

# AUGUST

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**YEAR B  
WEEKDAYS II**

Wednesday, August 1, 2018  
(Lec. 403)

- 1) Jeremiah 15:10, 16-21
- 2) Matthew 13:44-46

WEDNESDAY OF  
17<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Alphonsus Liguori,  
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC 546**

FOCUS: The kingdom of heaven is here among us.

It is interesting to note that the first parable we heard today, which described the kingdom of heaven as a treasure buried in a field, does not tell us if the person was actually *looking* for the treasure, or happened to come across it. Whereas in the second parable, we are told that the merchant is searching for fine pearls when he finds a *pearl of great price*. The first one discovers what he was not necessarily looking for, and the other discovers something much greater than he may have expected. Whatever the circumstances, the outcome for both is that they are willing to give up everything for the great treasure they have unearthed.

The kingdom of heaven is indeed a treasure, here among us today, and yet also still to come. It is something some of us happen across while others go looking for it. The truth is, any encounter with Christ, or any true experience of faith, changes us, whether we are tilling the ground by happenstance or searching. The point to these parables is that the kingdom of heaven is life-changing and worth putting up everything we have for it. That being said, we would be hard pressed to argue that this necessarily means running off, away from our family, friends or work.

Instead it is a bit more simple: what worldly things bind us to the world and not to the treasure of the kingdom? For some, it may indeed be “everything,” and those are the ones whom God may be calling to a life of asceticism or radical simplicity. For most of us, however, it is most likely the daily distractions that interfere with our ability to live as we are called.

The good news is – literally – we can follow Christ and give our all for him, as we offer our day-to-day activities, fears, challenges, successes, desires and needs ... completely to him. We can give gratitude for the things we have; we can offer up our suffering for the sake of the world. We may have grandiose ideas about what it means to “sell all” for God, but really it is about trusting that which we have before us, and in our grasp: a treasure that will provide for and sustain us more than anything else ever could.

Prayer and discernment are essential elements of knowing what God is calling us to at all times in our life. This is what we are to seek – to know God’s will; and this is what we are to do – try to follow it. If we run off following our own ideas, we will surely get tripped up in the process. Let us bury our fears. Let our self-pity and criticism lie dormant under the surface as we replace them with selflessness and encouragement. The kingdom of heaven is here on earth, evident in the life of those who follow Christ in faithfulness.

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Thursday, August 2, 2018  
(Lec. 404)

- 1) Jeremiah 18:1-6
- 2) Matthew 13:47-53

THURSDAY OF  
17<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Eusebius of Vercelli,  
Bishop;  
Saint Peter Julian Eymard,  
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 1034, 1117 **CSDC** 12

FOCUS: Let us be patient, trusting in God's sovereignty.

Anyone who has ever dealt with an unexpected event, or has had a sudden change of plans, knows that those times remind us that we control far less than we might wish. A sickness, a job change, a relationship that arises suddenly or ends suddenly – there are some things we *can* control in life, but *many* that we *cannot*.

Scripture references this lack of control with two powerful images in today's readings. Both images would be recognizable to the people of biblical times: the image of a potter and the image of fishermen.

In the first reading, the Lord explains to Jeremiah that *he*, the Lord, is the Creator. God is the potter, the maker, the shaper, the one who fashions us. How does the Lord fashion us? Into a vessel of whatever sort *he* pleases. Is the potter lazy in his work? No, he is at work already before Jeremiah arrives. Does the clay have power over what it will become? No, it will be shaped according to the creator's designs. Is the potter able to work with clay that is rigid, unyielding? No.

Similarly, God is a trusted craftsman, awake when we are not, working in our lives in ways we may not recognize. God can, and does, fashion us into whatever he pleases, and our "role," so to speak, is to cooperate with God's activity through our willingness to set aside rigidity, to be flexible, to become humble: soft clay in the potter's trusted hands.

Jesus references this patient and humble approach with a parable. The kingdom of heaven is a net cast into the sea. Do we cast the net? No. Do we determine what goes into the net, and what stays out? No. Do we even get to decide, after all the fish are caught, which ones are to be saved and which thrown out? No. We are not in charge.

We are to be patient, trusting God's sovereignty, accepting that we are not in control, allowing God to act in the world in ways we may not see, and to shape us in ways God knows best.

Friday, August 3, 2018

(Lec. 405)

1) Jeremiah 26:1-9

2) Matthew 13:54-58

Gospel related: CCC 495, 500 CSDC 259

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

FOCUS: God never gives up on us.

Today's readings present parallel stories that are meant to give us a glimpse into the unparalleled depth and breadth of God's compassion toward his people. In the first reading, the Lord commands his prophet Jeremiah to stand in the Temple and speak on his behalf, addressing the people of the land of Judah: *Whatever I command you, tell them, and omit nothing. Perhaps, the Lord adds with kindness, they will listen and turn back, each from his evil way.*

Similarly, in the Gospel story it is Jesus himself who stands in the synagogue at his native place, Nazareth, hoping to touch and convert hearts with his teachings and his presence. Whereas the Lord had given Jeremiah specific words to speak in the Temple, Jesus is now *the* Word of God, alive and among them in the synagogue. This is an interesting passage from the Gospel of Matthew, since it takes place immediately after Jesus had addressed a crowd of people who had been following him. Using seven different parables, he taught and explained the mystery of the kingdom of God to this group of seekers.

The fact that Jesus returns to his own people, to those who had known him since he was a child, and had known his parents and their story, tells us just how much the Lord wanted them to hear his words of salvation. With a heart full of compassion, he went to his hometown synagogue and began to teach.

Yet while the seekers who heard Jesus' parables had responded with admiring astonishment regarding his teachings, here – in his own home, with those who had known him longest – the people's astonishment is merely a dismissal. They take offense at him, labeling his desire to teach them as pretentious. Their familiarity with Jesus, *the carpenter's son*, becomes for them an insurmountable obstacle. They simply cannot hear him, dismissing Jesus by noting what they already knew of him, saying, *Is not his mother named Mary?*

Both of these Scriptures remind us of the message that remains the same for us as for the people of Judah and of Nazareth. In spite of our inability and our unwillingness to hear, God never stops trying to reach us. God never gives up on us. How we respond to God's Word is worth considering today. What helps us to hear him? What keeps us from hearing? Let us allow the Eucharist to guide us toward more of the former than the latter.

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Saturday, August 4, 2018

(Lec. 406)

1) Jeremiah 26:11-16, 24

2) Matthew 14:1-12

SATURDAY OF

17<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

Saint John Vianney,

Priest;

Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: We are called by God to walk in truth and righteousness.

Since the beginning of time, we as human beings have not always been open to God's ways. Our human nature wants to be in control of circumstances that make us accepted, comfortable and complacent. Today, we hear about two men who dared to proclaim righteousness in the face of danger, and even death.

In the Old Testament passage, we are brought into the middle of a story. Israel had long been ignoring God's laws and precepts by worshiping false gods and idols. The prophet Jeremiah bravely warned Israel that there would be consequences for their evil deeds if they continued to disregard God. When the prophets, priests and people heard Jeremiah's harsh indictment, they were angry and wanted to kill him. Jeremiah, however, reminded them that God had sent him as a warning. Ultimately, they spared Jeremiah's life.

The Gospel reading recounts the beheading of John the Baptist. Again, God had sent a prophet to urge Israel to repent and to turn to God. Specifically, John had warned Herod that Herod's relationship with his brother's wife was evil. This was not received well by her, and she plotted her revenge. Ultimately, John the Baptist was beheaded.

Many times in life, we are tempted to be compliant and to go with "the flow" by trying not to cause controversy. It may seem to be the easiest route to take, but, it is not the best route. Only in adhering to the truth of the Good News do we overcome the challenges of this life; only in repenting and constantly returning to God do we obtain the promises he has made.

For God is merciful and full of love. He calls us to be righteous because it brings us closer to him. He knows we will fall, but he gives us the grace and means to recover. He wants us to live in eternity with him. The free will he gave us is a great gift, enabling us to *choose* him rather than be forced to follow him. Let us take advantage of that gift, and walk in truth and righteousness.

