

# SEPTEMBER

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12 13

14 15 16 17 18

19 20 21 22 23

24 25 26 27 28

29 30

Friday, September 1, 2017

(Lec. 429)

1) 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

2) Matthew 25:1-13

Gospel related: **CCC** 672, 1618

FRIDAY OF  
21<sup>ST</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Nobody else can light the lamps of our spiritual lives for us.

What is our fundamental, lifetime task as Christians? It is to become holy and pleasing to God through cooperation with the grace and help of Jesus – and, through our words, service and example, to bring others to the love of God. Ultimately, our goal is to keep the light of our lives shining so when our time comes to stand before the Lord Jesus to give an account of our lives, we might be judged worthy of eternal life in heaven. But to do so in a world that so often claims our attention through its many distractions requires vigilance, perseverance and prayer.

Jesus gives us that message loud and clear in today's Gospel: the parable of the five wise virgins and the five foolish virgins. The foolish virgins did not have enough fuel to sustain their lamps once the bridegroom arrived. It might seem selfish that the wise virgins did not share their oil with the foolish so that all ten could have joined the bridegroom, but they simply did not have enough oil – enough grace – to cover for someone else who was less prepared.

This is a lesson that many good teachers offer to their students: each must do his or her own work to be ready for tests or assigned dates for papers or projects. When students come face to face with a test, they have only the resources they've brought with them – their own hard work of study and preparation. Similarly, when our final exam comes, so to speak – when our time comes to stand before the Lord to give an account of our lives – we can bring only our own lamps, fueled by prayer, attention to the matters of God, and our responses to God's call throughout our lives.

Of course, our parents, religion teachers, pastors, spiritual companions and friends can teach, encourage and inspire us – but they can't take our final test for us. When we stand before Jesus to give an account of our lives, the only thing we bring with us will be the lives we have led. Hopefully, for each of us, our lamps will be well-stocked with lives led in faithfulness and poured out in love and service to God and our neighbor.

\* \* \* \* \*

Saturday, September 2, 2017  
(Lec. 430)

- 1) 1 Thessalonians 4:9-11
- 2) Matthew 25:14-30

SATURDAY OF  
21<sup>ST</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Saturday in honor of  
BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 546, 1029, 1720, 1936, 2683, **CSDC** 259, 326

FOCUS: The greatest of all the gifts we have been given is love.

The gifts and talents that we have as children can change and develop as time goes by. A skill in sports may develop into a completely different activity – perhaps competitive dance. TV shows such as “America’s Got Talent” and “American Idol” remind us that gifts and talents are an important part of our human makeup given to us by God and unique to each individual. We, on the other hand, have a responsibility to discover what our gifts are, and to use them so that we live up to our God-given potential.

The foundation of all our varied gifts and talents is the gift of love. God has freely bestowed the gift of love on each and every one of us. We did not earn this gift, and it cannot be taken away. Yet, we must be willing to accept God’s gift of love; we must nurture the love in our hearts. Paul reminds us in his first Letter to the Corinthians in chapter 13 that no matter how talented we are, if we do not have love then we gain nothing.

In our first reading, Saint Paul addresses the Greek community in Thessalonica. Throughout Greece, he has run up against rejection and faced persecution as he began his second missionary journey to the Gentiles. His message to the Thessalonians is to remain faithful to the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, just as he and his companions have remained strong in the faith, preaching the Gospel, enduring hardship and living the faith on their behalf. Paul reminds them of the importance of fraternal charity, which finds its greatest expression in the love God has taught them.

In today’s Gospel, the talents in the parable refer to money, not skills. However, Jesus uses the example of monetary talents as a metaphor for the gifts God has entrusted to each of us. In the story, all three servants were entrusted with various amounts of money. Two of them doubled the master’s money, and the other returned exactly what was given to him. The two who doubled their master’s money were rewarded, while the one who earned nothing was chastised and received nothing. One of the points Jesus seems to be trying to drive home in this parable is this: don’t just sit on your talents, get up and do something with them so that they increase – so that you become a better Christian and lead a life which bears good fruit for God.

God has entrusted each of us with unique gifts and talents. It is up to us to recognize our talents, use them and nurture them so they grow and increase. Since each of us has received the gift of God’s love as well, we are enabled to go forward to share the gift of his love, and the unique gifts and talents God has given us.

\* \* \* \* \*

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2017**

(Lec. 124)

1) Jeremiah 20:7-9

2) Romans 12:1-2

3) Matthew 16:21-27

Gospel related: **CCC** 226, 363, 540, 554, 607, 618, 736, 1021, 1969, 2029, 2232

**TWENTY-SECOND  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: We are to take up our cross each day and follow Jesus.

No pain, no gain is a common phrase which reminds us of the fact that sacrifice is almost always required in order to accomplish things that are important. The saying holds true with regard to growing in our love for the Lord and living as faithful disciples of Jesus as well.

In the first reading, we are given a look into the heart of the prophet Jeremiah, and the trials and suffering he experienced as a result of being faithful to God's call to serve as a prophet. The words of Jeremiah are powerful and poignant, *You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped; you were too strong for me, and you triumphed. All the day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me.*

These aren't words of surrender or defeat on the part of Jeremiah, but an honest expression of the struggles and personal price he paid as a result of speaking the word of the Lord to the Israelites to call them to turn away from sin and renew their faith and trust in the Lord.

And although Jeremiah suffered as a result of his fidelity to God's call to serve as a prophet, his words make it clear that he also experienced an inexplicable joy as a result of being faithful to God's plan for his life: *I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.*

The second reading speaks of sacrifice as a fundamental requirement for leading lives which are holy and pleasing to God. Saint Paul urges us not to be conformed to this present age. This requires making the decision each day to set aside personal ambitions and desires and to make our number one priority that of being faithful to God's will for our lives.

Finally, the teaching of Jesus in today's Gospel that whoever wishes to follow him must take up their cross and follow him leaves no room for doubt that sacrifice is a fundamental and non-negotiable requirement for being a faithful disciple. So if we want to live as faithful disciples of Jesus and come to experience the inexhaustible treasure and blessings of the kingdom of God more fully, we have no choice but to take up our cross each day and follow Jesus. In other words – no pain, no gain.

\* \* \* \* \*

Monday, September 4, 2017

(Lec. 431)

1) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

2) Luke 4:16-30

Gospel related: **CCC** 436, 544, 695, 714, 1168, 1286, 2443, **CSDC** 28

MONDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God's saving grace is unconditional.

*All spoke highly of him*, we hear after Jesus reads in the synagogue from the prophet Isaiah and proclaims the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that God would send someone to comfort, heal and liberate people. Only a few verses later, however, the same people who were *amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth* are ready to hurl Jesus headlong from the top of the hill on which Jesus' hometown, Nazareth, was built. What's going on here?

The *year acceptable to the Lord*, which Jesus says he was sent to proclaim, is reminiscent of the jubilee years, celebrated by Jews in Jesus' day every half-century. During a jubilee year, the fields lay fallow, people returned to their homes, debts were forgiven and slaves set free. Jubilee years also reminded people that God did not reserve his blessings for those he had called to be especially his own. God loves and blesses *all* people.

Jesus gives his Jewish audience two examples of this universal love. During a prolonged famine, Jesus reminds them, God sent the great prophet Elijah not to a member of their own people, but to a Gentile widow living outside Israel. And Elijah's successor, Elisha, never cured any lepers among his own people, only the Gentile Naaman, from Syria. Those were the words that changed the people's admiration for Jesus to resentful anger.

The people were enraged. They were enraged because they were hearing, rightly, that God's saving grace is unconditional. It was not just for the chosen people. These words are meant for us, too: Jesus, by his death and resurrection, redeemed *all of creation*.

