a request to join his hosts for a meal. We can surmise it was less about needing to be fed, and more about his mission: to make known the Father and to establish the kingdom of God on earth. He was, and *is*, as Saint Paul tells us, *the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*. And so he never stopped loving his people; he never stopped engaging; he never stopped speaking the truth to them in love (*cf. Eph 4:15*). Jesus avails himself to all, so that *what can be known about God is evident to them* and they – and we – can freely choose to believe in him.

The problem for the Pharisees, and for us, is that – again as Paul says – we exchange *the truth of God for a lie and revere and worship the creature rather than the creator*. That is, like the Pharisees – who represent, for Luke, spiritual blindness and legalism as impediments to knowing Christ – we can hold stubbornly to sins of hypocrisy, arrogance and certainty. We look good on the outside, but within we can be *filled with plunder and evil*.

Jesus loved the Pharisees, and God loves us, far too much to allow us to stay as we are. Therefore, he always accepts our invitations to come into our lives. And he never hesitates to instruct us in our faults. If we would only listen! What can be known about God is evident to us. So let us freely choose to believe in him – to invite him into our lives, repent of our sins and trust that he will make all things clean and new. *For the one who is righteous by faith will live.*

* * *

Wednesday, October 18, 2017
(Lec. 661)

- 1) 2 Timothy 4:10-17b
- 2) Luke 10:1-9

Gospel related: CCC 765, 2122, 2611 CSDC 259, 492

**SAINT LUKE,
EVANGELIST
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Strong and faithful, ready to place his gifts and talents at the disposal of the Gospel, Saint Luke recorded the great mystery of salvation in Jesus.

Today we celebrate one of four canonical evangelists whose Gospel now forms part of sacred Scripture. As with all the early disciples, our knowledge of Saint Luke and his life is sparse and uneven and yet his two great works, his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, occupy almost a third of the New Testament.

From what is known, Luke most likely encountered Christ through the preaching of Saint Paul. In today's reading, Paul praises Luke for his fidelity when others had deserted and betrayed him, and in Colossians refers to him as *the beloved physician* (Col 4:14). Tradition tells us that Luke was probably from Antioch in Syria, and used his education and writing skills to help Paul in his mission. After Paul's martyrdom, Luke continued to preach the Gospel and to share it by written and spoken word, eventually dying in Constantinople.

Although a disciple of Paul, Luke adopted a unique approach to proclaiming the Gospel. In his Gospel, he recalls the life and mission of Jesus from his mysterious birth in Bethlehem to his death and resurrection. In Acts, he tells the story of the early Church: its initial growth and development in Jerusalem, and then beyond as it spread to the Gentile world.

While Luke's writings might seem like a biography, they are really a document of faith, recalling how God's salvation definitively entered human history through Jesus, and passed from the risen Christ to his Church. It is this truth that Luke recalls in order to strengthen those who have accepted Jesus as Savior. Luke wants us to come away not with a book of historical facts, but with an assurance and trust in Jesus as Messiah and now Lord of all peoples.

Four major themes dominate Luke's writings.

Inclusivity: Writing for a predominantly Gentile audience, Luke emphasizes the universal and inclusive nature of salvation — women, public sinners, Gentiles, slaves; those on the fringes are all invited to embrace this divine offer.

Reversal: Luke is at pains to emphasize that God's ways are different from ours. This theme is best seen in the Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55) where the proud are put down and the lowly raised up, the hungry are fed and rich sent away; and again in the Beatitudes (Lk 6:20-30) where the poor inherit the Kingdom, the hungry are satisfied and the sorrowful shall laugh.

God's abundant mercy: As the Gospel unfolds, so, too, does this theme of mercy. Both Mary and Zechariah proclaim God's mercy in their hymns of praise as part of Luke's presentation of the origins of John the Baptist and Jesus. But it is in the parables that we see this mercy lived out in the actions of the good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son.

