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YEAR B WEEKDAYS II

Tuesday, May 1, 2018
(Lec. 286)

- 1) Acts 14:19-28
- 2) John 14:27-31a

Or for Memorial (Lec. 559)

- 1) Genesis 1:26–2:3 or
Colossians 3:14-15, 17, 23-24
- 2) Matthew 13:54-58

Gospel related-John: CCC 606, 1851, 2853 CSDC 491, 516

Gospel related-Matthew: CCC 495, 500 CSDC 259

TUESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Joseph the Worker)

FOCUS: Like Joseph, we are called to trust in God and be faithful.

In today's Gospel, we hear folks wonder out loud where Jesus got *such wisdom and mighty deeds*? After all, wasn't his father simply a carpenter?

Not much is said about Joseph in Scripture. We know he was an honorable man because he is described as a "righteous" man, which meant he was faithful to the law and Scriptures; he was just. We also know he descended from the house of David. The Church gives Joseph two feast days: today, as Joseph the Worker, and on the nineteenth of March as the husband of Mary.

The comments by those in the crowd, the ones that express astonishment at what they perceive as Jesus' pretentiousness, are not meant as a slight against Joseph. In fact, the word translated here as "carpenter" is one whose deeper meaning is "master craftsman," so it is clear they knew who Joseph was and have great respect for his work. What they cannot comprehend, and actually take offense at, is how "this son," – Jesus – came from "that father," Joseph.

And therein lies the root of all who lack faith in who Jesus is: a failure to understand and believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, not just of Joseph. So why celebrate Joseph today?

Because Jesus, Son of God, was as fully human as he was fully divine, and he needed a human father. Joseph, knowing who Jesus was, raised him in the law and Scriptures, provided for him, and never sought glory or attention on account of him. Instead, teaching and traditions about Joseph speak only of his work ethic, patience, stalwartness, courage and love. Thus, over time he has become the patron of workers, and a model for all laborers to follow.

God created Joseph, as he did each one of us, and does with every human being, in his own image. Joseph was faithful to the one who created him, as we are called to be.

There is much work to be done in sharing the Good News of Christ. In the spirit of Joseph the Worker, let us "roll up our sleeves" and have at it. Then, when our time here is coming to an end, and we invoke Saint Joseph that we, too, might experience "a happy death," may we be able to tell him when at last we meet, we, too, had faith in Jesus his son as the Son of God.

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Wednesday, May 2, 2018
(Lec. 287)

- 1) Acts 15:1-6
- 2) John 15:1-8

WEDNESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(OBL MEM

Saint Athanasius,
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 308, 517, 737, 755, 787, 859, 864, 1108, 1694, 1988, 2074, 2615, 2732 CSDC 39

FOCUS: Remain in Christ.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, *I am the true vine*. These words would have resonated deeply with the disciples. Wine, the product of fruitful vineyards, was a commodity of wealth in ancient times, and the vine was used in the Old Testament to represent the people of Israel. It continues to be an important symbol of our faith today.

Jesus speaks this truth at a critical time – the Last Supper. Jesus knows he will be leaving the world. By proclaiming himself as *the true vine*, Jesus reveals himself as the source of new life, of heavenly treasure rather than earthly wealth. He is the new covenant established with Israel, and the world. For the fruit of the vine to grow, and to continue in the Church, he needs his disciples to understand the intimate relationship they have with him. They are more than followers; Jesus' disciples are in communion with him.

Baptism grafts us to the vine of Christ. The Eucharist keeps us united to this vine, enabling the Holy Spirit to flow freely through us so we may bear the fruits of holiness and love. This communion provides for "The fruitfulness of apostolate for ordained ministers as well as for lay people ... Charity, drawn from the Eucharist above all, is always as it were, the soul of the whole apostolate" (CCC 864).

The imagery we heard today helps us see how the Lord lovingly tends to his vine. *He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit*. Our fruitfulness is a response to our heavenly gardener's abounding care.

Such a relationship also helps us realize the power of Christian prayer. We pray *in Jesus* not just *to* him. He is not our last resort; he is our only resort. Jesus tells us, *Remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you*.

Today we celebrate the memorial of Saint Athanasius, Bishop and Doctor of the Church. He was born in Egypt at the end of the third century. While other priests denied Christ's divinity, Athanasius remained in Christ. He received the grace to defend the truth for his flock. He was exiled for his beliefs, then later invited to return as bishop at the demand of his people.

Like Saint Athanasius, we will encounter certain individuals and ideas that threaten our beliefs. We must remain in Christ. His grace will give us strength to uphold our faith and bear fruit in the world. This is what makes us disciples, and this is what glorifies God.

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Thursday, May 3, 2018

(Lec. 561)

1) 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

2) John 14:6-14

Gospel related: CCC 74, 459, 470, 516, 1698, 2466, 2614, 2633, 2815 CSDC 1, 555, 28

SAINTS PHILIP AND JAMES

- FEAST

FOCUS: By our witness, let us share Christ with others.

Antiques Roadshow is one of those quirky programs on TV that still manages to capture our interest and attention. It's a PBS show where people are invited to bring their most treasured, and at times not so cherished, possessions for valuation and appraisal by experts. Traveling from city to city, each episode is unique as folks bring in a wide variety of items and tell the story of how they first came into their possession. In most cases, the appraisals are not too surprising, but now and again someone will be shocked to hear that their item is of great monetary value. Often, it is something that was handed down to them by a family member or friend, and so they cherish it not for its monetary value but because it reminds them of a loved one.

Saint Paul, in our reading today, reminds the Corinthians that they, too, have received a great treasure: not one of monetary or earthly value but still one of *first importance*. Like a loving parent, Paul has handed on to his children what was once in turn given to him – namely, knowledge of the risen Christ. For Paul, there is no greater gift or treasure than to know of Christ and the salvation won for us by his cross and resurrection.

Determined to set out his apostolic credentials, Paul briefly records the events after the resurrection, of how the risen Christ first appeared to Peter and then the other Apostles, including Philip and James, whose feast days we celebrate today, and finally to Paul himself. Paul knows that these appearances were never meant to be purely personal events, but to be shared and witnessed to before the world. Today, as we remember two great Apostles and their commitment to the Gospel – a commitment that would ultimately lead to their martyrdom – let us recommit to live the Gospel and to be faithful to it before all.

The truth of the Resurrection lies at the very heart of that Gospel message and is the core of the Christian vocation. All who have encountered Christ are obliged to share that knowledge and witness with others. So we, too, are called to hand on this holy treasure. As we strive to do so, let's remember that when we share Christ, we also share the One who sent him, the eternal Father.

In his response to Philip's request to *show us the Father*, Jesus reminds the disciples of the unique oneness and unity that exists between him and the Father. To know Jesus is to know the Father, for he alone is the way, the truth and the life.

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Friday, May 4, 2018

(Lec. 289)

1) Acts 15:22-31

2) John 15:12-17

Gospel related: CCC 363, 434, 459, 609, 614, 737, 1108, 1823, 1970, 1972, 2074, 2347, 2615, 2745, 2815 **CSDC** 13, 29, 39, 580

FRIDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: We are chosen by God to be his friends.