This is not cheap grace, however. It is not simply a gift that means everyone has a first-class ticket to heaven. What it means is that by redeeming all of creation, God has offered salvation to all of creation – but each one of us must receive and accept that saving grace. We must choose to sincerely seek God, and – with that grace strengthening our desires – strive to do his will. The grace itself is unconditional: there is no one not offered it by God. Is the grace we share just as unconditional?

It is easy to love those who are like us, or who share the same values. It is more difficult to "love the unlikeable" and to offer grace to those we deem unworthy. The Jews in the synagogue certainly exemplified this. They could not believe, or accept, that a carpenter's son – an uneducated man from a small town – could instruct them, let alone be the fulfillment of Scripture.

It is not our job to put conditions on God's salvific grace. It is our calling as Christians to empower and enable others, as much as possible, to respond, receive and accept it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tuesday, September 5, 2017

(Lec. 432)

1) 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6, 9-11

2) Luke 4:31-37

TUESDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Who do you say that Jesus is?

The Roman armies had conquered Jerusalem sixty-three years before the birth of Jesus Christ. They established it as a Roman province headed by a Roman governor. Life for the Jews was brutal and miserable under the Romans, and the Jewish religious authorities did not make life any easier for them. The Jewish people, in expectant hope, were looking for the Messiah that God, through the prophets of the Old Testament, had promised them. At the time of Christ, there were many charlatans among the Jews – charlatans who claimed to be their hoped-for Messiah.

Properly identifying the Messiah was of the greatest importance both then and now. In the sixteenth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel, we find this account: *When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

In today's Gospel, we find that even the demons themselves knew, without a doubt, who Jesus was because one said, *I know who you are – the Holy One of God.* Even so, after two thousand years of Christian history we find many people today who cannot, or who will not, answer the question: Who is Jesus Christ?

Jesus is not just another important religious figure in human history. Jesus is God who has come to us as one of us, and is available to us in our human nature.

Who is Jesus Christ? What does the question mean to you personally? Jesus has the power to forgive our sins and make us new persons, to erase our pasts and empower us to start out all over again fresh and new, to make us new creations, to erase our past failures, faults, sins and regrets. Jesus has the power to drive our demons out of us.

May his peace be with you.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wednesday, September 6, 2017  
(Lec. 433)

- 1) Colossians 1:1-8
- 2) Luke 4:38-44

WEDNESDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We who have faith can share the Gospel in numerous ways

It is easy to find examples – in real life and in fiction – of people being involved in a medical or emergency setting where their specific actions have had a direct impact on a positive outcome. Today's Gospel passage shows us two such instances: Jesus cures Simon's mother-in-law, and then he heals a multitude of people with various ailments, including demonic possession.

The implications are clear: someone's direct intervention is necessary for an immediate effect. And while those moments are essential in human life, if one is looking at them through the eyes of faith, they can make the Christian life seem a bit out of reach: how can we *possibly* live up to these standards?

The error, it seems, is in thinking that these are the *only* standards available to us; that doing something directly to, or for, another, is the only way to bring about good.

But how many of us have ever had the experience of someone saying to us, "I had this wonderful event happen because of you," or "I did this particular [good] thing because you set an example"? Perhaps we simply make an offhand comment one day and discover, years later, that a certain individual needed to hear those very words, even if the words were not necessarily intended for them.

This, we might conclude, is where today's letter from Saint Paul has something particularly relevant to offer on this topic.

Saint Paul is writing to a community of believers who have, by all accounts, no miracles to their name – yet their community is growing. Paul is enthusiastic, and high in his praise of the Colossians: for their obvious faith in Christ Jesus, their love for one another and in the Spirit, and their professed hope in the truth of the Gospel. Their actions are bringing people to Christ.

Many of their actions are assuredly specific, with a direct impact on the outcome. And yet, the fact that Paul writes not about activities ("great job baptizing everyone in that part of the village!") or events ("wonderful parish mission you all had!"), but about Christian *qualities*, tells us that the reason he knows of their success is because of the way they live their lives.

What a privileged and humbling experience it must have been to hear such praise from Saint Paul; what a privilege and humbling experience it would be for us to receive such affirmation of our Christian lives.

The possibilities are there. We who have faith can share the Gospel in many ways. Let us strive to do so, that it might be said of us that *we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the holy ones.*

\* \* \*

Thursday, September 7, 2017

(Lec. 434)

1) Colossians 1:9-14

2) Luke 5:1-11

Gospel related: **CCC** 208

THURSDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus is always calling us to put out into deeper waters – to not be afraid and follow him.

Today's Gospel is about the call to discipleship, specifically Simon Peter's, but by extension our own as well. The two main figures of the Gospel are Jesus and Simon, later called Peter – the rock, the one whom Jesus will entrust with the keys of the kingdom. Jesus approached Simon Peter's boat after the fisherman worked all night catching little or no fish. Simon and his business partners were busy cleaning and repairing their nets. Jesus approached them while they were doing these everyday tasks. He directly asked Simon for the use of his boat, in order to preach to the pressing crowd, by getting in the boat and then asking to put out a bit.

After teaching the crowds from the boat, Jesus told Simon to put out to deep water. Jesus, a non-fisherman, tells someone who knows his craft well, to do something out of the ordinary. Reluctantly, Simon Peter complies only after telling Jesus that he thinks that the effort will be futile – after all, they had worked all night catching nothing.

As soon as the nets were dropped in the water, they filled with more fish than they could hold. Simon Peter, realizing the miracle, dropped to his knees, humbly acknowledged his sinfulness, and used the honorific Lord rather than teacher, when he asked Jesus to leave him. But Jesus tells him not to be afraid. Jesus had another job in mind for him.

Much like he did with Simon Peter, Jesus comes to us in the events of our daily lives. He gets in and asks to work in and through us. Jesus teaches us also, if we are willing to allow him in and listen to him through Scripture and prayer.

Some of us may separate our spiritual life from the way we live at home or work, perhaps thinking, "Does God care about the numbers I crunch as an accountant or the subjects I teach as a teacher?" But we must not allow ourselves to fall into this way of thinking and living. For if our faith and love for God are true and genuine, it cannot be separated from the way we live.

So let's ask ourselves: Do we have the attitude of a disciple? Does our faith and love for God shine forth in how we lead our lives? Do we work hard and strive to do the right thing even when it's difficult? Do we treat others with kindness, love and compassion?

Jesus tells us to put out into the deeper water of faith – to honestly examine how we live and interact with others. If we are willing to do what Jesus asks of us we will, in the same way as Simon Peter, witness the extraordinary in the ordinary. So let us not be afraid to humbly follow Jesus.

\* \* \* \* \*

Friday, September 8, 2017  
(Lec. 636)

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

- 1) Micah 5:1-4a or  
Romans 8:28-30
- 2) Matthew 1:1-16, 18-23 or  
1:18-23

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 430, 437, 452, 486, 497, 744, 1507, 1846, 2666, 2812, **CSDC** 378

FOCUS: Even in our redemption, God has chosen to respect our human freedom.

Celebrations of the birthdays of saints are very rare in the Church's calendar. Instead, we tend to celebrate the day they died and were born into eternal life. In addition to Christmas, only two others have this privilege: John the Baptist and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Today, we celebrate Mary's nativity and recall her unique role in the great drama of salvation. Our readings are full of prophecies — from the words of Micah who foretells that the Messiah, the one *whose origin is from of old*, will be born in Bethlehem — to the opening verses of Matthew's Gospel recalling the genealogy of Jesus, and Mary's special place in that record. For it was of Mary that Jesus, who is called the Christ, was born. Here Matthew recalls another great prophecy, that of Isaiah: *Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel*. Together, they speak of God's great initiative to redeem and reconcile a broken creation.