Perseverance in prayer: Throughout the Gospel, Jesus prays before every major event in his life. His deep and abiding communion and relationship with the Father is a key component in understanding Jesus and in embracing the Christian life.

We may not *write* a Gospel, but we can certainly live it out. May we, like Saint Luke, place our gifts and talents at the disposal of the Lord who is calling us to participate in, and share, the salvation of Jesus Christ.

Thursday, October 19, 2017
(Lec. 470)

- 1) Romans 3:21-30
- 2) Luke 11:47-54

THURSDAY OF
28TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
USA: Saints John de Brébeuf
and Isaac Jogues, Priests,
and Companions, Martyrs)

FOCUS: Martyrdom is willingly dying while giving witness to the truths of the faith.

In the very beautiful passage from the first reading, Saint Paul tells us that salvation comes through faith in Christ. Living this faith means offering a total gift of self. Not through self-initiated acts, but by entering into an intimate relationship with God who reaches out in love. Such a profound grace enables a person to share in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. When viewed in this way, the good works of that individual are a sign of God's love working in and through that person.

Jesus sets the stage for living such a profound faith life through his strong words about hypocrisy in today's Gospel. He tells the Pharisees that they are building monuments as acts of atonement for having killed prophets in the past while they have exactly the same attitudes as their ancestors. In other words, they are not listening to their own teachings. In making such statements, Jesus is referring to the history of martyrdom that is evident throughout the Old Testament. He is also beginning to indirectly refer to his own death.

Jesus continues to say difficult things to them. He states that they are interpreting the law in a way that hinders the ordinary person from living it. Jesus also tells them that it is even worse because they do not observe the law themselves. These words increase their hostility toward Jesus. They fail to realize that his vision of the kingdom of God is different from their own.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes today's readings even clearer by making important points about the life of a martyr. It says, "Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he is united by charity. He bears witness to the truth of the faith and of Christian doctrine. He endures death through an act of fortitude" (CCC 2473).

Today, the Church celebrates the martyrdom of Saint John de Brébeuf and Saint Isaac Jogues, and Companions. These eight people were members of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits. In the 1600s, they traveled to North America to preach the truths of the faith. Based on their convictions about the faith, they were tortured and killed.

As we consider today's readings and these martyrs, let us pray for all those throughout the world who are being persecuted because they are Christians. Let us also pray for the grace to grow stronger in our own faith, and the will to live it with conviction.

* * *

Friday, October 20, 2017
(Lec. 471)

- 1) Romans 4:1-8
- 2) Luke 12:1-7

Gospel related: CCC 342, 678

FRIDAY OF
28TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Paul of the Cross, Priest)

FOCUS: Faith and trust equal uprightness before God.

In the first reading, we hear Saint Paul speak of justification through faith – that is, a righteousness before God that arises from unwavering belief in God and his promises. In Paul's overarching framework, this involves welcoming the Holy Spirit into our lives and turning away from sin (*cf., Rom 6 and Rom 2:4*).

In the Gospel, Jesus warns against hypocrisy. We cannot simply claim to have faith, and continue in our sinful habits. Whatever we do in darkness will be brought to the light. Everything will be revealed; nothing is hidden from God.

Both communities of listeners in today's Scripture passages were living under persecution – and while Paul and Jesus have difficult words for them, they are also words of encouragement. For Paul is reminding the Romans that forgiveness of sins is possible, and that all believers – through repentance and trust – will be considered righteous as Abraham was. Faith, believing *in* God who exists (not just *that* God exists), allows the power of the Holy Spirit to bring us to new life in Christ.

Jesus is reminding his listeners that even in the face of persecution, they have nothing to fear – God will protect them. The one with power, in the end, is God. We will experience suffering and death in this world, but God promises salvation to the ones who acknowledge and follow Christ.

