

JUNE

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YEAR B WEEKDAYS II

Friday, June 1, 2018
(Lec. 351)

- 1) 1 Peter 4:7-13
- 2) Mark 11:11-26

Gospel related: CCC 2610, 2841

EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Justin,
Martyr)

FOCUS: Stay focused and hope-filled in living out our Christian lives.

One of the chief characteristics of the early Church was it lived with a strong belief in the imminent return of Christ in glory. This belief was reflected in her sense of urgency to preach and share the Gospel with as many people as possible, and in the writings of the Apostles and early fathers. Any moment now, in the blink of an eye, at the hour known only to God alone, they believed Christ would return in glory to judge the world and to take with him his faithful people into new life.

This sense of urgency is evident today in the first reading from Saint Peter. Writing to the Christian community in Asia Minor at a time of great persecution, the Apostle seeks to encourage and console them in their moment of challenge, and to remind them to stay focused and hope-filled by living out their Christian lives until that great and glorious day. They are to see this time of persecution not simply as a trial, but as a sharing in the sufferings of Christ that will ultimately lead them to a share in his glorious resurrection.

As modern Christians, we can sometimes be guilty of believing that the return of Christ, which is part of our Sunday creed, is so far off that we need not worry about it for now. But just as the early Church was wrong in its conclusions, so might we be. As believers, we need to be prepared, for as Jesus tells us we do not know the hour or the day. So how do we prepare? We begin with a life of prayer and by being part of a community of faith. But it is not enough just to turn up on a weekly basis. No, we are called to bear fruit – to live the Gospel message in all areas of our lives even when it is most difficult and challenging.

Jesus cursed the fig tree because it failed to do the one thing that is required of all fig trees, which is to produce figs – in other words, to bear fruit! He drove out the money changers because they were seeking to gain from the Temple – turning God's house into a den of thieves.

Jesus challenges all believers to have a true faith in God, one that is persevering, even defiant, when all seems most hopeless and futile. He challenges us to be hope-filled, and to bear good fruit in the world.

As we heard in the first reading: *As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.*

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Saturday, June 2, 2018
(Lec. 352)

- 1) Jude 17, 20b-25
- 2) Mark 11:27-33

SATURDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.)

Saints Marcellinus and Peter,
Martyrs;
Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: The materialism or “false prophet” of the world today distracts us and undermines our faith.

The word “prophet” is defined as “a person regarded as an inspired teacher or proclaimer of the will of God.” Prophets figure prominently in the Bible; major figures such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Amos and Jonah have their own biblical books, while minor prophets such as Nathan, the court prophet of King David, had other important roles in the history of the Jewish people.

Human history is filled with almost as many false prophets as true ones. In religious terms, false prophets are those who claim they are acting on divine inspiration or who spout prophecies that are untrue, leading people away from God.

False prophets are referenced in today’s readings. First, the Letter of Jude reminds its audience to *remember the words spoken beforehand by the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ*, the implied message being, don’t get drawn in by those who reject Christ. Not much is known about Jude, but he is concerned the message of Christ is being compromised by those who scoff at him. Jude exhorts us to strengthen our faith through prayer, to expect God’s mercy and to help others avoid sinful lives.

The concept of “false prophets” also materializes in Mark’s Gospel, where the Pharisees are questioning the authority of Jesus, attempting to demonstrate the falsity of his teaching. They fear Jesus and the crowds that follow him, because he is flying in the face of the status quo and preaching against the centuries-old traditions and practices of the Jews. For the Pharisees, Jesus is a false prophet, a force they cannot control.

Even today, our secular society is filled with false prophets. We could all list some of these “false prophets,” but regardless of what they are, they involve putting ourselves ahead of God and his plan for us. The many ways in which we can be swayed by the false prophets of our times should remind us that we must guard against the things of this world that can separate us from God.

So let us pray for the grace to recognize when we are being led by false prophets, and to *remember the words spoken ... by the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

SUNDAY, JUNE 3, 2018

(Lec. 168)

1) Exodus 24:3-18

2) Hebrews 9:11-15

3) Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

Gospel related: CCC 1328, 1335, 1339, 1403

**THE MOST HOLY
BODY AND BLOOD
OF CHRIST
(Corpus Christi)
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: Christ is wholly present in the Eucharist.

All three readings today speak of covenant: first, the covenant God made with the people of Israel, and second, the new covenant extended to all through the mediation of Christ and God's promise of eternal salvation. They are beautiful Scriptures in and of themselves, but they are especially important for the feast that the Church celebrates today: the most holy Body and Blood of Christ – the feast of Corpus Christi.

We hear these familiar words and give thanks and praise for them: *Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many."*

The feast of Corpus Christi is marked in places all over the world with public Eucharistic processions: an opportunity to share the Blessed Sacrament with, not just Catholics who encounter the Real Presence in Mass and Exposition, but *all* people. It reminds us, and others – if they are open to hearing God's message – that Christ's redemption is for all.

To some outside of our Catholic communion, it may seem quite odd that we would have such a feast day, but not to us. For at the very core of who we are as Catholics is our belief that, through Christ's Word and the action of the Holy Spirit; the instrumentality of the priest; and under the appearances of bread and wine, the risen Christ is truly, fully, and substantially present in body, blood, soul and divinity (cf., CCC 1374, 1375).

The feast and its processions mark the most visible example of "public witness" of our beliefs (cf., Can. 944 §1, 2), but it ought never be our *only* public witness. For in addition to the graces bestowed upon us in our reception and veneration of the Eucharist are the fruits of our communion that our life of discipleship can bring to the world. Christ is the mediator of a new covenant that seals our eternal relationship to the Father, and promises everlasting life. In our communion with him we have both blessed opportunity, and scriptural commandment, to share that gift with others.

Perhaps it is hard to explain, or understand, why some people choose to stay away from so great a gift! But *we* are here. We are here because we are in awe of our God. We are in awe of a God who would not spare his only Son to prove his love for us. We are in awe that God would make it so very simple for us to have him with us until the end of time. And maybe, in her wisdom, this is why the Church has such a public witness of our devotion to the Eucharist. And perhaps this is where our own smaller, "public witness" comes into play.

After our celebration here today, and in every moment, let us proceed into the world as a visible representation of that which is made real to us here in the Eucharist. May we bear its fruits by helping to build the kingdom of God.

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Monday, June 4, 2018
(Lec. 353)
1) 2 Peter 1:2-7
2) Mark 12:1-12

MONDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God entrusts a vineyard of gifts to his people; we are the stewards, but not the owners, of these gifts.

In today's first reading, Peter emphasizes certain gifts that support one's faith. Faith itself, he suggests, is incomplete. Faith itself can benefit from other qualities, such as virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance and devotion. What faithful person has not at one point in their life needed the virtue of self-control? Or endurance? But each of these gifts are just that – gifts. They do not belong to us, but are, in a way, "loaned" to us – shared with us so that we may produce fruit for God. We see this expectation of "producing fruit" in the Gospel.

Jesus presents a parable: A vineyard owner buys a piece of land and gets it ready to become a vineyard. He obviously cares for this vineyard – he invests in a hedgerow, in a wine press and in a tower. He wants to see it succeed, to produce fruit. Before he travels to another country, he leases the vineyard to tenants, who are to care for the vineyard in his absence.

Yet instead of caring for the vineyard as *stewards*, the tenants treat it as *their own*. They reject any effort by the owner to collect the fruit that is due to him. Perhaps they are greedy. But perhaps they have worked long hours. Perhaps they feel the owner is not entitled to anything, since he has been absent. Rather than give to the owner what is due, they beat, and in some cases kill, his messengers, even his beloved son.