Mary's birth was an important event in this plan of redemption. Specially chosen to give birth to the Savior, she would have the unique privilege of bringing Christ to all peoples. And through her life of perfect fidelity to God and her motherly love, Mary gives us the example *par excellence* of faithful discipleship. It was her total and unconditional "yes" to God that gave the world its Savior — a yes that continued through her earthly life and was rewarded with the gift of eternal life. Mary was doubly blessed, as mother and as faithful disciple.

The origins of this feast go back to the fifth century, and commemorate the building of a church on the site traditionally identified as the home of her parents in Israel. From there it spread to Rome, where it received papal approval. While the Gospels do not focus on the details of Mary's early life, Tradition tells us that she was the long-awaited child of Ann and Joachim, and from a very early age was dedicated to doing the will of God — even when it might have seemed improbable or impossible. But what the Scriptures do show is a young girl who would embody the very hope and longing of Israel for its Messiah, and who would be blessed as mother and faithful disciple of the Lord, and a loving maternal presence at the heart of the Church from its very beginning.

Mary's nativity points to one important fact of faith: that in the salvation of humanity, God has chosen to give us a role and to respect our human dignity and freedom as his sons and daughters. As Mary had a special role in giving the world its Redeemer, we now have a special role making him known to the world.

\* \* \* \* \*

Saturday, September 9, 2017  
(Lec. 436)

- 1) Colossians 1:21-23
- 2) Luke 6:1-5

SATURDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM USA:  
Saint Peter Claver,  
Priest)

FOCUS: Persevere in the faith, for it is what firmly grounds us.

The first reading for today's Mass comes from Saint Paul's letter to the citizens of Colossae, a city in what is now Turkey. The Colossians were in spiritual danger. They were influenced by false teachings which included cultic practices, specific rules about food and drink and a particular philosophy that held the belief that Jesus Christ was only one of many god-like beings. So Saint Paul writes them to address those issues, and to encourage them.

He says, *God has now reconciled you in the fleshly Body of Christ through his death, to present you holy, without blemish, and irreproachable before him, provided that you persevere in the faith.*

*Provided that you persevere in the faith.* Notice the verb and the object, here: persevere, and faith. Not “go *find* the faith” or “press on in suspicion and unbelief.” No, the message is this: you have already been given what you need for this life and the next (faith, not false teaching), so persevere in *it* and stop looking elsewhere for your sustenance.

Perhaps if Saint Paul were around today he might send us the same letter and it would be entitled, “Saint Paul’s Letter to the Americans.” Or “Saint Paul’s Letter to the Modern World.” In it, he would remind us of the gift of faith we have been given, and that we should *cherish* it, and persevere *in* it, even in the face of so many troubles that surround us.

He would encourage us that a life of faith is one that is *firmly grounded, stable, and not shifting from the hope of the Gospel that [we have] heard.* And while those may seem like just words, are they not a promise that there is something beautiful that is even stronger than the wars that surround us? Stronger than the terrors that strike our hearts or our communities? Stronger than any false promise that the world makes?

Indeed, they are that promise. So let us pray that we will have the strength to persevere in our faith, and with God’s grace help others to do the same.

\* \* \* \* \*

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2017**

(Lec. 127)

1) Ezekiel 33:7-9

2) Romans 13:8-10

3) Matthew 18:15-20

Gospel related: **CCC** 553, 1088, 1373, 1444, 2472, **CSDC** 52

**TWENTY-THIRD  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: There is much riding on our ability to follow Jesus' instructions for salvation.

Perhaps you have seen the commercial for a security company that shows a man inspecting a family home for termites. The conversation goes something like this. "Yup, it's termites." Husband: "Well, get rid of them." Response: "Oh no, I'm not an exterminator, I'm a pest monitor." Just then, a young girl comes romping down the stairs and falls through two of the steps.

I don't think this is what God had in mind when he appointed Ezekiel watchman for the house of Israel. God basically tells Ezekiel he didn't hire a monitor, he hired a spokesperson. As God's spokesperson, Ezekiel will be held responsible if he does not care for God's people as instructed. By doing what God expects of him, Ezekiel finds salvation.

Saint Paul's message to the Romans, and therefore his message to us, is also to do what God expects. Saint Paul paraphrases Jesus in telling the people they don't need to remember all the commandments about how to get along with each other, if they remember to love one another. By being faithful to this great commandment about love, they will, in fact, be keeping the commandments passed down to them through Moses.

In our Gospel today, Jesus is giving his disciples a primer on how to deal with someone who wrongs them.

Basically, all of our texts today lay out for us a right way and a wrong way to go about doing the work of the Lord. Yes, it is our responsibility, like it was for Ezekiel and Saint Paul, to bring others to the Lord.

We do this by guiding our children down the right path; not so much by our words, as by our example. We do this by loving our neighbor regardless of the circumstances. We do this most importantly when we believe we have been wronged, by first lovingly bringing it to a person's attention, and trying to reconcile.

God's expectations are not easy. They are downright difficult. Embracing the cross of Christ requires a spiritual stamina that is only possible because Jesus has promised to be ever yoked to us. We are also promised eternal life.

With Ezekiel as our watchman, Saint Paul cheering us on and Jesus ever at our side — how can we fail? We dare not, for a lot is at stake, is it not? Not just for us, but for our children and their children and their children's children.

Make no mistake about how to love one another: how we treat one another is at the very heart of who we are as faithful servants of the Lord. We need to get this right.

\* \* \* \* \*

Monday, September 11, 2017

(Lec. 437)

1) Colossians 1:24-2:3

2) Luke 6:6-11

Gospel related: **CCC** 581, **CSDC** 261

MONDAY OF  
23<sup>RD</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Nothing is more important than taking care of our brother or sister who is in need.

Jesus offers strong words of caution about how we practice our faith in the Gospel of Luke today. When Jesus meets a man with a withered hand in the synagogue, the scribes and Pharisees watch Jesus closely to see if he breaks the prohibition of working on the Sabbath by curing the man. Jesus knew what they were up to and so poses a question to them: *Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?*

Jesus looks to them for an answer, but goes on and restores the man's hand. The scribes and Pharisees were angry to see him do this, and they started talking amongst themselves, trying to figure out what they might do to Jesus.

It is clear from the action of Jesus that there is nothing more important than taking care of our brother or sister who is in need. There is no law greater than loving our neighbor, which fulfills the greatest commandment of loving God, for we know that whatever we do to another, we are doing to God.

How might this Scripture passage be relevant to us today as Christians? Consider our obligation to attend Sunday Mass. Would it be okay for us to stay home and take care of a sick relative who needed us? What if we were up all night at the hospital, exhausted because our presence was needed at someone's bedside? These would absolutely apply to what Jesus was saying to the scribes and Pharisees. If it is necessary that you tend to the needs of another, that supersedes your responsibility to be at Mass. That being said, let me say a few words about our obligation to attend Sunday Mass.

Our obligation to attend Mass should not be taken lightly, as it is a grave matter for us to miss for circumstances other than what Jesus put forth today. Inconvenience is not a reason, for example. Because we love Jesus, Mass is a beautiful opportunity for us to worship God together, in gratitude for all that he has done for us. As Catholics, we do not *want* to miss Mass as it is such a privilege to give glory to God and to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. Although we are obligated, our attendance at Mass is so much more than fulfilling an obligation! It is an act of love! Let us continue together now, giving all glory to God.