Fear is a powerful motivator, but it is a false idol. Fear says that God is not sufficient; that something is more powerful than God and can prevent him from doing wonderful things in and for us. Both Paul, implicitly, and Jesus, explicitly, denounce this false idol and encourage their communities, and us, to trust. Trusting God while living our faith makes us upright before the Lord, and credits us with righteousness.

Let us pray, then, for the grace to trust and to live our faith with conviction; for the grace to welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives and to turn away from sin; for the grace to not be afraid. We are of immense worth – Jesus died for us. May we live for him.

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Saturday, October 21, 2017
(Lec. 472)

- 1) Romans 4:13, 16-18
- 2) Luke 12:8-12

SATURDAY OF
28TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor of
BVM)

Gospel related: CCC 333, 1287, 1864

FOCUS: We are children of promise. We can hope against hope, as Abraham did, because we claim God as our Father.

In not-too-subtle language, today's readings remind us that we are God's children, children of promise. In Abraham, our father in faith, we are given the example of a faithful believer who — without hesitation and in spite of every impossibility — trusted that God would fulfill the promises he made to him and Sarah. Indeed, it was a promise *guaranteed to all his descendants ... who follow the faith of Abraham*, as Saint Paul noted in his letter to the Church in Rome.

Why is it so easy for us to doubt this promise when God's ways seem to be different than our way? When the path seems dark and unfamiliar, do we trust God, our Father, enough to cast away our doubts in favor of hope?

When Saint Paul remarks that Abraham hoped against hope, he is not referring to "hope" as something interchangeable with "wish," as in, "I hope it won't rain tomorrow." Abraham hoped because he believed — in both God and his promises. When others could see only the impossible and incomprehensible, Abraham recognized an opportunity to experience God's enduring grace.

This hope is a theological virtue; we place our trust in God's promises and rely "not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit" (CCC 1817). The light and grace we received in our baptism already fill us with the wisdom we need to proclaim the faith — to see God's presence in all aspects of our lives, from the most significant events to the mundane daily reality of dirty dishes and piles of laundry.

We can hope as Abraham did because God promised it. And God is faithful. Abraham knew and believed with his entire being what we claim through our baptism; that God always fulfills his promises. Always. Like a child on his father's lap, Abraham trusted the Father to provide for him. And he could, therefore, praise God in the daily and the difficult and the unexpected. Not only did Abraham recognize that he would be showered with all he needed, he also trusted in God's promise that there is always more grace.

Brothers and sisters, we, too, can rest in the truth that God always gives us the grace we need. In today's Gospel, Saint Luke reminds us of the promise God made to be present to us as we walk this earthly pilgrimage with our eyes set on our heavenly home. To all who claim Jesus as the Christ, our Lord says, *do not worry about how or what your defense will be or about what you are to say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say.* And God always fulfills his promises. Always.

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SUNDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2017

(Lec. 145)

1) Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

2) 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b

3) Matthew 22:15-21

Gospel related: CCC 2242 CSDC 379

**TWENTY-NINTH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Give God the first fruits. He will never be outdone in generosity.

Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not? Jesus is asked in today's Gospel. Matthew makes it clear that those who ask this question are interested in one thing only: *how they might entrap Jesus in speech*. If Jesus answered "yes," he might forfeit his popularity with the masses, who resented the payment. If he answered "no," he could be denounced to the authorities for inciting people to break the law.

Jesus does not give either of the answers his questioners were looking for. Jesus' reply, *Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar*, rejects the radical position of those who claimed that the Roman government was unlawful and should not be obeyed at all. All the emphasis, however, is on the second part of Jesus' answer: *[Pay] to God what belongs to God*.

What *is* God's anyway? The answer is inescapable: everything! From God we receive all that we are and have, sin excepted. God has given us the gift of life, and has preserved our lives until now in the midst of heaven-knows-how-many dangers to life. God has given us our talents: everything from the five senses, which we share with the animals, to the uniquely human gifts of thought, speech, love and laughter, to the individual talents that make each person unique. How dull life would be if we were all the same!