In most discussions of this parable, the owner represents God, who sends messenger after messenger, prophet after prophet, who are rejected. He sends his beloved Son, who is killed. The tenant farmers are the religious authorities who reject Jesus and the God who sent him.

One another level, however, we can think of God's vineyard as the gifts that God gives to us. These gifts could be our health, our family, our homes, our education or our talents. They do not belong to us, but are from God and are to be used to grow the vineyard, to produce fruit. As soon as we see these gifts as belonging to ourselves, as soon as we try to *own* them, to *possess* them apart from God, we become like the tenant farmers who lay claim to land that is not their own – who do whatever they can to control what is not theirs.

We are stewards, not owners. We are tenants, here for a time on this earth, to use the gifts God has given us to produce fruit for his world.

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Tuesday, June 5, 2018
(Lec. 354)
1) 2 Peter 3:12-15a, 17-18
2) Mark 12:13-17

TUESDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Boniface,
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 450; **CSDC** 379

FOCUS: Putting God first brings blessings and joy.

Many of those who *put* questions to Jesus did so not to get information, but to *ensnare him in his speech*. They hoped to get a reply they could use against him. This is the case in today's Gospel. The taxes imposed by the Roman government of occupation were deeply resented by Jesus' people. If Jesus told people not to pay the census tax, he could be denounced to the authorities. If he said the Jewish people *should* pay, he would be discredited by them.

Jesus does not give either of these answers – ones his questioners were looking for. He seldom did. Instead, he demands that they show him the coin used to pay the tax, and they bring him one. It is a denarius – a Roman coin. By producing it from their own pockets, Jesus' questioners show that, whatever their theoretical or supposed religious position, they in fact recognize the existing economic situation. The country is ruled by foreigners, and it is their money which is legal tender, and no other.

Jesus' first words of reply, *Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar*, reject the radical position of those who claimed the Roman government was unlawful and should not be obeyed at all. He then raises the ante, so to speak, in this discussion about money, and adds: *and [repay] to God what belongs to God*. Do that, Jesus is saying, and everything else will fall into place.

What *belongs to God*, anyway? The answer is inescapable: everything! From God we receive all that we are and have, sin excepted. God even gives us our possessions and our money. How long would we retain our possessions and earning power if we lost our health or even one significant human faculty? Even the things we have worked for are gifts from the Creator and giver of all: God.

If *repaying to God what belongs to God* means anything, it must mean putting God *first* in our lives. It means giving him the first fruits of our love, labor and talents. It means that God's command to love one another is of higher importance than any earthly demand we might face. In fact, placing God first ensures that our ability to meet any of those demands is made possible.

As Saint Peter tells us in the first reading, we ought to be on guard *not to be led into the error of the unprincipled and to fall from [y]our own stability*. *But grow in grace, and be eager to be found without spot or blemish* before the Lord. Repay to God what belongs to God

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Wednesday, June 6, 2018
(Lec. 355)
1) 2 Timothy 1:1-3, 6-12
2) Mark 12:18-27

WEDNESDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Norbert,
Bishop)

Gospel related: CCC 993, 1619

FOCUS: As disciples of Jesus, we are given a new perspective on this life and the next.

Today's readings invite us to share Jesus' perspective on this life and on the next – on our role in our lives as Jesus' followers, on what we can expect in God's reign after our death, and on the very power of God that underpins our lives in this world and the next.

Paul invites Timothy – and, by extension, those of us who continue to follow Jesus today – to a life of trust in God and a willingness to suffer in our efforts to live as disciples of Jesus. We are all called to *bear [our] share of hardship for the Gospel*. This means different things to different disciples.

Most of us are not called to suffer in the same way that Paul and Timothy did, through ultimate martyrdom. But we are all expected to preach the Good News of Jesus through our lives and in the opportunities presented to us, whether by raising our children to follow the path of Jesus, by being honest in our dealings with others, or acting according to our conscience. Our perspective on life must reflect that of Jesus – a life of faith in God, spreading of the Gospel and serving others whenever possible. Paul reminds us that, as we do our part, we can depend on God to give us the strength and courage we need each day.

Jesus patiently teaches the Sadducees – who are trying to trick him – about the life to come and that God has the power not only to create us but to bring us life beyond the grave. He sidesteps the utterly ridiculous situation proposed by the Sadducees to teach them and the crowds about what they can expect after they die: an eternal life that has its own parameters because of the immortality in which we will be clothed.

While we may want to hear more specific details about the life to come, Jesus still gives us reason for hope and expectation of that life. We are invited to trust in the power of God and in God's love for us as he claims to be our God – the God of the living in this life and in the next. Let us, like Timothy, hold fast to that hope – to that belief in the power of God, no matter what lies before us in this life. With that hope and with the strength that comes from God, we can truly *bear [our] share of hardship for the Gospel* in whatever way God calls us.

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Thursday, June 7, 2018

(Lec. 356)

1) 2 Timothy 2:8-15

2) Mark 12:28-34

Gospel related: CCC 575 CSDC 40, 112

THURSDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself.

We live in a world of rules and regulations. Some are human-made and help us to live in harmony with others – rules of the road, for example. Some rules are in the realm of nature and science. One law of physics tells us that every action has an opposite action – an important fact to know when trying to hit a baseball!

And, of course, God has rules for us to follow so we can stay close to him as well as be able to nurture good relations with our brothers and sisters in this world and to care for our own self. God has given us the Ten Commandments. The first three pertain to our relationship with God. The other seven are given to help us be able to love others as well as ourselves. Now the kicker: it's not always easy to love God, others or self, let alone all three at the same time.

Saint Paul faces this challenge head-on in our first reading today. He wrote to his beloved Timothy from prison reflecting on his love of Jesus Christ raised from the dead. His suffering and imprisonment were due to his preaching this Good News to those who had not yet heard of the saving power of Jesus Christ. Paul was following the intent of the Ten Commandments to love God, others and himself. He preached the love of God in Jesus. He sacrificed his own comfort and safety for the love of others so they could come to believe. And he remained true to himself, in effect loving himself in spite of his sufferings.

The scribe in today's Gospel passage wanted Jesus to tell him which was the number one commandment. Being a scribe, he knew all 613 Jewish laws. Jesus answered by restating the first commandment, also known as the *Shema*, the Jewish prayer said at morning and night. Jesus expanded this commandment to include love of neighbor and self, saying, *there is no other commandment greater than these*. In turn, the scribe affirmed this and restated what he had heard from Jesus in such a way as to show that he understood the meaning of the law.

As we see in the actions of Paul and the thinking of the scribe, it is not enough to memorize the rules, laws and commandments of life. We must go deeper and come to understand the underlying meaning that is the basis for any rule. Then we can be reassured that we are on the path to loving God, neighbor and our self, and know that the kingdom of God is close to us.

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Friday, June 8, 2018

(Lec. 171)

1) Hosea 11:1, 3-4, 8c-9

2) Ephesians 3:8-12, 14-19

3) John 19:31-37

Gospel related: CCC 478, 608, 641, 694, 1225, 1432

**THE MOST
SACRED HEART
OF JESUS
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: How is the love of Jesus manifested in our lives?

The heart is an essential part of the body. We die if our heart stops beating. Jesus became one of us and his Sacred Heart, which we honor in a special way today, is a symbol of his humanity. Jesus was not *like* a human, he *was* human – fully human while also fully divine. Apart from sin, he took on all the mental and physical frailties and limitations we all face.

The Sacred Heart also exemplifies the extravagant love Jesus has for us. Part of that extravagance is his willingness to forgive us over and over, like a parent who cannot help but love his child, regardless of the hurt that child might inflict through disobedience, apathy or willfulness. Today's first reading gives us a beautiful poem that describes this love Jesus came to show us.

God is speaking to Hosea, and tells of his relationship with Israel. *Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms; I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks.* It was *this* sort of love that Jesus' physical heart embodied.