Tuesday, September 12, 2017

(Lec. 438)

1) Colossians 2:6-15

2) Luke 6:12-19

TUESDAY OF

23<sup>RD</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

The Most Holy Name of Mary)

Gospel related: **CCC** 695, 1116, 1504, 1577, 2600

FOCUS: As Jesus called his Apostles by name, so he calls us by name as well.

Names were of great importance in ancient times, and this is reflected in Scripture. Names change when someone encounters God or the Lord Jesus: Abram becomes Abraham, Sarai becomes Sarah, Simon becomes Peter.

One's good name still carries weight today in our culture. The Church recognizes the significance of being called by name as a sign of being called to a personal relationship with God. At our baptisms, parents are asked, "What name do you give your child?" We may also choose to take on a new name when we receive the sacrament of confirmation to symbolize a change in our character and a personal commitment in confirming ourselves as Christian disciples.

It is not without good reason, then, that Saint Luke tells us, in today's Gospel, that Jesus called each of his Apostles by name. Jesus knew each one of them, and the unique gifts they had to share as his disciples. He also knew how they would fail him. Yet, he called – and each one answered.

There are two takeaways from this passage. The first is, God knows our potential for good, and he knows how we will fail him. Yet he still calls us! He loves us without condition or pretense, and desires only that we be in a relationship with him and love him in return. He also knows the specific help we need and, through the Holy Spirit, provides all we need to live this life of discipleship. He takes what we have to offer, and uses it to build his kingdom on earth.

The second insight is that, like the Twelve, we should say "yes." Even when we do not fully understand what saying "yes" will mean; even when it might represent an uncertain future; even when it means that we will have to trust Jesus over ourselves. When the Lord calls us by name to serve, we must not shrink back and think we have nothing to offer.

Nor are we ever alone in responding to his call. God never leaves us, the Holy Spirit has been sent to sustain and strengthen us, and the ability to witness to the Gospel remains with us today through Jesus' gift of himself in the Eucharist. As we celebrate his selfless love for us today, let us respond to his call in gratitude, and intentionally commit to living the life to which he calls us.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wednesday, September 13, 2017  
(Lec. 439)

- 1) Colossians 3:1-11
- 2) Luke 6:20-26

WEDNESDAY OF  
23<sup>RD</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint John Chrysostom,  
Bishop and Doctor  
of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2444, 2546, 2547, **CSDC** 325

FOCUS: The kingdom of God is open to all the faithful, regardless of their earthly stature.

The Beatitudes, which we heard proclaimed today, are found in the part of Luke's Gospel referred to as the Sermon on the Plain. The Beatitudes are also found in the Gospel of Matthew, in a section known as the Sermon on the Mount. One of the striking differences between the two Gospel accounts is that the Gospel of Luke includes a list of woes. We should be careful, though, not to focus only on the woes, while forgetting about the blessings. Good balance is important.

The Beatitudes can be a bit challenging. To understand them, it is helpful to look at the bigger picture. What is it that Jesus wants to tell us in these statements? He wants to give us encouragement. For those who are experiencing difficulty in life, the Beatitudes provide hope. If you are poor, or hungry, or sad, or if you are persecuted or excluded or rejected because of your belief in Jesus, do not despair. For you will receive the kingdom of God. You will be satisfied – you will laugh again.

In the midst of whatever you are going through, you can look forward to your reward in heaven. We heard in this passage: *Rejoice and leap for joy on that day!* This is great news. The other part of the message comes from the verses on the woes. It is very clear – and comforting for those who are suffering – to realize they have not been forgotten by God, just because, for instance, they are not rich. There was the belief during the days of Jesus that your material wealth was evidence of your blessings from God. If you were poor, it could look as though God was not shining his favor on you. The Beatitudes turn all of this upside down. Jesus helps us understand that if you do not enjoy earthly consolations, it does not mean you are excluded from the kingdom.

The words of the Beatitudes also provide encouragement for us to be courageous when others speak against us because of our faith. They help us to look beyond our immediate struggles. To stand for God, in the face of evil, truly allows us to be counted among the blessed. These words of Jesus affirm that your condition in life does not matter – all the faithful are to be counted among those who will spend eternity with him. This is cause for great rejoicing indeed!

\* \* \* \* \*

Thursday, September 14, 2017  
(Lec. 638)

**THE EXALTATION  
OF THE HOLY CROSS  
- FEAST**

- 1) Numbers 21:4b-9
- 2) Philippians 2:6-11
- 3) John 3:13-17

Gospel related: **CCC** 219, 423, 440, 444, 454, 458, 661, 679, 706, 2130, **CSDC** 3, 64

FOCUS: Let us never forget that God sent his only Son, that we might be saved.

We live in a world where debates among strangers can rage across an Internet blog. We recognize that everyone seems to have an opinion and we accept that everyone is entitled to that opinion. We applaud a broad egalitarianism where anyone can follow their own heart, create their own rules, establish their own religious laws, or choose to not believe anything at all.

But is this really okay? Is this really God's plan of salvation? Today's Scripture is pretty clear. Perhaps it is imperative that we look again at "the essentials."

First, Almighty God created the world and everything in it. Each creature, element of the earth and each human being is part of his creation. Humanity erred and fell out of right relationship with God. He sent prophets and leaders to call them back, making a covenant with Abraham that his descendants would be numerous and that from among his descendants (Mary), would be born the Christ (CCC 706).

Finally, God sent his only begotten Son into this world, born of a Virgin and conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, in fulfillment of the Scriptures. To be a Christian, one must believe that Christ is the Son of God (CCC 454). That term — "Son of God" — was heard at the Baptism of the Lord, at the Transfiguration, and by the centurion at the foot of the cross (CCC 444). This "Son of Man" was also human, one like us in all things but sin.

By his incarnation, by his preaching, by his miraculous healing, by his institution of the sacraments, Christ showed God's love for the world. But it was on Calvary that God proved his divine and infinite love for the world when he sacrificed his own obedient Son to save humanity from their sins (CCC 219). As we just heard: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.*

By his cross and Resurrection he has set us free. He has freed us from sin and from death itself. Dying, Christ destroyed *our* death and, rising, he restored *our* life. This is the Paschal Mystery. This is Good News! This is the truth of our faith. This same Christ rose from the dead, ascended to the Father, and sends his Spirit to sustain us.

Each time we gather for the Mass, we join in Christ's sacrifice to the Father, yet again. Each time we see the cross, we must appreciate the immensity of this sacrifice. We must be grateful for so great a love, so great a sacrifice, so great a gift! And our gratitude must motivate us to share the truth of this salvation with others — with our family, our co-workers, and all we meet. This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus our Lord, through whom the world was saved.

\* \* \* \* \*

Friday, September 15, 2017

(Lec. 441)

1) 1 Timothy 1:1-2, 12-14

(Lec. 639)

1) John 19:25-27 or

Luke 2:33-35

Gospel related: **CCC** 149, 495, 501, 575, 587, 618, 726, 964, 2605, 2618, 2677, 2679.

FRIDAY OF

23<sup>RD</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

Our Lady of Sorrows)

FOCUS: Turning to God in our sorrow leads to hope.

Today is the Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows. There's a choice between two Gospel readings for today. One describes Simeon's prophecy that sorrow, like a sword, would pierce Mary's heart (Luke 2: 34-35). The other Gospel passage describes Mary at the foot of the cross (John 19: 25-27). One passage predicts Mary's sorrow; the other shows the fulfillment of that prediction at the height of Mary's grief.

When others turned away, Mary remained at the cross and endured the sorrow of witnessing her son's suffering. She couldn't relieve Jesus' pain, but she could give him the gift of her presence. There's nothing noble about suffering needlessly. If there's a way we can alleviate pain – our own or that of others – we should do so. But when pain is unavoidable and must be accepted, trying to deny or run away from the sorrow it causes can generate more misery than facing it.