If paying to God what is God's means anything, it must mean putting God *first* in our lives. *Are we putting God first in our lives? Or does he get the leftovers? Our spare time (if any)? The gifts and talents that are left over when we have finished doing the things we want to do?*

Jesus understood, and taught, that we must give God the first fruits – out of gratitude. This grateful giving of first fruits was based on the truth that everything comes from God, and hence everything belongs to God.

If we truly want to "pay to God what is God's," we must put God *first* in our lives – in all areas of our lives. There must be no fenced-off areas where he is second or third – or where God is not allowed to enter at all.

When we put God first in our lives, we make a beautiful discovery. We find that what is left over for ourselves is always enough, ultimately more than enough! We find that God will never be outdone in generosity.

Monday, October 23, 2017
(Lec. 473)

- 1) Romans 4:20-25
- 2) Luke 12:13-21

MONDAY OF
29TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint John of Capistrano,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 549 CSDC 325, 326

FOCUS: As we work to earn a living, we must also work on our relationship with God.

Today's readings address the topics of worldly possessions, greed and making sure our priorities are in a proper order. Material goods are not bad things in and of themselves. God provides the things of this world for our benefit. We must be mindful, though, of their role in our lives and their impact on our relationship with God.

Jesus, in today's Gospel, says that although *one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions*. Notice that it is not pursuing and sustaining a comfortable lifestyle that Jesus is criticizing. To provide a safe, clean home for one's family; to put nutritious food on the table; to save money for the post-secondary education of children — these are all good aspirations for us as disciples of Jesus.

But these goals need to be tempered with growing *rich in what matters to God*, as Jesus says. To pursue worldly comforts at the expense of neglecting one's relationship with God, as well as failing to hear the cry of the poor in our pursuit of material security — these are dangers we must guard against throughout our earthly life.

Keeping material goods in proper perspective can be challenging. Saint Paul reassures us in today's first reading that what God promises, he is also able to do. God will help us keep our priorities in order if we spend time each day developing our relationship with him in prayer, as well as allowing the grace of the sacraments to support us in our walk of faith.

So let us avoid greed while making good use of our time, talent and treasure. Let us rejoice in God's promise of salvation, and receive it with gratitude as we prepare to receive Jesus in holy Communion. And let us strive to grow rich in what matters most to God, so as to glorify him on earth and live in his glory for eternity.

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Tuesday, October 24, 2017
(Lec. 474)

- 1) Romans 5:12, 15b,
17-19, 20b-21
- 2) Luke 12:35-38

Gospel related: CCC 2849

TUESDAY OF
29TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Anthony Mary Claret,
Bishop)

FOCUS: For all those who believe in, and place their faith and trust in Jesus, there is a promise of eternal life

Isaac Newton's Third Law of Motion states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. For every "push" of something, there is "pushback" by something else. It may sound complicated, but we all experience this law of motion daily: for example every time we take a step, drive a car, or sit in a pew.

Saint Paul was not a physicist, but the passage from his Letter to the Romans today may be something that Newton would appreciate. For Saint Paul tells us of the "initial force" driving us toward death: *Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned.*

He also tells us of the "reactive force" overcoming death and giving us an eternal life: found in the *abundance of grace and the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ.*

Now, of course, this is an analogy, and certainly not a perfect one. Nothing can ever be a perfect analogy for God. But it does allow us another way of looking at something that we know to be true, yet perhaps do not always appreciate for its graciousness and wonder.

That gracious and wonderful truth is this: though sin and earthly death still exist, for all those who believe in, and place their faith and trust in Jesus, there is a *future far beyond* the here and now of this world. There is a promise and assurance of an eternal life.

Granted, this promise is not unknown to us, and the Christian life is one we hope to already be living with attentiveness and joy, and a heart set on eternity. But pondering that first moment of sin entering the world reminds us that there was a time on earth when Christ had not yet come – and that today, there are places and people's hearts where he is not welcome. And yet, God never abandons us. Never gives up on us. Never stops drawing us to himself.