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**SUNDAY, AUGUST 5, 2018**

(Lec. 113)

- 1) Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15
- 2) Ephesians 4:17, 20-24
- 3) John 6:24-35

Gospel related: **CCC** 423, 698, 728, 1094, 1296, 2835

**EIGHTEENTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Here in this desert, we are being wonderfully fed.

How wonderfully God provides for the needs of his people. In today's first reading, God generously responds to the complaints of the people he has miraculously freed from slavery, by providing daily rations of quail and manna – in a desert! He gives them just as much as they need, when they need it, inviting them to trust in him to fulfill every necessity, every day.

More than one thousand years later, Jesus explains to the crowd that *he* is the bread of life – the answer to every need. *He* is the one who fulfills every necessity, every day, for he is *food that endures for eternal life*.

We have much in common with both the Israelites who wandered in the desert, and with the crowds who were fed by Jesus and later sought him out, looking for more. Whether we live in a bustling city, in a suburb or in the remotest rural area, we face deserts in our own lives – difficult times when we seem to be lost or facing impossible challenges.

Jesus reminds us, as he reminded the people of his time, that we need to rely for strength and nourishment on food that is “imperishable” – food that will feed our souls and bring us eternal life. This is not unlike Saint Paul's message to the Ephesians, that they must no longer *live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds ... you should put away the old self ... and be renewed in the spirit of your minds*. Paul, of course, is speaking not just of how we think, but how we live. And living in the Christian community means celebrating and partaking of the Eucharist, the sacrament which forms and transforms us to live in this world and the next.

As the crowds did, and the Ephesians did, let us seek Jesus and rely on him when we need anything. He is the one sent by God to bring life to the world – and to help us through the desert journey of this life.

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Monday, August 6, 2018

(Lec. 614)

1) Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

2) 2 Peter 1:16-19

3) Mark 9:2-10

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 459, 552, 649

**THE TRANSFIGURATION  
OF THE LORD  
– FEAST**

FOCUS: The Transfiguration event is not simply a moment in time; it is re-occurring in our lives too.

In light of today's feast and the Scriptures we just heard proclaimed, the obvious question to be asking is: "Have I allowed Jesus to be transfigured before my very eyes yet?"

This pre-Resurrection event is a glorious one indeed! For Jesus is in dialogue with Moses and Elijah, glowing with the Father's love. A Father who is well pleased with what his Son has already accomplished and with what he would soon accomplish – reuniting God's greatest creation, us, with the Father – through his death and Resurrection.

Allowing Jesus to be transfigured before our eyes means accepting, though never fully understanding, that Jesus is our Lord, our Savior, our Friend. To accomplish this, we must surrender to the Father.

For many, the word surrender carries negative connotations. It can be defined as "giving in" or "giving up." Some say it is the same as admitting defeat or capitulating our position. For Christians, however, giving in to God, capitulating to God, is neither giving up nor admitting defeat. It is submitting to a good that is greater than anything we can ever imagine.

For when we celebrate the Eucharist, Jesus is transfigured before our very eyes. In the miracle of bread and wine being transformed into the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus, we encounter the same one in whom the Father is well pleased. When we receive Jesus in Communion, we are, in a sense, on the mountaintop with him in all his glory, as this gives us a foretaste of Christ's transfiguration of our own bodies (CCC 1000). The proper response to the question of surrender, then, should be more than just a simple yes. It calls for an enthusiastic Amen – so be it – we must say!

If Amen is not our enthusiastic response, then the Transfiguration of Jesus proclaimed in today's Gospel falls upon deaf ears. Worse yet, we walk away unchanged. This is because, every time we receive Jesus in the Eucharist we are being called to transformation, called to change, called to renewal.

Our temptation is not unlike Peter's in today's Gospel. It would be much easier for us to want to simply pitch our tents here and stay where we are. But it is the responsibility of every disciple to bring others to know the glory of Jesus dwelling within them, whether they realize it or not. Let us not shy away from those holy moments when they come our way – to invite someone to come and know Jesus – and to promise them that we will walk with them on their journey in faith.

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Tuesday, August 7, 2018

(Lec. 408)

- 1) Jeremiah 30:1-2, 12-15,  
18-22
- 2) Matthew 14:22-36 or  
15:1-2, 10-14

TUESDAY OF  
18<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Sixtus II,  
Pope; and Companions, Martyrs;  
Saint Cajetan, Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC 448 CSDC 453**

FOCUS: God is always with us, let us trust in him.

In the first reading, we hear that the Israelites were suffering as a result of their many sins. Even so, God took responsibility for their suffering, saying through the prophet Jeremiah, *I have done this to you.*

God had allowed them to suffer the consequences of their willful choices against his law of love – but he didn't abandon them. He assured the Israelites their pain had a purpose: it was a discipline to correct them. And it wasn't permanent. God promises in today's passage that he would free them from their oppressors, return them to their homeland and restore their joy. *You shall be my people, he says, and I will be your God.*

In Matthew's Gospel, the disciples are *a few miles offshore [and] being tossed about by the waves.* They were out there because Jesus had *made the disciples get into the boat and precede him* across the lake. They were there because they followed Jesus' instructions.

Jesus allowed his disciples to experience the wind and the waves – but he didn't abandon them. In the midst of the chaos, he came to them, walking on water. But the disciples were terrified, thinking he was a ghost. Jesus invited them to trust him in spite of their fear, and Peter answers that invitation. He begins to walk on the water, as Jesus was doing, but when he took his focus off of Jesus and put it on the wind and waves, he began to sink. Jesus caught Peter, returned to the boat with him, and calmed the wind. Filled with fear, the disciples' faith had faltered. But Jesus never abandoned them.

Whether we're hurting or in difficulty because of our own choices or because of circumstances beyond our control, God doesn't abandon us. Our problems may be bigger than we are, but no problem is bigger than God. As the saying goes, "Pain is inevitable; suffering is optional." When we focus on our misery, like Peter focusing on the wind, we're easily overwhelmed. Our difficulties may *feel* unfair, pointless or even hopeless – but our feelings aren't the whole story. Faith runs deeper than our feelings.

No matter what we're feeling, we can trust that God is with us and will bring us through whatever challenges we're facing. When we turn to him, our pain isn't wasted. God raised Jesus from his death on the cross; he will raise us, too, if we let him.

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Wednesday, August 8, 2018

(Lec. 409)

- 1) Jeremiah 31:1-7
- 2) Matthew 15:21-28

WEDNESDAY OF  
18<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Dominic,  
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 439, 448, 2610

FOCUS: God loves us with an age-old love.

What wonderful reassurance there is in hearing God proclaim that he will be our God and we will be his people, as we heard in today's first reading: *With age-old love I have loved you.*

It is the Gospel, however, that tells us that the love spoken of in Jeremiah is lavished on all people, not just those who can trace their roots to the original tribes of Israel. In curing the Canaanite woman's daughter, Jesus demonstrates that the saving power of the Messiah is not limited to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*. This, indeed, is good news!

Gratitude is the only response to such good news. We show our gratitude by giving ourselves to God. By living as Jesus taught; by sharing the Good News with others; by serving our neighbor.

We have an excellent model for these ways of showing love and gratitude to God in the person of Saint Dominic, whose feast we celebrate today. Dominic, who lived from 1170 to 1221, was a great scholar and preacher, and a defender of the faith who, through conversation and debate, brought many who professed heresy into, or back to, the Church. He gave up everything he owned to join the Benedictines, and then – in 1215 – formed his own religious order for the purpose of theological education, moral formation and the combatting of heresy. We know of this religious order as the Order of Preachers, or – more commonly – Dominicans.

As we continue our celebration, let us tell God how much we appreciate the love with which he envelops us. It is an age-old love that comforts and consoles, challenges and wishes us well. It is a love that is with us always, giving strength when we need it, and rest when that is what will do us the most good. In the spirit of Saint Dominic, may we do our best with the gifts and love God has given us, preaching (with our actions and our words) the Good News of Christ.

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Thursday, August 9, 2018

(Lec. 410)

1) Jeremiah 31:31-34

2) Matthew 16:13-23

THURSDAY OF

18<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross,

Virgin and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 153, 424, 440, 442, 540, 552, 553, 554, 586, 607, 869, 881, 1444, 1969

FOCUS: Live with God's law written on our hearts.

