

APRIL

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Dear Subscriber,

Beginning with this quarter we are providing a wedding and a funeral homily in addition to the daily homilies in your subscription.

Our editors hope you find these homilies to be useful resources as you serve the people of God.

Thank you for your subscription and your vocation!

- The Editors of *Daily Homilies*

WEDDING HOMILY

- 1) Genesis 1:26-28, 31a
- 2) Romans 15: 1b-3a, 5-7, 13
- 3) Matthew 5: 1-12a

FOCUS: God created everything as *very good*. May God also bless this sacramental marriage as *very good*.

How beautiful this moment is! We are blessed to witness the joining together of [N and N.] as husband and wife. We celebrate two persons coming together as one, in the sacrament of marriage. How good it is that they have come before God, and witnesses, to enter into this covenant. How good it is that we are honored to share this with them!

We believe that God has created all things and all creatures, and all people. And as our first reading states, *God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good*. For those here who are married, and soon to be married, hearken back to the first time you saw your partner. Did you think to yourself, “Hmm, that person is very good!”? Certainly, you saw something very good that set your spirit on fire. It burned so strongly that you made a commitment to live the rest of your days with this very good person. But nobody is “very good” all the time, and certainly, no one other than God is perfect. And so it can be difficult sometimes to remember the other as “very good,” in the midst of struggles and obstacles.

But this is not something to fear! Instead, it is a reminder of why the sacramental celebration of your marriage is so important. For as the two of you become one, in the eyes of God and the Church, you are not alone. God is present within this sacrament and within your marriage. And God has ordained *it* to be very good. The graces you receive here today and throughout your marriage strengthen and sanctify you, as you strengthen and sanctify one another.

Saint Paul prays for the Christian community in Rome, and for us, and you [N] and [N], when he says: *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. We, as witnesses and members of a community who love you, pray for the same. Not all married couples will agree with each other on every little thing, and that is okay. In fact, disagreements are often a source of growth and renewal. So while little moments or little “things” may seem at times not be “very good,” the covenant you have made with one another *is*.

So remain steadfast in your commitment to one another. On this you *can* agree! Married life is not a sprint; it is a marathon involving love and endurance with one another, and together, endurance with the challenges of daily life. Let God be your source of encouragement and hope, so that when you struggle with each other, or you struggle together against difficulties, you may be filled with joy and peace through the Holy Spirit. Remember, even in the most difficult times, that God has created each of you, and this sacrament, as “very good.”

In the glow of this blessed day, know that neither of you is perfect, for God alone is perfect. Be patient with one another, and care for each other. Together, seek to be perfect as your Father is perfect, while acknowledging that it is a difficult task. In other words, *hunger and thirst for righteousness, for [you] will be satisfied*, as the Gospel tells us. Bear with one another, in good times and in bad. But also know that there are many others who love you, as individuals and as a couple. Turn to them for their support. They are here to commit themselves to you. They are saying, “We are here to help you remain in your commitment and love to one another.” They are mirrors of God’s presence for you, just as you mirror God’s love to one another. May the life you create together be blessed by God as “very good.”

FUNERAL HOMILY

- 1) Acts 10:34-36, 42-43
- 2) Romans 5: 5-11
- 3) Matthew 5: 1-12a

FOCUS: God's love, poured out for all people, invites us to enter into the hope of eternal life.

We welcome all of you, again, as we come together in prayer. Each of us is unique – we each have our own relationship with [N] that no one can quite share. But, remembering that we are gathered in prayer, we each have our own unique relationship with God. And no matter what our own individual histories are, God is with us, particularly during this time when we remember [N].

In the first reading, Saint Peter is addressing a crowd of people who are curious about the man Jesus that he is preaching about. Some in the crowd had not heard of Jesus, while others may have heard of him and wanted to learn more. Peter has come to them to share Jesus' message, that *all* people are able to receive God's love, for he shows no partiality. This love is there, manifested in front of them, waiting to be grasped and entered into. No matter where any of us come from, God is present to us; God is with us. *Whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.*

When we enter into God's love, we enter into a hope that transcends this life in which we live. In the second reading, Saint Paul preaches that hope is poured into our hearts. It enters into our very being! Where does that hope point? Nothing on earth is worthy of that hope. Instead, we grow enamored of the life that God alone can give to us, which is with God in heaven after our earthly lives have ended. Jesus, the Son of God, has come to take on our sufferings and pains. He frees us to be able to join him in everlasting life in the glory of heaven.

In the Gospel, Jesus himself preaches that we are blessed. We may find this difficult to hear, or understand, during this time of grief. But Jesus offers his blessings to us as he says, *Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.* Comfort, and consolation, come with the hope that the love of God and the Incarnation of his Son bring us: the promise of eternal life in heaven. The eternal life unto which we today commend our sister/brother [N].

That comfort is not present just in this Mass, however. We can console one another, supporting one another in our grief. When we love and comfort one another, we realize the blessing of which Jesus spoke, one that comes from participating in the life of Christ. For as God loves us, so we love [N], and that love does not die when our mortal bodies do.

May our time together be a time of healing for ourselves, but also for relationships that may be broken. Let the hope, that God alone can offer, permeate our hearts, to remember [N] who has gone before us, but also so that we can, in peace and love, celebrate with one another the life of [N].

YEAR B WEEKDAYS II

SUNDAY, APRIL 1, 2018

(Lec. 42)

- 1) Acts 10:34a, 37-43
- 2) Colossians 3:1-4
or 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8
- 3) John 20:1-9
or Mark 16:1-7 (41)

EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD - SOLEMNITY

Gospel related: John: CCC 515, 640; Gospel related-Mark: CCC 333, 641, 652, 2174

FOCUS: When we come to the empty tomb and look in, what do we see?

The fact that Easter falls on April First this year will not be overlooked by the most cynical of nonbelievers concerning the resurrection of Jesus. Saint Paul, in the first chapter of his first letter to the Church of Corinth, refers to the cross as a stumbling block for some and an absurdity for others (1:23).

Those of us gathered here, however, embrace the cross; we see right through the pain and agony of the cross to the glory of the Resurrection. For like Mary Magdala, Peter and the Beloved Disciple, we have come to the empty tomb, we have peered deep inside and we believe.

Like Mary, Peter and the Beloved Disciple, we arrive at our understanding of the resurrection of Jesus at different speeds, each at our own pace. In Saint John's account, Mary Magdala first thought someone stole Jesus' body, and Peter was perplexed at what he saw. The Beloved Disciple is the first one to grasp what has taken place.

If the Gospel message ended at the cross, you and I would not be here today. The stories about all the good works, all the miracles, all the teachings of Jesus would be collecting dust on a shelf somewhere. Oh, he would have been seen as a wonderful and compassionate prophet, but he would not be seen as he is today, as the glorified and risen Son of the living God.

Every day, we have a decision to make as followers of the Risen One. Each day, we must decide whether we will be observed helping to roll the stone away or trying to keep the stone still in front of the tomb. By our actions – by our witness in the workplace, in our homes and among our neighbors – are we fools for Christ, or do we hang back and let someone else do the heavy lifting?

Last night, all around the world, the universal Church grew by leaps and bounds as thousands of new Catholics were welcomed among us as they celebrated the Easter sacraments. Now, on this most sacred of days, each of us will renew our baptismal promises. Once again, we will reject evil and embrace the living God. Let us not doubt, let us not be perplexed. Let us instead come, peer deep inside the empty tomb, and believe. Alleluia!

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Monday, April 2, 2018

(Lec. 261)

1) Acts 2:14, 22-33

2) Matthew 28:8-15

Gospel related: CCC 640, 641, 645, 654

MONDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: *Do not be afraid*, for we will again see Jesus.

