

# July

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## WEDDING HOMILY\*

- 1) Tobit 8:4b-8
- 2) Colossians 3: 12-17
- 3) John 15:12-16

**FOCUS:** God's blessings of peace, friendship and love are abundant and rich, but God also calls upon the beloved to offer forgiveness and reconciliation when they are needed.

We are happily gathered here this day to witness two beautiful people promise in the presence of God and us, the Church, to love each other faithfully for the rest of their lives. We can look around and see others who have made that same commitment to one another. For hundreds and thousands of years, men and women have consented to join themselves to one another in the sacrament of holy matrimony.

In our first reading, we hear the story of Tobiah and Sarah, who arose from their wedding bed to pray together. They gave praise to God for creation and for his ordaining of man and woman to be together as one. And, just like *N.* and *N.* are about to do, they asked God to consecrate their union, to have mercy upon them, and to let them *live together to a happy old age*. It is fitting, then, that we have gathered in this church to ask God to have mercy on this couple, and to bless them that they may have many happy years together. What more could love want? Who would not want the blessing of their loved ones and the blessing of God as they enter into married life?

*N & N*, these blessings, and the graces obtained in this sacrament, are necessary and beautiful gifts – for as those who are married can attest, the glow of newly married life does not last forever. Saint Paul reminds us of the challenges of living in communion, and encourages us to bear with one another, and to forgive one another. It will come as no surprise to you that there will be days when you will have to “put up with each other.” And there will be times when your beloved will offend you, whether it be in small matters or large ones. Practicing the virtues of patience, humility and forgiveness will enable you to navigate the challenging times, as will prayer. And of course, having a good sense of humor helps a lot!

From this day forward, you two are one. Nothing is more important, or takes higher precedence, than your relationship with one another, and as one – with God. All you do should be directed toward the good of your marriage. This includes the most basic principle of how you relate to one another. We are a People of God rooted in forgiveness and in reconciliation, and so you will prosper best when you say, “I am sorry,” and when you graciously accept an apology from one another. You will increase in *the bond of perfection*, as Saint Paul says, when you forgive one another, and when you love one another, as God loves you. You will sanctify one another, which is a gift that is vastly underrated and too often ignored.

Be kind to one another, and to yourselves. Remember that true love does not mean that you want to be as happy as possible, but rather, it means that you want to help your beloved become the best person possible.

\*Readings from usccb.org

## FUNERAL HOMILY\*

- 1) Wisdom 3:1-9
- 2) Romans 6:3-9
- 3) John 12:23-28

**FOCUS:** The Eucharist is the grace to share in the life of Christ, so that like him, all who believe may be taken, blessed, broken and finally given over into the blessings of eternal life.

On behalf of *N.*'s loved ones and this faith community, may I offer a sincere and heartfelt welcome to all of you who have come to remember *him/her*. Our Catholic tradition impels us to celebrate our faith through the Eucharist, in which we offer our thanks to God, and thanks for the gift of *N.* into our lives. We do this by remembering that we are invited by Jesus to take part in his Passover sacrifice in which he was taken, blessed, broken and given for the sake of the whole world.

When *N.* was baptized in the sacramental waters of new life, *he/she* was taken before God and chosen to be a part of his holy people. Baptism, as Saint Paul claims in the second reading, means that we enter into Jesus' death. But it also means that we will be raised from the dead, just like Jesus. Baptism, then, means that *N.* has been chosen by God to live with him in eternal glory. This earthly life may have ended for *him/her*, but now *he/she* basks in a new life with the Blessed Trinity.

While alive on this earth, *N.* was blessed. Oftentimes, we may think of blessings as being those concrete, tangible things that we have – a home, a car or any of the possessions we own. But blessings are more than just those things. We are blessed to have people who care for us and who love us, whether in the good times or the difficult times of life. Even more so is the love of God for *N.*, because as we heard in the first reading, God's grace, mercy and care are given to those whom he chooses. No matter what *N.* did in this life, God blessed *him/her* – this is what we know as unconditional love – that he loved *N.* no matter what.

As God's people, as Eucharistic people, we are a broken people. All of us have experienced pain in this life. For some, that pain comes through physical suffering, while for others, it may be emotional, or mental, or spiritual. Right now, we may be in deep sorrow at the loss of *N.* from this life. But we are not people who remain broken. We find redemption through that brokenness. We are not meant to live only in this life. At some point, we all will die, we all will be broken off from this life, but then we find redemption in God's glory.

And so, we pray for *N.*, and we give *him/her* over to God. The hour has come that *he/she* may be glorified in eternal life. In this earthly life, *N.* followed and served God. The time has come for *him/her* to receive God's reward and to be honored by him. We may mourn because *N.* is no longer with us, but if we truly are a Eucharistic people who are taken, blessed, broken and given, then let us give *him/her* over to the God of eternal life.

\*Readings from usccb.org

**YEAR B  
WEEKDAYS II**

**SUNDAY, JULY 1, 2018**

(Lec. 98)

- 1) Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24
- 2) 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9,13-15
- 3) Mark 5:21-43 or 5:21-24; 35b-43

Gospel related: **CCC** 548, 994, 1504, 2616

**THIRTEENTH SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: *God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.*

Here we are, just a few days past the first day of summer. This time of year, with its periods of sun and relaxation, makes it easy to see that God rejoices in life. Fields are fast approaching harvest time. Gardens that adorn our homes and our parish grounds are filled with beautiful flowers and produce. As we drive about, we see scenes of life repeated everywhere. We also see abundant life in the family gatherings, picnics and reunions that are a part of this time of year. All of these remind us that God is a God of life. God loves us and the world that he created and saw to be good.

We also know that our world is not quite the place that God intended it to be. Because of a human choice made long ago, our world is broken, less-than-perfect, a place where sadness, sickness and death occur all too frequently.

This balance between joy and sorrow, between sickness and health, between life and death, is something we all know. Think for a moment about the prayers of intercession – the prayers of the faithful – that are proclaimed each time we gather for Eucharist. There are prayers for situations in our world that desperately need God’s help and our own; there are prayers for those who are sick and for their caregivers; there are prayers for our beloved dead, known and unknown. What happens with those prayers as we offer them each time we gather for Eucharist? How do we offer them to God? How does God reaffirm himself as the God of life, not death?

It is no mistake that we make those prayers as we prepare to offer our gifts of bread and wine, simple things, made of wheat that has been ground down and grapes that have been crushed – bread that sustains and wine that can be a drink of great joy. So it is with our prayers, as we offer them and unite them with the gifts of bread and wine that are placed upon our altar. We join together things that sustain us and things that make us feel ground down; we join together that which makes us feel crushed with that which brings us joy. We place it all on the altar and we ask God to make it holy – to hallow our gifts of bread and wine and the gifts of our lives into the body of Christ.

It is no mistake that words such as “holy” and “hallow” come from the same root word as “health,” “healing” and “wholeness.” Isn’t that what we seek when we gather at this table for Eucharist? Here we have a glimpse of heaven, something that reassures us that God is a God of life. Here, God takes everything we bring to the table, hallows it, makes it holy and makes us the body of Christ. God hallows each of us, making us holy, sharing healing love with each of us.

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Monday, July 2, 2018

(Lec. 377)

1) Amos 2:6-10, 13-16

2) Matthew 8:18-22

Gospel related: **CCC** 2444

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

FOCUS: Christ gives us a new relationship with the Father.

Today's readings offer us a contrast between our relationship with God in the time of the Old Testament and the relationship with the Father that is now available to us through Christ.

The Old Testament, in its making known God's plan of salvation through the old covenant, always needs to be understood in light of its primary purpose: preparing for the coming of Christ (Cf., *Dei Verbum* 14, 15). Thus, when hearing the Lord speak in the book of Amos, we should recognize that it was during a dark time for the Jewish people who had not yet been fully reconciled to God.

The kingdom was divided between Israel and Judah, and God was angry with them both for their many sins. The condemnations issued were harsh and likely very frightening for those who were listening. *I will crush you into the ground, the Lord says. Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong man shall not retain his strength; The warrior shall not save his life, nor the bowman stand his ground.* Even for us today, this is hard to hear, unless we grasp that God has only and always ever acted with the intent to save us from sin.

This scene depicts a relationship with God that reflects the fallen characteristics of his chosen people. It was a time before our redemption – when the relationship was not yet perfected through Jesus Christ, and we as his people were still vulnerable to death and annihilation. In his infinite mercy and love for us, God never imposed death and annihilation upon us. Rather, he exhorted us – sometimes with harsh words – to be faithful to the covenant.