God never abandons us in our suffering. Trusting that God is with us, even in our pain, enables us to walk through our sorrow with hope. Knowing we are not alone, we can allow him to strengthen and comfort us. When others are hurting, we can give them the gift of our presence. We can reassure them they're not alone. We don't deny or minimize pain, we simply acknowledge that it doesn't have the last word.

Hope empowers us to endure, trusting that God can bring good out of sorrow and pain. How can anything good come from pain? Here are a few examples:

- Because it gets our attention, pain can motivate us to take needed action.
- It can lead to healthy humility. When we come to the end of our resources, we often have no choice but to rely on God instead of our own strength. That's an uncomfortable and scary place to be, but it's also an opportunity to grow in faith.
- As we continue to put one foot in front of the other, one step at a time, we strengthen our faith "muscle." We affirm that God knows what he's doing even when we can't see it.
- Our own pain can help us grow in empathy for others who suffer.
- Our words of comfort to those who struggle become more credible when we have our own experience to share.

God works through both the joy and the sadness in our lives. If our heavenly Father can bring good out of Jesus' suffering and death, he can bring good out of our sorrow, too. Just ask Mary.

\* \* \* \* \*

Saturday, September 16, 2017  
(Lec. 442)

- 1) 1 Timothy 1:15-17
- 2) Luke 6:43-49

SATURDAY OF  
23<sup>RD</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saints Cornelius, Pope  
and Cyprian, Bishop, Martyrs)

Gospel related: **CSDC 70**

FOCUS: We must dig deep in order to live as faithful disciples of Jesus who bear good fruit for God.

Jesus seems to have had a poetic spirit as he traveled Galilee and preached the kingdom of God. In today's Gospel, he presents two vivid and complementary images of human beings. He describes us as trees that bear good fruit or bad fruit, depending on the kind of person we are, and as the owners of two types of houses: one with a strong foundation and one that is too poorly built to withstand storms.

Jesus' image of the tree echoes the description found in Psalm 1, which compares the blessed with *a tree planted near streams of water, that yields its fruit in season*. This tree becomes "good," bearing good fruit, because its roots dig deeply into the soil, receiving nutrients and water. In the same way, a house can withstand whatever storms throw at them because of its deep foundation, built on rock.

Through these images, Jesus encourages us to "go deep" if we want to be steadfast in faith and lead lives which bear good fruit for the Gospel. We must "dig deep" into ourselves and encounter Jesus, through the practice of quiet prayer. If we only skim the surface in our lives, if we don't go deep within to listen to God speak to our heart, we will be susceptible to whatever comes our way – and our lives may fail to bear good fruit for God.

But Jesus does not leave us alone in our struggles to be strong and fruitful disciples. Jesus wants to be the very foundation of our lives, the "living water" that keeps our faith vibrant and alive. As we heard in today's first reading, Jesus is the foundation of Paul's own life. Paul, who called himself the *foremost* of sinners, received mercy from Jesus – and loving patience, as Paul lived out his new life. In our efforts to follow Jesus more closely, we, too, can rely on Jesus' mercy, patience and unconditional love.

As you go about your life today, try to get below the surface of tasks to accomplish, activities to be engaged in and the noise of the world around you – and dig in deep to the foundation of Jesus' love, mercy and patience. Jesus will give you the grace and strength to endure any storm you face in life, and to bear good fruit for God that helps build up his kingdom on earth – and which makes a difference in the lives of others.

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2017**

(Lec. 130)

1) Sirach 27:30-28:7

2) Romans 14:7-9

3) Matthew 18:21-35

Gospel related: **CCC** 982, 2227, 2843, 2845

**TWENTY-FOURTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Jesus calls us to forgive others as we have been forgiven.

Most of us live with some form of financial debt these days. It might be the mortgage or the car payment. Perhaps there are student loans that paid for our education. We're used to debt and we're used to getting statements reminding us to pay our debts. Of course, one of the great fears we have is that there may be circumstances in which we're not able to repay what we owe.

Imagine, then, going to your mailbox and getting a note telling you that all your debts have been paid. In fact, they have been paid in full. My guess is that our first reaction would be, "Wow!" And then, after a few moments, being the wise and worldly people that we are, we might wonder, "So, where's the catch?"

Think about that in light of today's Gospel, in which the servant's huge, un-payable debt is kindly and fully forgiven by the king. While the servant seems to leave with a sense of relief, what he does not clearly understand is that there is a catch to all this. He, the servant, must forgive the debts of others, as he, the servant, has been forgiven by the gracious king. And that's the catch for all of us: realizing that in his great mercy, God has forgiven our sins, and thus we are called to be a people of forgiveness to others.

I know it can be uncomfortable to focus on our sinfulness. We know it's there, but we much prefer to focus on the good in ourselves. Yet every now and again, we have to stop and think about the reality that we do, in fact, sin. At the very beginning of the Mass, we acknowledge this reality as we ask for God's mercy and forgiveness in the Penitential Rite. We realize that Jesus' mercy is amazing, and in that realization, we come to know not only that we are forgiven, but that we must be generous in forgiving others.

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus speak about the breadth of the forgiveness we are called to offer. We are called to forgive not just once and not just seven times. We are called to forgive seventy-seven times – we are called to forgive overwhelmingly, just as the king forgives the servant in the parable, just as God forgives each of us.

Jesus leads the way in this, forgiving the woman caught in adultery, forgiving Thomas in his doubting and forgiving Peter for denying him three times. Jesus forgives us. How different would our world be if we practiced this kind of forgiveness constantly?

The Eucharist we celebrate today is the first sacrament of forgiveness. In it, we acknowledge our debts and through it we receive the Lord's own gift of forgiveness. In the Eucharist, we come to know we are forgiven so we can go out into the world and be generous in loving and forgiving others.

\* \* \* \* \*

Monday, September 18, 2017

(Lec. 443)

1) 1 Timothy 2:1-8

2) Luke 7:1-10

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

FOCUS: We are saved and redeemed by Christ's passion, death and resurrection.

Today's first reading tells us that Christ is the one mediator between God and humanity. What is a mediator? Webster's dictionary defines a mediator as "one that mediates, especially one that mediates between parties at variance." A mediator's role, in secular terms, is to help two disputing parties resolve their differences. And reconciling humanity to God was at the core of the Jesus' saving mission.

The profound depth of who Jesus is and why he came to earth seems to have been lost on much of modern society because he tends to be seen only in worldly terms. The secular world often sees Jesus as a "do-gooder" who shows us how to love each other and be nice to each other. But that was hardly the extent of Jesus' mission. Ultimately, his mission was to bring about the salvation of humanity. That's what his role as mediator – as the "go-between" between God and humanity – is all about.

Jesus was fully human and fully divine. By becoming human, he did not give up his divinity. And in his divinity, Jesus did not become any less of a man. Our fallen and sinful natures notwithstanding, God redeemed us through the passion, death and resurrection of his son, Jesus.

In the first reading, Paul tells us that Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all – as the paschal Lamb who was offered and who offered himself for us to take away the sins of the world. This act, by which Jesus draws into deeper union with himself, is perpetuated until the end of time through the Eucharist.

We will receive Communion in a few minutes, and just before we do, let us pray over and reflect on the profoundly powerful fact that we will receive Jesus Christ himself – Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. In becoming one Incarnate man with two natures, one fully human and one fully divine, and in sacrificing himself for our redemption and salvation, Christ is an unbreakable link between humanity and God.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tuesday, September 19, 2017  
(Lec. 444)

- 1) 1 Timothy 3:1-13
- 2) Luke 7:11-17

TUESDAY OF  
24<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Januarius,  
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 994, 1503

FOCUS: Let us turn to Jesus in times of trouble.