Today's Gospel has many messages, but we will focus today on one seemingly small sentence. Jesus says, *You are my friends if you do what I command you.* What does it mean for Jesus to call us *friend*?

The Greek word used here for friend is *philos*, which indicates companionship and kinship; a virtuous friendship of affectionate regard and loyalty. Only one other individual in Scripture is identified as a friend of God, and that is Abraham (*cf* Is 41:8). So as Abraham was God's friend in the old covenant, we are his friends in the new covenant that Jesus established.

A friend is someone we know well, someone we like and someone who has things in common with us. A friend is someone we trust, someone we know we can rely on and someone we can confide in. Sometimes a friendship involves sacrifice, as when a friend is moving and needs someone to do the heavy lifting, and help carry furniture. But it also includes smaller, but no-less-important, relational aspects, such as sharing meals.

The love at the basis of these friendships is that virtuous affection and loyalty of which John writes. This is what Jesus is asking of us in naming us friends: to love him; to love one another as he has loved us and to lay down our lives for each other. This is no small thing. Jesus is *God*, after all, and yet God wants to *be in relationship with us*. Not as master and slave, but as love personified in friendship. This is astounding when we think about it. No other faith tradition has such a divine union between God and humanity.

God, of course, gives everything in this relationship, literally laying down his life for us. All he asks in return is that we keep his commands. God chose us. Let us remember that. *God. Chose. Us.* And therefore his grace is sufficient for us to do what he asks. We simply need to be willing to do the heavy lifting that a life of Christian discipleship and friendship sometimes requires.

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Saturday, May 5, 2018

(Lec. 290)

1) Acts 16:1-10

2) John 15:18-21

Gospel related: CCC 530, 675, 765

SATURDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: If we follow the will of God, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we may one day see the kingdom of God.

Almost every day of our lives, we recite the Lord's Prayer, that wonderful gift that Jesus taught his disciples. Each time we pray it, we declare to God, *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*. This is a central tenet of our faith – that we look forward to the time when the kingdom of God will be fulfilled here on earth. But when we look around, or turn on the news, we can see that the construction of the kingdom of God here on earth is still very much a work in progress. The mission of our lives is intrinsically tied in to Jesus' own mission – to bring about God's reign here on earth.

The work of doing God's will is central to today's readings. In the first reading, we follow Paul as he journeys throughout modern-day Turkey. Along the way, he takes on a travel companion, Timothy, a man held in high esteem by the people. Paul and Timothy continue their work, but the Holy Spirit prevents them from going north into Asia. So, they turn west, toward what is now Bulgaria. Again, the Holy Spirit does not allow them to proceed where they want to go.

In the passage, we don't hear Paul complain or gripe that he isn't allowed to go where he wants. No, he heeds the advice of the Holy Spirit, and understands that he needs to follow God's will, wherever it may take him and Timothy. He understands also that God is guiding him through signs that no one else is privy to. Through a vision, or what we would call "a dream," Paul is told to go to Greece, to be with the Macedonians. Paul follows God's will, by looking for the signs that God places along his path.

The Gospel relates a different take on the importance of following God's will. Remember that for the evangelist John, the world either knows God, or does not know God. In today's Gospel, Jesus cautions his disciples that they will be living and working in a world that does not know the one who sent him. Because of this, they will face persecution.

Our great hope, though, is that we who seek to do the Father's will may one day see God's reign. In the third Eucharistic Prayer, we pray to God, *To our departed brothers and sisters and to all who were pleasing to you at their passing from this life, give kind admittance to your kingdom. There we hope to enjoy for ever the fullness of your glory*. Let us do God's will here on earth, and so, be pleasing in the eyes of God, and enjoy our eternal reward.

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When the Ascension of the Lord is celebrated on the following Sunday, the Second Reading and Gospel from the Seventh Sunday of Easter (see Lec. 60) may be read on the Sixth Sunday of Easter.

SUNDAY, MAY 6, 2018

**SIXTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

(Lec. 56)

- 1) Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48
- 2) 1 John 4:7-10
- 3) John 15:9-17

Gospel related: **CCC** 363, 434, 459, 609, 614, 737, 1823, 1824, 1970, 1972, 2074, 2347, 2615, 2745, 2815; **CSDC** 13, 29, 39, 580

FOCUS: Love is the basis of Christian joy.

What gives joy? The beauties of nature, surely. And children. How Jesus rejoiced when little children climbed onto his lap! And what joy he felt when he healed people.

The deepest source of Jesus' joy, however, was his loving relationship with his heavenly Father. Jesus tells us that wherever he might go, whatever he might do, he remains in his Father's loving embrace.

Jesus wants *us* to have this joy, too. He tells us this in today's Gospel: *I have told you this that my joy may be in you and your joy might be complete.* And he adds: *Remain in my love.* How? Jesus explains at once: *If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love.*

What is the commandment above all that Jesus is talking about? He tells us: *Love one another as I love you.* Jesus goes on to explain the kind of love he is talking about: not just a warm *feeling*, but an active *being*. A costly love which gives and goes on giving. *No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.* That is what Jesus did for us. That is what he asks us to do for one another.

In the First Letter of John, we hear this same message. *Let us love one another*, John says, *because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.* And God revealed this love to us through the complete offering of himself, in the form of his Son, so that we would come to know God, love God and have life in God. Who wouldn't find joy in experiencing that kind of life-giving love?

Saying that love is the basis of Christian joy does not mean that love is easy. Loving others is difficult at times. Not in the sense of how we feel, and whether we "like" them, but because of the selflessness and sacrifice it demands of us. And yet, it is precisely these demands that give love its joy: for the more we give of ourselves in love, the more room we make in ourselves for God who is nothing *but* love.

To love is to completely will the good of another; to desire nothing other than another's flourishing and growth in virtue. Let us pray for the grace to do and be as God asks of us; and may the Eucharist, the tangible presence of God's unfailing love for us, transform us with that grace.

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Monday, May 7, 2018

(Lec. 291)

1) Acts 16:11-15

2) John 15:26–16:4a

Gospel related: CCC 244, 248, 263, 692, 719, 729, 1433, 2671 **CSDC** 39

MONDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus reminds the disciples of trials they will face and of the Spirit he will send.

Many of us are people of lists: “To-do” lists, “to-call” lists, “to-accomplish” lists. It can be very gratifying to cross off an item on our list.

Yet there are days when our most careful plans do not work out. Lists get discarded, schedules upended, or plans are interrupted. Occasionally, however, there may be days where everything just falls into place without a list – where somehow events go smoothly without advance planning.

Note what is described in the Acts of the Apostles today. Paul and Timothy are traveling from city to city, sharing the Good News of Jesus. The description is almost haphazard, as if they did not plan in advance where they would be or how they would spend their time: *We set sail from Troas ... from there to Philippi ... we spent some time in that city ... we sat and spoke with the women who had gathered there.* Prior to this passage in the same chapter in Acts, we hear that in some cases they had been unable to preach – that they *had been prevented by the Holy Spirit* (6).