Contrast that to the exchange between Christ and one of his disciples in today's Gospel. *Follow me and let the dead bury their dead,* Jesus says. His words were not as dire as those we heard in the reading from Amos, but they are challenging nonetheless. Jesus is telling the disciple, and us, to put him first, before everything else. Why? Because God could have crushed us into the ground for our sins, and he didn't. Instead, he gave us his Son, who takes away the sins of the world, as the one, true means to relationship with him and to eternal life.

Come follow him, and draw ever closer to the Father. Come, partake of this new covenant of Christ, and lovingly serve the needs of others; give Christ a home in our hearts.

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Tuesday, July 3, 2018

(Lec. 593)

1) Ephesians 2:19-22

2) John 20:24-29

Gospel related: **CDC** 448, 644, 645, 659 **CSDC** 491

**ST. THOMAS,**

**APOSTLE**

**- FEAST**

FOCUS: *My Lord and my God!*

Today's Gospel is a familiar one to most of us. In this story featuring God's redeeming and undeserved mercy toward his people, a resurrected Jesus appears to Thomas, one of the twelve disciples and Jesus' close friend.

As the Gospel writer tells us, when a resurrected Jesus first appeared to the group of his disciples, Thomas was not present. So when the others excitedly tell Thomas, *we have seen the Lord*, Thomas' first reaction to the news that his master had come back from the dead was strong. He demanded to touch the Lord's body, to put his own hand into Jesus' wounded side. And he insisted on seeing with his own eyes, *the mark of the nails in [Jesus'] hands*.

Poor Thomas. Never mind that in an earlier chapter of John he was willing to dive head first in faith, declaring, *Let us also go to die with him* (Cf., Jn 11:16). And never mind the fact that Thomas' presence is noted – by name – several times among Jesus' chosen Apostles. What we all remember about Thomas, called Didymus or the Twin, is the nickname that describes him in this particular Gospel account: doubting Thomas.

But this story is not as much about Thomas as it is about God. Jesus' response to Thomas, in both words and actions, tells us a lot about God – about his mercy and his desire to meet us as we are, no matter how distant we become or how much faith we are lacking. In his unending, generous, and intimate love for us, the Lord knows how often we need to experience him with all our earthly senses before we can recognize his presence in our midst. So it is not surprising that in this short Gospel story there are 13 different references describing human sensibilities and senses, from presence and touch, to eyesight and personal witness.

When he stands in the Apostles' midst – despite the fact that they had locked their doors, Jesus patiently says to Thomas, *Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side*. With loving and undeserved mercy, Jesus comes, once again, to Thomas and to all of us, right in the midst of our weaknesses, our doubts, and all of our needs. We can almost hear Jesus saying: "What else can I do, what else do you need before you are able to acknowledge my presence?"

Whatever we need, he is willing to do and to be, because our Lord is Divine Mercy. He desires to love us as intimately and personally as is humanly possible. And he is waiting for us to acknowledge and respond, along with Saint Thomas, *My Lord and my God!*

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Wednesday, July 4, 2018

(Lec. 379)

1) Amos 5:14-15, 21-24

2) Matthew 8:28-34

WEDNESDAY OF  
13<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.)  
Independence Day  
in United States  
of America)

NOTE: for Independence Day, any readings from the *Lectionary for Ritual Masses* (vol. IV), the Mass "For the Country or a City," nos. 882-886, or "For Peace and Justice," nos. 887-891

**FOCUS:** Christ has the power to free us from that which keeps us from treating others with justice and goodness.

In today's first reading, the prophet Amos continues to speak out against those who go through the motions of worship yet fail to embrace justice and goodness in their lives.

But can *any* of us say that justice and goodness gush out of us without fail? It is doubtful. And certainly, not without God's help. Let's think about that. Justice is what others have the right to expect from us; it is what we owe others. Actions such as treating each other with decency and respect; using kind words, and offering encouragement, understanding, forgiveness and compassion. And doing so not just when we are in a good mood and things are going well for us, but even on bad days, stressful days and down days.

But because of sin, we are weak – especially when we're feeling frustrated, tired or stressed. Our moral defenses lower and that is when we give in to the temptation to say awful words we know we shouldn't, or take a tone we know we'll regret.

So what are we to do? Should we throw up our hands as if there's nothing that can be done? Well, we could certainly choose that route, after all, God gave us free will ... but it would be the wrong choice. For we are Christians, and as such our strongest help is right here, ready to do for us what we can't do for ourselves.

Just as in today's Gospel when Jesus freed those men of the demons that had taken over and led them to a place of death, Jesus can free us of any unkindness or malice that surrounds us or lives within us and that leads us to a dark place. Unlike those men, however, we have the great blessing of receiving that power in Word – through our ears, and in sacrament – in our hands and on our lips. May we do so with the faith that the Christ we receive can set us free to live in the manner that God asks of us: *[letting] justice surge like water and goodness like an unfailing stream.*

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Thursday, July 5, 2018

(Lec. 380)

1) Amos 7:10-17

2) Matthew 9:1-8

THURSDAY OF

13<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Anthony Zaccaria, Priest;

USA: Saint Elizabeth of Portugal)

FOCUS: Seek the Lord's healing and forgiveness.

"Sin" is a word that sometimes makes people uncomfortable. Perhaps it is because we are ashamed of our sins. Or maybe we fear what the consequences of our sins will be when we hear words like we heard in our first reading. Until we remember that there is the Gospel ....

The Good News in today's Gospel gives us hope that despite our sinful tendencies, the Lord wants to forgive us and heal our relationship with him, our relationships with others and the "dis-ease" within ourselves. How does he do this? He sends Jesus.

There is both a contrast and a connection in the way God responds to the sins of Israel and those of the paralyzed man. Through the prophecy of Amos, God issues a strong punishment against Israel – not only to the sinners, but to future generations as well. Yet in Matthew, God grants Jesus the authority to forgive the paralyzed man's sins and the power to heal. The contrast is the presence of Jesus. The connection is that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, of which Amos was a part.

God sent Jesus to redeem us. Despite our sinfulness, he wants to unite us with him and offer us his kingdom. He gives Jesus the authority to forgive sins and allows his only Son to be crucified so we may be saved. This power is passed on to the Apostles and to our priests, who forgive our sins in the name of Jesus during the sacrament of reconciliation.

While the focus of this Gospel is the paralyzed man and his obvious faith, let us not overlook the importance of those who carry him. The man could not make it to Jesus alone – he needed help. The faithfulness and generosity of the people assisting him can inspire us and demonstrate the importance of evangelization. Like the paralyzed man, some of us are in physical, mental or spiritual states that do not always allow us to reach Jesus without help. How privileged we are when we can carry others to Christ so they too may experience our Lord's merciful love. How blessed we are when others carry us.

Sin is present in the world, and in each one of us. But it does not have to be what defines us, nor does it need to scare us away from a relationship with God. We know that Jesus saved us from our sins, and as Catholics, we believe Jesus is present in the Eucharist. This sacrament strengthens us in our life of faith. When we are in communion with Christ, we are victorious in the battle against sin. And it's through our faith in his Word that we will be saved.

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Friday, July 6, 2018

(Lec. 381)

1) Amos 8:4-6, 9-12

2) Matthew 9:9-13

FRIDAY OF  
13<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Maria Goretti,  
Virgin and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 581, 589, 2100

**FOCUS:** If we allow our lives to give bold witness to our faith, we may help Jesus bring redemption to sinners.

Today, we remember Saint Maria Goretti, who was born in Italy at the end of the nineteenth century. We honor her for being faithful to God – in mind, body and soul. When the nineteen-year-old son of the widower who had taken in Maria, her siblings and their widowed mother attempted to sexually assault Maria, she resisted by fighting him off and yelling at him. “It’s a mortal sin!” and “You will go to hell.” The man was angry at her words and refusal, and so stabbed Maria repeatedly. Before she died the next day, she publicly forgave him for what he had done, even hoping that one day, he would join her in heaven. Maria was only eleven years old.

Maria’s attacker, Alessandro Serenelli, was sentenced to thirty years in prison. At first, he was unrepentant. It took the intercession of the local bishop for him to acknowledge his sinfulness. Upon his release he sought, and received, forgiveness from Maria’s mother. Alessandro went on to become a Capuchin Franciscan, and was present when Maria was canonized in 1950. Maria is honored today because her story, along with Alessandro’s, is the story of the redemption of God’s chosen people.