It is here that the physics analogy ultimately breaks down. First, there is nothing "equal" about God's "reaction" to that initial force of sin. Sin and death pushed into the world, and God pushed back with a mind-boggling response: his only begotten Son, through whom sin and death were acquitted and eternal life gained. No matter the strength of sin – God's grace is always stronger.

Second: in Newton's law, there is no *choice* involved in the action/reaction. But *we do* have a choice. We have the free will to respond to the force of sin in whatever manner we choose. We can choose to react in a way that allows sin to direct our path. Or, with prayer and a firm reliance on God's grace, we can push back with greater force, found in our faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

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Wednesday, October 25, 2017
(Lec. 475)

- 1) Romans 6:12-18
- 2) Luke 12:39-48

WEDNESDAY OF
29TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: How to live the life of a disciple.

In both of our Scripture passages today, we hear a message about how to live the life of a disciple. For Saint Paul, in the passage from his letter to the Romans, it means being aware of the right thing to do, and when to do it. He exhorts us to remember that we are freed from the eternal bonds of sin and death, through God's grace and the power of Christ's death and resurrection.

For Saint Paul, the right thing to do is to be obedient to God's will, and the time to do it is now – and always. We are commanded to make our bodies and ourselves an instrument of righteousness, and to follow *the pattern of teaching to which [we] were entrusted*. This way of living is both an expression of gratitude for God's grace in redeeming us, and a necessary result of truly having the mindset of Christ.

Jesus' message in the Gospel today complements that of Paul's, as we hear more about being entrusted with teaching. Jesus says, *Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more*, and he uses parables to highlight his meaning. His counsel here is that living the life of a disciple relies not just on knowledge, but also on love.

In both Gospel parables, knowledge of what has been revealed and proper preparation for the future are what protect the master of the house in the first, and the servant who acts appropriately in the second. We also see what happens when either of those are lacking. But the point is not to scare us, rather to embolden and encourage us: God has given each one of us every conceivable blessing, and the only thing that prevents those gifts from expanding, and from being used in the building up of the Kingdom, is our failure to love. That is, our sin.

But we know we have been freed from sin, and through that grace we have the ability to conform ourselves completely to Christ. In doing so, we embrace the knowledge with which we have been entrusted, and have full freedom and the will to carry out what it is expected of us as recipients of such a lavish gift. Yes, there will be times when we mess up – Jesus acknowledges that. But he reminds us, as does Paul, that we are not alone in our journey. It is God who has begun the good works in us – may we have the grace and strength to bring them all to completion.

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Thursday, October 26, 2017
(Lec. 476)

- 1) Romans 6:19-23
- 2) Luke 12:49-53

Gospel related: CCC 536, 607, 696, 1225, 2804

THURSDAY OF
29TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We have the choice to accept the gift of the kingdom of God.

We normally think of giving a gift on the occasion of a birthday, anniversary, wedding or other special occasion. A gift can mean many things, depending on the occasion. A graduation gift may recognize the hard-earned accomplishment of years of study by a student. Exercising the corporal and spiritual works of mercy may provide us the opportunity to give a gift of time, talent or treasure to help those in need. Our desire to exchange gifts has its roots in our basic need to communicate our love for each other in an effort to strengthen the bonds of family and community. As an expression of love, giving can be a good thing to do. The gift does not need to be extravagant.

Our experience tells us that not everyone is comfortable giving or receiving gifts. It may be that exchanging gifts was not part of a person's upbringing. Or that it triggers difficult memories. It may be that we find it easier to be the giver of the gift rather than the recipient. Whether easy for us or difficult, we can be assured that each of us has been given multiple gifts by our loving God – the gift of life, the gift of God's son, Jesus, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. These gifts and countless others permeate our very being. We have only to pause and reflect on all the good God has done for us and for others.