In each instance, note how there does not seem to be a schedule or any kind of an itinerary. Paul and his companion are utterly reliant on the Holy Spirit to take them where they need to be, to have them speak to those ready for the message, and to stop them from being where they should not be.

In a related way, Jesus has a message to the disciples in the Gospel. He will be departing soon and the disciples will, like Paul and Timothy, go out to share the Gospel. They will face hardship and persecution. And not only that, they will be persecuted by those who *think* that they are doing God’s will. Yet the disciples will not be alone because Jesus will send them the Spirit. The Spirit will testify to Jesus along with the disciples.

The Spirit will strengthen them. And they will need it. They, like us, may have their own ideas, their own lists, their own agendas carefully laid out – but Jesus knows it will not be easy. He knows that plans are often interrupted, that fear and doubt may overwhelm us. And he encourages them, and us, to trust the Spirit – in the midst of trials, in the midst of uncertainty, to trust the direction of the Holy Spirit, who has his own, much higher, agenda at work.

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Tuesday, May 8, 2018

(Lec. 292)

1) Acts 16:22-34

2) John 16:5-11

Gospel related: CCC 385, 388, 692, 729, 1287, 1433; CSDC 453

TUESDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The Holy Spirit offers the gifts we need to be faithful and fruitful Christians.

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of sending an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to his disciples. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, and he sends the Holy Spirit to each of us through the sacraments and in every moment that we pray for his aid.

Our Church teaches that the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude or courage, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. We can see these gifts take hold in the lives of the post-resurrection Christian communities.

The Acts of the Apostles was written by Saint Luke to record activities of the earliest Christians. In today's first reading, Paul and Silas are jailed for their teaching, but their faith does not falter. In fact, they continue to pray and sing to the Lord – and an earthquake throws open the prison doors! To the amazement of the jailer, Paul and Silas stayed in the prison, trusting that God had a greater mission for them – a mission to convert the jailer and his family.

In such circumstances, many of us would have bemoaned our bad luck at being beaten and thrown in jail. If an earthquake shook open the doors, we'd probably escape while we had the chance. Where do Paul and Silas get the faith to remain prayerful and patient to carry out their mission to evangelize? From the Holy Spirit.

We see these gifts lived out by Paul and Silas. Paul and Silas acted in courage to preach the Gospel in the face of persecution and imprisonment. They exercised the gift of piety when they prayed in prison. They acted with wisdom and spiritual knowledge when the earthquake struck, knowing that God had a mission of evangelization for them, and with understanding that running away might mean that the prison guard would be punished for letting them escape. The prison guard was blessed with the gift of fear of the Lord when he saw the power of their prayer, and God's intervention for their freedom. And finally, they counseled the guard in how he and his family might also come to follow the Lord Jesus.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not limited to amazing stories of the Apostles who lived two thousand years ago. Jesus desires that we should live as missionary disciples, exercising those gifts in our everyday life.

In any situation we encounter, suffering or not, we can ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom, knowledge, understanding, the gift of counsel, courage, piety and fear, or awe and wonder at the power of God. Perhaps we need one gift more than others. So today we invite the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to empower us with those gifts so we, too, may follow Jesus faithfully and well.

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Wednesday, May 9, 2018

(Lec. 293)

1) Acts 17:15, 22–18:1

2) John 16:12-15

Gospel related: CCC 91, 243, 244, 485, 687, 690, 692, 729, 1117, 1287, 2466, 2615, 2671 **CSDC** 29, 104

WEDNESDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: What is God saying to us that we are not ready to hear?

Sometimes we're not ready to hear what someone is saying to us, even when it is something we need to hear.

We may ask friends for advice about relationships or career decisions, but more often than not we just want them to confirm what we already think. We may have experienced this ourselves when trying to help someone we love: for example, intervening in an unhealthy relationship, or confronting a spouse, child or best friend about a problem. When we love someone, we want to help them. But in many cases that person is not ready to be helped, and that can be a frustrating, sad experience.

Saint Paul loved the people to whom he preached. He was filled with missionary zeal, driven by the love of Christ. It was his desire that all men and women should know the one true God, and his only begotten Son, who gave himself for our salvation. He preached in synagogues, in the marketplace, in people's homes, searching for those who were ready to hear the Word of God.

Today, we hear about his experience in Athens. He was exasperated by the number of idols in the city. But instead of scolding the Athenians for idolatry, he addresses them in a spirit of compassion. He compliments them on being "extremely religious," even erecting a statue to the Unknown God. But what they worship in ignorance, Paul has come to reveal in truth.

The Athenians offered different responses to Paul. Some scoffed and turned away; others showed interest and asked to be taught more, later. A few, such as Dionysius and Damaris, were ready to hear and respond to Paul's preaching.

Like the Athenians, we may find ourselves turning away from God's Word. Perhaps we find it too challenging, and are afraid to respond. Perhaps we are simply not ready to hear what he is saying to us – what we really need to hear. Perhaps we are just not willing to change, or to offer ourselves to him completely. But unlike the Athenians prior to Paul, we are fortunate to worship a God whom we know, the one true God – who loves us completely. He speaks to each of us in the stillness of our hearts. We need only open our hearts, trust in him and listen.

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NOTE: Regarding the Ascension of the Lord, the ecclesiastical provinces of Boston, Hartford, New York, Newark, Omaha, and Philadelphia have retained its celebration on the proper Thursday, while all other provinces have transferred this Solemnity to the Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 28. If transferred, Thursday, May 10, is observed as an Easter Weekday or as the following Optional Memorials: Saint Damien de Veuster, Priest. The following readings are used: Acts 18:1-8/John 16:16-20(294).

Thursday, May 10, 2018

(Lec. 58)

- 1) Acts 1:1-11
- 2) Ephesians 1:17-23 or
Ephesians 4:1-13 or 4:1-7, 11-13
- 3) Mark 16: 15-20

Gospel related: **CCC** 112, 627, 652, 659, 730, 981, 1120, 1122, 1304 **CSDC** 52

**THE ASCENSION
OF THE LORD
- SOLEMNITY**
(Holy Day of Obligation)

FOCUS: Jesus has gone before us to show us the way, and sent us the Holy Spirit to be our Helper.

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, the account we heard in today's Gospel: *Then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. We celebrate knowing that where Jesus has gone, he is enabling us to go as well.*

Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon, famously said, "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." Although that step out of the spaceship was just one small step for him, it had amazing significance for the human race. Neil Armstrong walking on the moon meant that it was possible for others to walk on the moon.

As astonishing as Neil Armstrong's action was, Jesus' ascension into heaven is what *truly* has significance for all of humanity and creation. Through the fall of Adam and Eve, all of mankind was separated from God. But through Jesus' life, passion, death and resurrection, he paid the price for sin and enabled us to be in union with God through him. Through the Ascension, Jesus has made it possible for sinners like us to enter heaven and abide in God's presence. Just as Neil Armstrong overcame limits, which allowed man to walk on the moon, so has Jesus overcome death allowing us to reach heaven.