Such beauty can be found in the words of Jesus in today's Gospel, when he says to his disciples: Do not be afraid. *Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.* It is another example of a "sending" by Jesus. If we listen carefully to these words, we come to understand that they are meant for us as well. We, too, have stood at the empty tomb and have been fearful, and are striving to take up the mission to go. It is the work of our lifetime – to point to Jesus so that others can see him.

Others can see him in us – in our words and actions, in our love and joy. Reflecting Jesus in our lives assumes that we know him on a personal, intimate level, and can thus imitate him. Through prayerful observance of him in Scripture, we see how he reacts, how he leads, and the way he considers people and situations. Jesus operates from a foundation of love and compassion. We are commanded to do the same.

To draw such lessons from Jesus' life is not to superimpose something that is not there. It is to see the reality of his life within the midst of a culture that questioned who he was and his every move. It is not so different for us: it is very easy for us to get distracted by things that draw our focus away from Christ, and we must be careful of this pitfall. We, too, live in a culture that has the ability to shift our focus from Jesus, but when we go to the Gospel and hear, *Do not be afraid*, and *Go tell my brothers*, and we are given the assurance in the words *they will see me*, we are strengthened in faith and purpose.

The strength that God provides is a grace for our journey. Notice in today's passage that when the disciples are sent, they are sent directly into a culture that has designed a masterful deceit. The guards were paid to lie about the Resurrection. If people believed their story, the mission of the disciples would be all the more difficult to carry out. But God *poured forth the promise of the Holy Spirit*, as Peter reminds us, and we are not alone.

To go and do what Jesus asks of us is not for the faint of heart. It is for those who know him, believe in him and have met him. Where have we met Jesus? Where do we see him in our daily life? To whom is he sending us? May the grace and strength of the Holy Spirit be with all of us as we live out our answers to these questions.

Tuesday, April 3, 2018
(Lec. 262)

- 1) Acts 2:36-41
- 2) John 20:11-18

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

TUESDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Turning away from self-defeating behaviors and expectations draws us closer to God and to each other.

In today's first reading from Acts, we hear Peter explain to his listeners – in terms they could understand – that Jesus was the awaited Messiah and that he, although crucified, had been raised from the dead. Peter invited the people to *repent and be baptized*.

Metanoia, the Greek word for repentance that is used here, means more than remorse. It implies a change of heart, a turning around. Peter's listeners did "turn around," and have a change of heart. Their lives changed as they turned their backs on all that took their minds and hearts away from God's love. Three thousand of them were baptized and subsequently joined in the community life of fellow Christians, which history shows us was one of devoting themselves *to the teaching of the Apostles ... to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers* (Acts 2:42).

In today's Gospel, we have another kind of "turning around." We find Mary Magdalene weeping at the empty tomb. She went there expecting to mourn the death of Jesus, her beloved *Rabbouni*, but he's not there. When faced with the empty tomb, she drew the only conclusion she could – someone had moved his body.

It wasn't until Mary turned away from the tomb that she saw Jesus. It wasn't until she heard him call her name that she recognized the truth: he had risen, just as he said he would. After Mary encountered Jesus, he told her not to cling to him. He sent her to the community of believers to share her experience with them.

In both readings, we hear about people who needed to turn around in order to grow spiritually – and they did it together with others. The same is true for us. The astonishing truth is that Jesus Christ, once crucified, is alive. As we proclaim in our mystery of faith, Christ *is* risen. Although he ascended to his Father, Jesus did not abandon us, but sent his Holy Spirit to the faith community gathered in his name.

The Good News is that Jesus' death and resurrection brought us forgiveness of our sins. This is not a passive thing, however, for it is through our baptism and repentance that we receive it. Forgiveness goes hand in hand with turning away from the self-defeating thoughts and behaviors, as well as sinful actions, that keep us from growing closer to God and keep us isolated from each other.

We turn our backs on the fears and anxieties that say we're unlovable unless we're perfect. We turn away from sinful deeds, and bring our flaws to God and experience healing. And when we encounter God's loving mercy, we cannot remain the same. We grow in love and strength, and communion with God.

So let us, through the power of the Holy Spirit and together with our community of faith, continue to turn away from whatever keeps us from living the full life God has in mind for us. And let us grow in love for God and for one another.

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Wednesday, April 4, 2018
(Lec. 263)

WEDNESDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

- 1) Acts 3:1-10
- 2) Luke 24:13-35

Gospel related: CCC 112, 439, 552, 555, 572, 601, 640, 641, 643, 645, 652, 659, 710, 1094, 1166, 1329, 1347, 2625

FOCUS: We are invited to walk with Jesus throughout the journey of our lives.

In both of today's readings, we encounter different examples of a disciple's walk with Jesus. First, we hear of the man who was crippled from birth experiencing an unexpected miracle of healing – who *leaped up, stood, and walked around* with Peter and John in ecstatic praise of God. We can only imagine the great joy with which he began his journey with Jesus.

The disciples in the Gospel, on the other hand, are hopeless, discouraged and unsure of things as they walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. This Jesus, whom they had followed so faithfully for all those years, was dead and buried – not the Messiah they had believed in so enthusiastically. It took the words of the unrecognized risen Jesus, who joined them on the road and was then revealed in the breaking of the bread, to heal their hearts and remind them of God's promises. They were so encouraged that, with night falling, they walked the seven miles back from Emmaus to Jerusalem.

Our own life's journey as disciples of Jesus will likely, at various points along the way, include the experiences of the crippled man and the discouraged disciples. We can perhaps recall the exuberance of first believing in Jesus and the motivation and energy it gave us. Has God ever worked a miracle in our life that made us feel ecstatic and overjoyed, with a renewed faith in him, like the crippled man in response to his healing?

At other times, we might relate more to the discouraged disciples, who were on the verge of giving up because Jesus did not meet their expectations. We may have suffered a loss and wondered how God could let that happen. Or we may have been trying for years to follow Jesus and weren't sure if our discipleship was making a difference – until we met somebody who assured us that something we did made a great impact on their life.

Whatever feelings we're experiencing on our journey of discipleship, we know that the risen Lord is walking beside us, always eager to hear of our experiences and ready to give us the encouragement or guidance we need at the moment. Let us watch for the risen Lord in the people we encounter – wherever we go, and in all of the events of the day. He is walking beside us, ready to set our heart burning within us as we walk along the way with him; he is there to heal whatever is crippling us and preventing our walk of discipleship.

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Thursday, April 5, 2018
(Lec. 264)

- 1) Acts 3:11-26
- 2) Luke 24:35-48

Gospel related: CCC 108, 112, 572, 601, 627, 641, 644, 645, 652, 702, 730, 981, 999, 1120, 1122, 1304, 2605, 2625, 2763 CSDC 52, 491

THURSDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Faith in the name of the risen Christ calls us to carry on the same work he did in his earthly ministry.

We can imagine that emotions were running high those early days after the crucifixion of that charismatic preacher, Jesus of Nazareth. We hear in the readings today that some people were *amazed* by the miracles being done in his name. Others were *startled*. *Terrified*. *Incredulous for joy*. Strange stories were being told and stranger things were being witnessed.

Yet why should anyone be surprised? Had not *The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ... brought to fulfillment what he had announced beforehand through the mouth of all the prophets*, as Peter said? The crippled man had faith in the name and power of Jesus Christ, why did the crowds not?

All the healings that had taken place over the last three years at the hands of Jesus were still taking place: still at the hands of Jesus, although now those hands were attached to Peter and John. The crippled man was cured not by the power or piety of the Apostles, but by the name of the Holy and Righteous One. Faith in the name of the risen Lord made a man weak with disease strong in health.

Jesus himself reminds his disciples, as Peter reminded the community in Acts, that they are now witnesses: witnesses to the fulfillment of everything that was written about him in the law of Moses, and in the prophets and in the psalms. He said, look at my hands and feet, it is the same me. And then he did what he had been doing with them for three years: he ate with them and taught them.