Today the Church has the option of memorializing Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, more recognizably known by the name, Edith Stein. As a child in the early 1900s, Edith believed in a God who was the God of Israel, the God of her ancestors. Sometime during her fourteenth year, however, God became irrelevant, and was meaningless in her life. A brilliant young woman, Edith began to study philosophy and investigate life's deepest questions. By the age of twenty-one, she had come to know God through Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. So she was baptized into the Catholic faith.

At the age of thirty-three, she entered a Carmelite convent and took the name Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. This led to her arrest with other Jewish Christians by Nazis and imprisonment in the concentration camp at Auschwitz, where she died on August 9, 1942. One can only imagine that it was in this last stage of her lifelong quest to know and love God that she most fully experienced the comfort and peace of the crucified Christ, risen to journey eternally with those who suffer in any way, but especially those who endure the most brutal of circumstances.

In the Gospel today, Jesus asks his disciples about their understanding of God, and who God is. *Who do people say that the Son of Man is?* he asks. That's an odd phrase to us, perhaps, but to all who knew Hebrew Scriptures, they would understand the echo of Daniel chapter 7, and the claiming of an exalted role in salvation history. The disciples list a few people in response, none of whom is Jesus. So Jesus asks another question: *But who do you say I am?* And here, Peter gets it right: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

We might reflect today how we would answer these two questions. Not just for Jesus, as if to impress him, but for ourselves, our families and the sake of the world. Edith Stein is chosen as a memorial today because she answered that question with truth and integrity, and so serves as a model for all of us.

Who is Jesus Christ? In a few moments, we will profess what we believe about God, and Jesus. Soon after, we will embody that profession as we come forward to accept the body and blood of Christ into our bodies. This means something – we believe that! And so with grace we allow that belief and Christ's real presence to strengthen us to serve rather than be served – to live in relationship with the living God whose law is written upon our hearts, where we carry it always with us.

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Friday, August 10, 2018

(Lec. 618)

1) 2 Corinthians 9:6-10

2) John 12:24-26

Gospel related: **CCC 2731 CSDC 570**

**SAINT LAWRENCE,  
DEACON AND MARTYR  
– FEAST**

FOCUS: As disciples, our life journey will often involve suffering and self-giving.

We are probably familiar with the old saying, the words we hear in today's first reading: *God loves a cheerful giver*. We may even know many who cheerfully give of their time, talent and their material blessings to others in their time of need. As Christians, our parishes and communities are full of cheerful givers from the volunteers who staff our many parish outreaches to the poor, to our catechists who help instruct our children in the faith, or our liturgical ministers who assist at our sacred celebrations. The list of cheerful givers is quite extraordinary and often surprising.

But have we ever asked why? Why in our busy world would someone share their material gifts or indeed the most precious of all commodities, their time, with others? Of course, there are many answers, but as Christians we would simply answer: we do it because we belong to Christ, and he who gave up everything for us invites us to do likewise in our life of faith.

Saint Lawrence, whom we celebrate today, is a powerful example of one who gave generously to others. As a deacon and a martyr in the early Roman Church, Lawrence is celebrated for his love and care of the poor and the needy, and as one who died for his faith. Like the grain of wheat that Jesus speaks of in today's Gospel, Lawrence certainly died to self but his death brought much fruit.

As one of the most venerated martyrs of the Church of Rome, perhaps second only to Saints Peter and Paul, Lawrence's faithful example has inspired many through the generations. According to Saint Ambrose, he was burned to death on a gridiron for his refusal to renounce his faith. As he was led out to death his words were strong and faith-filled: "I rejoice greatly because I have been considered worthy to be a sacrificial victim for Christ."

Like Christ he gave all, fulfilling the Gospel mandate that if we wish to come after Christ, we, too, must take up our cross and follow. Lawrence did that, and he did it with joy! His martyrdom was the supreme proof of his love and his faith. As we celebrate not just his entry into eternal life but his selfless example, there is much that we can learn from this cheerful giver. While we may not be asked to lose our lives in the literal sense, we are certainly asked to share our time, talent and treasure with others, all for the sake of Christ and our faith and hope in him. May we learn to do so with joy in our hearts and the knowledge that God truly loves a cheerful giver!

Saturday, August 11, 2018

(Lec. 412)

1) Habakkuk 1:12–2:4

2) Matthew 17:14-20

SATURDAY OF  
18<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Clare,  
Virgin)

FOCUS: Jesus assures us that nothing is impossible, and teaches that faith can move mountains.

Today is the feast day of Saint Clare, who lived in Italy in the thirteenth century. She abandoned a life of ease and wealth to follow Saint Francis of Assisi, and embraced a life of poverty, prayer and service to God. Her faith was unfaltering, her love unwavering. The lessons about faith in the readings today are reflected in the way she lived her life.

In today's Gospel, Jesus cures a boy who suffered from what was, most likely, severe epilepsy. Matthew tells us that *the demon came out of him and the boy was cured*. Jesus performed a miracle. This is big news! It points to who Jesus is, and it further defines his specialness, his authority and his divinity. That, in itself, is an event of great importance. Jesus is demonstrating that he is the one for whom the nation of Israel has been waiting. His public life is on display to his disciples and those who seek him. But the lesson in this Gospel doesn't stop there. It continues and speaks to us of the power and magnificence of faith.

As the story continues, the disciples question Jesus about why they were not able to cure the boy. *Because of your little faith*, he tells them. Because of their little faith. This is what Jesus says to his disciples: the ones who followed him daily, who watched as he cured the sick and gave sight to the blind, who listened to him preach, who had left their homes to travel with him, who helped feed the multitudes and gave witness to his ministry. If they had little faith, how can we begin to compare?

So, how much faith is enough? Jesus gives his disciples, and us, an image for this. He says, *If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move*. He goes on to assure us that nothing will be impossible with such faith.

We know that the Apostles grew in faith and that we can as well. Our own faith is not a stagnant thing. Prayer, the sacraments, liturgy and the daily presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives will strengthen this gift of faith. Perhaps it will even grow to be the size of a mustard seed – or beyond. After all, we all have mountains to move.

Our mountains may be obstacles that stand in our way and block our vision. They may be things that separate us from God and draw us away from our spirituality. They may be things defined by anger, greed, fear or selfishness. These mountains in our own lives may even seem insurmountable, but let us remember to keep faith. Jesus promises that he is there to help us move those mountains.

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**SUNDAY, AUGUST 12, 2018**

(Lec. 116)

1) 1 Kings 19:4-8

2) Ephesians 4:30–5:2

3) John 6:41-51

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 259, 591, 728, 1001, 1335, 1406, 1428, 2837

**NINETEENTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: When we feel exhausted, God is here to nourish and sustain us.

Each year our parish, like all others, is required by the diocese to submit an annual report that outlines not only parish finances but also statistics such as the number of baptisms that were celebrated, how many people received the sacrament of confirmation, the number of folks who were welcomed into the Church through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, how many weddings were celebrated, the number of deaths in the parish, and so on. It is a lot of interesting and helpful information. On one level, it can look just like so many numbers. But it is so much more than that!

The annual parish report is about life and activity. It is a way of thinking about our growth as a parish community. When parish staff look back at numbers that capture a year's worth of parish life, it can feel a little exhausting. Those numbers really are about the life of our parish – your life and our lives.

There are the things we celebrate, such as babies' births; graduations from grade school, high school and college; engagements and weddings; paying off a mortgage; retirement. There are also things that are sad, such as illness and death; the loss of a job; friends who move away. So much can happen in just 365 short days! It can make us stop and wonder how we managed to get so much done. It can make us wonder how and why things happen.

There are times when it is easy for us to relate to the prophet Jeremiah in the first reading: "Lord, I'm exhausted! Just let me sit down and rest." And so we do – we sit down and rest, here under our broom tree, so to speak, right here in our parish church. Our church is meant to be a place where we can simply rest in the Lord's presence in the midst of the busy-ness of our lives. Our personal lives and our parish life can be quite full, with opportunities for prayer, growth and a great deal of service. All of us need to make sure that we regularly take the time to sit and rest here for a whole sixty minutes or so each Sunday. It is in this place that God can uniquely and gently tend to our needs. In Word and sacrament, God fills us with inspiration and courage, and provides us with the best of food right here at this altar table.