Saint Paul reflects further on God's gift to us in today's reading from the Letter to the Romans. He reminds the Christians in Rome who are caught up in the ways of the world that *the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*. Admonishing them because of their human weaknesses, he places before them two choices. If they choose to remain a slave to their sinful ways, then death will be their reward. If, however, they choose God over sin, then their gift will be eternal life.

Jesus proclaims the gift of the kingdom to his disciples in our Gospel passage from Saint Luke. As in our first reading, people will have a choice to either accept or reject the kingdom. Jesus bluntly tells his disciples what will be demanded of those who choose to follow him. What must the disciples have thought about division within families? Did they know he was talking about his death when he referred to his baptism? Following Jesus can be difficult. That's his point. God's gift, however, makes it worthwhile: eternal life in Christ. Will we accept God's gift today?

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Friday, October 27, 2017
(Lec. 477)

1 Romans 7:18-25a
2) Luke 12:54-59

FRIDAY OF
29TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus claims the role of the Messiah, and warns against the consequences of rejecting him.

Let us focus on the Gospel reading for today. Jesus is giving an urgent warning to the crowd, and to us. First, he chastises them for their attention to the physical world, but their lack of interest in the spiritual world. He draws on their ability to read the signs of the climate to tell if dangerous weather is coming. This shows the time they put into the practical aspects of life. Jesus isn't condemning this practice. He wouldn't begrudge a farmer for caring for his crops, or a shepherd for caring for his flock, if bad weather could harm them. This, in itself, is a good thing.

But Jesus compares this to their inability to *interpret the present time*. He is referring to the Father's promise to send a Messiah, a promise that was foretold at length in the Old Testament. Although people regularly check weather patterns, they are unable to recognize the fulfillment of God's promise – even when it is being done right before their eyes.

Jesus follows this with an urgent warning. The analogy he uses is terribly appropriate. The Magistrate is God the Father, who is a just judge. This means that he will be required to send to prison anyone who has not looked for the true meaning of the Old Testament prophecies. God is merciful, of course, but the people must be honest with themselves and with God. God cannot do it for them. If they are willfully choosing to ignore the spiritual realities of this life that have been revealed to them, then what more can God do? Jesus' warning is stern because so much is at stake.

Jesus is speaking to us, too, and his message is still very appropriate. Are we any different than the crowds surrounding Jesus? Which do we spend more time thinking of and caring for: our physical bodies or our spiritual souls? When we think of our neighbors, do we think of their spiritual wellness or how good they look? When we talk of being "green" and taking care of the planet, is our motivation to save ourselves or is it to honor the one who created it all?

Jesus desires that all of us recognize God when we see him. He wants us to be attuned to the spiritual reality as well as the physical. Will we accept his challenge?

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Saturday, October 28, 2017
(Lec. 666)

- 1) Ephesians 2:19-22
- 2) Luke 6:12-16

Gospel related: CCC 1577, 2600

**SAINTS SIMON
AND JUDE,
APOSTLES
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Christ calls us to his mission.

In today's Gospel, Jesus makes a critical decision that impacts salvation for all eternity: he names the Twelve Apostles. *Apostles*, translated from Greek, means "to send out." The number twelve is associated with the twelve tribes of Israel mentioned in the Old Testament. These ordinary men become extraordinary successors of Christ's mission by spreading his message throughout the world, and establishing an early community of believers that has lasted more than two thousand years.

Before naming the Twelve, Jesus spends a night in prayer. This reveals the humble and trusting commitment of Jesus' human will to the loving will of the Father (CCC 2600), and teaches us the importance of prayer. It also shows us what is possible when we trust Jesus. We must pray at critical moments in our lives instead of relying on ourselves or the opinions of others. In this way, we can imitate Jesus and deepen our relationship with the Father.

While the Apostles are probably surprised at being chosen by Jesus, they trust him. He makes them holy — with profound knowledge of the Father and authority to perform miracles in his name. Whenever we are tempted to shy away from our call — out of fear or feelings of inadequacy — we must trust Jesus. He prepares us for the work that lies ahead.