Our second reading adds to this picture, telling us that through Jesus we can internalize this love God has for us. Christ can actually dwell in our hearts through faith. We can let him take over our heart, filling us with love for one another, expanding our ability to give of ourselves generously, unselfishly. As we are able to do this, our ability to know and feel God's love for us is heightened, so that we can be *filled with all the fullness of God*, as the reading says.

The Gospel helps us see another aspect of the Sacred Heart. When it speaks of water and blood gushing from the side of Jesus on the cross, we realize that in his death, Jesus washed away our sins. The water and blood are the life forces poured out for us, bringing us the offer of eternal life with God.

Today's solemnity, honoring the Sacred Heart, provides a special time to focus on God's love, manifested in his only begotten Son living and dying for our salvation. As we give thanks for the gift of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, let us search our own hearts and see how well we have conformed our own hearts to Jesus' Sacred Heart, and how his love is manifested in our lives.

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Saturday, June 9, 2018
(Lec. 358)
1) 2 Timothy 4:1-8
(Lec. 573)
2) Luke 2:41-51

SATURDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
The Immaculate Heart
of the
Blessed Virgin Mary)

Gospel related: CCC 503, 517, 531, 534, 583, 2196, 2599 CSDC 259

FOCUS: As our intercessor and our mediator, the Blessed Virgin Mary helps us live a life of discipleship.

The story in today's Gospel shows the wisdom and grace in Jesus as a boy. As he announces his mission and the meaning of his existence, he clearly states the priority of God in his life. He realizes that his life is so intertwined with God that it surpasses human relationships. In the midst of his parents' anxiety and inability to understand what he is saying, the family returns to Nazareth. Jesus is obedient to them. At the same time, however, Mary keeps *all these things in her heart*. What does such a statement mean?

It is a reference to the interior life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. That inner life consists of her joys and sorrows. It points to her virtues. It stresses her maternal love for her son, Jesus, as well as her love for God the Father. Furthermore, it refers to her compassion for all the people of this world. The only human being who lives such a Christ-like existence without flaw is Mary. From the first moment of her existence to the last breath of her mortal body, she fulfills the will of God perfectly.

Christ was born through Mary. As the Mother of God, she has a role as mother of the Church. And it is through the Church and outpouring of the Spirit that Jesus continues to be born in the hearts of those who believe. As the Mother of both our Savior and the Church, Saint John Paul said this: "Mary carries out her maternal role in constant dependence on the mediation of Christ, and from him receives all that his heart wishes to give mankind" (Oct. 1, 1997). We acknowledge this every time we pray, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death." Throughout our life, Mary is the special person through whom the grace of Christ flows to the Universal Church.

With Mary as our role model, mediator and intercessor, we can fulfill the challenge given to us in the first reading from the Second Letter of Timothy. It says that we should proclaim the Word. The tasks involved in such a proclamation differ according to the grace given to any one individual. Each one of us needs to discover what God is asking us to say and do. When we know, we need to be persistent in these tasks whether they are convenient or inconvenient. There will be many joys. There will also be times of trial and suffering. Let us remember to ask for Mary's intercession when we need help fulfilling our mission.

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SUNDAY, JUNE 10, 2018

(Lec. 89)

- 1) Genesis 3:9-15
- 2) 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1
- 3) Mark 3:20-35

Gospel related: CCC 500, 539, 548, 574, 1864

TENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We must build our lives upon Jesus.

Anyone who has ever built a home or any other sort of building knows just how important the foundation is. Before a wall is built or a roof covers the structure, the foundation must be set firmly in place. A firm foundation requires an immense amount of work and preparation. If the foundation is built on shifting or unstable ground, the building will ultimately fail – it is just a matter of time.

In a very real sense, Jesus is challenging us as disciples to pay attention to the foundation that supports our daily life. In today's Gospel, Jesus rightly notes that a spiritual house built upon a shaky foundation is bound to fail. Some of the folks who insult Jesus in the Gospel think he is mad – that he is in league with the devil himself. As Jesus notes, a house built on such a foundation will collapse against itself.

To some, however, building a house upon the foundation of Jesus may seem like utter insanity. Why would we wish to do such a thing? After all, a strong and secure life requires that we have the best of everything. Some say that an even better and more successful life is one in which we have achieved every measure of success that is possible, so that people admire or envy us, so that we have power and influence that we can wield in order to determine our own destiny. This is the most solid foundation upon which to build one's life – from the *world's* perspective.

Jesus reminds us that if our lives are built only upon power, influence, prestige or achievement, they will ultimately come tumbling down. At the conclusion of today's Gospel, Jesus gives us a clue about what leads to true satisfaction. As he speaks to his disciples, he reminds us that the ultimate strength in our lives comes from a living and loving relationship with him and with the people of his Church.

If Jesus and the life to which he calls us become the central focus of our everyday living, then we live as members of his family – we are his brother and sisters. Like younger siblings, we have the opportunity to look up to Jesus, to emulate his ways of selfless life and love, to cooperate with his grace in order to bring peace and mercy more firmly into our world. What a joy that Jesus teaches us by word and example to live our lives with his life and love as both foundation and cornerstone.

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Monday, June 11, 2018

(Lec. 580)

1) Acts 11:21b-26, 13:1-3

(Lec. 359)

2) Matthew 5:1-12

MONDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Barnabas,
Apostle)

Gospel related: CCC 520, 544, 581, 764, 1716, 1720, 2305, 2330, 2518, 2546, 2763 CSDC 492

FOCUS: Jesus' Good News is good news for all of humanity.

Both of our readings today show the movement of the Gospel message beyond the Jewish community and into that of the Gentiles. In the first reading, we hear about Barnabas, whose feast day we celebrate today, and his mission to Antioch, Greece.

A Jewish man from Cyprus, Barnabas was instrumental in the growth and development of the early Church. He was a friend of Saint Paul and participated with Paul in the Council of Jerusalem, which concerned the admission of Gentiles into the Christian community. This was a sticking point in early Christianity, and both Paul and Barnabas proposed that Gentiles be allowed into the community without being circumcised. It is noteworthy that the community of Gentiles in Antioch is the first group of disciples to be called Christians, as we heard today.

In our Gospel passage, we hear the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew tells us, unlike Luke, that Jesus gave his sermon to the crowds – meaning, all who cared to hear and listen – and not just his Jewish disciples. Jesus' Good News is good news for all of humanity: the path of the kingdom of heaven is available. Those who walk it and stand strong in the face of persecution, sorrow and injustice shall be blessed and called children of God. They will *rejoice and be glad, for [their] reward will be great in heaven.*

The name Barnabas means “son of consolation,” or “son of encouragement,” and so it is both consoling and encouraging for us to hear about Saint Barnabas today, and to know we are beneficiaries of his love for the Gospel. We have the grace and opportunity to reap what he sowed. Let us harvest it with gladness.

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Tuesday, June 12, 2018

(Lec. 360)

1) 1 Kings 17:7-16

2) Matthew 5:13-16

Gospel related: CCC 326, 782, 1243, 2821

TUESDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: In the Eucharist we are nourished, and then sent to be bread for others.

We know that imagery of food, and the importance of meals are stressed throughout Scripture, and today's readings give us a bountiful feast of a message. The first reading focuses on flour and oil, and reminds us that survival in antiquity required that there be ample supply of both. When Elijah meets with the widow, he extends God's promise to her that her *jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry*. True to God's word, the widow, her son and Elijah are able to eat and survive, for their flour and oil never ran out.