The people who surrounded Peter, John and the cured man; the disciples; as well as all of us are witnesses to the power of the Resurrection, and are thus called to carry on the same work Jesus did in his earthly ministry. Though Jesus is no longer present among us as a man, nothing has changed. The afflicted need to be cared for, every human being needs to be invited to the table, and repentance and forgiveness of sins needs to be preached, all in the name of the Author of Life.

We, as descendants of the earliest disciples, must do the work of the Lord, having faith in that blessed name, just as they did.

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Friday, April 6, 2018

(Lec. 265)

1) Acts 4:1-12

2) John 21:1-14

Gospel related: CCC 448, 645, 659, 1166

FRIDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Christ awakens our faith.

If any of us have had our faith awakened by an intense situation or powerful retreat, we're not alone. The Pew Research Center reports that about half of Americans have had a "sudden religious insight or awakening" at some point in their lives.

While such experiences can be life-changing, it can be a struggle to keep the fires of our faith burning brightly after the emotion of an event, or as we transition back to everyday life from a retreat. Work, school, family responsibilities and other obligations rightly take up our time and do not necessarily allow us the same opportunity for intimacy with the Lord.

Today's Gospel begins as the disciples go back to their daily activities after what we might call the ultimate spiritual experience – witnessing the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ! After an unproductive night of fishing, they return with empty nets. Jesus, whom they do not immediately recognize, tells them to go back out to sea and cast their nets to the right side of the boat. They catch 153 large fish. On the shore, Jesus has prepared a fire burning *with fish on it and bread*.

Jesus wants his Word to guide our lives like it guides his disciples. We may not recognize his presence the way we do during an intense, spiritual experience, but he is there – filling our nets with blessings and inviting us to join him at the eternal banquet he has prepared. This meal is our salvation, and we partake of it when we receive the Eucharist.

It is worth noting that Jesus addresses the disciples as *children* when he calls out to them. Like children, the disciples, who were experienced fishermen, needed to set aside their pride to trust his instruction. We, too, are called to be humble so we may trust his word.

In today's reading from Acts, Peter and John are no longer fishermen. They are now *fishers of men* (Mt 4:19) as Jesus promised. The Sanhedrin questions them about their preaching and ability to heal a man, which inspires many to believe. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter says that it is in Jesus' name the man is healed, and boldly professes that *there is no salvation through anyone else*.

No one fills our nets the way Christ can. We must seek his presence in our lives and allow him to awaken our faith. Whether we've had a religious experience or not, he's always here with us. He stands on the shore, his fire burning brightly, waiting for us to proclaim his name.

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Saturday, April 7, 2018

(Lec. 266)

1) Acts 4:13-21

2) Mark 16:9-15

Gospel related: CCC 643, 645, 659, 888, 977, 1223

SATURDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: When our actions reflect our faith, we proclaim the Gospel to others without saying a word.

We heard Jesus tell his disciples: *Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.*

Today's reading from Acts gives us one example of how the Apostles did just that. The context is that Peter had just healed a crippled beggar, in the name of Jesus. Resenting this, the Temple authorities had arrested Peter and John and brought them before the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin. This is where we encounter them today.

The leaders, elders and scribes all perceive Peter and John to be *uneducated, ordinary men*, yet they are worried about them proclaiming the power of the risen Christ. So they forbid Peter and John from speaking of Jesus again, but the two disciples disregard the warning. *It is impossible*, they said, *for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard.*

We, who are also called to spread the Good News, can learn from this example. Notice that the opportunities to witness about Christ's power and love happened as a result of Peter's actions, as well as from his words. He went to the Temple as he usually did. He didn't have money, but helped the man he encountered using the resources he had. The result captured people's attention and created an opportunity to share the Good News. We, too, can rely on God's grace in these moments.

At times, people might find our words or actions threatening, as the members of the Sanhedrin did. At other times, the chance to proclaim Christ's resurrection may arise much more subtly: when our actions speak louder than our words. People notice what we do – even if what we do is not miraculous.

If we want to share the Good News as Jesus calls us to, let's start with the opportunities in our daily lives. Let's also remember that what we do sometimes has much more power than what we say.

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SUNDAY, APRIL 8, 2018

(Lec. 44)

1) Acts 4:32-35

2) 1 John 5:1-6

3) John 20:19-31

Gospel related: CCC 442, 448, 514, 575, 643, 644, 645, 659, 730, 788, 858, 976, 1087, 1120, 1287, 1441, 1461, 1485, 2839; **CSDC** 491

SECOND SUNDAY

OF EASTER

or

DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

- SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: All encounters with Christ bring about hope and healing.

Healing plays a huge role in our society. We spend billions on healthcare, and rightly so. Like our physical health, our spiritual health also needs attention. Throughout the Gospels, healing is one of the major characteristics of Jesus' ministry. Some are recalled in detail, others simply noted. Yet all these healings are signs of the kingdom of God. Here in Christ, God comes forth into our world in a new and dynamic way, fulfilling his promises and even at times turning the laws of nature upside down.

Today, we hear this ministry of spiritual healing being passed to the Eleven, through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Our Gospel passage today is the scriptural basis for the sacrament of reconciliation. John tells us that Jesus appears to the Eleven as they hid in the Upper Room. One can imagine the stale air and oppressive smell in a room shut away from the world. But Jesus appears among them like a fresh breeze filling the house, displacing that stale air of fear, gently blowing away the dust of disappointment and propelling the disciples to forgiveness and healing.

In this moment of encounter and empowerment, the Apostles are given a holy responsibility to share God's healing and forgiveness with others. They are now carriers of God's promises, and have the power to heal physically and spiritually in Christ's name. What they say about the risen Christ is no mere fantasy or delusion. They witnessed his death and Resurrection, and now they bear witness to his risen glory – becoming instruments of the very mercy and forgiveness that Jesus so abundantly and generously bestows on all who follow him.

John then shows us how Thomas receives this life-changing mercy. Thomas finds it hard to believe what the other disciples tell him, and so Jesus literally stands before him and shows him his wounds: he gently takes Thomas from doubt to faith. Using his own words, Jesus coaxes one of the great declarations of faith – *My Lord and my God*. In that moment, Thomas is both healed and changed – healed of his grief and pain, changed from doubt to belief.

The need for that mercy and healing is just as great today as it was in the first century. Perhaps that is why Pope John Paul declared today to be Divine Mercy Sunday. At the heart of our faith is this recognition that we need the risen Christ; we need his healing and above all his steadfast mercy. Without these we are lost, still in our sins – unable to be reconciled with God. As we continue to celebrate the Resurrection, let us each open our own hearts to that healing and then commit ourselves to be channels of that healing in our words and actions this coming week.

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Monday, April 9, 2018

(Lec. 545)

1) Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10

2) Hebrews 10:4-10

3) Luke 1:26-38

Gospel related: CCC 64, 148, 269, 273, 276, 332, 430, 437, 484, 486, 488, 490, 491, 494, 497, 505, 510, 559, 697, 706, 709, 723, 2571, 2617, 2677, 2812, 2827, 2856 CSDC 59

**THE ANNUNCIATION
OF THE LORD
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: The Lord who told Mary, *Be not afraid*, is saying the same to us.

Do not be afraid, the angel Gabriel says to Mary. To be visited by an angel was no ordinary experience, so it is not surprising to hear that Mary was *greatly troubled*, as Luke says. To reassure her, the angel says that Mary is full of grace. Grace is God's favor, a supernatural gift of kindness and divine assistance. How comforting it must have been for this young teenager to hear this.

Only after speaking this reassurance does the angel tell Mary that, even before her planned marriage to Joseph, she is going to be pregnant. No wonder she asks how this could be. In response, Mary hears the stunning news that the child will be conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit. Then the angel says, *the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God*.