But this is no easy journey. Just as Neil Armstrong went through training, so do we need to be trained, as it were; formed as disciples of Jesus Christ. In doing so we become more like him and become more and more able to enter the glories of heaven. There is no chance we could ever accomplish this on our own – but we are not alone. Jesus has gone before us to show us the way, and sent us the Holy Spirit to be our Helper and Paraclete.

It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to follow the command Jesus gives us before he ascends in today's Gospel: *Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.* We are his disciples, and he has shown us the way. Let us follow him with joy and thanksgiving.

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***Optional Homily for May 10, 2018**

Thursday, May 10, 2018

(Lec. 294)

- 1) Acts 18:1-8
- 2) John 16:16-20

THURSDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK OF EASTER

(Opt. Mem.)

USA: Saint Damien de Veuster,
Priest)

FOCUS: We know who Jesus is, and we come here to celebrate him.

One of the main themes in the whole of the Gospel of John is the distinction between those who are “in the know,” and those who are not. There are those who know, and can see – like the blind man Jesus heals in the well-known story (*cf.*, John 9) – that Jesus is the Son of God; and those who do not know, and cannot see him – like the religious leaders who accused the blind man – even when he stands before them.

The disciples are themselves learning what it means to be “in the know” as the Gospel progresses. They constantly ask Jesus to explain what he means: by his references to being the Son of God; that he will leave them and go to the Father, etc.; and today, that in *a little while and you will no longer see me, and again a little while later and you will see me*.

This is not Jesus trying to fool them; he is not playing a divine version of “now you see me, now you don’t.” He is continuing the explanation, emanating from the very first verses of John’s Gospel, of who he is, why he has come, and what God is doing through him for the world. That the disciples question what Jesus means is not a mark against them – these words would be difficult for anyone to fully grasp – but instead reveal an insistence on maintaining their relationship with Christ and coming to know him better.

We do not know what he means, they say, indicating not doubt, but lack of full knowledge. They do not turn away from the message, but pursue it more deeply. Jesus, in his infinite patience with them, does not give them a direct answer, but provides them with the assurance central to the Gospel message. *You will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy*. In other words, it is okay if we do not fully understand every aspect of God’s plan. As long as we know and believe in Jesus as the Christ and the way to the Father, we will one day share eternal life with him.

We here, today, are in the know. We are the heirs of those who knew Jesus, saw Jesus, broke bread with him, and witnessed his resurrected body. We are the descendants of that emerging Church, blessed with the fullness of God’s revelation in the person of Jesus, and the Scriptures and Tradition that allow us to hand on the faith under the guidance of the Spirit.

We know who Jesus is, and we come here to celebrate him, profess him, and allow him to transform us for the good of the world. Let us listen when he speaks to us, and never cease trying to know him better. And may all our grief turn to joy.

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Friday, May 11, 2018
(Lec. 295)
1) Acts 18:9-18
2) John 16:20-23
Gospel related: CCC 2615

FRIDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Our grief will become joy.

Today's Gospel image of a woman in labor is a striking one. As a metaphor for all the hardships and anguish we endure in this life, it serves as the perfect illustration for Jesus' message to us: in the end, the suffering will be forgotten. Our hearts *will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you*, Jesus lovingly reminds us; *your grief will become joy*.

But any message of hope – even as beautiful as Jesus' prayer for us and assurance of future joy – is painfully difficult to accept as truth when we find ourselves in a crisis. The death of a family member. A major physical injury. A spousal's betrayal. A child's addiction. A chronic illness diagnosis. A parent's senility.

Sometimes the pain and hardships we experience in this life feel like a siphon sucking away our sense of genuine joy – let alone any semblance of hope we might have. It is easy to let life become something we merely endure, and to trade our attitude and stability for despair and hopelessness.

When we find ourselves in this darkness, we can pray for the courage to live through the pain of each day. The psalms, for example, are a powerful way to express our deep emotions in conversation with God. Or, we have the perfect words in the prayer that Jesus taught us, asking our Father to heed our needs and concerns. Remember: *Whatever [we] ask the Father in [Jesus] name he will give [us]*.

We can seek compassion, for ourselves and others, by reaching out to others, especially those who share similar circumstances or hardships. Service moves our focus from self to other, breaking down the illusion that we are alone. It opens us to the possibility of joy. It reminds us that we will one day see Jesus face to face, and grieve no more.

We are a people looking forward to, and awaiting, the second coming of Christ – while simultaneously appreciating and giving thanks for the life we have here. We dwell in the paradox of “already but not yet,” where the kingdom of God has been established but has not yet reached its full expression and glory. Let us take comfort in the promises of God, and his attentiveness to our needs, as we “wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.”

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Saturday, May 12, 2018
(Lec. 296)
1) Acts 18:23-28
2) John 16:23b-28

SATURDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saints Nereus and Achilleus,
Martyrs;
Saint Pancras,
Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 661, 2615, 2795, 2815

FOCUS: Whatever we ask the Father in Jesus' name, he will give us.

Today's Gospel passage is from the Gospel of John, specifically from the three-chapter section also known as the "Farewell Discourses." This section represents some of Jesus' final teachings on prayer and the life of discipleship. We heard Jesus tell his disciples: *whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you.*

Jesus speaks to us about prayer throughout the Gospels, from the "Our Father" in Matthew and Luke to the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his crucifixion. As the one who reveals the Father to us, Jesus is also the one who serves as our advocate and mediator back to the Father for our needs. Prayer is how we maintain our relationship with God, and it is meant to sustain, refresh and renew us.

We know the importance of prayer in our own lives – it focuses our words and actions, and it provides us with hope in our sometimes-hopeless-seeming world. Prayers of praise and lament detail the history of the Israelite people, and are abundant in the Old Testament and psalms. Under the new covenant, a strong prayer life is essential for a peaceful and productive Christian life.

In today's Gospel, we are again reminded not only of the *importance* of prayer but also of its *power*, and the strength it provides. *For the Father himself loves you*, Jesus tells his disciples, *because you have loved me and have come to believe that I came from God.* The love of God, which already created and sustains us, is now a love we reciprocate and also share with one another. This is what Jesus means when he desires our joy to be complete.

Nowhere is this joy more complete than in Mass. Through the miracle of bread and wine transformed into the body and blood of Christ, we have a true communion between ourselves and God through the sacrifice of his Son. "In the Holy Spirit, Christian prayer is a communion of love with the Father, not only through Christ but also in him" (CCC 2615). God hears us, and God answers. Let our prayer life strengthen us.