In Ephesians we learn how the Twelve, along with the prophets, form the foundation of the household of God. Jesus is the capstone, uniting the people of the Jewish faith with the Gentiles. No longer strangers, they become fellow citizens with the holy ones, and members of a structure built as a dwelling place for God in the Spirit.

The household Paul describes is the Church. Its construction continues, ascending from the foundation laid by the prophets and Apostles. Today is the feast of the Apostles Saints Simon and Jude. Simon was called a zealot, for his zeal for God and purity of religion, and possibly for his association with the Zealots — Jewish nationalists who opposed paying taxes to the Romans. Jude, mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark as Thaddeus (so as not to be confused with Judas the traitor), was a cousin of Jesus. People often turn to Saint Jude when they face impossible situations. Both men are believed to have been martyred in Persia.

By committing ourselves to prayer and the Eucharist, we enter into deeper communion with the Trinity and each other. Christ strengthens us, as he did the Apostles, to persist in our own mission with faithfulness and zeal. He prepares us to answer his call.

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SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2017

(Lec. 148)

- 1) Exodus 22:20-26
- 2) 1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10
- 3) Matthew 22:34-40

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

**THIRTIETH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: By witnessing to the Good News, we share God's love.

The opponents of Jesus just won't give up! Last week, they tried to trip him up on the sticky question of taxes to Caesar. Today is a cunning attempt to lead him into a hair-splitting debate and lose him in the wilderness of the subtleties of the Mosaic Law! It is noteworthy that Matthew uses the same Greek word here – to test – as when describing Jesus' earlier confrontation with Satan in the desert. Clearly, he wants us to understand that those who test Jesus are in league with, or at least unwittingly doing, the work of Satan.

Matthew sets the scene well! A Pharisee – a lawyer – asks Jesus which of the commandments is the greatest. His response does not seek to set aside the Law, but instead to interpret it more fully. For Jesus, the greatest commandment is found in Deuteronomy: *You shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength* (6:5).

Jesus' answer emphasizes the centrality of love – a cord that binds together the human heart and soul and directs us toward God.

While asked for only one commandment, Jesus adds a second, quoting from Leviticus, which he says is equal to and inseparable from the first: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (19:18). Everything, he says, hangs on these two interrelated commandments. Like a door on two hinges that will not open or close properly if out of alignment, so, too, our lives if we do not love God and our neighbor. Jesus is not discounting any other commandments, but simply emphasizing that these two are foundational.

So what does this declaration mean for us today? As we struggle to live the Christian life, we can so easily compartmentalize love of God and love of neighbor. Sometimes, it may seem easier to love God than to love our neighbor. But, as Jesus proclaims, these two loves cannot be separated.

By linking this Gospel with a practical reading from Exodus, we are reminded that this love is more than a warm and fuzzy feeling. Out of Israel's experience of slavery in Egypt, there emerged the reality of a God who is compassionate and protective of the weak. No one is to take advantage of them or to imprison them in a relentless cycle of dependence. How challenging these ancient words and this ethical wisdom can sound today.

Paul confirms this teaching by reminding the Thessalonians of their fidelity to Christ. He rejoices with them because they have remained steadfast and active in faith. For them, faith is more than a passing fad. Clearly, they have recognized the word of God in Paul's preaching, and through the lived example of their lives, have now become ministers of the Gospel to others within their community and beyond. Awaiting the return of Christ, they have become people of hope, bringing the combined love of God and neighbor to others.

May we, too, be a people of hope – witnessing the Gospel to others and sharing God's love.

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Monday, October 30, 2017
(Lec. 479)

- 1) Romans 8:12-17
- 2) Luke 13:10-17

Gospel related: CCC 582 CSDC 261

MONDAY OF
30TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are children of God, and his Spirit is within us.

While Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, he noticed a crippled woman. She was bent over and couldn't straighten up. Imagine living life hunched over — constantly looking down, never able to look anyone in the eye.

Jesus took the initiative to free the woman from the bondage of her crippled body. After he touched her, she stood up straight. For the first time in eighteen years, she looked at someone face to face — and the first face she saw was that of Jesus, her healer. No wonder the Gospel tells us she began glorifying God.

Praising God. What an appropriate thing to do in a synagogue on the Sabbath. *Remember the Sabbath day — keep it holy.* That's what God commanded his people to do at Mount Sinai (Ex 20: 8). What could be holier than freeing a woman from the bondage of her deformity, freeing her to stand up and praise God from the bottom of her heart?

Nevertheless, the synagogue official was angry that Jesus broke the Sabbath law by doing work — that is, by healing. In a way, that official was crippled, too, by his narrow, scrupulous understanding of the law. The Sabbath was meant to provide God's people a day of rest. Loss of perspective had turned the Sabbath into a burden.

Jesus offered freedom to those in bondage to the letter of the law. He reminded them that if it was acceptable to care for an ox or other animal on the Sabbath, it was much more acceptable to care for a child of God. When we focus on keeping the letter of the law, we lose sight of its spirit, which is love.

As we hear in today's first reading, we are children of God and his Spirit is within us. Living according to the promptings of the Spirit brings us beyond fear-based rule-keeping. However, this freedom doesn't mean we can do whatever we feel like whenever we want. Living according to the demands of our egos, or our flesh, is self-destructive. Our egos are never satisfied.

We need to surrender to God's Spirit to be free. As Saint Paul said in his letter to the Romans, *if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

Scrupulosity keeps us focused on ourselves. So does ego-driven self-will. The Spirit of Christ frees us from bondage to both. As children of God, we're free to live in God's love and share that love with one another.

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Tuesday, October 31, 2017
(Lec. 480)

- 1) Romans 8:18-25
- 2) Luke 13:18-21

Gospel related: CCC 2660

TUESDAY OF
30TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are called by the Spirit to be filled with enduring hope and perseverance, proclaiming the kingdom in our example and witness.

In our first reading today, on this eve of All Saints' Day, we hear from Saint Paul's encouraging words to the Romans. In the early days of our Church, there were very difficult times for the followers of Jesus. Paul proclaimed that the many trials, hardships, persecutions and sufferings were nothing compared to the wonders and richness of Christ's glory as would be revealed in the Spirit.

The early Church, part of the world and yet so different from that world around them, experienced growing pains of every kind. Paul preached and proclaimed the need for hope and endurance. Hope from corruption, hope from slavery and persecution, to live in the glorious freedom as true children of light set forth by Jesus through the Spirit.

Then, in today's Gospel reading, we hear two parables. In the parable of the mustard seed, one of the smallest seeds grows into an extremely large bush. In the parable of the yeast, a tiny portion of yeast leavens a huge batch of wheat flour into magnificent dough.

Both of our readings point to the growth and enrichment of our lives as followers of Jesus, and of our life as his Church. Both vividly apply to current situations in our world. So many things around us can be contrary to the ways of God and disrespectful of the miraculous beauty of creation. We should focus on the hope and endurance Paul proclaimed and demonstrated, and uphold the responsibility and honor of being called to be yeast in the world, evangelizing and leading others by our example and witness.

With All Saints' Day upon us, let us look to the inspiring words of Saint Paul, seeking the redemption of our bodies as temples of God, in the glorious fruits of the Spirit, waiting diligently and building up the kingdom. As followers of Jesus, we delight in the miracle of growing in his Spirit of love and justice, following him closely day by day, little by little, blossoming in his creation and salvation.

May God, who has called us in hope, continue to lead and guide us as we journey in the footsteps of Christ – as members of his holy body, the Church on earth. May all the saints before us provide examples as we prepare to celebrate their glorious witness.

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