Did Mary understand that? How could she? And yet, without hesitation, Mary responds in trusting faith: *I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word*.

The angel spoke for God, saying, *do not be afraid*, because God wanted Mary to know he was fulfilling his promise: the promise he made to his people Israel, to honor the covenant; the promise that Isaiah refers to when he tells us, *the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel*.

The Lord is saying those same words to us, right now: "Be not afraid." Trust me. I am with you. I *shall* be with you – always. So on this day when we celebrate Mary's acceptance of the Lord's call, we ask her to pray for us, that like her, we, too, may say our "yes" to God, and be bearers of the covenant in our own way.

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Tuesday, April 10, 2018
(Lec. 268)

- 1) Acts 4:32-37
- 2) John 3:7b-15

Gospel related: CCC 423, 440, 505, 526, 591, 661, 691, 728, 1287, 2130 CSDC 50

TUESDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: There was no needy person among them.

The community of believers described by the Acts of the Apostles sounds ideal. There was no needy person among them. Individuals spontaneously gave up their property and offered it for distribution by the Apostles. To our ears, this may sound easy for a primitive group of Christians, but impossible almost two thousand years later.

So what might this early community teach us by their way of life? After all, in most of the world, we need property and a home for family stability; clothing and access to transportation in order to work to provide for that family; savings and retirement funds to secure our future so as not to depend on others. We take responsibility for our needs, the needs of our children, and perhaps even further extended family. And yet, we may live under a cloud of anxiety and a “spirit of scarcity” – always wanting more to make us feel secure.

This spirit of scarcity is not from the Holy Spirit. *Generosity* is fruit of the Holy Spirit. When we live in the Holy Spirit, as the community of believers did in Acts, *of one heart and mind*, we realize our abundance as they did, instead of fretting over a sense of scarcity.

Pope Francis wrote on this topic in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, or *The Joy of the Gospel*. He reminds us that “Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. The Church has realized that the need to heed this plea is itself born of the liberating action of grace within each of us, and thus it is not a question of a mission reserved only to a few” (187-188).

Each individual Christian. Jesus invites us, as he did Nicodemus, to be born of the Holy Spirit and to be this instrument of generosity. He invites us to believe in him, and look forward to eternal life, instead of feeling crippled by scarcity in this life. To live a life of gratitude for what we have, rather than live in fear out of a spirit of scarcity.

Christ gave fully of himself to give us life. There is no scarcity there. So as we partake of this gift, let us consider how we might share with others what we have in abundance, and ask the Holy Spirit to make us more fearless and fruitful in giving to those in need.

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Wednesday, April 11, 2018
(Lec. 269)
1) Acts 5:17-26
2) John 3:16-21

WEDNESDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER
(OBL MEM
Saint Stanislaus,
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 219, 444, 454, 458, 678, 679, 706 CSDC 3, 64

FOCUS: Let us live the Truth of the Gospel.

Today we celebrate the feast of Saint Stanislaus. An outspoken bishop who lived almost a thousand years ago, he was known for his preaching and spiritual advice. Like the Apostles in today's first reading, Stanislaus defied the leaders of his day in proclaiming the Gospel. He refused to condone the public sins of the king, and publicly criticized him, eventually excommunicating him. In retaliation, the king killed Stanislaus while he was saying Mass.

We know most of the Apostles and early Church leaders were killed by those in power. Truth is often a threat to power. And yet, our holy ancestors chose death, rather than forsake Jesus and his teachings. They believed in the Gospel message we heard today: *Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.*

It is better to be condemned by a king or some other earthly leader, rather than by God, is it not? Especially when it is a matter of choosing between a temporary, earthly life, and eternal life in heaven.

Yes, following Jesus can be difficult, if not outright dangerous. Even today this is true. People are still being martyred for their steadfast commitment to Jesus and what he taught. Still, brave and holy men and women are not counting the cost. We can be grateful that most of us will likely not face this challenge. Nevertheless, we want to demonstrate our steadfastness to Jesus.

How do we do this? By being willing to suffer or to make sacrifices for the sake of love and forgiveness, as Jesus taught. By committing to living the Gospel commands, even when it is not easy to do so, or when it might end a career or a relationship, or sacrifice our personal comfort. By living the truth, as Jesus says, so that the world might clearly see God.

Let us pray to have the grace and fortitude of Saint Stanislaus, and all defenders of the faith, as we strive to live the Truth.

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Thursday, April 12, 2018

(Lec. 270)

1) Acts 5:27-33

2) John 3:31-36

Gospel related: CCC 161, 504, 690, 1286

THURSDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Guided by the Spirit, let us proclaim the love we have seen and experienced in our lives.

We are most familiar with the Old English origin of the word “witness,” as in “testimony,” or to have knowledge of something. But in Hebrew, the root of “witness” goes deeper. A witness is one who not only testifies, but also “repeats” what he or she saw.

So when Peter and the Apostles declare in today’s first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, *we are witnesses of these things*, they are not only telling the Pharisees and court officers that they have a unique knowledge about Jesus. They are stressing that they must proclaim in their words and in their actions *these things* that they know in their hearts and in their memory. They must *repeat* them! For the Apostles, the experience of and relationship with Jesus changed them. It transformed their beings, down to their “spiritual DNA.” Even more important, they knew they had been raised anew with Jesus. They simply could not stop repeating this Good News, both with their words and with their actions.

Brothers and sisters, we, too, are witnesses! In this second week of Easter, let us take a moment to reflect on what we know with our hearts and have experienced in our lives about Jesus, the Christ. What are the mighty deeds that God has done with and through us? Looking over the individual story of each of our lives, where do we see the presence of God in our past? What identifiable moments – or through what specific person – did we see and recognize God? As John reminds us in today’s Gospel, we, too, must proclaim and testify to what we have seen and heard.

The Father loves the Son, says the Evangelist, and he *has given everything over to him* – and by extension, to us, because we are his children. It was the Father’s great love for us that led him to send his Son, our brother Jesus, to share humanity with us, to be one with us in all things. It is also the Father’s love that gave us the Holy Spirit to guide and shine his light on us; that gave us Mary, our heavenly Mother, who lovingly and personally makes the depth of the Father’s love known to us. This is what it means to be *witnesses* of the Resurrection. Guided by the Spirit, this is the Good News we have known and experienced. This is the news we must sing, as we did today in our responsorial psalm: *His praise shall be always in my mouth* (Ps 34).

Can our Good News get any better? Let us live as witnesses of this great Love. Let us acknowledge, proclaim and repeat the truth that we are God’s children now.

* * *

Friday, April 13, 2018
(Lec. 271)
1) Acts 5:34-42
2) John 6:1-15

FRIDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Martin I,
Pope and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 439, 549, 559, 1338

FOCUS: What comes from God has no bounds.

We have all heard the story of the loaves and fishes many times. As the only miracle story found in all four Gospels, its importance centers on emphasizing for us not only that we are fed through Jesus, but that there are no limits to his nourishment of us. Here, the crowd of more than five thousand eats from five barley loaves and two fish. Soon that bounty, and the twelve baskets left over, will seem like crumbs in light of *all humanity* able to be fed by the body and blood of one God-become-man, Jesus Christ.

As Gamaliel observes in our first reading, this is the difference between what is of human origin and what comes from God. Something that is of human origin is finite; it has a fixed number, a beginning and an end. What comes from God has no bounds. There are no limits to what God can do. Therefore, just as death came into the world through the eating of the forbidden fruit, so eternal life is restored by eating the Bread of Life.

This truth is revealed in the life of Christ. Religious leaders of his time had certain expectations about the messiah and so they denied Jesus was who he claimed to be. They saw him as a man who could be stopped by death. They were wrong.

Through Christ's resurrection, he fully reveals that he is the Messiah. He triumphs over his own death and offers the promise of eternal salvation for all people – a promise that has continued through the Church for two thousand years.