In the first reading, the prophet Amos calls out the people of Judah and Israel who take advantage of the needy and the poor. Amos recognizes that those in power use their position for their own self-interests, using the lowly for their own benefit. It is clear from the Lord’s words in this passage that what the people are doing is sinful, and will lead to their death. Exactly as Maria insisted Alessandro’s actions would.

Yet Alessandro’s own story can be held up next to that of Matthew’s, who Jesus called in today’s Gospel. Both men had sinned against others – granted, not in the same manner – but they also experienced a profound transformation in their lives. Alessandro publicly repented of his crime, and like Matthew who committed his life to follow Jesus, Alessandro left his former life behind. They both are the ones whom Jesus came to call – the sinners.

Both Maria and Alessandro were bold witnesses to the faith: of trust in God’s promises, of faith in his redemptive sacrifice, and in belief in his unending and merciful love. The prophet Amos and the life of the disciple Matthew also speak to God’s dominion. Let us, then, not be afraid to also give voice to every word that comes from the mouth of God. Let us not be silent, but proclaim the goodness of the Lord, to the righteous and to sinners.

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Saturday, July 7, 2018

(Lec. 382)

- 1) Amos 9:11-15
- 2) Matthew 9:14-17

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

FOCUS: God restores what is lost and brings new gifts, more than we could imagine.

There is a story told often during retreats and faith formation workshops about a peasant who loved his life dearly. The story varies somewhat, but the main point of it is that this man loved his town, the beauty of the fields, the soil, the harvests. He loved his family, his friends, sharing meals together in this beautiful country or land. One day, realizing that death was near, he began to be afraid – not of death or the afterlife, but afraid of leaving behind all that he held dear: his land, his wife, his children, his home. He decided to grab a handful of soil from his beloved homeland, and told his loved ones to bury him with it.

When he died, Peter welcomed him at the gates of heaven but said, “You must let go of the soil in order to enter.” The man protested, for the soil represented his beloved homeland. Peter explained, “I am asking you to trust that God can give you more than a few grains of soil.”

The man refused, and Peter reluctantly left him.

A few moments later, a small child came out of the gates. She didn't try to persuade him, she didn't even say a word, but she put out her hand to him, in order to lead him into the gates. As he went to hold her hand, he released the soil, and he was led into the gates.

What lay before him, as he entered heaven, was all of his beloved homeland!

Today, the prophet Amos encourages the people of Israel, those who have experienced loss and destruction: God will renew! Listen to the words of reassurance: God will *raise* the ruins, will *restore* the people, will *rebuild* their cities, will *plant them* on their own land. It will be even better than they could imagine: the mountains “shall drip with the juice of grapes,” *and all the hills shall run with it*. God is a God of restoration – of bringing new life to what was thought lost.

Jesus references this newness in the Gospel. The disciples of John question him, “Why don't your disciples fast?” Jesus replies that this is a time of joy. He is with them. There is newness taking place. Stop trying to hold onto what is old, grasping it like an old wineskin. It will burst – the new gifts of Jesus cannot be contained in what is old. There is a time to mourn, but now is not the time.

As Christians, we need this message of trust, of hope, of letting go in order to see the joy God wants for us. So often, in our fear, we try (like the man from the story) to hold on even more tightly. We may be clinging to past relationships, to a lost job, a former reputation, to bitterness or anger. We want the *old* wineskins. We *grasp* what we once had as belonging to us, as our own *possession*. In the process, we cannot open our hands to what God has ready for us and what he can restore; what new things he offers for those who let go, who trust that Christ is with them, bringing new gifts along the way.

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**SUNDAY, JULY 8, 2018**

(Lec. 101)

1) Ezekiel 2:2-5

2) 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

3) Mark 6:1-6a

Gospel related: **CCC** 500, 699, 2610; **CSDC** 259

**FOURTEENTH  
SUNDAY IN  
ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: As believers, our strength lies in our relationship with Christ and not in our abilities or talents.

Throughout the centuries many have speculated about Paul's thorn. Some have said it was a physical illness like recurring malaria, or an eye infection that impaired his vision. Others have postulated that it was a spiritual ailment like the pain of rejection or a demonic presence that constantly tested his faith and tempted him to sin. But whatever it was, and we shall never know, it caused Paul to be all the more dependent on Christ and – in the words of today's psalm – to keep his eyes *fixed on the Lord*. So maybe in the long run, it is best that we never know, otherwise we might miss the real reason of his sharing – that in our times of struggle we might learn from him and seek refuge in Christ.

In those very honest words, Paul shares not just his trials and challenges, but the very fact that he begged the Lord three times to remove this thorn. Here, he realizes that his weaknesses and failures before the world are what actually hollow out his personal spiritual depths. Here, Paul is emptied of any false illusions about his success, creating within him a space where God's power can truly dwell and expand. It is as if he stands spiritually naked before the Lord, vulnerable, open and yet paradoxically, at his strongest!

It is in this holy moment that Paul realizes that whatever befalls him in this life, his first duty must be to Christ. Nothing else will do honor to God or pay true homage to the gift that God has given. Like Ezekiel from our first reading, Paul realizes that no matter what response he receives, he must be bold and courageous in his witness. He must accept, as Jesus pointed out in the Gospel, that a prophet is not always accepted in his native place and that while many will accept the message, many more will reject it.

Perhaps this is where Paul's insight speaks to us this day. To be a disciple of Christ, we, too, need to be courageous and faithful in all things, even if it runs contrary to the ways of the world or what is now socially acceptable. This is the first step in true Christian living.

Today's readings also remind us that, like the prophets, we are sent into the world and that, like the Apostles, we will be challenged to explain and defend our faith before others. We cannot be believers who sit on the fence or disciples who are lukewarm or half-hearted in our commitment. Trying to reconcile the ways of this world with those of the Gospel will inevitably cause us to have to choose between the two.

Instead, we need to be believers who know of our need for God, and believers who are always growing in our faith and prayer life. It is only when our courage, perseverance and fidelity are united with Christ and his mission that, like Paul and Ezekiel, we can humbly accept our own weaknesses and our need of God's grace and strength. Only then can we stand up more firmly grounded in our faith and in our relationship with Christ.

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Monday, July 9, 2018

(Lec. 383)

- 1) Hosea 2:16, 17b-18,  
21-22
- 2) Matthew 9:18-26

MONDAY OF  
14<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Augustine Zhao Rong, Priest  
and Companions, Martyrs)

FOCUS: Allow Jesus to touch our hearts in prayer.

While the age of the woman who encounters Jesus in today's Gospel is never mentioned, many picture her as being older because of her circumstances. The image of a kindly grandmother or great aunt comes to mind. Her encounter with Jesus can be easily missed because we are focused on what Jesus is going to do for the official whose daughter has died.

This miracle within another miracle can seem mundane when compared to Jesus taking the hand of a dead little girl and restoring her to life. Yet both miracles involve touch. In the case of the woman, she touches Jesus' tassel; in the case of the little girl, Jesus touches her hand.

Touch is so very important to the human condition. The importance of a newborn infant being touched, and held close, has been proven to have an impact on the well-being of the child. The calming influence of touching someone experiencing great pain, be it physical, spiritual or emotional, is also well-proven. Holding the hand of someone near death helps to bring peace to the one about to encounter the Lord, and it brings peace to the one having to let go of a long and loving friendship.

We also know that things less physically tangible, such as loving words and beautiful music, can touch our hearts and even our souls. Words and music of prayer, for example. We have all heard prayer described as a conversation between God and ourselves. If we see prayer, however, as an encounter between God and ourselves, then we are drawn to something even deeper: "The life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him" (CCC 2565).

What a wonderful way to look at prayer! It is not just our reaching out to touch God, but that we are *in the presence of God*, encountering him who is actually reaching out to touch us. It is the miracle within the miracle!

Today, we memorialize Saint Augustine Zhao Rong and his companions, whom we do not know much about other than that there were 120 of them martyred between 1648 and 1930. They ranged in age, at the time of their deaths, from nine to seventy-two. What must have been true for each of them, however, is the depth at which they encountered Jesus; the depth at which Jesus touched each of them, that they would be so willing to suffer a martyr's death.

In the quiet prayer of our hearts today, let us allow ourselves to be touched by Jesus to that same depth – touched by the miracle of his life dwelling within us. Let us then strive to bring this encounter with Jesus into the marketplace, into our neighborhoods and, most certainly, into our homes.