It would be fascinating to talk to the young man we hear about in today's Gospel. He was dead and Jesus brought him back to life for the benefit of the man's mother, who was a widow and had no other children.

Jesus knew how hard it would be for this widow. He took pity on her and gave her son back to her. But the Gospel never mentions that Jesus made any demands of the young man. Being brought back to life seems like it would inspire a person to lead an exemplary life, but Jesus performed this miracle from the generosity of his heart, *because he was moved with pity*, or compassion, for the woman.

Compassion means to share feelings; to feel what someone else is feeling, especially when those feelings are ones of distress or pain. The word implies a desire to help alleviate the pain or distress. Jesus was able to do that as no one else ever has. He was fully man, with all the feelings and pains and troubles we have, yet he was also fully God, with all the power of the universe and a love for humankind that is beyond measure.

The widow of Nain was fortunate that Jesus came along as her son was about to be buried. But how fortunate are all of us that he is present to us anywhere we are, any time we need a compassionate presence. He may not bring our loved ones back to us, but he will be there to help us through whatever is causing us pain.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus works in and through others who care about us to offer comfort and reassurance. He gives us the gift of himself in the Eucharist to draw us closer to himself, and to give us the grace to persevere in living our faith in good times and in bad. Jesus speaks to us through sacred Scripture, and he speaks to us when we pray with the still small voice we hear in the silence of our hearts.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wednesday, September 20, 2017  
(Lec. 445)

- 1) 1 Timothy 3:14-16
- 2) Luke 7:31-35

WEDNESDAY OF  
24<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saints Andrew Kim Tae-gon,  
Priest,  
and Paul Chong Ha-sang,  
and Companions,  
Martyrs)

FOCUS: Let us strive to live in the way God calls us to live.

Expectations have some great benefits. They help establish norms for living with others. For example, athletes are expected to follow the rules of their sport; without these rules and these expectations, the game would be utter chaos. As citizens, we are called upon to follow the laws, pay our taxes and our debts, vote, and treat others with civility. Schools and places of business set their own expectations for teachers, students, employees and customers. In the first reading, Paul tells Timothy that he is writing to tell him how one ought to *behave in the household of God*. He is laying down and clarifying *per se* the expectations for living as a disciple of Jesus and a member of the Church.

But expectations also have a downside in that a person can have preconceived ideas or expectations that blind them from the truth. Jesus laments this reality in today's Gospel with regard to the many people of his time who, blinded by their own preconceived ideas and expectations regarding the Messiah, were rejecting and critical of him as well as John the Baptist.

So today's Gospel reminds us that we are to let go of any preconceived ideas or expectations we may have about God or others for they can blind us to the truth. Instead, one set of expectations should govern our lives, and that is the way God calls us to live as his dearly beloved sons and daughters. We are blessed in that God has clearly revealed to us how he expects us to live through his commandments, through the teaching and example of his son, Jesus, and through the teachings of the Church.

Living in the way God calls us to live will bring us to lead lives which help build up God's kingdom on earth, bring us to experience more fully the blessings of peace and joy, and help to ensure we are judged worthy of eternal life in heaven.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thursday, September 21, 2017

(Lec. 643)

1) Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13

2) Matthew 9:9-13

Gospel related: CCC 581, 589, 2100

**SAINT MATTHEW,  
APOSTLE AND  
EVANGELIST  
- FEAST**

FOCUS: As we accept the invitation to follow Christ and receive his mercy, we extend this same invitation to others.

From time to time, people are asked to extend an invitation through an invited guest for others to come to a gathering or dinner. The host is glad to have more guests. The one invited is happy to bring others along with him.

On this feast of Saint Matthew, we hear the Gospel account of his call to be a follower of Jesus. As Matthew leaves his customs post to follow Jesus, he receives Jesus into his home for dinner. But he also became the means by which the invitation to follow Jesus was extended to others. The Gospel says that *many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples*. Matthew did not restrict Jesus to himself. From the beginning of his acceptance of Jesus' call, Matthew was an extension to others of the invitation to follow Jesus.

To accept Jesus into one's life is to accept God's mercy into one's life. No one knew the need for God's mercy more than the tax collectors and sinners. They were constantly reminded by the Pharisees and religious leaders that they were despised by society and by God. Since Jesus was a man of God, eating at table with him was seen as an acceptance not only by Jesus, but also by God. Matthew not only experienced God's mercy through Jesus, he became an extended invitation of God's mercy to his fellow tax collectors and sinners who joined him at table with the Lord. It was a banquet of mercy, feasted upon by the ones who knew they needed God's mercy.

Matthew perpetuated his ministry to be an extended invitation to follow Jesus and to receive his divine mercy through his work as an evangelist. Clearly, the ministry of evangelist was recognized as a God-given gift *for building up the Body of Christ*, as Saint Paul explained to the Ephesians. Matthew not only embraced his apostolic call to proclaim the Good News of God's mercy through Jesus, he handed down a written account of teachings, healings and forgiveness by which people could be confident in God's mercy for them, and be challenged to become extensions of God's mercy to others.

Through the Gospel of Matthew, we are the recipients of the invitation to follow Jesus that was extended through Matthew. Jesus receiving us as his own is a sign of his mercy poured out upon us. Like Matthew, discipleship demands that we extend the invitation to follow Jesus and reveal his mercy to others. Matthew started with his friends and co-workers at table in his house. This may be exactly where we need to start.

Jesus is always happy to receive more guests at his banquet of mercy. He always extends a call to follow him. Let us rejoice in the fact that we are one with the Apostles and evangelists in extending Jesus' invitation to others.

\* \* \* \* \*

Friday, September 22, 2017  
(Lec. 447)

- 1) 1 Timothy 6:2c-12
- 2) Luke 8:1-3

FRIDAY OF  
24<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *Compete well for the faith.*

A widely known proverb in our culture is that “money is the root of all evils.” Today’s first reading reveals the origin of this aphorism, even if it shows that the author, Saint Paul, did not say that it was money itself that was the root of all evil, but the love of it.

Today we hear about a group of holy women who placed a higher priority on their discipleship than their wealth — and it would appear they were women of some means. Luke tells us specifically that they supported Jesus and the Apostles *out of their resources*.

After encountering Jesus, they chose a different path from chasing after the riches of this world. Instead, they did what Paul advised Timothy, pursuing *righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience and gentleness*. They did this because, in Jesus, they found eternal life, a richness greater than anything this world can offer.

The story of the women who helped Jesus and the Apostles, and the warnings of Saint Paul that we heard today are not a call for all of us to embrace radical poverty and give away all our possessions as Saint Francis of Assisi did. Rather, it is a reminder that we are to love God above all things, and make loving him and living as faithful disciples of Jesus the number one priority in our lives. Perhaps through our witness, others may come to know Jesus and place their faith in him. Let’s *compete well for the faith, and lay hold of eternal life*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Saturday, September 23, 2017  
(Lec. 448)

- 1) 1 Timothy 6:13-16
- 2) Luke 8:4-15

SATURDAY OF  
24<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Pius of Pietrelcina,  
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 368, 1151, 2668, 2731, 2847

FOCUS: Jesus is God's living Word made flesh for the salvation of all humanity.

Owning and operating a birdfeeder has its joys as well as its challenges. The joy is in seeing various and sundry birds come to the feeder to eat the seeds. The challenge is to keep it stocked with seed, clean and protected from the squirrels. As the birds feed and the squirrels weasel their way onto the feeder, some of the seed inevitably falls to the ground. There, some seeds are eaten by the ground critters, some take root but soon wither, and some grow into various orphan plants. You may see corn stalks or rye grass in abundance.