As the ordinary bread and wine that we offer in this Eucharist become, in reality, the body and blood of Christ, we are nourished by a God who held back nothing in order to give us back everything. So let us not be concerned, as the disciples seemed to be, that "we do not have enough" to serve each other, and the Lord. For when we offer what we have to him, he blesses it and multiplies it and brings forth great fruit from it, often exceeding our wildest expectations. What comes from God has no bounds.

* * *

Saturday, April 14, 2018
(Lec. 272)
1) Acts 6:1-7
2) John 6:16-21
Gospel related: **CSDC** 453

SATURDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: To cry out for help is to acknowledge that we seek wholeness and fulfillment in our lives.

It is the middle of April, a perfect time to enter “spring cleaning” mode. For many, this is a season to get the house in order. There may be closets to be emptied, home-improvement projects to be undertaken, and flowers to be planted. This may be too much to do if a person lives alone. A call for help may be sent out, and those who care may respond.

Some people will never ask for help. For them, they may not be able to admit that they cannot do it all on their own. But all human beings are limited in what they can do. A plea for help does not have to be seen as a sign of weakness. Instead, it is a request to help bring about a sense of wholeness or fulfillment to their lives.

In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, there is tension between the Greek-speaking and the Hebrew-speaking Christians. The Greek speakers feel that their widows are receiving less than their fair share of assistance from the nascent Christian community. The twelve Apostles recognize that they have many responsibilities to the community – perhaps too many responsibilities – and they need help! They may not know who the best people are to support them, so they turn back to the community and ask them for recommendations. The requirements are that they have to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and wisdom.

The community lifts up seven men who we come to know as the first deacons of the Church. The ministry of the deacons in the early Christian community is to serve those with physical needs. This allows the twelve Apostles to focus on prayer and study. By delegating certain responsibilities to the deacons, the Apostles are able to see that the needs of their community are being met, so that ultimately, each person can find physical and spiritual wholeness and fulfillment. They commission the deacons through prayer and the laying on of hands – ritual actions that continue to this day.

Like people who are hard at work cleaning their homes after a long winter, there may be more that can be done by just one person. There may be events in our lives that can't be transformed by anyone other than God. So, let us heed the psalm response that we prayed, as the psalmist cries out, *Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.* A call for help to friends and family may help us out, but even better is our trust that God hears our cries for help. When the spring storms come down upon us as they did on the disciples in today's Gospel, let us do as they did: fix our eyes on Jesus, and then remember who it is to whom we can always turn.

* * *

SUNDAY, APRIL 15, 2018

(Lec. 47)

1) Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

2) 1 John 2:1-5a

3) Luke 24:35-48

Gospel related: CCC 108, 112, 572, 601, 627, 641, 644, 645, 652, 702, 730, 981, 999, 1094, 1120, 1122, 1304, 1329, 1347, 2605, 2625, 2763 CSDC 52, 491

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

FOCUS: The risen Christ releases us from fear and assures us that he lives anew, and forever.

Today's Gospel follows the encounter the two disciples had with the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus, where they had recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Now, these same two disciples have returned to Jerusalem, to the Upper Room where the Last Supper took place. All of the Apostles are hidden there, staying out of sight for fear that those who killed Jesus will soon be coming for them.

Jesus appears to them in that room and offers the peace that he alone can give. He reassures them they are seeing victory, not defeat – that he is truly risen. He is not a ghost and they are not hallucinating. He eats with them, and then gives them a detailed recounting of how prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures have all been fulfilled by his passion. The disciples' mission will be to go and tell others the very same truth – God's plan of salvation did not take a detour at Calvary; instead it was the defining moment of victory.

Jesus calls them all *witnesses of these things*, a point echoed by Saint Peter in the Book of Acts. Peter has indeed become a witness. Before the Holy Spirit came upon him in wind and fire, he, like the others, hid himself from the public eye. Now – his fears replaced by faith in the Resurrection – Peter stands publicly as the rock of Christ's Church, challenging his listeners to repent, and inviting them to be baptized and share in Christ's victory.

Then and now, the resurrection of Jesus is disbelieved by some, and ignored by many. However, for those who have faith in the Lord and lean on the cross of Jesus, the Resurrection becomes an anchor that preserves our hope, even, and especially, during the darkest days of our lives. In the sacraments, Jesus takes our fears away – the same way he did on the road to Emmaus and in the Upper Room. Like his disciples, we are then called to go and free others from their fears, by telling them the Good News that Christ has conquered death.

* * *

Monday, April 16, 2018

(Lec. 273)

1) Acts 6:8-15

2) John 6:22-29

Gospel related: CCC 698, 728, 1296, 1338, 2835

MONDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Let us allow Jesus to nourish and transform us.

Today's Gospel passage from John is the introduction to what scholars refer to as the "Discourse on the Bread of Life." The crowds are constantly following Jesus, seeking him out; traveling to see him. They wonder at how he arrived where he is, and what they can do *to accomplish the works of God*.

Knowing they are seeking him out of curiosity still, and not yet belief, Jesus gives the first indication in John's Gospel that the food which he, as the Son of Man, will provide, leads to eternal life. *Do not work for food that perishes, he says, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.* He then answers their question more directly: *This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent.*

Like those early Christians, we, too, seek ways to accomplish the works of God, and the answer seems simple: *believe in the one he sent.* In other words, believe in who Jesus is, and what he came to do. But as simple as the answer truly is, accomplishing it can be quite a challenge.

It can be a challenge because we travel our journey of discipleship along roads and in places where others do not believe so easily in this itinerant carpenter from Nazareth. We are bombarded by distractions from our material world, tempted time and again to "go it alone," and fix our problems without the help of God. We are tempted to trust in the things that perish – the wages and material goods of our earthly lives here – and slip away from our trust, first, in God. We may encounter others who can *not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit* which come to us in the Gospel message, just as we saw Stephen encounter such people in the first reading.

But we know we are not alone in our struggles. God is always with us, always ready to nourish us with grace in the sacraments – to gently turn us back to him and embrace us with a love beyond our understanding. So, let us profess our belief in the one God sent and allow him to nourish and transform us – and go forth knowing that no challenge, with God's help, cannot be overcome.

Tuesday, April 17, 2018

(Lec. 274)

1) Acts 7:51–8:1a

2) John 6:30-35

Gospel related: CCC 423, 1094

TUESDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus is the bread of life, given by the Father, who gives his life to the world.

If our first reading is any indication, Stephen was an “in- your-face” kind of messenger, and his message incited rage among the people. His tone fanned the flames of their fury, as he called those to whom he preached, *stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears*. He accused them of acting like their ancestors – who persecuted and killed the prophets – in their betrayal and murder of the Righteous One about whom the prophets spoke: Jesus Christ. He told them they failed to observe the law. Blunt words, to say the least. It is no wonder the pious Jewish community elders and scribes were angry.

In contrast to the first reading, the scene in the Gospel is much more civil. Although the undertone of the questions seems menacing – give us a sign, show us what you can do, perform for us so that we can believe in you – they were not unlike the questions their ancestors had asked of the prophets when they wanted tangible proof that those claiming to be prophets were indeed God’s messengers. Ironically, the sign for which they were asking was right before their very eyes. Jesus is the sign. Jesus is that bread – the bread of life given by the Father so that all may have life and have it in abundance.

In both of the readings, the crowd hears the truth, but it is received very differently. In John’s Gospel, the people allow it to transform their hearts: *Sir, give us this bread always*, they say. And Jesus will continue, beyond what we hear today, to instruct them and to gain followers. In our reading from Acts, the people, elders and scribes to whom Stephen is preaching cover their ears, harden their hearts, throw him out of the city and stone him.