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Tuesday, July 10, 2018

(Lec. 384)

1) Hosea 8:4-7, 11-13

2) Matthew 9:32-38

Gospel related: **CCC** 2611 **CSDC** 259

TUESDAY OF  
14<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God holds us in his heart.

Jesus was often surrounded by crowds. They followed him through the countryside and gathered around him in the cities. They pushed their way into homes where he was staying. In one instance, they even tore away the roof tiles to reach him.

For the most part, the people who followed him were not the powerful – not the wealthy. Just ordinary people, longing for someone to help them, to heal them, to bring them the Good News. Someone simply to love them. Their longing must have been intense, for we are told several times in the Gospels that Jesus needs to withdraw from them to a quiet place and pray. Their demands drain him to the point of exhaustion.

But Jesus doesn't see them as demanding, or aggressive. He sees into their hearts, and he understands. They are *troubled and abandoned*. Troubled by what? Abandoned by whom? Certainly, the times in which they lived were difficult, to say the least. Many lived at a subsistence level, others were destitute. The Jewish homeland was occupied by Roman soldiers, who were all-powerful and often brutal. The Roman tax system was oppressive and corrupt. The religious leaders were powerless to resist the oppressors, and some openly collaborated with them.

Given these circumstances, it's no wonder that the people felt troubled and abandoned. But Jesus seems to respond to something deeper, something that may be found in our own hearts as well. Political empires come and go, but the kingdom of sin and death persists, and that is the kingdom that oppresses us. We are all under the "curse of Adam," as Saint Paul has written (Rom. 5).

It is no wonder, then, that Jesus looked at the crowds and *his heart was moved with pity for them*. For what is troubling them is the power of sin in their lives. And that is what troubles us as well. It is the reason Jesus came into the world – to free us from the chains of sin and death by his own death and Resurrection. It is the reason he calls us to repentance and offers us forgiveness of our sins.

It is not popular to talk about sin today. We can offer excuses, rationalize our actions and blame our circumstances. But Jesus sees it for what it is and names it for us – sin. It is sin that distorts the image of God within us, and keeps us from living as he intended. It leaves us troubled and abandoned, often without even knowing why.

Jesus could have looked at the crowd and condemned them. Instead, he was moved to pity. How humbling to know that God holds us in his heart. Let us approach the altar with that humble knowledge, and hold God in our own heart in return, repenting from sin and seeking the Good News.

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Wednesday, July 11, 2018

(Lec. 385)

1) Hosea 10:1-3, 7-8, 12

2) Matthew 10:1-7

WEDNESDAY OF  
14<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Benedict, Abbot)

Gospel related: **CCC** 543

FOCUS: Now is the time, now is the hour.

*It is time to seek the Lord*, Hosea told the Israelites.

*The kingdom of heaven is at hand*, Jesus said, sending forth his disciples to proclaim the same.

“Now is the hour for us to rise from sleep,” Saint Benedict, whose memorial we observe today, wrote in his Rule for leading a holy life (cf. Rom. 13:11).

There’s a sense of immediacy in these appeals – all delivered centuries apart. They convey a message that doesn’t change over time. It’s a message for us today.

Distracted by prosperity and superficial pleasures, the Israelites turned their backs on God. Hosea reminds them that God, and not kings, has made Israel a *luxuriant vine* with *abundant ... fruit*. So the Israelites asking for a king to provide them with a just society is fruitless. After all, *[s]ince they do not fear the LORD, what can the king do for them?* Hosea’s exhortation is a sign that God is always reaching out to those who have turned from him; he is always calling back those who have wandered or been lost.

Jesus reminds us of the same thing in today’s Gospel, as he instructs his Apostles to Go *... to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. In this passage from Matthew, the specific context is evangelizing those of the Jewish community who have not heard the Good News. But we know, from the entirety of the New Testament, that God’s plan for salvation is meant for all. We are all invited to partake in the kingdom at hand.

Now is the hour. Now is the time to become a fertile field for God’s work in us. Now is the time for *us* to go forth proclaiming *the Kingdom of heaven is at hand*.

Saint Benedict recognized *his* hour. Born into an affluent family, Benedict was raised with all the comforts and advantages wealth and social status afforded him. He abandoned these luxuries and the decadence of city life, however, and searched for a simpler way. He later developed a model of monastic life based on living in community, prayer and manual labor.

Not all of us are called to monastic life. Even so, if we want the rewards of God’s kingdom, we need to make room for them. We can’t receive what God wants to give us if our hands are full.

Time away from the distractions of everyday living helps us know God and our true selves. God’s peace, love and joy are gifts, but we prepare ourselves to receive them by loosening the soil of our hearts hardened by fear, pride, resentment or complacency.

Let’s consider what we have to let go of to make room for God’s blessings. When should we do it? The time is now.

Thursday, July 12, 2018

(Lec. 386)

1) Hosea 11:1-4, 8e-9

2) Matthew 10:7-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 543, 1509, 2121, 2122, 2443 **CSDC** 184

THURSDAY OF  
14<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *Without cost [we] have received; without cost [we] are to give.*

Many of us may remember warm summer nights, and playing outside with the joy that comes from the knowledge that there was no school to wake up for the next morning. And then we would hear our parents call us home, pretending as long as we could that we had not. Some also may remember calling our *own* children or younger family members home at the end of the day, wanting them safely with us and yet feeling like the more we called to them, the more they ran away.

Just as we likely did not recognize the concern of our parents, our children and younger family members likely did not realize we were drawing them in with *bands of love* for their own good. In today's first reading, the prophet Hosea reminds the children of Israel that the Lord called them away from the danger of worshipping idols, and called them back to his loving arms.

The love of God is infinite. The Holy One acts not only with pity but with mercy, refusing to allow the flames of his wrath to consume us in our sin. God's ultimate mercy is found in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ came to proclaim the kingdom of God is at hand. He taught his Apostles, fed them, healed them and when the time was right, he sent them to do the same. As they received the Lord's healing without cost, they were to give their own healing without cost as well.

We are not so unlike the Apostles today. We, too, are taught by Jesus through Scripture. We are fed by Jesus by partaking of his body and blood. We are healed by Jesus through prayer and sacrament. And all without cost.

So without cost, let us do the same for each other. Let us teach the power of forgiveness by ourselves forgiving. Let us feed those hungry for justice by standing with them. Let us heal the ones injured by loneliness by offering them our companionship. Let us offer to all the peace that only the Lord can give.

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Friday, July 13, 2018

(Lec. 387)

- 1) Hosea 14:2-10
- 2) Matthew 10:16-23

FRIDAY OF  
14<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Henry)

Gospel related: **CCC** 161, 728, 764, 1821

FOCUS: God is with us, always.

Today's Gospel at first sounds like a commission no one would want! Jesus is frank with his disciples, telling them that they will face persecution because of their mission. He warns them that they will be *like sheep in the midst of wolves*; and that they need to be *shrewd as serpents and simple as doves*. Stark imagery to be sure, indicating that they will be vulnerable to attack and persecution, but also that they need to use their heads and look for ways to avoid a fight, finding what common ground they can.

Jesus does not just caution them, however, he also encourages them. He tells them not to worry about what they will say to those who persecute them. They can trust that God will be with them, putting the right words in their mouths. Their reward for enduring these trials and being faithful to the Gospel message is the redemption that Christ has brought to the world. In this light, the commission to go forth and evangelize becomes one they embrace rather than fear.

The warnings and encouragement are the same for us, as is the promise of a reward for our endurance. Hosea tells us that those who rely on the Lord shall blossom and prosper. *Straight are the paths of the Lord, in them the just walk, but sinners stumble in them*. Those who are wise will know this – and they will share it. Others will hear it, and if they are wise they will embrace it.

Persecution comes in many forms: from systematic oppression of Christianity in some parts of the world – which most of us will never see firsthand – to individual slights we experience from our culture or even our family and friends. Our defense in the face of it comes only in one “form,” however, and that is in the Truth that comes from our Triune God: God is with us, always. *In him we live and move and have our being* (cf., Acts 17:28), and through him we have eternal life.

So as we approach the Eucharist, let us not worry about those who may be against us, but give thanks for the One who is always for us. And let us pray, as the psalmist does, for a clean heart and a steadfast spirit, that we may know the joy of our salvation.