In today's Gospel, the focus is on salt, which flavors food, and light – which allows food to be grown. Though Israel and Judah were small and of little consequence, they had a significant natural resource – the Dead Sea, and all the rich mineral salt it contained. Salt was used as currency – an additive, a preservative, a medicine. Rome conquered Israel and Judah in 63 B.C. and took possession of this precious reserve, but the meaning remains the same. A world without salt is poorer, has less flavor, is not as durable and is more prone to weakness and illness. In the same way, the world without Christians would be a cold and hostile wasteland where no one cared for the least among us.

For its part, light, too, is essential to everyday life and to the world in which we live. Light provides the conditions for plant growth, shields us from darkness, warms us against the cold, protects us from danger and guides us to the right path. Without light, we would not be able to farm and grow food; we would stumble and fall, and we are afraid of the dangers hidden in what we cannot see. So, too, a world without Christians living, loving and sharing their faith is a cold and dark world, inhospitable, fraught with danger on every side.

This Gospel passage immediately follows Jesus' preaching of the Beatitudes during the Sermon on the Mount. For him to tell his disciples that we are called to be salt and light means, quite simply, that we are essential and we are priceless. Certainly, this is true in the eyes of God, as we also see from God's individual care of the widow and her son, but Jesus' hope is that we might look upon each other with the same affection.

The ability to obtain the ingredients for food is a matter of life and death, just as important in the world today as it was in ancient times. But these Scriptures are less about actual flour, oil and salt and more about God's provision for and sustaining of our lives. They are meant to induce hunger, not for earthly food, but for the Eucharist. In that bread-and-wine-become-body-and-blood of which we partake, we are nourished and then sent to be bread, oil, salt and light for others.

So let us prepare ourselves, and pray to be made worthy of such a mission.

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Wednesday, June 13, 2018
(Lec. 361)
1) 1 Kings 18:20-39
2) Matthew 5:17-19

WEDNESDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Anthony of Padua,
Priest and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 577, 592, 1967, 2053

FOCUS: Let our lives reflect the Gospel values we profess.

It's a humorous image, and Elijah made the most of it. Knowing God's true identity, Elijah challenged the four hundred and fifty false prophets to call on Baal to start a fire to prove Baal's existence. So after the mob of prophets had been carrying out their rituals to the fake god for a reasonable amount of time, with no result, Elijah taunted them: *Call louder ... he may be meditating ... or may be on a journey. Perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.* It is easy to imagine his confident smile. After all, he knew the Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, was and is the only real God. There was no real competition.

Elijah doesn't mince words: *If the Lord is God, follow him; if Baal, follow him.* Stop straddling, he commands the people. Yet much like the Israelites in this Old Testament story, and in spite of the truth we know in our hearts, if we are honest with ourselves we must confess how easy it is to do just that. It is so easy to wander away from God's path, and allow the false gods of the world to direct our actions and muddle our spirit.

So who is our true God? Are we tuned in to the needs of others? Or do we concentrate instead on our own pleasure, affirmation and comfort? If someone looked at how we lead our lives, would they be able to tell the Gospel values we profess?

Saint Anthony of Padua, whose feast we celebrate today, is held to have said, "Actions speak louder than words; let your words teach and your actions speak." Known for his gift of speaking and preaching, he taught with his words, and proclaimed his Gospel values in his priestly ministry, hospitality and self-sacrificing zeal.

Let us pray, brothers and sisters, for the honesty and willingness we need in order to examine our hearts and to consider how well we are living God's commands; how well we are *obey[ing] and teach[ing] these commandments* so that we *will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven*, as Jesus says.

* * *

Thursday, June 14, 2018
(Lec. 362)

1) 1 Kings 18:41-46

2) Matthew 5:20-26

Gospel related: CCC 678, 764, 1034, 1424, 2054, 2257, 2262, 2302, 2608, 2763, 2792, 2841, 2845

THURSDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God calls us to repentance and reconciliation.

Today's first reading and Gospel seem, at first, to be about two very different topics. The passage from the First Book of Kings takes place at the end of a drought that had afflicted the land. In the Gospel, Jesus instructs his disciples on anger and reconciliation.

There is wisdom behind the pairing of these two Scripture readings, however, and we can understand it by examining the broader context of the first reading. The people of Israel had been divided in their worship. Some had been misled into worshipping Baal, who was recognized by his followers as a god of the storms and fertility. In a demonstration of God's power over Baal, a drought had been cast over the entire land. The part we heard today was the point in which God restored the rain following the repentance of the people of Israel.

Jesus is calling us to that same repentance and reconciliation when there is division among us. He says, *if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.* We might think of this as "first things first." Whatever divides us from one another – in the first reading it was the worship of Baal, and here Jesus speaks of anger – needs to be resolved before we can properly offer ourselves and our gifts to the Lord.

Jesus' further instructions regarding anger make a great deal of sense when we consider its corrosive effects, and that of division, on our relationships and ourselves. Effects such as a drought upon the land, as Israel experienced. In a drought, the ground grows harsh and incapable of producing anything good. In the same way, when our souls are shrouded in conflict, they become increasingly incapable of experiencing joy, love and the many positive aspects of our relationships. This is why Jesus instructs us to repent and reconcile: so that we might be refreshed by living waters and our communities may flourish.

We will shortly present our prayers and gifts to the Lord, in anticipation of his real presence among us. It is likely not possible that we are each able to *go first and be reconciled with* anyone, in person, but we can ask God's help in this. Let us pray for those who have wronged us, and ask forgiveness for what we have done wrong. And may God reconcile us to him and to one another, for the building up of his kingdom.

* * *

Friday, June 15, 2018

(Lec. 363)

1) 1 Kings 19:9a, 11-16

2) Matthew 5:27-32

Gospel related: CCC 226, 764, 1034, 1456, 2330, 2336, 2380, 2382, 2513, 2528, 2763

FRIDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We find God where we choose to let him in.

The prophet Elijah provides a good example of listening for the voice of God, obeying his commands. In today's reading we find him in a cave on Mount Horeb. Elijah had slain all the prophets of the pagan god, Baal. In fear for his life he had fled from Jezebel, wife of Ahab, King of Israel, both of whom had forsaken the covenant with God. Here, Elijah experienced the presence of God in the *tiny whispering sound*. He tells God that the Israelites have been unfaithful, killed other Jewish prophets, and that he is next. In turn, God sends him to anoint two new kings as well as Elisha, the prophet who is to succeed him.

Elijah had a mission. Like Moses who received the first covenant on Mount Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai, Elijah's mission was to renew the covenant between the people of Israel and God.

Jesus was the fulfillment of that covenant. He was sent by his Father to reconcile all who have drifted away from God, and to teach what it means to live out the commandment to love one another. We see this quite clearly in this section of Matthew's Gospel. In the verses immediately following the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:1-12), Jesus provides his disciples with a long list of teachings: on the law, anger, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, love of enemies and more. On all of these subjects, he is instructing his followers in setting priorities – doing those things that lead one closer to God and not further away from him.

In our Gospel passage today, Jesus addresses injustice and unchastity found within marriage, in this case speaking about both adultery and divorce. Each of these represent a level of unfaithfulness to a spouse, but they are not the only possible ones. Spouses can betray one another and fail to sacrificially love one another in myriad ways. Regardless of the cause, or the extent to which it takes place, injustice and unchastity within marriage destroy the covenantal bond. And covenants are important to God. Both readings today show God's commitment to keeping his covenant with us.

As human beings, we are going to stumble, fall, and, at times, utterly fail in our efforts to remain faithful to our promises and covenants. That does not lessen our responsibility for doing our best and asking for God's grace to assist us, however. We are to love one another as God loves us. And his love is never unfaithful.

* * *

Saturday, June 16, 2018
(Lec. 364)
1) 1 Kings 19:19-21
2) Matthew 5:33-37

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

Gospel related: CCC 581, 592, 764, 2141, 2153, 2338, 2463, 2466, 2763

FOCUS: Let our actions speak in place of oaths as we follow Christ, the fulfillment of the Old Covenant.