As God nourishes us with the Bread come down from heaven, God reminds us that he is steadfastly with us each day. Soon, God will send us forth from this place with his strength, his love and his nourishment to continue our journey in faith.

Monday, August 13, 2018  
(Lec. 413)  
1) Ezekiel 1:2-5, 24-28c  
2) Matthew 17:22-27

MONDAY OF  
19<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saints Pontian, Pope  
and Hippolytus, Priest,  
Martyrs)

FOCUS: Christians are to live and be an example for all.

Compared to many of the profound and wonderful miracles Jesus performs throughout the Gospel of Matthew, the one in today's Scripture *seems* small and unimportant. Matthew began this chapter with an account of an extraordinary miracle: the Transfiguration of Jesus. Along with the shining sight of Jesus, Moses and Elijah, a voice from the heavens proclaimed Jesus as God's beloved son. The importance of this sign abounds even today, in our celebration of the Eucharist.

Now we come to the end of this chapter in Matthew. We have moved from a great and visible sign of Jesus' power and glory, to a fish with a coin hidden in its mouth. In the story today, Jesus instructs Peter to catch a fish. Pretty ordinary work for a fisherman. And in this fish's mouth, Peter finds a coin they need to pay the Temple tax. From Transfiguration to a simple coin. It seems pretty anticlimactic.

But the *reason* Peter fishes for the coin is to pay the collectors of the Temple tax for him and Jesus. Jesus points out that this particular tax does not apply to him, but because he and his disciples do not wish to offend anyone, he pays it anyway. This is the example he provides. And it serves as a standard for the conduct of all the disciples. So, what are we to learn from this?

What we can learn is that while we are in the world, we are not of the world. Jesus could easily avoid paying the tax, evade the tax collectors or simply refuse to pay. He is God's beloved Son after all, definitely above the mundane tasks and concerns of the world. But there's more here than simply paying taxes. It is a call to live within the rules of society, and to contribute in some way to the common good. All Christians live in the earthly kingdom, even though they belong to the kingdom of God. Even Jesus follows these rules while he's on earth.

The Transfiguration that began this Gospel chapter gives us a glimpse of how one day we, too, will be transfigured in our own bodily resurrection. The miracle that ends this chapter reminds us that we have responsibilities to ourselves and our communities until that time comes. What seemed small and anticlimactic is actually central to the Gospel: they did not want to offend (love one another), and Peter obeyed Jesus' instructions (keep God's commands).

So as we approach the table where Christ is transfigured and we are transformed, let us pray we might live the Christian life we are called to live. By God's grace, may we be an example to others who share in this earthly kingdom, so they, too, may someday share with us the heavenly kingdom.

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Tuesday, August 14, 2018

(Lec. 414)

1) Ezekiel 2:8–3:4

2) Matthew 18:1-5, 10, 12-14

TUESDAY OF  
19<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Maximilian Kolbe,  
Priest and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 329, 336, 526, 605, 2785, 2822

FOCUS: Shout to all the lands the Good News of God.

Today is the memorial of Saint Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish, Franciscan priest with a great devotion to the Immaculate Virgin Mary, who volunteered to die in place of a man with a family in the Auschwitz prison during World War II. Kolbe didn't ask questions about the man who was marked for death. He didn't judge whether he was worth dying for. He simply saw Christ in the man, and immediately offered to give his life for him. He embraced his priesthood in the midst of the torture, death and squalor, and acted *in persona Christi* so that another could live.

Like Saint Maximilian Kolbe, each of us shares in the life of the risen Christ – by virtue of our baptism. In baptism we are born to a new life in him, and Christ lives in us. So is it any wonder that, as Matthew's Gospel tells us, Christ would seek out that one lost sheep? Is it any wonder that Father Kolbe would lay down his own life for the other? If Christ himself lives in the one who is lost, or in trouble, how could he not go after him? The flock is not whole without him. We are not whole.

Because we are not whole when we have some who are lost, wayward or in trouble, God never leaves our side. Jesus the Good Shepherd is always present; the Holy Spirit remains within us to guide us, and to help us do our own part in building the kingdom. And our part, rightly so, is one that should take place in humility. Jesus tells us in today's Gospel that *unless [we] turn and become like children, [we] will not enter the Kingdom of heaven*. We are to be humble, like children are: open to and grateful for gifts given; willing to allow others – i.e., God – to be in charge; enthusiastic and able to share good news. Especially *the Good News*.

We have been fed the Word of God, much like Ezekiel was, only in ways that do more than nourish our bodies. May this Word, these words, bring us a joy so uncontainable that we have no choice but to be that child who cannot contain *himself or herself* and shout to all the lands the Good News of God.

\* \* \*



Wednesday, August 15, 2018

(Lec. 622)

1) Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab

2) 1 Corinthians 15:20-27

3) Luke 1:39-56

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

**THE ASSUMPTION  
OF THE BLESSED  
VIRGIN MARY  
- SOLEMNITY**

(Holyday of Obligation)

FOCUS: Let us say yes to God's plan for us.

Today, as we celebrate the Assumption of Mary into heaven, we reflect on how, in the end of her earthly life and assumption into heaven, we see the power of God. This same power that will one day lift us above a world of sin and into the fullness of union with him.

Mary shows us where we are going, what we are striving for. But we must remember that this was the end of a life completely devoted to love and service. Mary not only shows us the end goal, but she models for us how we should act in order to achieve that goal.

At the Annunciation, celebrated every year, Mary says in reply to the Angel Gabriel: *I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word.* Mary models for us how to say "yes" to God's plan for our lives. Even though she didn't completely understand what God was asking or how he would accomplish it, she chose to say yes. She was willing to put her faith and trust in God. The same must be true for each of us. God has a plan for us, but he will never force himself upon us. He waits patiently and steadfastly for us to say "yes" to him. He doesn't just do this once, but over and over, each and every day.

At the Visitation, recounted for us today in the Gospel of Luke, Mary expresses her gratitude to God, saying: *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.* Mary models for us how to live in God's grace by allowing his light and love to be magnified and proclaimed through our words and actions. Mary shows us that it is possible, even in the midst of trials and difficulties (traveling to see Elizabeth was no easy journey!) to rejoice in God. As Christians, we are called not to seek attention and glory for ourselves, but to use our gifts, talents and abilities in order to give praise and glory to God.

Finally, at her Assumption after Christ's death and resurrection, Mary is the visible sign of our own destiny. God has made us for himself and ordained that we abide with him for all eternity. But just as he won't force himself upon us in this life, so, too, he will never force eternity with him upon us. Like Mary, we must choose to say "yes."

As we celebrate this feast of the Assumption, may we set our sights on heaven, and make it our goal to settle for nothing less than that great glory. We ask today that Mary would intercede for us, that we would say "yes" to God's plan for us and allow him to shine in and through us. Then one day we will abide with him, and with Mary our Mother, forever.

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Thursday, August 16, 2018

(Lec. 416)

1) Ezekiel 12:1-12

2) Matthew 18:21-19:1

THURSDAY OF

19<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Stephen of Hungary)

Gospel related: **CCC** 982, 2227, 2364, 2843, 2845

FOCUS: Sin isolates; forgiveness is important.

With today's readings, we reflect upon the burdens and effects of sin, and the freedom found in forgiveness.

In the first reading, the Lord has Ezekiel flee the *rebellious house* of Israel in a method that not only foreshadows the Babylonian captivity of the people of Israel, but demonstrates the harmful effects of sin. Ezekiel leaves as if he has been exiled; he digs with his hands through a wall, literally placing that wall between him and his community – and in this case, God. He also covers his face as he exits, just as a defeated prince would flee his land in disguise – too ashamed to face his own people.

When we sin, we are not necessarily sent into a physical exile, but an exile arises within our hearts. There are real psychological, emotional and spiritual ramifications to sin. We may find ourselves isolated from God and from one another. Like the defeated prince, we may be ashamed and unable to face either God or our neighbor.