Saturday, July 14, 2018

(Lec. 388)

1) Isaiah 6:1-8

2) Matthew 10:24-33

SATURDAY OF

14<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

USA: Saint Kateri Tekakwitha,

Virgin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 14, 305, 363, 765, 1034, 1816, 2145

FOCUS: Courageously profess our faith in Christ.

As Christians, we find our identity in imitating Christ. This is evident in how we express our love for God and fellow human beings, as well as our willingness to defend our faith regardless of how the consequences will affect our lives.

In our first reading, we find a man willing to profess his faith in God and his promises – more than six hundred years before that promise is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. After the seraphim purifies Isaiah, he accepts the Lord's mission to warn Israel to repent, and he prophesies the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah's entire life was uprooted and changed, and tradition holds that he was martyred.

Today, we celebrate another brave Christian – Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, the first Native American saint. Kateri was born in New York in 1656 to a Mohawk father and a Christian Algonquin mother. Despite facing persecution and being ostracized from her tribe, she was baptized. She later took refuge in a Jesuit mission village near Montreal, which allowed her to remain faithful to her love for Jesus, prayer and daily Mass. She died at the age of twenty-four.

The lives of such courageous men and women inspire us to stand firm when our beliefs are challenged. They also reveal how our Lord calls on the most unlikely of people – people like us – despite circumstances and sinfulness. We may not feel qualified, but we can count on the Lord to satisfy our spiritual needs so we may accept his mission.

Jesus tells us in today's Gospel, *It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher*. We are to proclaim the same Good News that Jesus did, and not allow fear to keep us from that mission. *[D]o not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul*, Jesus says. God is always watchful, always caring for us, and when we acknowledge Jesus as Lord, humans may fail us but God never will.

It is doubtful any of us will face a martyr's death. But it is likely we will be confronted with harsh words, and even actions, of those who disagree with our faith – maybe even from people we love.

In a few moments we will stand and profess our faith in Christ. May the graces we receive in this Mass allow us to stand anywhere and do the same. And in the midst of it, let us pray for the strength to heed Jesus' command to *not be afraid*.

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## SUNDAY, JULY 15, 2018

(Lec. 104)

- 1) Amos 7:12-15
- 2) Ephesians 1:3-14 or 1:3-10
- 3) Mark 6:7-13

Gospel related: **CCC** 765, 1506, 1511, 1673

## FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

**FOCUS:** God has chosen us to be his disciples, and now sends us out to bring his love and mercy to the world.

Who remembers being out at recess during school, and picking teams? It could be scary, thinking about how that would turn out. Would we be picked? Would someone choose us? Were we good enough? Many of us may approach our faith and relationship with Jesus this way, asking whether or not God will choose us, whether or not we're good enough. The good news for each of us today is that God *has already chosen* us, and sends us out on a mission that we can accomplish through his grace, power and authority.

First, we are not alone. Looking around us today, there are people here who are our brothers and sisters in Christ – we are not alone in this mission! Jesus sent his disciples out two by two, and we, too, are encouraged to find others who can walk with us as we strive to follow Jesus.

Second, it's not all up to us. Jesus didn't send the disciples out saying, "Do your best!" Jesus sent them out and gave them authority. As we strive to act as disciples of Jesus and to carry out the mission which he has entrusted to us, we must recognize that he's not standing at a distance watching us, grading us or critiquing us. Jesus is here in the midst of our struggles giving us strength – in the midst of our victories rejoicing with us. He does not ask us to go out with only our natural abilities, but gives us his strength, power, authority and grace. All that is necessary is for us to receive it.

Finally, Jesus will continue to choose us and work through us, even if we fail over and over again. There is a striking aspect in this Gospel passage. The Scripture simply says, *The Twelve drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.* This means that Judas, who eventually betrayed Jesus, would have been included in that number. Judas – through the power and authority of Jesus – healed the sick, preached repentance and drove out demons.

In our lives, there will be times when we choose against Jesus, when we betray him, when we deny him – but Jesus never gives up on us. In those moments, we are called to repentance, and then to begin to walk with Jesus again. If Judas was able to do such mighty works before his eventual turning away from God, what might Jesus do in and through us if we allow him to?

As we continue on with this week, we might take some time to reflect on this Gospel passage, not as something that happened millennia ago, but as an encounter with Jesus today. And as we encounter Jesus in Word and sacrament, let us allow him to transform us, and to reveal how he is choosing us and sending us out. Who is it he wants to give us as a partner in this mission? And how is he calling us to repent of the failures of our past and to persevere in following after him despite our weaknesses?

Monday, July 16, 2018

(Lec. 389)

1) Isaiah 1:10-17

2) Matthew 10:34–11:1

MONDAY OF

15<sup>th</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel;

Saturday in honor of

BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 858, 1506, 2232 **CSDC** 193

FOCUS: Listen with our hearts to what God has to say to us.

In our busy world, it is not always easy to squeeze out time to listen to our interior voices and feelings. We have obligations and responsibilities, and we should certainly not neglect our health, our relationships and the needs of others. Yet we also need to find a way to integrate listening into all our activities throughout the day. Why? We listen so that we can hear. We hear so we will know what others are saying, especially when the other is God.

Our ancestors in faith also struggled to listen: to each other, to the prophets and to God. The prophet Isaiah lays it out for them in our first reading: *Hear the word . . . Listen to the instruction of our God.* What they had grown to understand as God's will was really their own interpretation of what God wanted. They offered their sacrifices, what they believed pleased God: burnt rams, fatlings, blood, lambs and goats. Yet they didn't think God would notice their neglect of orphans, widows and other evils which they obscured in the smoke of their burnt offerings.

Isaiah gave them a wakeup call. God wanted none of this. God wanted them to turn away from doing evil and to *[m]ake justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow.* This is the kind of sacrifice that pleases God.

Jesus gave his Apostles a kind of wake-up call, too, before sending them out to begin their mission. In today's Gospel passage, Jesus tells them that his message will cause division within families, friends and communities – not because Jesus himself is divisive, rather because the Word of God will upend the status quo. *[W]hoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me,* Jesus says. God's Word spoken through Jesus and his disciples will call people to turn from their human ways and embrace the challenge of losing one's life for the sake of finding it in Christ.

It is the same for us today. As hearers of this Word, we must consider what we desire, or think we desire, and compare that to what we hear God telling us in Scripture and through his Church. Are we truly listening to God's call to *make justice [our] aim* for the wronged, the orphan and the widow? Do we listen with not just our ears, but our hearts and minds, so we may hear what God asks of us?

Let us pray, now, for the grace to be true disciples of Christ: listening for, hearing and acting upon his Word.

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Tuesday, July 17, 2018

(Lec. 390)

1) Isaiah 7:1-9

2) Matthew 11:20-24

Gospel related: **CCC** 678

TUESDAY OF  
15<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God is always present – in our times of challenges and in our daily lives.

Today's readings are a reminder of God's constant presence with us, and our call to develop and hold fast to a firm faith in his divine providence.

In the first reading, we hear a call to radical trust as Isaiah coaches Ahaz to face his enemies with tranquility, and to keep his faith in God firm. Our enemies and dangers are not the same that Ahaz faced, but they can be just as threatening to our well-being and flourishing; they can challenge us in our relationship with God in much the same way. Whatever we think is lined up against us – from natural disasters to physical, spiritual or emotional struggles – we, like Ahaz, are called to face these trials with realistic, common-sense actions but also with trust in God's presence among us.

Maybe the bigger peril to us, however, is in our daily lives, when we fail to recognize God's presence and actions when things are going perfectly well. In the Gospel, Jesus took the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum to task for not recognizing the wonders that he had performed in their midst – the signs of God's presence, love and action.

Perhaps we, too, miss the signs – the smaller, more common, everyday ways that God acts in our lives. The gift of sight, and of a doctor who can improve it with glasses. The helpfulness of strangers as we make our way to a destination. The smile of a friend or the generous action of a family member or co-worker who brightens our day. In all of these little but profound ways, God is active in our lives, helping to get us through our day.

God's message in all of this is simple: trust in him, and be firm of faith. Recognize the many gifts that have been given to us each day through the actions or words of others. By the same token, God might well be asking us to be alert to the ways that we can be of help to others around us – to show them the miracle of God's presence and love. Whatever our profession or calling in life, we have the opportunity to help others to be aware of God's presence in their lives, often by simple acts of kindness and service.

So today, as we partake of this most perfect sacrament of God's presence among us, let us allow it to transform us and keep us alert for God's actions, and to embrace the ways we can transform, for good, the lives of others.