Prove it! How many times have we heard that that phrase in response to someone providing a statement? Maybe we have said it ourselves: Prove it!

Today's Gospel passage is part of a series of Jesus' teachings following the same formula: "You have heard it said that ... but I say..." In the first half of each statement, Jesus references the Mosaic Law, which the Jews had been following for over a millennia; in the second half, he reinterprets it in light of the new covenant he establishes. In what we just heard, Jesus is telling us about oaths, and their value. Essentially, he says, if we live our lives with an integrity and truthfulness, then we never need use an oath. Our own word and actions will suffice.

Why do we take oaths, anyway? Unfortunately, it is because of a common human weakness: the temptation to lie. Some may be tempted to "prove" their truthfulness by swearing by something important or sacred: the Lord, heaven, Jerusalem, earth, even oneself. These all directly or indirectly invoke God, who is sovereign over all. While the Church acknowledges that oaths invoking God are acceptable in "grave and right reasons (for example, in court)" (CCC 2154), most of the time, for our day-to-day encounters and activities, it is simply not necessary to swear an oath. Merely say yes or no.

How, then, can we "prove it" – that is, convey our truthfulness and integrity?" The First Book of Kings gives us an example in our first reading: with actions.

We hear about the meeting between Elijah and Elisha. Elisha was going about his daily work, plowing a field, when Elijah appeared and threw his cloak over him. This signified that Elisha was to serve him. What was Elisha's response? He *ran* after Elijah and promised to follow him after he kissed his parents goodbye.

Elijah does not argue, and Elisha then does something extraordinary: he slaughters his oxen and smashes the plow and yokes, burning them to boil the oxen, and feeding the meat to his people. He responded radically to God's call through Elijah by destroying the tools of his former life. This symbolized a complete dedication to his new role as Elijah's disciple, and later as God's prophet.

And really, doesn't that "prove it" greater than any oath?

Today, let us pray that the Holy Spirit helps us recognize the people in our lives calling us to live up to a higher standard. May we accept the invitation to enter a deeper relationship with Christ as we go about our daily work. And may we respond not with oaths, but with actions as complete and decisive as Elisha's.

* * *

SUNDAY, JUNE 17, 2018

(Lec. 92)

- 1) Ezekiel 17:22-24
- 2) 2 Corinthians 5:6-10
- 3) Mark 4:26-34

Gospel related: CCC 546

ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: It is often the small or insignificant that is the focus of God's presence.

Last weekend we returned to Ordinary Time having celebrated Lent and Easter. But *Ordinary Time* should not be understood as unimportant time but rather that, for the next twenty-one weeks, we will mine the riches of the mystery of Christ in an ordered way, ponder all that we have celebrated in Easter and perhaps even reflect on those long- forgotten Lenten resolutions. And we will continue to give thanks for God's faithfulness and presence in our lives and in the life of his Church.

There's a phrase that could summarize today's readings: Small is beautiful! Indeed, as we survey the life of faith, it is often the small or insignificant that is the focus of God's presence. The young David slayed Goliath and became a great king; Paul, whose name means small, became a celebrated evangelist and preacher; Teresa of Calcutta began with a few rupees and a mission and became a saint whose work continues to inspire millions. Yes, small is beautiful!

Jesus uses the images of the sower and the small seed to help explain the kingdom. Despite our illusions, the work of faith is ultimately God's work – as silent and unseen as the growing seed. We are called like the sower to prepare the ground and to be generous in sowing, but then to step back and allow the Lord to bring forth the harvest. Jesus takes this image further – small though it may be, the mustard seed has the potential to be the largest of all shrubs. In other words, one cannot judge the size and potential of anything by its initial size, least of all the kingdom of God! Like the mustard seed that grows to be a large shrub in which the birds will find shelter, so the kingdom must grow to offer shelter to all nations. It must become like Ezekiel's tree in the first reading – majestic and full of the fruits of the kingdom.

Saint Paul reminds us in the second reading to be courageous – to remember that our ultimate destiny is not of this world. We are to walk by faith and not by the passing ways of this world, no matter how tempting or convenient they may be. Aware that we must all give an account of our lives, we must be people of prayer, who are constantly growing in our faith. We must know that our efforts, even if they seem small and insignificant, will be blessed by the Lord.

* * *

Monday, June 18, 2018

(Lec. 365)

1) 1 Kings 21:1-16

2) Matthew 5:38-42

Gospel related: CCC 764, 2443, 2763

MONDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: A just act brings victory over evil.

Jesus' words in today's passage from the Gospel of Matthew can, at first glance, seem unreasonable. Who among us is going to voluntarily submit to further maltreatment when struck, or offer to do more than required for people who cause us harm? How can we possibly give something to everyone who asks us for something? By all appearances, in first century Palestine, and in general, this instruction goes against natural human tendencies!

This passage is about justice – God's justice and not our own. Jesus is preparing his disciples for his persecution and death. Rather than lashing out at others, Jesus teaches them that a just act will bring victory over evil by rising above it. As indicated by his reference to the legal standard, *an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*, Jesus communicates to them that God's justice is not about getting even, or doing greater harm – but about restoring our relationship with him.

This restoration, of course, takes place with Jesus' death and resurrection. But as a people waiting for a conquering messiah who would come with a sword to restore political power to the Jews, the disciples did not as yet understand this. Even we, who are the beneficiaries of this salvific act, may have difficulty understanding this in the face of our own difficulties and challenges.

So where does this leave us? It leaves us smack in the middle of a world still suffering from the effects of sin: in violence, evil and all manner of persecution and oppression. But it also leaves us with the knowledge that death and sin are of this world only – that God has heard our cry for justice and responded. And that in the gift of Christ's presence in the Eucharist and the intimacy of the Holy Spirit, we have a God who, to paraphrase the Gospel, metaphorically gives us his cloak when we ask for a tunic, goes two miles with us when we request one, and never turns his back on us in our need.

* * *

Tuesday, June 19, 2018
(Lec. 366)
1) 1 Kings 21:17-29
2) Matthew 5:43-48

TUESDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Romuald,
Abbot)

Gospel related: CCC 443, 764, 1693, 1825, 1933, 1968, 2013, 2054, 2262, 2303, 2608, 2763, 2828, 2842, 2844 CSDC 40

FOCUS: Being perfect doesn't mean being flawless; it means fulfilling our purpose by loving as God loves.

So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect. That's a tall order, especially if we think it means we have to be flawless. But the Greek word for perfect is *telios*. It means being complete or reaching one's goal or purpose.

As Christians, our goal is to love. Jesus told us the two most important commandments are to love God, our neighbor and ourselves. As Jesus said in today's Gospel, loving others includes loving our enemies. What does it mean to love our enemies and how do we go about it? One way to love our enemies is to pray for them. Praying for others can help us let go of hurt and hatred, before they consume us.

Jesus isn't commanding us to tolerate abuse, put ourselves in harm's way, or have warm, fuzzy feelings for those who hurt us. Love goes beyond feelings. Ask any parent who loves their child no matter what. Love is a decision to care about – and act in – another's best interests.

Perhaps it is human nature to want to lash out at those who hurt us. We're not responsible for how we *feel*. But we *are* responsible for how we *act*. Because God gave us free will, we have choices.

We can choose to forgive no matter how we feel. On our own, this seems impossible, but we aren't on our own. We have the example of Jesus, who forgave his enemies from the cross. We have the love of the Father, who sends us the sun and rain whether we're at our best or worst. We have the Holy Spirit working in us to comfort, guide and strengthen us.