Jesus' words in the Gospel today give us not only the remedy for this exile, but the degree with which we must implement it. Extending mercy and forgiveness to our neighbors liberates *us* from the grasping tentacles of resentment and anger. And when extended to those who have repented and are genuinely asking for forgiveness, it liberates *them* from their shame and restores their dignity. Conversely, *we* are liberated by God's forgiveness of us and the forgiveness extended to us by others, when we are repentant.

Jesus says that we must forgive our brother *seventy-seven times*. This is not a literal number, but a way of speaking at that time that indicated something "limitless." Practically speaking, to forgive others does not mean we must stay in unsafe situations or relationships, or allow toxic people to do us harm. We can certainly forgive from a distance! Nor does it preclude a requirement for justice, or the necessity of repentance for the sake of their soul.

What it *does* mean is that we allow a love that is stronger than sin to live in our hearts, to become a living reality of God's true presence in our world. It means we turn the struggle over to God, for "it is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense; but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession" (CCC 2843).

One approach is to pray for those who have hurt us. In doing so, we configure ourselves to Christ, and open ourselves up to the grace we need to truly forgive the person from our heart, as the Gospel commands. So let us pray for that grace, let us pray for those we need to forgive and let us pray for God's mercy.

\* \* \*

Friday, August 17, 2018

(Lec. 417)

1) Ezekiel 16:1-15, 60, 63 or  
16:59-63

2) Matthew 19:3-12

Gospel related: **CCC** 796, 922, 1579, 1605, 1610, 1614, 1615, 1618, 1620, 1644, 1652, 2053, 2336, 2364, 2380, 2382 **CSDC** 209, 210, 217, 219

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

FOCUS: God's covenant with his people is everlasting.

At first glance, today's readings seem to spare no effort in reminding us that we are imperfect. It is true, we are susceptible to being ungrateful, unfaithful, stubborn and disobedient to the will of God. These are not pleasant things to be reminded of, but it is probably a good idea to be prodded into examining our consciences from time to time to be sure we are on the right path. By the same token, however, we realize that these Scripture passages are not really about *us*, but about *God*.

Biblical scholars have interpreted this passage from Ezekiel as an allegory for the relationship between the Israelites and God. Like the narrator of the story taking a low-born woman and bestowing love and riches on her, God took the Israelite people from nothing, and made them great in the eyes of the world. Both the woman of the story and God's chosen people turned their backs on the one who loved them. But even after these betrayals, their lovers were forgiving and continued to love and care for them. And we know that God not only continued to love his people, but manifested his love in the person of the Son, so that all who follow the Son of God are part of his beloved family.

With this knowledge, we hear today's Gospel and recognize in it a loving Father who desires the best for us. As he loves us with an everlasting love, so he intends for us to find lasting love in the bonds of marriage. Jesus' answers to the Pharisees demonstrate his concern for *all* offenses against the dignity of marriage, of which divorce is one. For marriage is the visible sign of the union between Christ and his Church. As a sacrament, "It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church" (CCC 1661).

In other words, the focus is not on the lawfulness of divorce, but the goodness and beauty of the matrimonial covenant. The matrimonial covenant mirrors in its indissolubility the covenant God has made with us – it is a sacrament that mirrors and imitates our relationship with God. And while civil law may decree what was once a marriage is no longer a marriage, canonically and theologically that can never be true.

This truth should greatly encourage us: no civil authority; no modern "prophet"; no "thing" of this world can ever truthfully decree that there is no longer a covenant with God – we know that it is not possible for that to be true. God's covenant with his people is everlasting. Let us give thanks for the ways he shows us, and provides for us. And may we never turn our backs on the One who loves us so completely and endlessly.

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Saturday, August 18, 2018

(Lec. 418)

1) Ezekiel 18:1-10, 13b, 30-32

2) Matthew 19:13-15

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

FOCUS: God's mercy awaits all who admit their sin and turn to him.

The simple message in the first reading today is this: the virtuous person will live; the unrepentant person who sins will die. God will judge each person accordingly for their deeds, either good or bad. So *turn and be converted from all your crimes*, says the Lord, *that they may be no cause of guilt for you.*

In today's Gospel, *children were brought to Jesus that he might lay his hands on them and pray.* When the disciples react with annoyance, Jesus responds by telling them not to prevent children from coming to him, *for the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.*

So the keys to the kingdom are living virtuously, and being (like) a child. What are we to make of these messages? In Ezekiel we see, for the first time, the idea that sin will no longer be passed down from the parents. Whoever sins will be punished, but their children will not be. As God lays claim to both the life of the father and the son, we have a foretaste of the new covenant that will arrive in the person of Jesus Christ. A covenant that will overcome the death of our forefathers' sin; a covenant that will open the gates to God's dominion to anyone who *lives by [his] statutes and is careful to observe [his] ordinances.* For as the Lord God says, *I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies ... Return and live!*

Now, this exchange with the children in the Gospel becomes a bit more clear. We in the new covenant are these children. We are the ones who have been redeemed from the sins of our ancestors, and who have the choice – and the responsibility – to live a virtuous life. The gifts of childhood help us, as most children are without guile; they are effusive with gratitude; they take great joy in the simplest of gifts; and they are eager to follow those who can lead them to happiness. May we, in our attempt at virtuous living, maintain these childlike gifts, while shedding any childishness that interferes.

So let us embrace the message we find in today's passages. Let us strive for a life well-lived, in virtue, as children of the new covenant. As inheritors of a salvation promised to our ancestors, and renewed by the Father who took on all of our sins in the form of his Son. Our brother. And may God richly bless our efforts, and give us the grace to do as he commands.

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**SUNDAY, AUGUST 19, 2018**

(Lec. 119)

1) Proverbs 9:1-6

2) Ephesians 5:15-20

3) John 6:51-58

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

**TWENTIETH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Where Eucharistic belief is deeply rooted, faith flourishes.

*How can this man give us his flesh to eat?* This question shows the amazing lack of faith found among some of Jesus' followers. Their first mistake was to refer to him as a man instead of the Son of God. They wonder how he can become food for them, but many of them have seen his mighty deeds. In this very same chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus has been seen walking on water and feeding thousands with five loaves and two fish. Clearly, he can do all things, including taking bread and wine and offering it as his own flesh and blood.

The Eucharist draws countless people to Mass, to adoration and to the Catholic Church every day. Sadly, where there is light there are also shadows. Many people who have left the Catholic Church cite one of the reasons being that they no longer believe what the Catholic Church teaches about the Real Presence of Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament. Statistics are alarming, but where Eucharistic faith is diminished, Mass attendance dwindles. Where Eucharistic belief is deeply rooted, faith flourishes.

It is our job – we who believe – to reawaken the Eucharistic faith of fellow believers and to go out and announce it to those who do not know that Jesus is the true bread sent from heaven. Why? Jesus answered that question for us – *Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. We want to go to heaven. We want everyone to go to heaven. Jesus has made the Eucharist a vital and necessary means by which we obtain eternal life.*

The first reading from Proverbs tells us to *forsake foolishness*. And Paul tells the Ephesians, *watch carefully how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise*. Where some believe it foolish to believe in God, in God's Son or in the Eucharist, for the person of faith who is open to the Word – it would be foolish not to believe. The world tells us this is myth, we say "no, it is mystery."

Those who wish to live forever would do well to acknowledge the truth of Jesus' words, and to eat his flesh and drink his blood, and to do so worthily. Then, we will have life because of him. Sadly, when children stop believing in Santa, the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy, it would be all too easy for them to believe Jesus and the Eucharist to also be fairy tales. Again the question, *how can this man give us his flesh to eat?* The answer is simple yet profound – because he is God, because God is good, and because God is love.

Monday, August 20, 2018

(Lec. 419)

1) Ezekiel 24:15-23

2) Matthew 19:16-22

MONDAY OF  
20<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Bernard,  
Abbot and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 2052, 2053, 2075, 2400; CSDC 22, 181

FOCUS: Jesus will not let us coast in our spiritual lives, but will always draw us on to more.