* * *

NOTE: In those places where the observance of the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord has been transferred to this day, the Mass and readings of the Ascension are used: Acts 1:1-11/Ephesians 1:17-23/Matthew 28:16-20 (Lec. 58)

SUNDAY, MAY 13, 2018

**SEVENTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

(Lec. 60)

1) Acts 1:15-17, 20a, 20c-26

2) 1 John 4:11-16

3) John 17:11b-19

Gospel related: **CCC** 611, 858, 2466, 2747, 2749, 2750, 2812, 2815, 2821, 2849, 2850; **CSDC** 18

FOCUS: Trust in God when making important decisions.

Today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles is absolutely perfect for us today. The choosing of Matthias to replace Judas takes place after the Ascension of Jesus and before the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Just like today is.

While the methodology for choosing Matthias may seem odd to us, it was common practice for our Jewish ancestors of faith to "cast lots" to make important decisions. But what must not be missed in our puzzlement over this casting of lots is that the Apostles *prayed* together before making this most important decision – a choice that would have an immediate impact on this very new Church.

This was certainly true throughout the lives of the spiritual leaders of Israel, such as Moses, Joshua and Ezekiel, to name but a few. So it would seem a natural approach for these new leaders of a fledging Church. It stands to reason, then, does it not, that we should bring decisions, especially important decisions, before the Lord in prayer and not leave them to chance?

When we bring decisions before the Lord in prayer and heed his voice in our hearts on a regular basis, then we understand what John is talking about in our second reading today when he states: *We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us.*

Jesus' prayer is for us to be one with him and the Father. Admitting that we are all works in progress, we must nonetheless commit ourselves to being one with the Father, as is Jesus. The more we allow ourselves to be one with Jesus in mind and in heart, the easier our decisions – important decisions, even life-changing decisions – will become.

* * *

Monday, May 14, 2018

(Lec. 564)

1) Acts 1:15-17, 20-26

2) John 15:9-17

Gospel related: CCC 363, 434, 459, 609, 614, 737, 1108, 1823, 1824, 1970, 1972, 2074, 2347, 2615, 2745, 2815 CSDC 13, 29, 39, 580

**SAINT MATTHIAS,
APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Jesus has chosen us to be his followers, but answering his call is up to us.

We know most of the Apostles for what they did, and the role they played, in helping the Church take hold among Jews and Gentiles, but not much is handed down to us on the particulars of their personalities, their families or their specific accomplishments. Saint Matthias, whom we celebrate today, may be one of the most unknown, since most people do not even remember him by name. We may know that Judas was replaced by someone, but few of us could say who that person was.

Today's first reading tells how Matthias was chosen. He had been with Jesus throughout all of his public ministry, but was not picked as one of the original Twelve. Still, he was a good and righteous man – one of two who seemed qualified to be counted as a viable witness to the risen Jesus. There was a secret ballot and Matthias was chosen. Peter, in calling for the vote, made it clear that God's choice would be made manifest through these ballots.

In the Gospel, we hear Jesus remind the original Apostles that they had not chosen him, but it was he who chose them. Like them, like Matthias and like other followers down through the ages, we are chosen by Jesus to live a life dedicated to love and service to others. He has already chosen us, but our choice to follow is something we need to do over and over, through all the ups and downs of life.

Because Jesus chose us, he helps *us* make the right choice. He assures us if we keep his commandments – that is, if we love one another as he loves us – we will remain in his love, and our joy will be complete. How could we choose otherwise? Let us ask Saint Matthias today to help us put our lives into the Lord's hands, and be willing to do the work he is calling us to do.

* * *

Tuesday, May 15, 2018
(Lec. 298)

- 1) Acts 20:17-27
- 2) John 17:1-11a

TUESDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Isidore)

Gospel related: CCC 217, 589, 684, 730, 1069, 1085, 1721, 1996, 2604, 2746, 2747, 2749, 2750, 2751, 2758, 2765, 2812, 2815, 2849 CSDC 122

FOCUS: Let us pray for one another, and bear witness to the Gospel.

In hearing this “high priestly prayer” of Jesus, as this passage from today’s Gospel of John is known, we have a truly privileged view of the intimate union Jesus has with the Father, and of the love he has for and confidence he has in his disciples. *Father, the hour has come, Jesus says: Everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine ... now I will no longer be in the world ... I am coming to you.*

We can picture this scene: Jesus’ tone conveying the tremendous love he has for his Father; and the visible warmth, affection and tenderness found only between two people who know each other better than anyone else in the world. And in this moment of calm before his own passion and death, Jesus gives praise to the Father through his words, and prays – not for himself and what he is about to endure – but for his disciples and followers. *Now they know that everything you gave me is from you, Jesus says, and goes on to say, they accepted [my words] and truly understood that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me.*

Fruit of this prayer is evident in Paul’s ministry and his dedication to the Gospel mission. He says to the community, *I did not shrink from proclaiming to you the entire plan of God.* And as he prepares to leave his community, much as Jesus prepared to leave his, Paul offers these thoughts: *I consider life of no importance to me, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear witness to the Gospel of God's grace.*

Paul – like each of us – was continually lifted up in prayer by Jesus. He was, and we are, united to Jesus with each other and the Father, allowing the glory of God to also be revealed by we who are made in his image. This sustained Paul and sustains us, who would not – for one minute – exist without this powerful union and the prayers of Jesus on our behalf.

Observing the reality of the union of Jesus with the Father, and of Paul’s dedication, we cannot help but be both overwhelmed and grateful for all the blessings that continue to flow from them. Perhaps we, too, may strive, as Paul did, to *finish [our] course and the ministry that [we] received from the Lord Jesus, to bear witness to the Gospel.*

* * *

Wednesday, May 16, 2018
(Lec. 299)

- 1) Acts 20:28-38
- 2) John 17:11b-19

Gospel related: CCC 611, 858, 2466, 2747, 2749, 2750, 2812, 2815, 2821, 2849, 2850 CSDC 18

WEDNESDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The truth protects us from false promises, and empowers us to follow God's call to love and service.

In today's readings we hear two farewells. Saint Paul speaks to the Church leaders in Ephesus, knowing that after he's gone, they will face opposition. He reminds them to rely on God but also to work hard in order to help those in need because *it is more blessed to give than to receive*.

At the Last Supper, Jesus prays for his disciples, and that includes us. Jesus says twice – in verse fourteen and again in verse sixteen – that the disciples don't belong to the world any more than he does. Why remain "in the world" if we don't belong? Because as the Father sent Jesus into the world, so Jesus sends us. Jesus doesn't ask that we be taken out of the world. He prays that we be protected from evil and dedicated to the truth. We're here for a reason.

That reason is to love one another; to follow God's commands and build up the kingdom. God made us to know him, to love him and to serve him in this world and to be happy with him forever in the next. It is certainly possible to be happy in this world, and there's nothing wrong with enjoying God's creation and the things of it, while we do so. However, if we're dedicated to the truth, we need to recognize the false promises of a world-apart-from-God.

It's an illusion to think we can find lasting happiness playing by only the world's rules. Doing whatever it takes to succeed certainly doesn't guarantee happiness – especially at the cost of friendships, family or self-respect. Besides, is what the world calls success really winning? If fame and fortune brought contentment, why are there so many celebrities, sports figures, politicians and others whose lives and behaviors indicate otherwise? As the saying goes, "Even if you win the rat race, you're still a rat." Buying into the world's priorities may not make us rats, but it does pull us away from God's plan for our greater good.