Let's take some quiet time to reflect on who our enemies are, how we feel about them, and what we need from God in order to forgive them, forgive ourselves and grow in love. Let's try praying for them – even if we pray through gritted teeth. We have the freedom to make that choice no matter what our feelings tell us. It may not change our enemies, but it will change us. God is so much bigger than our feelings – and so is his love.

* * *

Wednesday, June 20, 2018

(Lec. 367)

1) 2 Kings 2:1, 6-14

2) Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Gospel related: CCC 575, 764, 1063, 1430, 1434, 1693, 1753, 1969, 2447, 2608, 2655, 2691, 2763

WEDNESDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: As Elisha took up Elijah's mantle, so we, too, take up the mantle of Jesus, our Teacher, and continue his works of mercy.

As Catholics, as followers of Jesus, we have much more in common with Elisha, the successor to Elijah, than we may think. The first reading has what may seem like peculiar images, from Elijah opening a dry pathway through the water and then going to heaven in a flaming chariot, to Elisha putting on Elijah's mantle – the cloak of the prophet – and also opening a dry pathway through the water.

If we think about it, however, the first reading is similar to the familiar story of the Ascension of Jesus, when Jesus returns to heaven by his own power, and leaves the mantle of leadership and preaching to us. In the first reading, Elisha begged for double the share of the Spirit that Elijah had; we, as Jesus' followers, have also received the Spirit so that we can take up where Jesus left off when he returned to the Father.

In the Gospel, Jesus takes on the role of Teacher to his disciples in both the first century as well as the twenty-first century. He instructs us on how to bring about God's kingdom quietly, through our everyday actions – without drawing attention to ourselves. We are, rather, to pray, fast and give to charities quietly, without making a scene – so that we can receive the greatest reward of pleasing God rather than other people.

Jesus doesn't ask us to part water in the rivers or to perform any kind of miracle, but to make a small difference in our own world – in our own neighborhood, home and workplace. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are ways to invoke God's help as we strive to bring into our own world the kingdom of which Jesus so diligently preached. Through prayer and fasting, we draw closer to God and are better equipped to perform works of mercy and charity for the people in our lives.

Today, when we leave church after Communion – the visible sign of our symbolically taking on the mantle of Jesus – let us consider what works of prayer, fasting, kindness or mercy Jesus, our Teacher, is calling us to. Who most needs the small miracle of love that we are specially prepared to provide? How can we most closely follow Jesus, our Master?

* * *

Thursday, June 21, 2018
(Lec. 368)
1) Sirach 48:1-14
2) Matthew 6:7-15

THURSDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Aloysius Gonzaga,
Religious)

Gospel related: CCC 268, 443, 764, 1165, 1969, 2608, 2632, 2659, 2668, 2736, 2759, 2763, 2776, 2792, 2841, 2845 CSDC 492

FOCUS: We do not need to babble like the pagans, for God knows what we need before we ask.

In praying, do not babble like the pagans. As Christians, we focus, rightly we might say, on how we ought to act and how our lives ought to reflect the Gospel values we claim and profess. But today, the message is about how a Christian ought to sound. That is, the words that we say as believers, matter.

The prophetic words of Elijah and Elisha in the first reading *were as a flaming furnace and wrought many marvels*. Their words mattered to the people to whom they prophesied, and to the God whom they served. They knew God heard them, not *because of their many words*, but because God already knew their needs, and those of the people, before they were even spoken. They did not babble like the pagans.

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, commonly referred to as Tertullian, and classified as one of the early Church fathers, would have been very familiar with how pagans babbled when they prayed. Born about 155 A.D. in the Roman province of Carthage in Africa, he was a pagan until his early forties, when he suddenly converted to Christianity and became a preeminent Christian apologist.

Tertullian asserted that the whole content of the teaching of Jesus, indeed an abridgment of the entire Gospel, was contained in the Lord's Prayer – beginning as it does with the acknowledgement that we are all God's children and praying for the fullness of God's kingdom to come.

As we continue the prayer by asking that we, each of us in the world, be given our daily bread; that we be forgiven in the same measure that we forgive; and that we be led "not into temptation but [delivered] from evil," our words comprise the epitome of the Gospel message. After all, what else do we need but these things?

Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, whose feast we celebrate today, seemed to grasp the truth of that question from the earliest age. Tradition holds that the first words he spoke were the holy names of Jesus and Mary. After a short time of religious life with the Jesuits, he died at the age of twenty-three, and history records the last word he spoke was the holy name of Jesus.

Words of prayer are important. Acts of Christian charity are important. Neither are mutually exclusive, for we are commanded to carry out the same for others that we ask for ourselves. Our prayers may not always sound exactly like the words of the Our Father – Saint Aloysius was quite on the mark simply by calling on the name of Jesus. But we know we do not need to babble like the pagans, for God knows what we need before we ask.

* * *

Friday, June 22, 2018
(Lec. 369)
1) 2 Kings 11:1-4, 9-18, 20
2) Matthew 6:19-23

FRIDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Paulinus of Nola,
Bishop;
Saints John Fisher, Bishop,
and Thomas More,
Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 368, 764, 2533, 2551, 2604, 2608, 2729, 2763, 2848 CSDC 260

FOCUS: Will we choose the things that fade away or are we choosing that which will last forever?

There is a whole lot of blood being shed over religion and power in our first reading from Second Kings. There has been a whole lot of blood shed for the sake of religion and power ever since. Saints John Fisher and Thomas More, whom we memorialize today, were victims of this power struggle in the reign of King Henry VIII.

It is extraordinary how often in conflict all sides claim God is on their side. True, God is on the side of righteousness and truth – but it is his righteousness, his truth – not our own – that counts. Jesus seems to touch on this in today's Gospel passage.

The lamp of the body is the eye, he tells us. He goes on to say a sound eye lets in light and a bad eye darkness. So when it comes to the decisions we make, we should be mindful of whether we are using a sound eye, thus letting in light, or a bad eye, thus letting in darkness instead.

Or as Jesus states in another way, where we choose to place our priorities – earthly treasures or heavenly ones – will both guide our heart, and we will be led by it. The decisions we make; the habits and virtues we cultivate; the sound eye we rely on to follow the lamp for his anointed – all enable in us a life of fidelity to the Gospel.

Anyone who travels to London ought to visit the Tower of London. There, the royal jewels and vessels can be seen under tight security. Out in the courtyard, however, one can easily miss a glass pillow that marks the spot where so many were beheaded, and where religion and power collided. It is here that Bishop John Fisher and Sir Thomas More surrendered their lives rather than surrender their faith. They chose fidelity to the Gospel.

Statistically speaking, we are highly unlikely to suffer a martyr's death, thanks be to God. We ought to remember, however, that the word martyr comes from the Greek word that means witness. We are called to be witnesses to our faith. While it may not lead to our physical death, it may lead to scorn or resentment. But what is a bit of decay and rot here on earth compared to the kingdom of heaven that awaits us?

From the beginning of our salvation history, God has promised to be our God if we would be his people. He has never reneged, and never will, on that covenant. Why should we? We have the far better end of the deal.

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Saturday, June 23, 2018

(Lec. 370)

1) 2 Chronicles 24:17-25

2) Matthew 6:24-34

SATURDAY OF

11TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Saturday in honor

of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 270, 305, 322, 764, 1942, 2113, 2416, 2424, 2547, 2604, 2608, 2632, 2659, 2729, 2763, 2821, 2830, 2836, 2848 **CSDC** 181, 260, 325

FOCUS: The antidote to worry is letting go and trusting God.

“Worry is like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do but it doesn’t get you anywhere.” That quote, attributed to several people, has been around a long time. The message behind it has been around even longer. As Jesus said in today’s Gospel, *Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span?* We know that worrying doesn’t change anything, but that doesn’t stop us, does it?