Following Jesus is not easy – and Jesus is always clear about that. Yet we are not left to our own devices as he draws us from good to better, leading each of us individually to become the person God made us to be.

We can see this discipline in today's readings. Ezekiel has tried unsuccessfully to call the people of his time to repent. Today we hear him prophesying to the people of Israel to turn away from their evil ways and listen to God. He warns them of the desecration, violence and suffering the people will undergo in exile because of their continued sins against God. But they are unmoving in their obstinacy.

God is unmoving in his generosity and mercy, however, and despite the failures of his people, he proffers a new covenant in the person of Jesus Christ. And in the Gospel today, we hear about a young man who has, seemingly, every desire to do what is necessary to gain eternal life. He has led an observant life and, perhaps of good upbringing by his devout parents, he has kept the commandments. This is a wonderful step beyond repentance as he puts into practice what God has asked at the most basic level. But clearly, he wants more and has come to Jesus asking for advice. Jesus knows exactly how to challenge and stretch his would-be disciple: sell what you have, give to the poor and follow me. We don't know if the young man was finally able to accept Jesus' invitation, but clearly he found it to be very troubling and difficult.

Where do we see ourselves in our spiritual life? Do we need to repent and turn our life around? Do we need to start following the basics — the commandments laid out by God? Or, like the rich young man, are we coming to Jesus and asking him what more we must do?

This week, let us take some quiet time to ask Jesus the key question: Lord, what are you calling me to? What must I do to gain eternal life? And trust that Jesus, the Shepherd of Souls, will guide us on to the next leg of our spiritual journey.

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Tuesday, August 21, 2018

(Lec. 420)

1) Ezekiel 28:1-10

2) Matthew 19:23-30

TUESDAY OF  
20<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Pius X,  
Pope)

Gospel related: **CCC** 226, 276, 308, 765, 1058, 2053 **CSDC** 181

FOCUS: Although humanity is capable of great things, only in God are *all things* possible.

*For God all things are possible.*

How often do we hear those words? And how often do we not understand them?

Throughout human history, people have sought to accomplish and achieve the greatest things. We have built grand structures, such as the Taj Mahal and the Roman Colosseum, and even at times believed these structures to be as wondrous as what God had made. We have landed men on the moon, unraveled the human genome, and run less than four-minute miles. And while these structures are indeed marvels, and these physical achievements extraordinary, they are not as praiseworthy as our God truly is! It is only with God that *all things* are possible!

Some people believe that God can do all things, but only those things *they* want to happen. They bargain with God to get what they want. Their prayer might sound like this: "O God, if you give me the job I want, I promise to better support the Church." It is always well and good to support the Church, but to make it a bargaining chip, or to "use God" as a way toward self-fulfillment, is to widely miss the point.

Let us remember how that turned out for the prince of Tyre in the first reading. He was *haughty of heart*, and thought himself a god. He believed he was *wiser than Daniel*; his intelligence and business acumen had made him rich. He thought he, and he alone, could do it all. There was no need for God. So God told him what would happen – not as punishment, but as the natural consequence of his way of living. Because he refused to include or rely on God for his needs, he would die a bloody, ignoble death at the hands of foreigners.

This may sound frightening, and perhaps we would be frightened ... but for the fact that we have Jesus' simple instructions for entering the kingdom. In essence, let God be God. We do not save ourselves – saving ourselves *is impossible, but for God all things are possible*. God saves us. God establishes the kingdom here on earth, and its fullness in heaven. And if we are attuned to God, then we truly know that God will take all that we have to offer, and lead us to eternal life.

To have the disposition to "let God be God," and come humbly before him is to open the soul to what he so desires. Whenever we recite the Lord's Prayer, we declare "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Let us take to heart that we are not gods, even if we are capable of great things. Let us pray for an openness to receiving whatever it is that God offers to us

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Wednesday, August 22, 2018

(Lec. 421)

1) Ezekiel 34:1-11

2) Matthew 20:1-16

WEDNESDAY OF  
20<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
The Queenship of the  
Blessed Virgin Mary)

Gospel related: **CSDC** 541

FOCUS: There is no shortage of work available in the vineyard.

It is not uncommon to find, in some form of media, a humorous picture of a particular task that has been done incorrectly – along with the caption, “you had *one job!*” While it is funny to see that alongside a chore of little consequence, or a mistake that can easily be corrected, it is not as amusing when it refers to an activity of great import.

In the first reading today, we have, in a way, an example of the latter. We can almost hear the Lord saying to the shepherds, “you had *one job!*” But he is not being funny. This Scripture passage from Ezekiel details the Lord’s disappointment with the shepherds who have failed to pasture his sheep. Rather, the Lord says, the shepherds *have fed off their milk, worn their wool, and slaughtered the fatlings, but the sheep you have not pastured.* He pledges to save the sheep *that they may no longer be food for [the shepherds’] mouths.*

Psalm 23, which we sang a moment ago, echoes this pledge, reminding us that God will pasture and protect us. And the Gospel shows us that the shepherd-turned-landowner, who both gathers us in and calls us to work in his vineyard, rewards our faithfulness and labor with his generosity and justice.

The Lord sent his Son to save and pasture his sheep, and open the path of salvation to us. It is by the grace and mercy of God that we have this gate by which to enter the kingdom, not the reliance on our own toil.

Today – and every day – we are challenged to recognize God’s grace and apply it in our lives as well as in the lives of those around us. Catholic teaching calls for the laity who work in the Lord’s vineyard “to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will” (CCC 898).

We believe that participating in this Eucharist has an actual transformative effect on us, preparing us to move from this place where we celebrated God’s mercy toward us, to the places outside these walls where we become agents of that mercy to others. It configures us to Christ, creating a desire to live always in him and love as he loves.

As Catholics, we have the responsibility to do all we can to care for one another, especially those who are the most vulnerable among us. There is no shortage of work available in this vineyard, and as the saying goes, “we have one job!” So let us pray that the graces received here today will help us to do it.

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Thursday, August 23, 2018

(Lec. 422)

1) Ezekiel 36:23-28

2) Matthew 22:1-14

THURSDAY OF  
20<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Rose of Lima,  
Virgin)

Gospel related: CCC 546, 796

FOCUS: Are our hearts stony or natural?

What is a stony heart? What is a natural heart? The prophet Ezekiel says that God's plan is to take from our bodies our stony hearts and replace them with natural hearts. We can imagine that a stony heart is unmovable and hardened – that nothing can soften it. The only thing one can do with a stone is to break it up, to crush it. In the end, it leaves nothing but a million little pieces. That does not sound like something that would be conducive to life as God's people. No wonder he wants to change it out!

A natural heart, on the other hand, is a heart that is filled with the love of God, a love that is shared with those we meet. It is what is placed in us when we are born. The stony heart may be what has been formed over the weathered years of a lifetime of labor on earth, built up and formed by sin. But all of this can be replaced by a natural heart.

In Ezekiel's time, God is speaking of the nations he scattered due to their unfaithfulness. Scripture tells us they profaned the holy name of God, and in order to *prove [his] holiness*, he brings them all back. It is a dramatic conversion – one that removes a stony heart and replaces it with a natural one. It is the kind of conversion that all those invited to the wedding feast in today's Gospel need to have. They refused to honor the invitation, and in fact killed the servants sent to invite them! Natural hearts are pure and holy, and are open to every invitation from God. That God can place one within us, removing from us our hard-heartedness, is something that can encourage us whenever we are burdened by our own sins or faults.

Let us ask God to remove *our* stony heart – or the parts of our heart that are unkind and unloving. It is a powerful prayer and one that draws from our heavenly Father's grace and mercy to change us. Let us accept every invitation to the wedding feast that he offers, and be prepared to celebrate the goodness and generosity of our God.

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Friday, August 24, 2018

(Lec. 629)

1) Revelation 21:9b-14

2) John 1:45-51

**SAINT BARTHOLOMEW,**

**APOSTLE**

**– FEAST**

FOCUS: Our loving God knows us and invites us into relationship with him.

Today, we celebrate the feast of Saint Bartholomew, whom the Church identifies as Nathanael in the Gospel passage from John. As he does with his disciples throughout Scripture, Jesus initiates an encounter with us today, inviting us to follow him, and to – as Philip said to Nathanael – *come and see*.