We can count on God's help and grace as we make every attempt to avoid evils and remain dedicated to the truth. We can call on our communities to pray for one another, that we might encourage and assist each other in loving one another. Someday, we, too, will say farewell to those we love as we transition from this life to eternal life. Let it then be said of us that we indeed knew God, loved him and served him. For in that, we will all one day share in God's joy, completely.

* * *

Thursday, May 17, 2018

(Lec. 300)

1) Acts 22:30; 23:6-11

2) John 17:20-26

Gospel related: CCC 260, 589, 690, 729, 820, 877, 2749, 2750, 2751 CSDC 34

THURSDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: United to Christ, let us make him known and loved throughout the world.

How often is the division between what we profess as believers, and how we behave, held up to close scrutiny by others in our culture? Any discrepancy between what we say, and what we do, certainly undermines our call to be credible witnesses of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Jesus expects more of his followers, as we can see from the Gospel. Jesus prays that his Apostles – and all who will come to believe in him through their words – might be one, as Jesus and the Father are one. That is, we are to be united to Jesus in exactly the same way that Jesus and the Father are united. We are to have the mind of Christ as we go about the mission of spreading the Good News. Just as we became believers through the words of the Apostles – handed down century after century to our time – so, too, should others come to hear and believe in the Gospel through our faithful witness to it.

In his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), Pope Francis calls on all Catholics today to take seriously their role as apostolic missionaries in our world, in our times. He encourages each member of the Church to be joyful in proclaiming the Gospel in their daily lives to “recover and deepen our enthusiasm” for the Gospel and for Jesus in our lives (10).

Just as Paul testified in Jerusalem and Rome, we are called to testify to Jesus' life, death and resurrection with our own lives – wherever God places us at each moment of our lives. Preaching God's word to a world that needs it can be as simple as visiting a neighbor who's facing some difficulties, going the extra mile for a family member or taking time to be involved in our child's school.

As we go forth from this church today, let us pray to have the heart and mind of Christ in our witness – and for the enthusiasm to let the people around us know about the mercy and love of God.

* * *

Friday, May 18, 2018
(Lec. 301)
1) Acts 25:13b-21
2) John 21:15-19

FRIDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint John I,
Pope and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 553, 618, 645, 881, 1429, 1551

FOCUS: Following Jesus and living out the Gospel can bring us a joy like no other.

Follow me. Two simple words from Jesus. *Follow me.* Paul followed Jesus' summons all over the known world, proclaiming to all who would listen the Good News that Jesus the Christ was risen from the dead. His own people accused him of denying his Jewish faith, and he was imprisoned until he was eventually martyred in Rome by Nero.

Simon Peter followed Jesus, preaching and healing in the name of risen Lord. Although he stayed closer to home, he eventually ended up in Rome as well, where he, too, was martyred by the same cruel emperor.

Pope John I followed Jesus' call, journeying to Constantinople and reuniting the Eastern and Western churches by restoring peace between the papacy and the Byzantine Emperor of Justin I during the time of the Arian controversy. On his way home to Rome, the frail and exhausted Pope was imprisoned by the King of Italy, where he died of neglect.

Likely none of these three men had an exact idea of where following Jesus would eventually take them, either geographically or spiritually. Even Simon Peter, who might have suspected from Jesus' words that he himself would at some point be imprisoned for his faith, probably did not know for sure that martyrdom would lie at the end of his journey. But follow they did, standing firm in their love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Follow me. "Follow me," the Lord says to us, no matter where it may lead, for we know the rewards of doing so, even if this world does not reward us. Follow me, because you love me, Jesus says – and you want to share that love with others.

Our choice to follow him out of love, and to live out the Gospel, can bring us a joy like no other – in our families, in our chosen profession, in our daily activities. And we can also find ourselves in places where we are imprisoned in fear, loneliness and despair because the world does not respect our choice.

But if we keep our eyes and hearts on following Jesus, then even when we end up in these situations, we, like Paul and Simon Peter and Pope John I, can stand firm in our faith through our reliance on the Lord. We can take the pain we are feeling and let it transform us to better be able to heal the pain in others. We can hold fast to the knowledge that no matter what hardship we are enduring, the kingdom of God remains in our grasp.

Follow me, beckons our Lord. Follow me, and together we will enter the kingdom of heaven.

* * *

Saturday, May 19, 2018

(Lec. 302)

1) Acts 28:16-20, 30-31

2) John 21:20-25

Gospel related: CCC 515, 878

SATURDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Christ is the Lord of new beginnings.

Our readings today have a bittersweet quality. The first reading is the end of the Acts of the Apostles. In this book, Luke has taken us on a journey from the Ascension of our Lord, through Pentecost and the bold preaching of Saint Peter and the other Apostles, and finally to the many missionary travels of Saint Paul. The ending is somewhat disappointing, in a way, as Paul remains under house arrest in Rome and the story comes to an abrupt conclusion.

But the point of the story is clear. The Church has spread from a small group of disciples in Palestine to the major cities of Asia, and even to the center of the Empire itself – Rome. And it is just the beginning. We hear that Paul *proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ*, and that is what the Church has continued to do. Peter and Paul were martyred, the Roman Empire fell, but the Church grew and spread, and lives on.

The Gospel is the ending of the Gospel according to John. Jesus has appeared to his disciples many times after the Resurrection, but now his time on earth is drawing to a close. The disciples are understandably anxious about his leaving. When will he return? Will it be in their lifetimes? He tells them not to be concerned about these things.

It is tempting sometimes to think of Jesus as someone who lived in the past. But on Easter Sunday, we declare that “the Lord has risen!” He is risen indeed. He lives on, not just in our memory, but in reality. “Christ dwells on earth in his Church” (CCC 669). He has promised to remain with us until the end of time, and he is faithful to his promises.

We face many endings in our lives, but they are also beginnings. In time, we all must face the end of our earthly lives. But because of Christ’s promises, we know that death is just another beginning. It is our birth into eternal life.

* * *

SUNDAY, MAY 20, 2018

(Lec. 63)

- 1) Acts 2:1-11
- 2) 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13
or Galatians 5:16-25
- 3) John 20:19-23
or John 15:26-26; 16:12-15

Gospel related-first option: **CCC** 575, 643, 645, 659, 730, 788, 858, 976, 1087, 1120, 1287, 1441, 1461, 1485, 2839; **CSDC** 491

**PENTECOST SUNDAY
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: We all are called to put to use the gifts we have been given by God in order to build up the Church – the body of Christ.

There once was an elderly woman who had four grown sons. The woman lost her home to fire, so the sons thought it would be good to build their mother a new home. They encountered some trouble. The first son was a carpenter, but he didn't know anything about plumbing, masonry or electrical work. So he thought there was no way he could build his mother a home. Each of his brothers – an electrician, a plumber and a bricklayer – had similar thoughts. They didn't know anything about the other building trades, so thinking only as individuals, they each decided there was no way any of them could build a new home for their mother. So the house never got built.