From world hunger to personal crises, any number of problems are cause for legitimate concern and call for appropriate action. Hopefully, we do whatever we can to resolve our own issues and to help those in need.

Even when we do our best, there are plenty of circumstances beyond our control. We run into them every day. So how are we to live without being consumed by anxiety?

Jesus points to the answer in today’s Gospel. We may not be in control, but God, who created the universe, is – whether or not it seems like it from our limited perspective. The antidote to worry is letting go and trusting God.

This is not always an easy thing to do, and it is tempting at times to believe that anyone other than God has our best interest at heart, and can give us what we really need. The first reading about King Joash gives us a good example of that. He tried to serve two masters, and fell prey to Jesus’ promises about that: *He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other.*

We do not have to be like Joash, though, even in our temptations. We *know* what God has *already* done for us, in giving us his Son, overcoming death and inviting us to share in eternal life with him. Compared to that, all else is fleeting. God is all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving – loving enough to care for sparrows and flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow. Perhaps we just need to get out of our own way and allow God to be God.

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SUNDAY, JUNE 24, 2018

(Lec. 587)

1) Isaiah 49:1-6

2) Acts 13:22-26

3) Luke 1:57-66, 80

Gospel related: CCC 422

**THE NATIVITY
OF SAINT JOHN
THE BAPTIST
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: By our baptism, we have a prophetic calling.

Prophets in the Old Testament such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and others whom we often hear from in our first readings were called by God to proclaim his teachings and his will for us in order to guide and direct us. Generally speaking, prophets were rejected, and sometimes put to death by the powerful and elite.

Being one of God's prophets wasn't a safe calling, but then Jesus' life wasn't a safe one either. At one point, Jesus told his Twelve Apostles: *Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist* (Matthew 11:11). And today, the Church celebrates the solemnity of his birth.

What made John the Baptist the greatest of all of the prophets, as Jesus declared? Was it his personality? No. Was it the ascetical life that he lived? No. What made him the greatest of all of the prophets was the role that he played in the great drama of our salvation. He was the one who *heralded [Jesus'] coming by proclaiming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel*, as we heard today. He was the one who would – quite literally – point to Jesus as the Lamb of God (*cf.*, John 1:29).

It was the role of John the Baptist to point out the tremendous reality of God's Word made flesh and dwelling among us. John the Baptist showed us that God's chosen one – God's Christ, God's anointed one – was actually here. No other prophet had that privilege. No other prophet could point to God's living presence among us in actuality.

This is also the remarkable moment when the Old Testament meets the New Testament, and all that God has given us in the Old Testament is being crowned by all that he will give us in the New. Isaiah prophesied that Israel would be brought back to God, and the survivors restored, so that the Lord's salvation might reach to the ends of the earth. Now this child, called John by his father, is born to Elizabeth and Zechariah to prepare the way for the Lord.

Each one of us shares in John's prophetic calling, through our baptism. By our lives, by our words, by our deeds, we, too, are called by God to manifest his presence in our lives. We are called to point out to others that Jesus Christ is alive and well, risen from the dead and present to those around us.

None of us will ever be the greatest prophet. But that does not mean we cannot be a very, very good one.

* * *

Monday, June 25, 2018

(Lec. 371)

1) 2 Kings 17:5-8, 13-15a, 18

2) Matthew 7:1-5

Gospel related: CCC 678, 2763

MONDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you.

There is a method of moral philosophy designed to help people make objective moral decisions. It involves imagining oneself behind a “veil of ignorance.” We imagine that we don’t know what family we will be born into, or what race or gender we will be. We don’t know how much money we will have or what kind of education we may be able to attain. We don’t know what our job will be or whether we will be of good health, poor health or physically disabled.

Behind this “veil of ignorance,” we decide what kind of laws or societal systems should exist in our world: laws, rights, privileges and systems that will inevitably affect people differently based upon their health, economic class, country of birth, et cetera.

Christians can claim no “veil of ignorance.” We know exactly what should inform our moral decision-making.

We hear in our first reading, the Lord warning Israel and Judah, *Give up your evil ways and keep my commandments and statutes.* In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus’ words are even more direct, as he promises that *the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you.*

Jesus’ words are part of a longer discourse in Matthew that began with the Beatitudes, and will end shortly with what it means to live as a true disciple on the firm foundation of the Gospel. Jesus reminds us over and over to love our neighbors as ourselves. In the Our Father, Jesus teaches us to pray that God will “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” If we expect forgiveness for our sins, we must forgive others. If we offer patience, we will receive patience. If we offer mercy when others fail or hurt others, we will receive mercy when we fail or hurt someone. Measure for measure.

We help create the world in which we live. If we create an unjust world, an intolerant, unforgiving world, and we are impatient for perfection and have a preference for the powerful, we will someday suffer the effects of injustice, intolerance, impatience, a lack of forgiveness and the crushing defeat of our weakness.

If we heed Jesus’ words and are generous with others, merciful to others, slow to judge and mindful of our own weakness and faults, our Lord God who sees our secret sins and imperfections will offer us the same measure of mercy.

As we now prepare our hearts and minds to receive the living Christ in the Eucharist, let us give thanks to God for his enduring mercy – and vow to be worthy of such measures.

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Tuesday, June 26, 2018

(Lec. 372)

1) 2 Kings 19:9b-11,
14-21, 31-35a, 36

2) Matthew 7:6, 12-14

Gospel related: CCC 1036, 1696, 1789, 1970, 2609, 2763, 2821 CSDC 20

TUESDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Pray, and trust in the Lord to respond.

In today's reading from the Second Book of Kings, a verse stands out among the rest that is particularly noteworthy and very helpful to each of us. We hear that Hezekiah *took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; then he went up to the temple of the Lord, and spreading it out before him, he prayed in the Lord's presence.*

What a wonderful example for us to follow! Whenever we are struggling with anxieties, fear or difficulties, why not put our concerns in writing and spread them out before the Lord and pray about them? We could go to pray in front of the exposed Blessed Sacrament (if that is an option), or even spend some time in front of the tabernacle. We can lay out our worries; write out our petitions. Then, knowing we have done all we can to bring these things before the Lord, we wait on him.

Waiting for the unfolding of God's response requires a great deal of patience and trust in God, but it is always a worthwhile practice in virtue. We can be confident that God always hears our cries and responds. He responded to faithful Hezekiah's pleas, protecting Jerusalem from siege and downfall. The Lord saves the city, he says, *for my own sake, and for the sake of my servant David.*

Perhaps this is what Jesus is trying to get his disciples to understand in the Gospel passage today when he speaks about the narrow gate: *the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction ... How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life.* We could understand his words to mean that God is not just *any* one we can count on, God is *the* one we can count on. We are called to believe and trust that he can, and will, attend to our needs far better than the false gods of the material world.

This is exactly what Hezekiah did: he didn't rely on his messengers or his army, or trust in the word of the Assyrian king. Instead, he offered his prayers and petitions to the Lord, believing that God would hear and answer him. And he did.

Indeed, it is a narrow gate and constricted road that leads to life. But it is not an impossibly small gate, nor an impassable road. We have the means to navigate them – it is simply up to us to use them well. Let us pray for the grace and wisdom to always do so.

Wednesday, June 27, 2018

(Lec. 373)

1) 2 Kings 22:8-13; 23:1-3

2) Matthew 7:15-20

WEDNESDAY OF

12TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria,

Bishop and Doctor

of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 2005, 2285, 2763

FOCUS: Let us be known by the Gospel fruit we bear.

The history of the House of David in the years after Solomon's death is full of many difficulties and tribulations. The Davidic, united, kingdom of Israel was divided in two when the northern tribes of Israel split from it, leaving only the southern kingdom of Judah to be ruled by the House of David, with its capital in Jerusalem. The northern kingdom later fell to the Assyrians, while the southern kingdom would ultimately fall to the Babylonians.