Many of us like to shop. One of the reasons it seems so difficult, for example, to limit Christmas shopping, is because so many people *want* to find and to give the perfect gift. The search engages us, challenges us; we like to discover the perfect kitchen accessory, the perfect book or some clothes that are just right. If we can't find it nearby, we have Amazon, EBay, and even Etsy. Even better, we can read reviews to make sure the item is *just right*.

In the search, we spend time and resources to locate the object of our desire; because of this, we are prepared to recognize it when we *do* find it.

Something similar – but of greater significance – happens in today's Gospel, but it is spelled out so quickly, and in such a short line, that it is easy to miss.

Philip, who has only just been called by Jesus to follow him, finds Nathanael, saying, *We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets*.

*We have found the one*. Doesn't this imply that they had already been looking? That they had already been reading and studying the law of Moses and the prophets, that they had already been seeking the one about whom the Scriptures speak? There is a sense of excitement – “We have FOUND him!”

Now Nathanael replies with his own preconceived notions of the Messiah: *Can anything good come from Nazareth?* Philip (repeating the words that Jesus had just said to him) replies, *Come and see*.

Something fascinating happens next. Jesus sees Nathanael and greets him, *Here is a true child of Israel. There is no duplicity in him*. Nathanael asks, *How do you know me?*

And this, it seems, is the key. We – like Nathanael – think *we* are the ones seeking God. And just like Nathanael, we have our own ideas about what we search for: who God is and what God does. Just like our shopping list, we think that we will know God – recognize God – when we find him.

But before we have a chance to find God, it is first the case that God knows us, first seeks us. Jesus says, *Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree*. It is Christ who says to us, “before you even *thought* of me, I saw you. I knew you.” It is Christ who says, “Come and see.”

We have a wonderful, loving God who knows us through and through, who seeks us before we can even begin our search, who invites us into a relationship with him. My brothers and sisters, may we respond by following Jesus with the joy of Nathanael as he proclaimed, *You are the Son of God*.

Saturday, August 25, 2018

(Lec. 424)

1) Ezekiel 43:1-7ab

2) Matthew 23:1-12

SATURDAY OF

20<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Louis;

Saint Joseph Calasanz, Priest;

Saturday in honor of BVM)

Gospel related: CCC 526, 2367

FOCUS: To participate in the glory of the Lord, we must serve rather than be served and follow the one true teacher, Jesus Christ.

A visitor to the Holy Land, and specifically to the town of Chorozain (alt., Korazin), would actually be able to sit on a replica of the chair of Moses, a seat carved into the remains of the second-century synagogue that was built on the remains of the one that existed at the time of Jesus. This seat was the place from which the scribes and Pharisees would pronounce authoritative teaching, highly visible to all the Jewish people. It was a throne of sorts, whether physical or metaphorical – a place meant for a king, one who would lead with integrity. (The original is in the Israeli Museum in Jerusalem.)

Perhaps that is why Jesus so harshly denounced these Jewish leaders: not for their words, but for their actions; not for the Mosaic law they imparted, but for their hypocrisy in not following it. They reveled in being worshipped, but did not worship as they should. They dressed as followers of God, but did none of the work. So Jesus exhorted his disciples and the crowds not to follow their example, but to recognize that there is *but one master, the Christ*.

It is little wonder that Jesus had no time for religious leaders who did not practice what they preached, for the kingdom of God was (and is) at hand! There was work to be done, and those who lifted not a finger to move the burdens they placed on the shoulders of others may have been mindful of the law, but they were not living the law of love. Whereas Christ, in the fulfillment of the law, has a yoke which is easy, and a burden which is light (Cf., Matthew 11:30).

How might Christ speak of *us* today? Does he look with disdain on any of our hypocrisy?

The chair of Moses may be a comfortable place to be served, but to participate in the glory of the Lord we must serve. We must remember always the one true teacher, and humble ourselves in love of our sisters and brothers. It is only then that we will be able someday to enter the inner court of the heavenly temple and dwell forever with the glory of the Lord.

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**SUNDAY, AUGUST 26, 2018**

(Lec. 122)

- 1) Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b
- 2) Ephesians 5:21-32 or 5:2a, 25-32
- 3) John 6:60-69

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

**TWENTY-FIRST  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: God calls his chosen people to fidelity and commitment.

Israel's relationship with the Lord is best described as long and tortuous – one full of second and third chances, of covenant and infidelity, of commitment and betrayal. Over and over again, Israel declares publicly her faith in the Lord only to see that commitment dashed in the dust of selfishness, disobedience, false regional alliances and the lure of foreign gods.

But betrayal is not just found in the Old Testament. Jesus, in today's Gospel, knew from the outset how fickle and weak his disciples would be, and that at the time he would need them most, they would not be able to stay the course. We are all familiar with Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial – how they must have hurt Jesus as much as any nail or crown of thorns! Here in our Gospel, some of the disciples who find his teachings difficult and shocking prefer to walk away. Again the betrayal is evident!

The great paradox of these betrayals is that although the disciples believed in Jesus and his message, that belief did not stop them from betrayal and denial. Contrast that with Jesus' faithfulness; that same steadfast love and resolute fidelity that stood at the heart of the covenant with Israel is now found in the new covenant. The contrast couldn't be greater! Humanity's faithlessness more than matched by God's faithfulness.

So we might ask ourselves if, given our human frailty, it is truly possible for us to be faithful to the Lord, or should we just throw in the towel and resign ourselves to infidelity, and even betrayals, of the One who loves us without condition and whose words are Spirit and life?

But before we do so, let us recall the words of the other Scripture passages that complement today's Gospel. First, we hear the challenging words of Joshua, *As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord*. Like Joshua, we, too, have come to know the Lord as Savior, the one who brings us out of the slavery of sin and who performs great miracles and mighty words before our very eyes. That mighty presence should be enough to encourage us to fidelity. When joined with the words of Paul, we are doubly reminded that if we seek to imitate Christ in our daily life, we, too, can learn to be faithful like he is on whatever path of life we have been called to.

Joshua invites Israel to choose between the ways of the world and service to the Lord. That same invitation and choice is placed before each one of us as individuals and as a community of faith each day. Let us pray that Israel's response will be ours: *Far be it from us to forsake the Lord for the service of other gods ... therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God*. For as Peter reminds us in speaking to Jesus: *To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*.

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Monday, August 27, 2018

(Lec. 425)

1) 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5,  
11-12

2) Matthew 23:13-22

Gospel related: **CCC** 586, 2111

MONDAY OF  
21<sup>ST</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Monica)

FOCUS: A sincere heart glorifies the Lord.

Google reports that 24 billion selfies were uploaded to their photo apps in 2016, not including those on Apple's iCloud, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter or Instagram. One study on selfies estimates it takes seven minutes to take, edit, retake, edit and caption the perfect shot. That time adds up!

Why do we spend so much time on selfies? Image is important to us; we want to impress others. Selfies allow us to control the perception people have of us. We can appear any way we'd like.

In a similar way to our use of selfies, the scribes and Pharisees used external religious practices to maintain their identities as respected religious leaders of their time. They wanted everyone to see how closely they followed the law.

In our Gospel, Jesus denounces the scribes and Pharisees – not for their failure to follow the law, but for their hypocrisy. Their external actions do not reflect an internal desire to serve God and one another. Instead, they are driven by pride.

Pride gets in the way of allowing the scribes and Pharisees to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus is the new Temple – “God’s definitive dwelling-place among men” (CCC 586). Rather than listen, they look for opportunities to silence him – the word of God! Their rejection of Jesus prohibits their entry into the kingdom and locks the doors to others they persuade. Lacking an internal love for God and one another, their religious practices are reduced to superstition.

In contrast to the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees is the sincere faith demonstrated by the Thessalonians. They suffer, yet their faith flourishes. Their love for one another grows stronger. This is what makes us worthy of the Lord’s kingdom.

Today we remember Saint Monica, known for her sincere love and endurance of faith. She was born to a Christian family in North Africa and married a pagan man, Patricius, who had a bad temper. Monica patiently endured her husband’s outbursts. Eventually, her love inspired his conversion to Christ.