Maybe our life as a Church is sometimes like that story of the mother and her sons. How often do we think that the Church could not possibly need or make use of our God-given talents? Sometimes, we might catch ourselves thinking that we can't lead a song or a prayer service or a parish meeting. Maybe we think we could never stand before a group of people and put a meaningful sentence together. Perhaps we think that the Church simply doesn't need us because we can't do anything spectacular. Maybe we feel we don't have any special talents to share with anyone, so why bother?

Let us consider for a moment the diversity of gifts that are necessary to bring to life a parish like our own. Our parish life is not just about those whose talents we see and hear at Mass each Sunday. It is also about those whose talents are used "behind the scenes" so to speak – the folks who clean the church each week or the person whose focus in prayer encourages others to do the same. The volunteers who work in our religious formation programs by assembling a mailing, assisting with record keeping, preparing materials for each session – all contribute immeasurably. Preparing a dish to be shared at a funeral luncheon can bring comfort and healing, as can an open listening ear and a compassionate heart.

God continues to pour out the Holy Spirit to touch the lives of each of us. This feast of Pentecost is all about being able to see and to sense how God has touched each of us with gifts that are necessary for the life of the Church. Yes, some gifts are used more visibly, but all those God-given gifts are necessary.

Pentecost is about believing that the power of the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon each of us. Those gifts can be pooled and put to use humbly and selflessly. Pentecost is about building a house, together, that no one person can do alone. It is about building up the Church.

* * *

Monday, May 21, 2018
(Lec. 341)
1) James 3:13-18
2) Mark 9:14-29

MONDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Christopher Magallanes,
Priest,
and Companions,
Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 162, 649, 1504, 2610

FOCUS: In Jesus we find the source of true faith.

In the first reading from Saint James, we hear from an Apostle who is deeply committed to Christ and the Gospel, and to the work of forming true disciples. James shares with us from his own experiences and tradition. He is honest and practical in his thoughts.

As a faithful Jew, James knew through the prophets of the Old Testament that faith always has an active and practical side to it: in many ways they are the two sides of one coin and can never truly be separated. He also knew that faith is a gift from God that calls the believer to a radical new way of thinking and behaving which is often at variance with the ways of the world. So his words today challenge us to a new way of thinking and behaving, one that is imbued with the fruits of the Spirit and the impact of God's wisdom in our lives.

This search for holy wisdom and true faith is also at the heart of today's Gospel. Jesus is asked to heal a young man possessed by a demonic spirit. It's a condition that has plagued him for years, threatened his life and brought much pain and suffering to his family. As with all healing stories, the truth lies in the details as recalled by the evangelist. The young man is healed by the Lord, and a significant encounter occurs between his father and Jesus.

Asking on behalf of his son, it is the father who is ultimately changed by the encounter. Of course to begin with, he has some degree of faith, perhaps enough to seek out Jesus and to first make his request. But in that encounter, that seed of initial faith bursts forth from the man into a great harvest of trust, hope and renewed faith – *I do believe, help my unbelief.*

While our needs might not be as great as the family in the Gospel, we all need the loving and healing presence of Christ. Perhaps in all of Scripture there are no more human and honest words than this father's declaration of faith on behalf of his son, for us to imitate in our moments of need. They stand before us today as a model of true prayer, a starting point for all who recognize that it is in Jesus that we find the source of true faith.

* * *

Tuesday, May 22, 2018
(Lec. 342)
1) James 4:1-10
2) Mark 9:30-37

TUESDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Rita of Cascia,
Religious)

Gospel related: CCC 474, 557, 1825 CSDC 379

FOCUS: Let us grow in the freedom of uniting ourselves with the perfect and absolute good and pleasure, who is God.

Where do arguments, conflicts and frustration come from? From how we address our need for pleasure, James points out in today's first reading. Pleasure itself is not evil, as it has been created by God for our benefit, but our motivations and the manner in which we seek it can be.

What's the solution? James tells us: *Submit yourselves to God. Resist the Devil ... Draw near to God ... Cleanse your hands ... and purify your hearts.* It makes sense. God wills peace, love and joy for all of us. He in fact *desires* that we have pleasure, for God desires all good for us. But it is *how* and *why* we go about attaining it that is at issue.

Even Jesus' disciples struggled with this. When Jesus told them he would have to suffer and die before rising again, they did not understand. And by not understanding *that*, they failed to understand that their own role in the name of Jesus was one of service. So they immediately gravitated to what they *did* understand from their culture: power and prestige. Thus they argued about who among them was the greatest.

Jesus recognizes their fear and misunderstanding, and so he sits among them, and explains: greatness comes in humility before God and service to others. Acting on passion and desire that *are* of God is life giving. Self-centeredness, and seeking pleasure and happiness for reasons that are *not* of God, is wrong. Doing so will, in a manner of speaking, kill the divine in us, much as it was used by the authorities to kill Jesus.

Is it possible to be happier when we forget our egos and acquire humility? Absolutely. Surrendering ourselves to God's love equals freedom. Freedom *for* the love and acceptance of God, and freedom *from* self-indulgence and self-gratification.

So let us seek that which God desires for us with humble hearts: resisting the Devil, drawing near to God, cleansing our hands and purifying our hearts. And may we grow in the freedom of uniting ourselves with the perfect and absolute good and pleasure, who is God.

* * *

Wednesday, May 23, 2018
(Lec. 343)
1) James 4:13-17
2) Mark 9:38-40

WEDNESDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Follow Jesus, and he will show us the way to our heavenly Father.

Following Jesus places demands on each of us. It is not always easy to remain faithful to our commitment to Jesus considering all of the distractions we face each day. Today's readings provide two pieces of advice that we can employ in order to stay close to Jesus, or to find our way back when we get off track. While we know in our hearts and believe that Jesus is *the way and the truth and the life*, we at times find ourselves following different ways. We know that *no one comes to the Father except through [Jesus]*, yet we sometimes forget that Jesus is the way to the Father (see John 14:6). Today's readings are a wonderful reminder about what we can do to remain faithful to Jesus.

Our first reading from the Letter of James is addressed to the non-Palestinian Jews living throughout the Greek and Roman world. James offers them sage advice on how to live a moral life. Basically, he tells them to rely on doing God's will rather than following their own designs. *Their* plan was intended to reap a profit at the expense of other people. Being open to God's will, on the other hand, would allow them to follow *God's* plan, whatever that may be. James guides them in forming their conscience with the fundamental moral principle of knowing and doing the right thing.

In our Gospel passage today, Jesus continues to teach his Apostles about discipleship and what it entails. The Apostle John's concern is about others driving out demons in the name of Jesus. Jesus responds by telling the Apostles not to prevent these good works. They are learning what it means to follow Jesus – in other words, the ins and outs of discipleship. Jesus reminds them that *whoever is not against us is for us*. In other words, God is able to carry out his plan in ways and through others which they may not always understand.