Through the decades, each kingdom had a succession of kings, both good and bad, and it is in this setting that King Josiah appears for us [though unnamed] today in our first reading from Second Kings. His reign was a time of national spiritual renewal – when pagan idolatry was banned and the Temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt.

Today's passage recalls the high priest's rediscovery of the book of the law hidden away in the Temple and his sharing of it with the king and his officials. What happened next marks a turning point in our salvation history, for on finding the book of the law, the king ordered that it be read aloud for all to hear.

The law contained not just a list of dos and don'ts – statutes and decrees – but also, and more importantly, the core of the ancient covenant relationship between the Lord and his people. It was this covenant that Israel had broken and so earned the anger of the Lord. By re-proclaiming the covenant for all to hear, the king was inviting the whole nation to recommit itself to renewing its side of the covenant agreement – which they did with their whole hearts and souls. In the language of today's Gospel, they recommitted themselves to bearing good fruit, the fruits that flow from a strong relationship with the Lord and a desire to do his will.

How important such moments are to all people of faith! Our human brokenness and the seeming attractiveness of sin can weigh us down. But we, too, are given opportunities for recommitment to living the Gospel to its fullest. Through the reception of Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation, we can reconnect and re-commit. In prayer, contrition and repentance, and through grace, we have the fortitude to heed Jesus' Word and let ourselves be known by the Gospel fruit that we bear.

We share one of those moments now. Let us stand as participants in the covenant (*cf*, 2Kgs 23:3), and give thanks for the One who provides it.

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Thursday, June 28, 2018
(Lec. 374)
1) 2 Kings 24:8-17
2) Matthew 7:21-29

THURSDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Irenaeus,
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 443, 581, 1821, 1970, 2611, 2763, 2826 CSDC 70

FOCUS: In this season of Ordinary Time, let us be mindful of where we are building our foundation of faith.

We are in the period known as *Ordinary Time*, the longest liturgical season of the Church, and one in which we are living the ordered life of the Church and not focusing on fasting/feasting, such as in Advent/Christmas or Lent/Easter. This is a time in which we can reflect on the entire mystery of Christ in light of his resurrection. It is a kind of liturgical equivalent to resting in the green valley after scaling the mountain peaks of the feasts. We call this season ordinary, not because it is “not special,” or “unimportant” but because we number the weeks: ordinary, coming from the Latin *ordinalis*, refers to numbers in a series.

The Saint we honor today, Saint Irenaeus, is an integral part of our ordered, ordinary Church history. One of the earliest Church writers (b. ~125 A.D.), he laid the foundation for much of Christian theology. His teaching refuted and overcame many false teachings, and saved the Church from the consequences of heresies. We have him to thank for many of the truths that have prevailed.

In this, we see that Irenaeus was following the message found in today’s Gospel passage. Jesus is pointing out that not everyone who claims to have the truth really does have it. Many will call Jesus *Lord*, and say that they prophesy and drive out demons in his name. Many will claim to do mighty deeds in his name. And, yet, because their belief in him is false and arising from their own will rather than the will of the Father, Jesus will not recognize them.

Jesus says to his disciples and us: *Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock.*

The mission of the early Church writers and fathers such as Irenaeus was to ensure that the people of God were building their house of faith on rock. We are called to the same mission today, and there are no secrets hiding the truth: Jesus Christ was sent by God to save us from death and sin, and we are commanded to love one another as he has loved us. Anything that defies, inhibits, suppresses, precedes or otherwise interferes with that, is not of God.

During this Ordinary Time in the Church, then, when we focus on watchful waiting for the second coming of Christ, let us be mindful of where we are building our foundation of faith.

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Friday, June 29, 2018

(Lec. 591)

1) Acts 12:1-11

2) 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18

3) Matthew 16:13-19

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

**SAINTS PETER
AND PAUL,
APOSTLES
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: Saints Peter and Paul are models of how to respond to God's call with great love.

Today is the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles. Well-known to us from the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and the New Testament letters, they are revered and honored for any number of reasons. They were models of inspiration and courage; of determination and a willingness to come when the Lord called – and to go where the Lord led. They were perfectly imperfect humans who show us that human weakness and imperfection are not barriers to salvation.

Both Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero sometime around the year 67 A.D. The Emperor Nero was carrying out a terrible persecution against the Christians at the time, and both Paul and Peter had to know the danger they faced in preaching the Gospel and building the Church. Yet they did not falter.

Our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, and our Gospel passage from Matthew, both written well after their martyrdom, are very deliberate in their meaning: God had chosen Peter. He had chosen Peter to lead the Church; to build the Church; and to protect the Church. Despite what we, and certainly God, know of Peter's moments of faithlessness, fear and outright denial of who Jesus was, Peter responded to God's call with great love. If he, asked to do so much, could faithfully submit to God's will ... how can we not do the same?

In the letter to Timothy, thought to be written shortly before, or very close to Paul's death, we hear of a Paul who sees his future clearly: both his earthly one, soon to end, and his heavenly one, forever with God in his kingdom. He is satisfied with his lot. Chosen directly by God, Paul is pleased that he has been able to be a disciple of the Lord while not sinfully prideful of that same fact. *The Lord stood by me and gave me strength, he says, so that through me the proclamation might be completed and all the Gentiles might hear it.*

Paul was tasked with taking the Gospel beyond the cultural and religious borders of Judaism – no easy request – and he accomplished it while always acknowledging his sins, vulnerabilities and reliance on God. If he, like Peter, could do so much in faithful submission to God's will, how can we not, as well?

This is not to suggest that we are called to physical martyrdom, although many still are in today's world. It is to propose that, since God does not put limits on those he chooses in terms of what we can accomplish in his name, then neither should we put limits on ourselves.

We, too, are perfectly imperfect, as were Peter and Paul. And like Peter and Paul, we can have faith that, if we compete well, if we finish the race, if we keep the faith, we too will have a crown of righteousness awaiting us. By grace we were chosen; in grace we respond. May we always be open to where that grace may lead us.

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Saturday, June 30, 2018
(Lec. 376)

- 1) Lamentations 2:2,
10-14, 18-19
- 2) Matthew 8:5-17

SATURDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
The First Martyrs
of the Holy Roman Church;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: CCC 517, 543, 1386, 1505, 2610

FOCUS: The Lord remembers his flock, and forgets not the souls of his poor ones.

If we listen closely to the Scriptures today, we might *almost* hear the actual call and response between humanity and God. Not the words that represent this exchange – those were clearly expressed a moment ago – but the groaning of humanity mired in darkness and despair, and the consoling reply of God who loves us more than we can ever imagine.

Worn out from weeping are my eyes, we hear in the first reading from Lamentations. Our children are suffering, we have lost our lands, our honor and our inheritance. We are dying in our mothers' arms. Where are you, oh God? In our desperate hope, Lord, respond with mercy.

And he does.

As the prophet Isaiah foretold, and Matthew recalls for us in today's Gospel, *He took away our infirmities and bore our diseases*. In answer to Zion's pleas, and her eventual repentance, God sent his Son to take away the sins of the world. But before he died and rose again he healed the sick, he cured disease and he drove out demons and evil spirits. Not to show what *he* could do, but what *God was doing*. In this way he began to reconcile God and humanity, and gave voice to both in the exchange.

We are the inheritors of this new covenant, and though we still have reason to lament in this fallen world, we are assured of God's continuous, merciful response to our repentance and our cries for help. In the Eucharist we are about to share, we have the most tangible reality of that merciful response. Let us give thanks for that, and pray for the grace to share that love and mercy in the world around us.

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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 Mark 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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