The birdfeeder is a good image of God's word in the Bible. God provides the Scriptures for our nourishment. The Bible is there for us to read and feast upon. Imagine how spiritually healthy we would be if we were to take time every day to nourish our hearts with God's word just as the birds feed themselves at birdfeeders each day. *The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (#21)* from the Second Vatican Council reminds us that we are nourished at the table of the word of God just as we are nourished at the table of the Body and Blood of Christ. Today's Scripture readings are just such a source of nourishment.

Listening to and spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ is the task for all Christians, as seen in a particular way in today's reading from the first Letter of Timothy. Saint Paul admonishes Timothy to *keep the commandment without stain or reproach* until Jesus returns in all his glory at the end of time. Timothy was chosen by Paul to lead the Church of Ephesus and spread the Gospel. Keeping the commandment means that Timothy must take his responsibilities as a Christian seriously by doing God's will. Like Timothy, we are also called by God and commissioned through baptism to follow his commandments. God provides the strength we need to accomplish this through his work.

Now in today's Gospel, Jesus is going about his Father's business of teaching the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Who is the audience? In addition to us, the "crowd" is made up of the Apostles, the women of Galilee who have chosen to follow Jesus and people from various towns who have journeyed to hear Jesus. Jesus teaches this mixed group the parable of the sower and the seed.

The moral of this parable is that the word of God will flourish in some hearts, and die away in others. Having heard God's word, it is up to each of us to provide the rich soil of a loving heart so that God's word produces abundant fruit in our lives.

\* \* \* \* \*

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2017**

(Lec. 133)

1) Isaiah 55:6-9

2) Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

3) Matthew 20:1-16a

Gospel related: **CSDC** 541

**TWENTY-FIFTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: God owes us nothing and yet he has given us everything, placing us forever in his debt.

Everyone has a sense of justice — that voice of conscience that tells us what is right and what is not. You might feel it's an injustice at work when someone gets the promotion you felt you earned. In school, the student who studied hard for the test and got a C certainly doesn't like the one who didn't prepare at all and got an A. When we see someone we feel to be less deserving walking around with a pocket of blessing, we might ask God, "Why them and not me?"

Would we ask the same question if we saw someone who was dying, paralyzed or who just lost their job? It's doubtful.

The parable in Matthew's Gospel is a challenge for all of us. Our first instinct is to take sides with those laborers who sweat it out all day and didn't make any more money for their efforts than those who just showed up to collect a check at the end of the workday. Insult is added to injury when the last get paid first and those who worked longest and hardest are made to wait. This kind of generosity shocks some and angers others. Our parents raised us to believe in an equal day's pay for an equal day's work.

This parable raises more questions than it answers. Why did the landowner keep returning to the square to pick more workers for his vineyard? In Israel at harvest time, it was essential to bring in the crops as fast as possible before the flooding fall rains set in. Why do those men stand around all day? They had no property. No power. It was the luck of the draw. They waited in hopes that someone would employ them so they could afford to feed their families.

God is much like the landowner — *generous in forgiving* as Isaiah said in today's first reading. We owe him a debt we can never repay. The Lord doesn't charge some more than others. He sent his Son to die for all of us. God owes us nothing, and yet he has given us everything, placing us forever in his debt.

All the men called to work in the vineyard were equals — they all had hungry mouths to feed. The landowner had mercy on all of them, giving them what they needed — not what they earned. This shows us how God has loved us in Christ. We are called upon to be as giving and forgiving of others as God has been to us. God loves all of us equally — the cradle Catholic the same as the convert, the sinner as much as the saint, every person in every pew.

God calls all of us to labor in his vineyard of mercy, and to *conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the Gospel of Christ*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Monday, September 25, 2017

(Lec. 449)

- 1) Ezra 1:1-6
- 2) Luke 8:16-18

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

**FOCUS:** Listening to God's word isn't enough; acting on it strengthens our faith and makes a difference.

"Use it or lose it." If we don't exercise our bodies, our muscles weaken. If we don't use our minds, they stagnate. The same is true of our spiritual life. In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that listening to his message isn't enough. We need to put it into practice.

It's one thing to believe in Jesus. It's another thing altogether to follow him. This requires opening our hearts to God's healing and saving grace, placing our faith in Jesus and making the conscious choice to follow him each day. This helps ensure we are living our faith with integrity.

Integrity means wholeness. It means that our insides match our outsides, that we don't say one thing and do another. It means we don't bury the light of God's truth beneath fear or prejudice.

When we're enlightened by our faith, it forms us, making a difference in the way we act in our daily lives. If it doesn't, what good does it do us? It might as well be a light squelched under a basket. The light of faith doesn't do us – or anyone else – a bit of good unless we let that light shine. That's easy enough to do when we're with like-minded people. It's harder to let our light shine in the darkness, but that's where light is most needed.

Letting God's light shine in and through us in the darkness is an act of integrity. It might be as simple as responding courteously when someone is rude or unkind to us, or letting someone out in front of us in traffic.

Every time we make the difficult correct choice instead of the easy wrong one, we are letting God's light shine. None of us will do it perfectly, but every time we exercise our faith muscles, they grow stronger. We who act on the faith we have truly will be given more.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tuesday, September 26, 2017

(Lec. 450)

1) Ezra 6:7-8, 12b, 14-20

2) Luke 8:19-21

TUESDAY OF

25<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saints Cosmas and Damian,

Martyrs)

**FOCUS:** Living as a follower of Jesus requires loving God above all things, and living according to Jesus' teachings.

How difficult it must have been for the Jewish people returning from exile in Babylon. They had heard stories of Jerusalem and the once-glorious Temple, but very little was left for the generations who returned. They had memories handed down from their parents and grandparents, and some writings carefully preserved. They also had a strong desire to repair, not just the Temple, but their relationship with God. They saw the destruction of Jerusalem and their exile as punishment for not being faithful to the Lord, for worshipping false Gods, and for ignoring his commandments. The Law was their key to binding themselves, as a people, to God again.

We hear a similar theme in today's Gospel. When Jesus hears from members of the gathered crowd that his mother and brothers were waiting to see him, he says that his mother and brothers are those who follow him and live according to his commandments.

Now the question becomes, what do these words of Jesus mean for our lives? Do these words mean that the love and relationships we have with our family are unimportant? By no means. Rather, what Jesus is saying is that the first priority in our lives must always be loving God above all things and living according to his teachings. In other words, the decisions we make must be made with our eye always on him, not on what we are expected to do as a son or daughter, mother or father. The Lord's call cuts through all human relationships.

Turning our attention back to the first reading, it is important to note that at the time the Temple was rebuilt, the Twelve Tribes of Israel were reduced to the two least significant: Judah and Benjamin. The ties of kinship that had bound Abraham's descendants had been all but eliminated. The returning exiles found themselves in the midst of the *people of the land*— those who had not been forced into exile and had intermarried with Gentiles (who were referenced in an earlier chapter of Ezra [4]). Family ties did not bind them to the Lord. But adherence to his Law, and common worship, did bind them.

Are we willing to follow Jesus, even when it causes disruption in our families? When it puts us at odds with those who are nearest and dearest to us? The decision to follow Jesus, and to live our lives following his commandments, is the only thing that determines whether we are his disciples. Nothing, not even family loyalties, should come between us and the Lord.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wednesday, September 27, 2017  
(Lec. 451)

- 1) Ezra 9:5-9
- 2) Luke 9:1-6

WEDNESDAY OF  
25<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Vincent de Paul  
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC 551**

FOCUS: We're empowered by God; let's use the abilities he gave us to share his love wherever we find ourselves today.