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Wednesday, July 18, 2018

(Lec. 391)

1) Isaiah 10:5-7, 13b-16

2) Matthew 11:25-27

WEDNESDAY OF

15<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

USA: Saint Camillus de Lellis, Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 153, 240, 443, 473, 544, 2603, 2701, 2779, 2785

FOCUS: God's Word is trustworthy and has been revealed by Jesus.

Sometimes, it is hard to know whether we can trust what we hear, from leaders, advice-givers or others. Have we been told all we need to know, in a given situation? Is what we have been told good for us?

We learn in today's Gospel that through his intimate union with the Father, Jesus will reveal what is necessary to those who follow him. He has been given everything by the Father, and to those who believe with childlike trust, things will not be hidden. This speaks to us of how we come to know the Father – through the Son – and of our need to turn to Jesus when we are in need. For it is God alone who directs our path toward goodness, and without him we can do nothing.

This is the prophet Isaiah's message today, where we hear of the Lord's anger and wrath at the King of Assyria taking credit for all of his efforts, success and possessions – and for doing things his way rather than God's. Only God can lead us to perfect goodness and happiness, and only through Jesus can we experience this and come to know the Father.

Jesus, in communication with the Father in this passage from Matthew, says that it has been God's will that nothing will be hidden from those who trust with a childlike manner. That does not mean someone who is helpless or naïve, but one who knows where to turn for whatever he or she needs, trusting that the prayer will be heard. Jesus praises the Father for this.

For all of our boasting and sinfulness, Jesus Christ has paid the price with his life. Now it is up to us to open our hands and hearts as an eager child awaiting a promised gift, and willingly accept all that Jesus gives us, which has been given to him by the Father.

Knowing this gives us great confidence and trust that the wisdom we need for any given situation will be made available whenever we call on God. We will not be led astray or find ourselves in danger of following false leaders if the One we follow is Christ, for he does not deceive.

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Thursday, July 19, 2018

(Lec. 392)

1) Isaiah 26:7-9,  
12, 16-19

2) Matthew 11:28-30

Gospel related: CCC 459, 1615, 1658

THURSDAY OF  
15<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The yoke of Christ eases our burdens.

Today's readings give great encouragement and hope for those who are on the path of Christ. So often, day-to-day life can be full of obstacles, great and small. We have responsibilities to ourselves, to our families and to our work. It may seem that adding "doing the work of Christ" on top of already-lengthy to-do lists would simply be the straw that broke the camel's back. "How, Lord," we might say, "can I possibly do more, when I can hardly make it through as it is?"

And yet, today we hear that Christ is calling us, who are weary and heavily burdened, to attach ourselves to his yoke and find rest! By attaching ourselves to Christ, we find that our litany of to-do lists aligns with the mission of Christ and flows from our baptismal responsibilities. For example, it is easy to see how caring for our own bodies, nurturing good health of mind and body, will enable us to more readily do the work of Christ. By extension, caring for our families and communities nurtures the "home base" that can give support to each individual's vocation and mission.

Perhaps taking on the yoke of Christ can be likened to parenthood, in one particular way. When parents give birth to a child and love that child with all their hearts, they may not be able to fathom how they could possibly love their child more, or even another child as much. That is, until they give birth to another child and suddenly their hearts swell all the larger, filling them with that unimaginable love they then pour out on both of their children.

Similarly, when we put on the yoke of Christ, it is not that all of our responsibilities disappear, but rather, God gives us what we need to fulfill all of those "to-do" lists, and to do them with gentle and humble hearts. All the while, we may find that God has added an array of ways we can feed the hungry, clothe and give shelter, tend to the sick and minister to those in most need. Christ promises that as long as we are tethered to him, we will not grow weary, but instead find relief and peace.

May we be renewed in our calling to learn from Christ through his gentle and humble ways, as found in his Word and in his Church. May we be empowered to take his yoke upon our shoulders, not only within our familiar circles of family and friends, but also with those in the margins, the people who are often overlooked or forgotten. With Christ, "to do" becomes "to love," and with love, we are never heavily burdened.

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Friday, July 20, 2018

(Lec. 393)

1) Isaiah 38:1-6, 21-22, 7-8

2) Matthew 12:1-8

FRIDAY OF

15<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Apollinaris, Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 581, 582, 586, 590, 2100, 2173

FOCUS: Prayer is opening our hearts to God and accepting in faith the challenges and joys of this life.

In the Roman Missal we read the words, “For, although you have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift, since our praises add nothing to your greatness but profit us for salvation” (Common Preface IV). These words address the reality and sometimes the challenge in building a life of prayer. Every believer knows how important prayer is, but many struggle with the challenge and often give up believing it is impossible or beyond their capabilities.

Today’s readings address this challenge and encourage us to persevere in the task. To begin to build a life of prayer, one needs to appreciate that the desire and the effort is itself a gift from God. We need to understand that we are already in relationship with God and that, like the loving parent, he only wants the best for us. Hezekiah’s prayer in the first reading reflects this appreciation and relationship, as he responds to Isaiah’s exhortation to prayers, and reminds the Lord of their history together.

In the Gospel, Jesus reminds us that even the command to keep holy the Sabbath was God’s gift to humanity – a time for family, prayer, renewal and, of course, sharing with others. It was never meant to be a burden or a moment of divine indictment.

So in a real way, our attempts at prayer should not be so much about changing God’s mind on a particular issue but instead opening our hearts to accepting what he wishes to bestow upon us.

As the preface points out, God is not in need of our prayers, whether it be thanksgiving, repentance, adoration or supplication. He is already on our side and has our best interests at heart. God acts in a way to meet the deepest needs of the human heart. It may not always be clear to us why God answers certain prayers in the way he does, but we can always be sure that he does so out of abundant goodness and greatness.

Hezekiah prayed to avoid death. Although noted for his deep faith and spiritual zeal, he had fallen out with the prophet and become seriously ill. Told that death was imminent, he wept and prayed, asking for time and reminding the Lord of his life’s work. His prayer is answered through God giving him time to continue his reign and work.

Not all of our prayers will be answered exactly as Hezekiah’s was. Our earthly life is a mixture of good and bad, celebration and trial, joy and pain. In the midst of all this, our eyes and hopes are fixed on the promise of eternal life in Christ. It is less important what God’s answer is, than that we pray to him for assistance. So we persevere – opening our hearts to the Lord, accepting life in all its experiences, knowing that God is on our side.

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Saturday, July 21, 2018

(Lec. 394)

1) Micah 2:1-5

2) Matthew 12:14-21

SATURDAY OF

15<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Lawrence of Brindisi, Priest and Doctor of the Church;

Saturday in honor of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC 713 CSDC 261**

FOCUS: We are invited to measure our success by the way we imitate Jesus rather than the ways of the world.

Today's readings present us with a stark contrast between our human ways and God's ways. The prophet Micah has harsh, critical words for the wealthy landowners of his day: he calls them out for plotting evil and illegal ways to take the houses and fields that legally belong to others. This is not just a violation of the Decalogue – coveting that which belongs to our neighbor – but an offense against divine order. God had bequeathed each parcel of land according to the tribes and families of Israel, and so they should remain as such.

Maybe we would be happy to stand next to Micah and speak our minds, as he did, against such blatant abuse of wealth and power. On the one hand, these landowners represent much of what is touted as successful today. They have determination, they know what they want and go after it, and they don't let anything stand in their way. Isn't that a good way to be? It certainly can be. But the cheating and the illegal tactics are what rile Micah.

Contrast this approach to Jesus' way of going about fulfilling his mission. Jesus realizes that the Pharisees are plotting against him. Instead of being aggressive and ruthless in return, Jesus takes his determination in another direction, and withdraws. He keeps his eyes on God and on his purpose – healing and ministering to those in need – rather than getting caught up in the agenda of the Pharisees. His motivation is for God's glory, not personal gain.

Drawing from Isaiah's description of the Lord's Servant, Matthew reminds us that the Messiah is not here to forcefully impose his will upon anyone, nor bulldoze over those who stand in his way. Rather, his way is to proclaim the kingdom of God, and invite all of us to it. God has bequeathed this kingdom to us all, so there is no need to "cheat and use illegal tactics" to have ownership.

Instead, with a determination rooted in love and guided by God's ways, we can follow in his footsteps. As we prepare to come to the Table, let us pray for the grace to be imitators of whom we receive, measuring our success by the gentleness of our conduct and the justice of our actions.