Monica had an eternal impact on her son Augustine. He impressed others with his outward show of intellect and culture, yet Monica was concerned about his internal state. She wept, prayed and fasted for him. After years of pursuing him across two continents, he converted. She died shortly after.

God is not concerned with external appearances. He sees what’s in our hearts. While it’s important to follow the laws of our faith, we can’t lose sight of the greatest commandment of all – to love God and each other. This is how we unlock the doors to our Lord’s heavenly kingdom. This is how we glorify our God.

Tuesday, August 28, 2018

(Lec. 426)

- 1) 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3a,  
14-17
- 2) Matthew 23:23-26

TUESDAY OF  
21<sup>ST</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Augustine,  
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

FOCUS: Let Truth be our guide and protection from hypocrisy.

Woe is not a word we hear much today, outside the Gospels or crossword puzzles. Jesus used it as a warning to those who were leading others astray. In the dictionary, it is defined as a *condition of deep suffering from misfortune, affliction or grief; ruinous trouble*, and so forth. It is not a nice state of affairs. Woe is in contrast to the Beatitudes, which all begin with *happy* or *blessed* is the person who does as God wishes.

Today's Gospel is directed at the scribes and Pharisees and their hypocritical ways. Jesus chastises them for overemphasizing minor aspects of the law while ignoring major ones such as judgment, mercy and fidelity. He also criticizes them for doing things to look good and holy on the outside, but in their hearts harboring evil thoughts and intentions. Hypocrisy is especially damaging when it is found in a leader. When there is a disconnect between their words and actions, it creates confusion, or worse, in the people they are supposed to be leading. How are people to know whether to follow what these leaders *say* or what they *do*?

Saint Paul has the answer to this when he tells the Thessalonians, *let no one deceive you in any way*. They are encouraged not to be shaken from the truth in any way; to *stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught*. For them, it meant not paying attention to the same sort of scribes and Pharisees with whom Jesus interacted. It meant disregarding those who attempted to speak in Paul's name (but was not doing so with his permission), and those who exhibited their own kind of "spirit" or claimed personal revelation. None of this was the Truth of Jesus Christ.

The same advice applies to us. We know what the Truth of Jesus Christ is, and anyone or anything that promises us something different, or does not deliver on those promises, is not to be trusted. This does not mean just people; it could be the lure of a worldly good whose pleasure is fleeting and cost is high. All of this, too, is a form of hypocrisy.

We, of course, are called to avoid hypocrisy in our own lives, and are given an antidote to avoiding it. We are to pray as Paul does: *May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting encouragement and good hope through his grace, encourage [our] hearts and strengthen them in every good deed and word.*

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Wednesday August 29, 2018  
(Lec. 427)  
1) 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10,  
16-18  
(Lec. 634)  
2) Mark 6:17-29  
Gospel related: **CCC** 523

WEDNESDAY OF  
21<sup>ST</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
The Passion of  
Saint John the Baptist)

FOCUS: We are called to live our faith boldly, whether convenient or inconvenient.

Some of us may recall that today's memorial used to be referred to as "The Beheading of John the Baptist." While this title captures the gruesome end to John's life, it doesn't capture the fullness of what we are invited to ponder. Reflecting on the Passion of John, and not only his martyrdom, helps us explore the extent of John's suffering that culminated with him paying the ultimate price.

It is hard to miss the obvious reference to the Passion of Jesus. We do not use this wording for any other Solemnity, Feast or Memorial. It is used only for the Passion of Jesus and today for the Passion of John the Baptist. Remember on Good Friday, we are called to reflect not only upon the cross, but what led up to the cross. So it is for us today.

Long before Herod decided to arrest and bind John in prison, John was ridiculed. While John had a following, he also had many detractors. Some thought he was a wild man, perhaps "just a bit off." Others appear jealous or to despise him, like Herodias, wife of Herod. You are not going to call people *a brood of vipers* (Mt. 3:7) and not have folks get upset with you.

So how does all of this have an impact on our lives today? Well, we are given yet another example of the call to live our faith boldly, whether convenient or difficult. There is likely not a person here today who has not found him- or herself in the awkward and difficult position of defending another, or an idea, in the face of intense criticism or perhaps even animosity. We just knew that as soon as we opened our mouth, someone, or several someones, were going to pounce on us. So what did we do?

Likely, our inclination was to back away. After all, we were not the one being put down, why should we get involved? Besides who are we to challenge them because, truth be known, we have likely done the same thing?

Hopefully, we fought – and continue to fight – that inclination. Especially since chances are very much in our favor that if we speak out against an injustice, we will not lose our head over it. However there will be those who will think we are perhaps "just a bit off" because we choose to challenge the status quo, or protect the rights of those who have no voice.

So let us not be afraid today to live our faith boldly. And let us pray for the intercession of Saint John the Baptist to give us the fortitude and words necessary to do so.

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Thursday, August 30, 2018

(Lec. 428)

1) 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

2) Matthew 24:42-51

Gospel related: **CCC 673 CSDC 259**

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

FOCUS: Being faithful and following the Christian way can be challenging.

There is a noticeable contrast given between the good servant and the reckless one in today's Gospel. As in our own lives, we have the freedom to choose which path to follow. Do we do what is expected of us, even when no one is watching, or do we do whatever we feel like and disregard potential consequences? In reality, two paths are laid out for us in this passage, and the dire warning of following the wrong one is quite startling.

We can look closely at the decisions we have before us and contemplate the right path to choose, because, we, too, want to be among the faithful who are blessed. It is safe to say that none of us here today want to be the unfaithful servant who behaves badly and treats others poorly when no one is looking! If the way seems too easy, we might want to seriously consider if it is the right way, because following the Gospel is frequently wrought with challenges.

God ensures we are able to meet these challenges, however. We hear Saint Paul tell the Corinthians that, because of *the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus ... you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and with sacramental grace, we are empowered to be that good servant, who has prepared the household for the master's return. This is not a passive role – we are not simply sprinkled with fairy dust that makes us perfect. It is a purposeful, faithful and active following of Christ to the point that our mind becomes one with his.

While the hour of the coming of Jesus remains unknown to us, we want to do all we can in this life to follow his ways. Every day, perhaps several times a day, it would be good if we could turn to God with a few simple words of thanksgiving, asking him in the moment, to help us stay faithful. Left to our own devices, it is tempting for us to take the easiest path. Instead, let us remain on the path of discipleship – no matter the challenges. We will be rewarded, for as we know, *God is faithful.*

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Friday, August 31, 2018

(Lec. 429)

1) 1 Corinthians 1:17-25

2) Matthew 25:1-13

Gospel related: CCC 672, 796, 1618

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

FOCUS: He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

What does it take to be alert in this day and age? As we walk or drive down the street, so many things draw our attention – cars buzzing past, advertisements on every corner, music and political debates on the radio. Even in our own homes, we have the pull of the television, our smartphones and all the daily tasks we need to get done. It is so easy to get caught up in the details of daily life and to get distracted.

We have two choices: We can succumb to it all, or we can rise above it. We can be foolish or we can be wise.

If given the choice, we would all choose wisdom. Wouldn't we? After all, we try to turn away from what's diverting us and focus on the right things. We think we are the wise ones who know what is out there and what we have to do to live as Jesus intends. But, Jesus' words are meant for all of us. "Stay awake!"

The topic of the Second Coming is one that we recite and profess belief in each week: "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end." He will come again. We don't know when or where. But we have hope that it will happen. We believe that Jesus will come again. The Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* states, "Already the final age of the world is with us and the renewal of the world is irrevocably under way; it is even now anticipated in a certain real way, for the Church on earth is endowed already with a sanctity that is real but imperfect" (*Lumen Gentium* 48).

It is already under way. And we need to be ready. Are we? Even the "wise" ones need to stay alert.

This is the Good News which continues. This is the Good News which gives us hope. This hope lives, breathes and sustains us in the difficult times. God never leaves us alone. The Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church and her people, and Jesus will return. From the first reading, we hear, *For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength*. Hope in God. His kingdom will have no end.

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