In the first reading we hear about Ezra. The Israelites –including their religious leaders – had intermingled with neighboring pagan communities and adopted their decadent practices. After learning of this, Ezra made a communal confession of sin and offered a prayer of repentance. While not included in today's passage, Ezra also urged the people, in light of God's mercy to them, to reform their lives in accordance with God's will.

Today's Gospel details Jesus' instructions to the Apostles. After empowering them for their mission, he sent them to surrounding villages to drive out demons, heal the sick and preach God's kingdom to any and all who would listen. Jesus told them to rely on God's providence rather than their own resources.

These two readings are most appropriate on this Memorial of Saint Vincent de Paul. For many, Saint Vincent's name is synonymous with helping the poor. To this day, the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity carry on his mission to serve the poor and suffering around the world. Saint Vincent, and those joining his efforts, ministered to the imprisoned and to victims of war, poverty and slavery.

He established hospitals for those in need. In addition, Saint Vincent helped reform the lax priesthood in France by developing improved methods of formation for those preparing for ordination. He also offered retreats to nurture spiritual renewal for both clergy and laity.

Like Ezra, Vincent called priests and lay people to repent and turn back to God. Like the Apostles, he healed the sick by establishing hospitals. He drove out demons of ignorance and injustice, and preached the Good News of God's love through his service to the poor and suffering. He used his God-given abilities to do what he could in the time and place in which he lived.

How can we respond to Jesus' call to serve today? We don't have to follow Jesus' instructions to his Apostles literally. We don't have to walk from town to town without a walking stick or beggar's bag to heal the sick, cast out demons or preach the Good News. However, like Saint Vincent de Paul, we can use the skills and resources we each have in the here and now.

Can we donate time or money to help those in need? Can we heal a wounded heart or drive out demons of hate, fear or loneliness with a kind word or smile? Can we share the Good News of God's love by the way we treat everyone we meet today? We aren't called to be carbon copies of Ezra, the Apostles or Saint Vincent de Paul, but we are called to do what we can.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thursday September 28, 2017

(Lec. 452)

1) Haggai 1:1-8

2) Luke 9:7-9

THURSDAY OF  
25<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Wenceslaus,  
Martyr;  
Saint Lawrence Ruiz  
and Companions,  
Martyrs)

FOCUS: Seek God at all times

Today's Gospel reading has an example of someone interested in Jesus for all the wrong reasons. From the time Herod had heard about Jesus, he had sought him out. He did so, not because he wanted to believe that God had sent a Messiah to his people, but – because he was superstitious and jealous – he sought after Jesus' power in order to exploit it, and Jesus, for his own use.

A similar pattern emerges among God's people in the first reading, though the Hebrews aren't curious about God and his power, as Herod had been. In the reading, the prophet Haggai tells the people that they are concerned only about their own comfort. During good times, they didn't think much about God or want to bother with God. But when times were bad, the people complained that God did not hear them or help them. It was then that they thought about God and sensed his absence. They wanted God's power only when they wanted things to be better for them.

Saint Wenceslaus and Saint Lawrence Ruiz, along with his companions, are honored today as men who saw God in the good times of their lives. They also relied on God as their help and strength when times were bad. They shared God's truth with those around them in both good times and bad. Their love for God was so strong that they gave their lives for God and were martyred for their beliefs.

What does this mean for us? God wants a relationship with us. Do we know that God is with us in our everyday situations? Do we see Christ at work in us and through our actions? Do we rely on God only when things are not as good as we would like them to be, or do we seek him in good times as well? Our choice is simple: We can choose to have a real relationship with Christ, communicating with him regularly through prayer and daily reflection; or, we can be like Herod and the ancient Hebrews and look for God's power only in times of need.

\* \* \* \* \*

Friday, September 29, 2017

(Lec. 647)

- 1) Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 or  
Revelation 12:7-12a
- 2) John 1:47-51

**SAINTS MICHAEL,  
GABRIEL AND RAPHAEL,  
ARCHANGELS  
- FEAST**

FOCUS: *You will see greater things than this.*

For so much of our lives – even our spiritual lives – we as Christians seem to be caught up in the “nitty-gritty” of everyday life. Perhaps this is why Jesus so often used these ordinary means to show us the way to God. From the work of his fishermen and their catch of fish, to the lamp set on a table stand, to the grain that is buried to bring forth new life, Jesus teaches us through the world we inhabit every day.

Yet, today, as we celebrate the Feast of the Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, we are invited to see beyond earth – to catch a glimpse of the heavenly realm we will only experience fully when we complete our lives on this earth. Today, we get to reflect on the glories of Jesus receiving full dominion over all of creation – in the sight of myriad angels and saints. We get to hear, with the humble Nathanael, Jesus’ promise that we will see so much more than we see now. Now beyond affirming that heaven is our true home, what can we take from these readings today?

It seems the answer can be found in focusing on the three archangels. You might say all three are “down to earth” because they have been sent to human beings as our protectors and guides. Michael is revered the world over as the protector of human beings – not only driving Satan out of heaven but keeping Satan from getting a toe-hold in our spiritual lives. Gabriel is world-famous for the astonishing news he brought to human beings – first to the doubting Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, and then to the humble and obedient virgin, Mary. And Raphael, featured in the book of Tobit, brought guidance and healing to a family beset by trials and suffering.

While the saints whose feast we celebrate today are mentioned in the Bible, they are among myriad angels created not only to worship God night and day for all eternity, but to help each individual member of the human family find their way home to God. One important way that they do this is by interceding powerfully on our behalf that we might be given the grace and strength that we need to persevere in faith and keep our feet firmly planted on the right path. So remember to turn to Saints Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, for their help and intercession. They are there for us.

\* \* \* \* \*

Saturday, September 30, 2017

(Lec. 454)

1) Zechariah 2:5-9, 14-15a

2) Luke 9:43b-45

SATURDAY OF  
25<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Jerome,  
Priest and Doctor  
of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC 554**

FOCUS: We must always be aware of God's presence in our lives.

In the first weeks of the Ignatian Exercises, one builds a toolbox of consolations that can be used to help in times of desolation or attack by the evil one. Today's Gospel is reminiscent of Jesus' attempt to help the Apostles in the same way.

Earlier in Luke Chapter nine, after the miracle of the loaves and fishes and Peter's confession of faith, Jesus had given his first prediction of his passion and death, as well as the conditions of discipleship. These last two things were easy enough for the disciples to forget when things were going well and Jesus was working wonders and miracles, as when Peter, James and John were given a glimpse of Jesus' resurrected glory as he was changed and transfigured before them. However, as we heard in today's Gospel, Jesus brings it home again to the disciples when he mentions his imminent passion and death.

He says to the disciples, *Pay attention to what I am telling you. The Son of Man is to be handed over to men.* By doing this, it seems that Jesus is trying to make it explicitly clear to his disciples that all the while they have seen the glorious moments of his life and work, they will also be required to witness and experience the hard times, too. It will be at these moments they will need to remember that just as they had seen God at work through Jesus in the good times, God will still work through him in the difficult times.

As disciples of Christ ourselves, we, too, are to make our own toolboxes to use in times of trouble. How do we do that exactly? One way is to be aware of the times in which God has been present in our lives. This requires reflection – spending time prayerfully thinking over where we have seen and experienced God at work in our lives. Spending time with a spiritual director who can help us identify the ways that God has touched our lives is another. Armed with these tools, we can, as “living temples,” share Christ's light and love more fully with others.

\* \* \* \* \*