Not everyone who hears the truth is ready, or even willing, to accept it. It might depend on the moment – today they listened to Jesus and not Stephen; we know that on another day they killed Jesus.

But the truth has survived, and it continues to be heard and sometimes ignored. Let us pray to always have open hearts and ears, asking – as we do – to give us this bread, our daily bread, always. May we be nourished by this bread, and in turn share it with others so they may be nourished as well.

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Wednesday, April 18, 2018

(Lec. 275)

1) Acts 8:1b-8

2) John 6:35-40

Gospel related: CCC 161, 606, 989, 994, 1001, 2824

WEDNESDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: We are forever in the hands of Jesus, who holds the key to eternal life.

Saul and the Samaritans have something in common, from our perspective two thousand years later. They were seemingly unlikely agents of change, and goodness, in the Church. Saul, who was attempting to destroy the infant Church, would one day be the reason it spread to the ends of the earth. And the Samaritans, who had as-close-to-nothing-as-possible to do with the Jewish people, and all that was occurring in their holy city of Jerusalem, would become a joyful city of healing, conversion and growth in the early Church.

Neither Saul, nor the Samaritans, would have foreseen the wondrous deeds the Lord was about to accomplish with them. And yet, given the opportunity, they embraced it. Of course, in our Scriptures today Saul is still persecuting the Jewish Christians, but we know his encounter with the risen Christ is coming. We know what that encounter means, for we have Jesus' own words to tell us.

We have all we need to obtain eternal life, he tells us. God will not reject anyone who approaches with true belief. We may be exiled from the life we desire by illness. We may be rejected by those we thought were friends. We may be scattered from our homes by unemployment. But we are not lost. We are forever and always in the hands of the one who holds the key to eternal life – Jesus Christ.

And we know this because this same Jesus has given us himself, his very self, his body and blood. *I am the bread of life*, he says, *whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst*. The bread of life and the cup of salvation, offered to us at every Eucharist. They are offered so that we, too, like Philip who went to Samaria, can preach a word of peace, expel the demons of hate, and heal those afflicted by loneliness – because we believe.

We do not know whether or not, if persecution had not occurred in Jerusalem, Philip would have gone to Samaria and brought the joy of the Gospel to that community. And like Saul before his conversion, we might not have any way of knowing what part we will play in God's mission.

What we *do* know is what God wants for us: *that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life*. Knowing this, let us then approach the altar where the bread of life awaits us, singing as our psalmist does today: *Shout joyfully to God, all the earth, sing praise to the glory of his name ... Say to God, "How tremendous are your deeds!"*

* * *

Thursday, April 19, 2018

(Lec. 276)

1) Acts 8:26-40

2) John 6:44-51

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

THURSDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: There are no limits on what God may ask of us.

The Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. What an interesting phrase! Some of us may envision this to mean that Philip simply disappeared from the eunuch's presence. However, that is only one way of thinking about this, and the original language of this passage implies more of a "spiritual" removal, rather than a bodily one. That is, while Philip was soon to leave the eunuch physically, he had already mentally departed, in a sense. His work was done there, and he was ready to move on to where the Spirit was leading him, and where he was needed.

We can think of being at a business where our transaction has just been completed, and suddenly the individual helping us has his name called over the loudspeaker, saying he is needed somewhere else. We might say to someone that "the individual was snatched from us." This does not mean he magically disappeared. It meant that our interaction was over, and the individual quickly went to someplace else where he was needed.

In the case of Philip, the Spirit may have urged him to leave the eunuch and go to Azotus, which he did. The Spirit "snatched" him away to work on and continue to fulfill his mission for Christ. For as Christ said, *everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me.* Philip, speaking in the name of Christ, had brought the eunuch to the Lord. It was time to move on.

We might find ourselves being "snatched away" at times: to prayer, to Mass, to the food kitchen for the needy, to any number of different activities that the Lord impels us to in fulfillment of our Christian commitment. Perhaps what we might take from this story is that there are no limits on what God may ask us to do, and that if we allow him to work in and through us, then others will listen to the Father and come to the Lord. Like Philip, we will not "magically disappear" but faithfully "move" ourselves to do what we are called to do in Christ.

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Friday, April 20, 2018
(Lec. 277)

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

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

FRIDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: In the Eucharist, Jesus' body and blood transform us, that we may transform the world.

In today's Gospel, while the crowds are amazed at Jesus and begin following him, we hear the Jews quarrel about how it is possible for him to give them his flesh to eat. This consternation by a first-century Jew is not surprising. There are clear prohibitions in Jewish law about consuming the blood of birds or mammals, along with its flesh. And yet Jesus is now telling pious Jews that, in order for them to have life in God, they will have to eat his very own flesh and blood.

Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. He adds, For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. This is a hard teaching, and subsequent passages in John will show that there was great defection among Jesus' followers. Some people would not accept his teaching. They returned to their former way of life and no longer followed him.

However, we know that many people chose to remain close to him. And, inspired by this chapter in John's Gospel and sustained by the teaching of Peter, the Apostles and their successors, the Catholic Church has held for the past two millennia to the doctrine of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Jesus Christ is fully present in body, blood, soul and divinity.

This real and substantive encounter with the risen Christ in the Eucharist transforms us, much as Saint Paul's real and substantive encounter with the risen Christ transformed *him*. We have the choice to allow that transformation to take hold and to be a witness to the Gospel, or not. As did Paul. He chose to be a witness, and brought the Gospel message to Jews and Gentiles alike.

At the end of every Mass, the priest or deacon dismisses the congregation with a command, the words of which, regardless of the particular form, serve to send the people out to the world in an evangelizing mission. For in hearing the word of God and receiving his body and blood, we are more properly formed and ready to go out to transform the world. So let us do just that, sharing with others the life we have within us.

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Saturday, April 21, 2018
(Lec. 278)

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

SATURDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Anselm,
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

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

FOCUS: The peace of Christ is the Gospel itself.

The Church throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria was at peace.

What does Luke mean by “the Church was at peace?” And how and why did it come to be so? For Luke, the concept of peace, or the bringing of peace, is intricately tied to the Good News of Jesus Christ. In fact, in both the Gospel of Luke and in the Acts of the Apostles, he uses this same word for “peace” a dozen times.

But how and why did this peace come to be so? History tells us it is because Saul, now Paul, had ceased his persecutions of the Church. Our reading from Acts tells us even more: *She [the Church] was being built up and walked in the fear of the Lord, and with the consolation of the Holy Spirit she grew in numbers.* In other words, the Church was at peace because of God's efforts and the people's response, not because of anything its members were doing on their own.

We see this in the first reading today. Peter, acting in the name and with the authority of Jesus Christ, and through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, both heals a paralytic and raises a dead woman back to life. All the inhabitants of Lydda and Sharon see what has happened and turn to the Lord. In Joppa, the miracle is known to all, and many came to believe in the Lord.

In today's Gospel we learn that many of Jesus' early followers *returned to their former way of life and no longer walked with him.* This was because they could not grasp or would not believe that Jesus was the Bread of Life.

Jesus' question to the Twelve is directed also to us. *Do you also want to leave?* Peter's response must be our response: *Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life ... You are the Holy One of God.*

The Easter Season is a season of “great joy in hope.” Joy in the knowledge that God is in charge. And hope in the peace that is ours, now and for all eternity, when we allow God to work in us, and we choose to walk with him.

SUNDAY, APRIL 22, 2018

(Lec. 50)

- 1) Acts 4:8-12
- 2) 1 John 3:1-2
- 3) John 10:11-18

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

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus is the Good Shepherd who has laid down his life that we might find salvation.

Jesus says to each one of us, *I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.* I remember as a child playing games where each one of us would choose an animal we wanted to be. We would almost always choose lions, tigers, bears, etc. We wanted to be strong, at the top of the food chain, a dangerous predator that could fend for itself. As I think back, I don't think any of us ever chose to be a sheep.