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**SUNDAY, JULY 22, 2018**

(Lec. 107)

- 1) Jeremiah 23:1-6
- 2) Ephesians 2:13-18
- 3) Mark 6:30-34

**SIXTEENTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Jesus is the Good Shepherd who reconciles all to the Father.

The context of today's first reading is interesting. Jeremiah preached in Israel before the Babylonian Exile, preaching under five different kings, each more sinful than his predecessor. God gave Jeremiah a message that forecast famine, war, exile and death as punishment for these kings who were leading the people astray. Israel's kings were chosen by God to shepherd the flock, but instead, they [*misled*] and scatter[ed] the flock, driving the sheep away.

After all the bad news Jeremiah foretold, in today's reading, he is given a prophecy about what will occur when the exile comes to an end, as God decided to take matters into his own hands: *I myself will gather the remnant of my flock*, God says. He promises to raise up a shoot from David's line, referring to the birth of Christ – a promise that would not see its fulfillment for nearly six centuries. In the wake of such bad shepherds who scattered the flock, the Lord God planned to send his only Son as the Good Shepherd to gather all the lost sheep together.

Paul alludes to this in his letter to the Ephesians. While not explicitly referencing Jeremiah, whose words he would have known well, Paul emphasizes that Jesus came to make peace: between God and human beings, and among people. Through the blood of Christ we are reconciled with God. Those who were far off – such as sheep that have been misled and scattered – are now brought back to the Father.

In the Gospel, we see the prophecy from Jeremiah fulfilled; and we encounter the Jesus of whom Paul spoke. Jesus, who wanted to get away and rest for a while, but who sees the vast crowd of people in need and begins teaching them. *For his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd.*

This is a lot of history, and it is a lot of material to take in within a short time frame. But the essence is this: From the beginning, God prepared for our reconciliation and salvation in the person of his Son. We may have been, and continue to be at times, scattered and misled, but now we have the Good Shepherd who seeks us out, calls our name and carries us home.

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Monday, July 23, 2018

(Lec. 395)

- 1) Micah 6:1-4, 6-8
- 2) Matthew 12:38-42

MONDAY OF  
16<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Bridget, Religious)

Gospel related: **CCC** 590, 627, 635, 678, 994

FOCUS: *To the upright I will show the saving power of God.*

Jesus' mission was to save us from our sins, and in doing so he revealed the infinite love of the Father. He did it with signs and wonders; he did it with cures and miracles; and he did it most of all by his death and resurrection. He did it without televisions, newspapers, social media or the internet. He walked from town to town, dined with sinners, preached to crowds and got into boats with fishermen. He had quiet conversations which transformed lives. He spoke in simple, but powerful parables. Even in death, the Author of Life descended into the depths so that the dead could hear the voice of God (CCC 635).

Jesus continues to speak to us, in Word and sacrament. Do we hear him? Or do we need to slow down a bit? In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the scribes and Pharisees that they are missing the point of it all. They look for signs and wonders, when something greater than Solomon or Jonah is there, among them. And here, today, right here – shortly on this altar, and within each one of us – that “something greater,” Jesus, is still fully present among us.

The psalmist says, *To the upright I will show the saving power of God.* In the person of Jesus Christ and in his death and resurrection, we have indeed seen God's saving power. It is our mission, now, to help others see – as best we can – that power, that infinite love of God.

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Tuesday, July 24, 2018

(Lec. 396)

1) Micah 7:14-15, 18-20

2) Matthew 12:46-50

TUESDAY OF

16<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Sharbel Makhluḥ,

Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 764, 2233

FOCUS: Following Jesus and doing as he commands makes us children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ.

The Gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogy crafted to honor the Christ. Right from the beginning of the Gospel we learn how important Jesus is. Jesus is both *the son of David* and *the son of Abraham*. Jesus is the descendant of two of Israel's greatest patriarchs. This is no small claim. Jesus is uniquely blessed.

Jesus' genealogy brings him great honor because of his link with the patriarchs, even as the fulfillment of the great promise of "son" to them; it authenticates his role and status as King and Christ. Both ancestral patriarchs were men of "faith," and Jesus inherits their virtue. The very first things we learn about Jesus come from this genealogy and his family connections. Family connections matter.

In today's passage from Matthew, we hear of an event from Jesus' life that bears out this point. Jesus is out, among the people, healing and teaching about the kingdom of God. As he travels, many have come to follow and learn from him. His mother and brothers, that is, male kinsmen such as cousins, are traveling with him and learning along with the disciples. His mother and brothers wish to speak with Jesus. When his attention is drawn to the fact they are waiting, Jesus' words in response offer a glimpse into how Jesus understands family connections.

What it is that makes one family of Jesus? Is a descendant blessed by his or her connection to Jesus? The same way Jesus is linked to Abraham and David? No. Jesus tells us plainly: *For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother*. Those with whom Jesus has a connection are the ones who do the work, who continue his mission. This is what makes one a part of Jesus' family.

If Jesus is granted status because of his family connections, we are granted even greater importance if we choose to follow Jesus and do as he commands. Following Jesus and doing as he commands makes us children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ.

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Wednesday, July 25, 2018

(Lec. 605)

1) 2 Corinthians 4:7-15

2) Matthew 20:20-28

Gospel related: **CCC** 440, 601, 605, 622, 786, 2235 **CSDC** 193, 379

**SAINT JAMES,  
APOSTLE  
– FEAST**

FOCUS: The cup of suffering comes before the rewards.

Today the Church celebrates the feast of Saint James, the Apostle. James and his brother, John, were the sons of Zebedee and Salome from Bethsaida in Galilee. They were with their father when the Lord came by and called them to follow him. They became such dedicated and zealous followers that Jesus named them *Boanerges* – sons of thunder. They were with the Lord at the significant events such as the Transfiguration, and the cure of Peter's mother-in-law. Saint James was beheaded by King Herod Agrippa in Jerusalem in year 44.

In today's Gospel, James' mother asked Jesus to have her two sons sit at a place of honor in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus called on them to take the cup of suffering with him first before expecting any reward. He also asks *us* to be humble and faithful with him and leave the rewarding part to God the Father. Meanwhile, in the first reading, Paul reminds us that we have already been rewarded for carrying within ourselves Jesus Christ, who gives us the power to overcome all the suffering and difficulties of this life.

My brothers and sisters, our earthly life has pain, suffering and challenges. But like Saint James, we rely on the Lord to give us strength and courage to carry our daily crosses faithfully, and come to receive the rewards promised to God's faithful in his kingdom someday.

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Thursday, July 26, 2018

(Lec. 398)

- 1) Jeremiah 2:1-3, 7-8,  
12-13
- 2) Matthew 13:10-17

THURSDAY OF  
16<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM

Saints Joachim and Anne,  
Parents of the Blessed  
Virgin Mary)

Gospel related: **CCC** 546, 787, 1724

FOCUS: Christ wants to reach all hearts and empower us in God's way of righteousness.

In today's Gospel, the disciples ask Jesus why he speaks to the crowds in parables. Jesus makes a distinction between his disciples, who have readily received his message, and others who just don't seem to be able to catch on. And so today, we might ponder which group we are in: are we already disciples, to whom much has been given and from whom much is expected? Or, do we have hearts that are, as Isaiah says, "gross," and incapable of taking in Jesus' Good News?

Disciples welcome Jesus and his mission as they would welcome a delicious meal after fasting. Disciples not only desire the love of the Lord, they also dish out God's love to share their delight with all whom they encounter. If we are *gross* in heart, however, we might greet Jesus and his message as we would a door-to-door salesman: guarded, and worried that we might be swindled out of our hard-earned treasure. Disciples, on the other hand, know that their treasure is with the Lord, and losing one's life for his sake will paradoxically lead to more life.

We know where we might put ourselves, but can we be certain where Jesus would place us? As disciples, we are called to faithful acts of justice and mercy. We are called to make room for encountering Christ, especially in those less fortunate or in that person in our lives who might need our help. We may find that our choices for Christ are at times inconvenient, and maybe even alienate some friends and family. We will be called to sacrifices great and small. Ultimately, our choice for Christ will lead to heavenly abundance.

Let's pray today that this may be our choice – to keep our hearts open to the challenging words of Christ – that we may be called his true disciples.

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Friday, July 27, 2018

(Lec. 399)

1) Jeremiah 3:14-17

2) Matthew 13:18-23

Gospel related: CCC 29; CSDC 325

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

**FOCUS:** We have joined Jesus as sowers of seed, helping people become part of God's kingdom.

When Jesus shares the parable of the sower in today's Gospel, he is telling his disciples something about God's kingdom. What they may not understand immediately is that his coming has marked a change in how the kingdom of God is manifested on earth.