In this life, we probably don't want to be a lion, tiger or bear, but we do desire some of those qualities. We want to be strong, self-sufficient and able to fend for ourselves – and our culture tells us this is good, that this is what we should be striving for. But Jesus gives us a different way, encouraging us to be sheep.

As sheep we are weak, often defenseless, and reliant on others. This would be incredibly bad news if we were being sent out into the world alone, or if we chose to try to do it all on our own. But we are never alone because Jesus is our Good Shepherd.

As sheep we are weak, but Jesus our Shepherd is strong. As sheep we are defenseless, but Jesus our Shepherd is our protection. As sheep we cannot succeed on our own, but Jesus is with us as the Good Shepherd to give us the guidance and strength to succeed in this life and reach the pastures of eternal life.

It is vital for us to recognize that we cannot do this on our own – we need Jesus! In the first reading, Saint Peter tells us that *there is no salvation through anyone else* other than Jesus. We cannot save ourselves, we cannot find salvation somewhere else or through anyone else. But we don't have to. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life freely, offering it up for you and me that we might have life and salvation in and through him.

May each of us choose to follow the words of our psalmist today: *It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.* Jesus is the only one who can save us, and he chooses to lay down his life for us. We do not have to earn it or merit it, we simply have to choose to follow him. Even in my weakness and my helplessness, Jesus loves me, for he is my Good Shepherd.

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Monday, April 23, 2018
(Lec. 279)
1) Acts 11:1-18
2) John 10:1-10

MONDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint George,
Martyr;
Saint Adalbert,
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 754, 764, 2158 CSDC 1

FOCUS: Jesus came to give us abundant life.

Whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep, Jesus tells us in today's Gospel reading, *the sheep follow him because they recognize his voice*.

Jesus' words are a reassurance and a promise. But they are more. They are also an invitation, and a challenge, addressed personally to each one of us: *Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture ... I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly*.

These words are not just platitudes, but straight-forward observation about God's plan for salvation. There will be many other voices crying out to us: voices of strangers, and thieves who seek *only to steal and slaughter and destroy*. We are to watch out for them, and resist their lures for they do not lead to abundant and eternal life, but to temporal and temporary pleasures only. Let's also remember that *all* are invited to follow this Good Shepherd.

This is the message we hear in the first reading. Peter explains to the community why the covenant has been extended to the Gentiles, saying, *If then God gave them the same gift he gave to us when we came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to be able to hinder God?* Indeed! God has chosen us, and has provided the way to eternal life. That, friends, is the Gospel. That is the Good News. Jesus came so that we might have life, and have it *abundantly!*

May our own lives reflect our focus on that gate, and shine a light on it for others.

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Tuesday, April 24, 2018
(Lec. 280)
1) Acts 11:19-26
2) John 10:22-30

TUESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Fidelis of Sigmaringen,
Priest and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 548, 582, 583, 590

FOCUS: Listen to the voice of the Shepherd.

As part of the 50th World Day of Social Communications in 2016, Pope Francis said: “We must first listen. Communicating means sharing, and sharing demands listening and acceptance.” He went on to say that to listen “is much more than simply hearing,” and that sometimes, it is “easier to play deaf.”

Jesus’ words often fell on deaf ears. He spoke to massive crowds of people, yet very few heard his message. Jesus acknowledges this in today’s Gospel. He tells those who don’t believe that they are not among his sheep. Not even the miracles that Jesus performs are enough to convince them. They demand more.

Perhaps it is easier for people to “play deaf” than to listen to Jesus. Following his Word demands change. For the people of his time, it meant changing the way they interpret the laws of Moses, and focusing more on acts of love and mercy. For us, it means changing our hearts and the way we live our lives.

Jesus says, *my sheep hear my voice*. To hear the voice of our Shepherd, we need to take a break from the noise in our lives and allow Jesus to speak to us. We can start by picking up our Bible. Jesus speaks to us through Scripture, the inspired word of God. We find a passage, and read through it once to familiarize ourselves with the words. We pause, then read it again to hear the message our Lord has for our life, and take a few moments to reflect on his message.

Prayer is another opportunity to hear the voice of our Lord. Saint Teresa of Ávila describes prayer as “taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.” Sometimes, we focus so much on offering our thanks, adoration and intentions that we don’t give the Lord the opportunity to speak to us. Maybe we can spend a few minutes of our prayer time sitting quietly. Open ourselves to his presence and listen.

Jesus promises eternal life to his sheep – those who hear his voice. No one can take them out of his hand because he and the Father are one, and no one can take them out of the Father’s hand. Our reading from Acts describes the presence of the hand of the Lord with the early missionaries in Antioch. When Barnabas sees the grace of God at work, he rejoices and encourages them to remain faithful to the Lord in firmness of heart. It is here that the disciples are first called Christians.

Like the Christians in Antioch, we must listen for our Shepherd’s voice. We must trust and follow him with firm hearts. Christ’s miracles testify to who he was. Our actions testify to who we are and *whose* we are. Let us be numbered among Christ’s sheep.

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Wednesday, April 25, 2018
(Lec. 555)

1) 1 Peter 5:5b-14

2) Mark 16:15-20

Gospel related: CCC 2, 156, 161, 183, 434, 659, 670, 699, 888, 977, 1223, 1253, 1256, 1257, 1507, 1673

**SAINT MARK,
EVANGELIST
- FEAST**

FOCUS: The Gospel of Mark sends the followers of Jesus into the world to evangelize others.

Today is the feast day of Saint Mark the Evangelist. He is called an Evangelist because he was given the grace to preach the Gospel in a specific way. The Church exists to evangelize. Why? Because evangelization expresses the Church's distinctiveness and completes the mission entrusted to her by Jesus. As members of the Church, we are all called to engage actively in the evangelization of the world. Each person achieves this goal in their own way, and must listen to the promptings of the Spirit and use the gifts they have been given.

It is commonly accepted that Mark's Gospel is the first to be written, and that it served as a source for the composition of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. We understand our faith, and our Church, more completely when we understand some of the historical details of this Gospel.

The narrative of the Gospel of Mark develops gradually. In the first eight chapters, the disciples are drawn into a relationship with Jesus of Nazareth, a powerful healer and preacher. During this period of time, no one understands Jesus' true identity. Only in chapter eight does it become evident that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah who will suffer, die and then rise again. This chapter also makes clear that this same route is the way of all Christians.

The journey of true Christian discipleship is now the focus of the Gospel, in chapters nine through fifteen, summed up here: *For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many* (10:45). Serving others, giving our lives over for others, is the key.

Even today's first reading emphasizes similar points. Peter speaks about humility. He speaks of vigilance, suffering and strength, and calls people to place their complete trust in God. No adversary will ever be able to overcome a God who is faithful, merciful and powerful.

The Gospel of Mark concludes by firmly stating that Jesus' death is not the end. Proclaiming Christ's resurrection as well as his being taken up into heaven, the Gospel ends with the command to which the Church still adheres today: to go out into the whole world and preach the Gospel.

The Gospels are not just pieces of historical writing; they are the living word sustaining and compelling us in our own Christian discipleship and evangelizing efforts. Saint Mark serves as a model for clarity and for love of the Gospel. May he today, on his feast day, and on every day, pray for us and draw us closer to Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. And may we, in turn, do the same for others.

Thursday, April 26, 2018

(Lec. 282)

1) Acts 13:13-25

2) John 13:16-20

Gospel related: CCC 447, 520, 858, 1269, 1337, 1694

THURSDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Our salvation history is a love story between God and humanity.

In today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear Paul reminding the people of their history with God. We can see the loving hand of God setting the stage over the centuries from the time of Moses for the arrival of our Redeemer.

A good way to consider this history, and covenant, is to think of God's relationship with his creations as a love story. At the beginning, there was a perfect situation between God and humanity. Original sin broke this relationship, and God has been working ever since to restore what we lost. We, of course, complicate this, since we are a collective of individuals, each possessing free will.

But God never gave up on us. He began by choosing Abraham and his descendants to be the first nation with whom to form a relationship. He was there for them to the extent they allowed him to be. At each turn in history, God provided individuals such as Moses, the prophets and others to guide them deeper into a relationship with him. And in God's time, he chose to dwell among his people – to gather unto himself all the nations. Thus, the Word was incarnated in the person of Jesus, the single, greatest and final revelation of God to humanity.

This great revelation – the perfect bridge between the Creator and the created – is the ultimate manifestation of love. Now it is up to us to respond – to not only accept the love of God through Jesus Christ, but to bring others as well.

Jesus in the Gospel today gives us both this responsibility but also a word of caution. He says, *so that the Scripture might be fulfilled, The one who ate my food has raised his heel against me.* It is a reminder that the Christian life may be one filled with great difficulty. Very few will be called to suffer the death of a martyr, but we may experience any number of hardships as we try to lead others to the embrace of our heavenly Father.

For everyone who accepts what we tell them about the Gospel, however, there is great joy to be found in knowing that there is another soul that has begun the journey to everlasting joy in heaven. And this is the culmination, not conclusion, of our great love story: in Christ's renewal of the covenant between the creator God, and us, his creation, we have the promise of an eternal union of love and endless happiness.

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Friday, April 27, 2018

(Lec. 283)

1) Acts 13:26-33

2) John 14:1-6

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

FRIDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus promised us an eternal dwelling place in heaven if we follow him.

Today's Gospel is part of the "Last Supper Discourses." Jesus knows his time with the Apostles is short. He has been preparing them for some time for his death, but now there is more urgency.

He wants to reassure them that he will be watching over them and available to them, similar to the way they already rely on the Father. They need to believe in him and his teachings, even when he is not visible to them anymore. He wants them to remember that God's desire is for his followers to live with him forever. As the fullness of God's revelation, he is the way for that desire to be fulfilled. Jesus says: *I am the way, and the truth and the life, and I am going to prepare a place for you.*

This message is for us, as well. This promise of a dwelling place in heaven stands within the unending mercy of God, who calls us into relationship with him, and forgives us when we falter. The promise was made to the Apostles shortly after Jesus had predicted they would deny and abandon him. And so this assures them – and us – that even when we fail, and stray from him, with repentance and forgiveness our place in heaven is secure.

Today is an ideal day to think about what our heavenly dwelling place might be like. Jesus is the general contractor and the master builder, but we are the suppliers and the workers. Let us work with Jesus to build the kingdom, and to increase the number of those who will have a room in God's house.

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Saturday, April 28, 2018
(Lec. 284)
1) Acts 13:44-52
2) John 14:7-14

SATURDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Peter Chanel,
Priest and Martyr;
Saint Louis Grignon de Montfort,
Priest)

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

FOCUS: God will give us everything we need to accomplish all he has in mind for us to do.

When Paul and Barnabas shared the Good News in Antioch, Jews and Gentiles alike responded enthusiastically. Some Jews, however, were jealous. Entrenched in centuries of identity as God's chosen people, they couldn't accept that God's saving plan included non-Jews – in spite of Isaiah's prophecy we heard today that the Messiah would be *a light to the Gentiles*. These Jewish leaders turned others against Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of their region.

Although insulted, rejected and persecuted, Paul and Barnabas traveled on, determined to continue spreading the Good News. Their faith and courage didn't come from themselves alone. The Holy Spirit empowered them to follow God's plan for them, in spite of circumstances.

In today's Gospel passage, immediately following Jesus' promise that he is going to his Father's house to prepare a place for them, the Apostles want concrete assurances. They ask to see the Father. Jesus invites them to trust him, saying they'd already seen the Father, since he and the Father were one.

As evidence, Jesus reminded them of his works, explaining he hadn't performed miracles on his own but by the Father working through him. Jesus then said that, through God's power, those who believe in him would do the same and more. He said they'd be given whatever they asked when they prayed in Jesus' name.

Because we're believers, this includes us. However, tacking the words "in Jesus' name" onto our prayers doesn't mean we'll be able to do whatever we feel like. Praying in Jesus' name means trusting God as Jesus did, and surrendering to God's plan rather than our own desires.

When we surrender our will to God's, we can trust that our prayers will be granted because we aren't asking God to do things our way. Instead, we're asking God to enable us to do things his way. Why wouldn't he give us what we ask for if it's what he wants?

Like Paul, Barnabas and the other disciples, God has a plan for you and me. He created us as individuals because he has a specific purpose in mind for each of us: to share the Good News using the unique combination of our own God-given gifts and abilities. Living up to our potential might seem intimidating. We can be reassured knowing that, if we're trying to do what God wants us to do, we can count on being given everything we need.

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SUNDAY, APRIL 29, 2018

(Lec. 53)

1) Acts 9:26-31

2) 1 John 3:18-24

3) John 15:1-8

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

**FIFTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

FOCUS: A life in Christ bears much fruit.

In all honesty, we must admit that we cannot “do it all” by ourselves. We will not be useful, productive or successful unless we go about our tasks and accomplish our mission in the power of Jesus Christ. But really, that is a good thing! Having Jesus Christ, Spirit-filled and risen from the dead on our side, and empowered by the gifts of God's Holy Spirit, is what truly gives value to whatever we do.

We are branches of the main vine, as Jesus tells us in today's Gospel account: *I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.* If you live in me and I in you, he tells us, you will live a life of meaning, purpose, direction and infinite value.

We, as Catholic Christians, are called to apply the powers we have, powers that come from God, to heal, redeem and thereby sanctify – not only in our own individual lives but in the world around us. In our commonly shared life of faith in Jesus Christ, we truly have the ability to make change happen in the world.

We have God's commitment: his covenant to be with us no matter what. And to help us be a part of accomplishing his work, we have God's Presence among us, even within us, when we receive the body and blood of Jesus. We live in him, and he in us. May our lives bear much fruit, for the glory of God and the good of the world.

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Monday, April 30, 2018
(Lec. 285)
1) Acts 14:5-18
2) John 14:21-26

MONDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Pius V,
Pope)

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

FOCUS: Strive to reflect the love of Jesus back to God and others.

We are all born with unique talents and characteristics. It is important that we strive to discover what makes us unique and to figure out our particular gifts and to exercise them. We must also name the source of our uniqueness. Are we good at athletics or music, or whatever we are good at, because of our own efforts, or is there more to it than that? As we search for answers, we realize that our efforts are only part of the equation. If we are honest with ourselves, we must acknowledge that parents, family and friends have helped to make us who we are. Most important, we will give credit to our God and Creator, who made us in his image and likeness.

This, in effect, is what Saints Paul and Barnabas acknowledged in our first reading. They admitted that the miracle of the cure of the crippled man was all God's doing and not their own. Imagine, however, if they had chosen to use the cure to their advantage. How would the scene have played out had they said to the people, "Yes, we are indeed Zeus and Hermes. We are these gods of yours so serve us in every way"? Fortunately, Paul and Barnabas staunchly believed that the source of their gift to heal was the power of the living God. Rather than pointing to themselves, they directed the attention of the people to God – the one who made heaven and earth.

How can we imitate the behavior of Paul and Barnabas? Like the disciples in our Gospel passage, we would do well to listen to the words of Jesus and to observe his commandments, and in doing so love him and be loved by the Father.

How do we go about loving Jesus and keeping his word? For starters, we must die to our human tendencies toward selfishness, and let go of the illusion that we are self-made. Dying to these egocentric tendencies will allow us to receive the love of Jesus and reflect it back to God and to others. Then due credit to God for all our blessings will be apparent.

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