Jesus has brought a new dimension to the kingdom, one that not only requires worship and obedience, but also participation in a relationship – a relationship that inspires and entices others to know, love and serve God. This is not a passive religion, where God acts and humans react. In Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, God is empowering us to sow the seeds of belief and faithfulness to everyone we encounter.

In the first reading we hear, *Return, rebellious children, says the Lord*. God is always calling his people to reconcile with him, and he offers his very Son as the way and means for this to happen. As believers, we are already participants and co-workers in the field; we have joined Jesus as seed sowers. The seed is perfect and needs no improvement. Our job as laborers is simply to prepare the soil of our hearts, and at times that of others, so the seed of the Good News may grow and prosper.

So let us prepare to join ourselves, in the Eucharist, with the One who first sowed the seed of love within us, that we might go forth and help it bear fruit that *yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold*.

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Saturday, July 28, 2018

(Lec. 400)

1) Jeremiah 7:1-11

2) Matthew 13:24-30

Gospel related: CCC 827

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

FOCUS: Our God is a God of redemption.

In the movie *Edison, the Man*, Thomas Edison, played by Spencer Tracy, handed a light bulb filament to an office boy to deliver for testing. This filament was the result of countless experiments and tremendous time and effort. The boy held in his hands the probable key to developing the first light bulb. Rushing upstairs, the boy dropped the filament and broke it.

After Edison painstakingly reconstructed the filament, he made a point of handing it to that same office boy to carry upstairs. With head held high, the boy carefully completed his task successfully, and the first light bulb was invented. Whether or not that actually happened in real life, it's an inspiring example of the power of second chances, and redemption.

We see this power in our Scriptures today. The Lord gives Jeremiah a lengthy message to proclaim to the people of Judah and of Israel. God sees what the people have been doing: relying on superficial worship; stealing and committing murder, adultery and perjury; and taking advantage of the most vulnerable members of their society. Yet God says he will bless them if they're willing to change.

In today's Gospel, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a man who sowed good seed in his field. An enemy planted weeds among the wheat, and when the field owner realizes this, he ensures that his servants do not pull them up. The weeds are tares, a specific weed that resembles wheat when young, and whose difference from the wheat becomes apparent only when the plants are fully developed. Waiting until harvest time ensures that only weeds are destroyed, and the wheat safely gathered.

In both of these stories, we see deception. We also see the possibility of redemption. For Judah and Israel, God simply tells them (again! if we recognize the Old Testament pattern) to reform their ways and he will remain with them as their God. For us, we are reminded that we are the seed sown in the field of the kingdom. We may be surrounded by weeds, and at times, as with early wheat, be indistinguishable from them. But in the end, if we have borne out the fruit of our discipleship, we will be part of God's harvest.

Our God is a God of redemption. His greatest gift to us, after we had metaphorically dropped and broken the filament of his light thousands upon thousands of times, is his Son. His Son, whose light cannot be broken, who redeemed us and whose presence in Word and sacrament enables us to carry that light to the world. Let us give thanks for all of that.

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**SUNDAY, JULY 29, 2018**

(Lec. 110)

1) 2 Kings 4:42-44

2) Ephesians 4:1-6

3) John 6:1-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 439, 549, 1338

**SEVENTEENTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: We are called to share our blessings with a world in need of healing and hope.

Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts were centuries away from becoming a reality, yet the young boy in today's Gospel was already living up to the Scout Motto: "Be Prepared." It appears thousands of adults followed after Jesus with no thought of what to do if it was time for dinner!

No fast food outlets nearby; too far to make it home in time. Andrew locates the boy who came prepared with bread and fish for a few, but not for the many. Jesus takes the little and feeds the many. Now, we don't know if anyone else prepared ahead like this young boy. It is possible. It is possible the few who did began to feed the many who did not. If so, that would have been quite a miracle too.

Notice the skepticism of the Apostles. Whenever we witness this skepticism, we tend to be harsh with them. Didn't they know any better? Didn't they understand with whom they were dealing? In reality, they didn't know any better because they still didn't fully understand who Jesus was or what he was going to do for them – namely, offer them salvation. By breaking the bonds of death by his death, and thus reuniting them to the Father, Jesus would do something far greater, even, than feed five thousand with two fish and five loaves.

Are we not skeptical at times, too? Doubting that Christ can truly take care of us and our needs? Where does that come from, since we know who Jesus is? It comes partly from our human nature, and partly from the reality that we, too, are coming to terms each day with who Jesus is – growing in our faith and increasing our trust in him.

The truth is Jesus is able to take what we have been blessed with and do great things only if we are willing to share, and not hoard, our blessings. It is our choice, our free will, whether or not to share what we have for the good of all.

The parallel of this to the Eucharist jumps off the pages of today's Gospel. Taking the bread, blessing and sharing it along with the chalice of salvation is at the heart of the liturgy we gather to celebrate. It is here we do what Jesus did, and the miracle of his saving presence takes place in this time and place before our very eyes.

There is no room for skeptic hearts here. There is too much to be done. We may be the few, but with the blessing of Jesus, we have the grace and grit to tend to the many. Bread taken, blessed and shared – that is what we are called to do with our blessings. In so doing, we state emphatically we understand the Eucharist we gather here to celebrate this day.

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Monday, July 30, 2018

(Lec. 401)

- 1) Jeremiah 13:1-11
- 2) Matthew 13:31-35

MONDAY OF

17<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Peter Chrysologus,  
Bishop and Doctor  
of the Church)

FOCUS: We are builders of God's heavenly kingdom.

The parables Jesus tells in today's Gospel are probably quite familiar to everyone here. And aren't they beautiful ways of talking about the kingdom of heaven, which he has begun to build! Jesus plants the seeds of the kingdom in us, through his Word, and we each grow. Encoded in the Word is everything we need to thrive – much as a tiny mustard seed becomes a large bush. Some will perceive this bush, that is, the kingdom, as a weed that must be uprooted, while others will flock to live in its branches.

One way to think about it is this: We receive the seeds of the kingdom when we are baptized. Then, at confirmation, we are blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit so we will have all the tools we need to help build the kingdom. The yeast Christ refers to is added to our substance, so that we may increase and help others to be fed in the kingdom. As we share our faith with others, the kingdom gets even larger. This happens through evangelization and expressions of love – as our Lord commands.

These parables challenge us to contemplate the kingdom of heaven on a deeper level, and to see our part in God's plan of salvation – a plan that was evident in Old Testament prophecies: *I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world.*

Everything Christ did contributes to the coming of the fullness of God's heavenly kingdom. He prepared the disciples to continue his mission proclaiming the kingdom – a mission he now entrusts to us. Let us go forth, large in faith and leavened with a promise of hope to share.

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Tuesday, July 31, 2018

(Lec. 402)

1) Jeremiah 14:17-22

2) Matthew 13:36-43

TUESDAY OF  
17<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 333, 1034

FOCUS: Christ ushered in the kingdom of heaven on earth.

*We wait for peace, to no avail; for a time of healing, but terror comes instead.* Jeremiah says these words in today's first reading, a lament to the impending fall of the land of the Israelites to their Babylonian and Egyptian enemies. It also connects to today's Gospel passage of the sower, the seed and the kingdom of God.

Jeremiah's prophecies to this nation in crisis have a familiar ring to them. Our own global culture is filled with examples of individuals, even nations, that have turned their backs on God in favor of the material world. In his time, Jeremiah was also ignored, and he was arrested, imprisoned and publicly disgraced. It was only after the Babylonian exile when the Israelites were forced out of Jerusalem, and the death of Jeremiah, that his words were studied as a way to discover how to get back on the path to the Promised Land.

Today's Gospel from Matthew follows a similar arc. Jesus explains to his disciples the meaning of the parable of the sower. He tells them the sower is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children of the kingdom, the weeds, Satan, and so on. Jesus is clear in his description of how good and evil will be separated at the end of time: evil ultimately will perish.

This is the Gospel's positive and saving message, and one we all ought to hear: our wait for the peace of which Jeremiah spoke is over because Christ ushered in the kingdom of heaven on earth. In time we shall experience its fulfillment, and *shine like the sun* if we have been righteous and faithful. So let us pray for the grace to be good seeds for the world, that the harvest may be plenty.

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