We, too, are followers of Jesus through baptism; we are his disciples. Jesus' advice applies to us as well. In our own life we would do well to remember this when new people, events and experiences enter into it. Others may do things differently from how we do them; they may look and talk differently. Events in our lives may not be exactly what we wanted or hoped for. Yet we should keep in mind the words of Jesus to not prevent others from carrying out God's good works. After all, when we follow Jesus, we have the same goal in mind, eternal life. We just have different gifts and callings in living out that Christian discipleship.

* * *

Thursday, May 24, 2018
(Lec. 344)
1) James 5:1-6
2) Mark 9:41-50
Gospel related: CCC 1034

THURSDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Christian discipleship is a life of charity and grace.

In today's Gospel, Jesus engages in "hyperbole" – an exaggerated or bombastic saying to make a point. He surely does not mean that sinners are actually supposed to maim themselves. A gathering of disciples would be a sight to behold if that is what he meant! No, as drastic as something like that would be to do, Jesus is making the point that the life of Christian discipleship is not just about ourselves, and how we act, but our communities and how what we do affects others.

At the beginning of this passage, Jesus is continuing his discourse on discipleship as service, especially to the poor – both materially and spiritually – and lowly. Thus, even the smallest corporal work of mercy is important. Jesus says, *Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward.* Too often we can get bogged down thinking the works of charity we must do need to be large, magnificent or noteworthy.

Just as small works of mercy and charity can have a huge effect on others, so can small commissions of sin have a larger and larger effect. Jesus' use of hyperbole here is essentially to say, in a modern phrase, "nip it in the bud!" Squash the evil intentions, bad desires and temptations at the earliest stage, for their continued presence, growth or attachment to us can do no good in our lives. They will only rot, destroy and corrode, as we heard in the first reading.

So it is better to be rid of whatever causes us to sin. It is also important that we do not cause others to sin. Therein lies the connection, in this teaching, of service to another and elimination of sinful tendencies. For the more we begin by offering, perhaps metaphorically, that cup of water in Christ's name, the more the behaviors and habits we develop will reflect a life of discipleship, and not of sin.

We do not do this ourselves, however. We need grace. Grace is what enables us to act in charity and grow in virtue, and it is available in both prayer and sacrament. As we listen to Jesus' words today, and remember James' warning, let us commit to praying for and relying on God's grace so that we may one day enter fully into the kingdom of God.

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Friday, May 25, 2018
(Lec. 345)
1) James 5:9-12
2) Mark 10:1-12

FRIDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Bede the Venerable,
Priest and Doctor of the Church;
Saint Gregory VII,
Pope;
Saint Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi,
Virgin)

Gospel related: CCC 1627, 1639, 1650, 2364, 2380, 2382 CSDC 217

FOCUS: Marriage is a covenant created to last for all time.

It is rare that the Pharisees ever ask Jesus a question in good faith, or in order to learn from him something about God's good news for us. Today's reading from the Gospel of Mark, where their question concerns the lawfulness of divorce, is no exception. Jesus, knowing that they were testing him, answered by asking *them* a question: *What did Moses command you?* The Pharisees replied that Moses permitted divorce, and thus the stage is set for another fantastic teaching moment for Jesus.

He reminds the Pharisees, and us: from Creation, God designed the nature of the covenant between a man and a woman to be a single, unbreakable one. *Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate.*

We do not know how the Pharisees responded, but they certainly would have recognized, just as we can, Jesus' emphasis on the sacredness of this union, and that God is an essential part of it. Jesus' additional reply, that *whoever divorces [one] and marries another commits adultery*, affirms this sanctity. It also gives due respect to a couple's original desire to enter such a covenant.

Thus we should take care not to hear Jesus' words as an instruction to shame those who have undergone such a trial. After all, as James tells us in the first reading, *Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that you may not be judged.* There are many possible offenses against justice and charity in marriage, and none of us is perfect.

Ultimately, what we can take away from this exchange Jesus has with the Pharisees, and any discussion in the Gospels regarding sins against justice and charity in marriage for that matter, is his emphasis on the holy nature of marriage. Only sacred things can be profaned, and this marital unity, established by a profound grace that comes from the Father through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, is most sacred.

And this is where the Good News of the Gospel comes in. For while these words may seem as if they are a condemnation, the exact opposite is true. By acknowledging the sacredness of marriage, the Church recognizes the tremendous suffering and pain that occurs when the two halves of a whole are ripped apart. It affirms that offenses against justice and charity, and faithfulness, are "big ones" and can be devastating. But as James and our psalm today tell us, *the Lord is kind and merciful.* We are not alone in our struggles. With prayer, repentance and forgiveness, each of us – no matter our transgressions – remains under the loving providence of God.

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Saturday, May 26, 2018
(Lec. 346)
1) James 5:13-20
2) Mark 10:13-16

SATURDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Philip Neri,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 699, 1244, 1261

FOCUS: Let us be joyful and full of wonder, as so many children are, at the marvelous things God does for us.

Jesus surprises his disciples by saying, *Let the children come to me*. Then he adds something which he repeats, in one form or another, throughout the Gospels: *The kingdom of God belongs to such as these* – in other words, to children. Elsewhere Jesus tells us that, to enter the kingdom of heaven, we must “become like little children” (cf. Mt. 18:2-5, Mk 9:36-37, Lk 9:47-48).

What exactly does that mean?

Perhaps our first reading and psalm can give us some insight, as they both are about prayer. *Let my prayer come like incense before you*, says the psalmist. What a lovely image! Incense burns, and the smoke rises – usually unimpeded – as most hot air does. The psalmist prays, and we can envision our prayers leaving the burning of our hearts’ desires, and rising upward. The burning incense does what it does, without guile and without concern for how the laws of physics work. Much like how children operate!

In our first reading, we are instructed to pray – no matter what. Suffering? Pray. Things going great? Pray. Are we sick? Gather a community to pray. Have we sinned? Pray for contrition and repentance, and pray for the healing of one another. Whatever the occasion, we are to pray: to tell God our needs, our desires, our wants; our sorrows and our joys. Let nothing impede our prayers rising as incense before him. Let no filter, as it were, arise between our thoughts and our words. Hmm sounds again much like how children operate!

There is something good, then, about being *childlike* – not *childish* – in our approach to God. Depending on him as Father means we give ourselves a bit of a break, and we can just tell him what we need to tell him, without guile. He loves us – nothing will ever change that. We can cast our worries onto him and be assured that he hears and acts. And we can be joyful and full of wonder, as so many children are, at the marvelous things that God does for us.

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SUNDAY, MAY 27, 2018

(Lec. 165)

1) Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40

2) Romans 8:14-17

3) Matthew 28:16-20

Gospel related: **CCC** 2, 80, 189, 232, 643, 644, 645, 691, 730, 767, 788, 831, 849, 857, 860, 1120, 1122, 1223, 1257, 1276, 1444, 2156, 2743; **CSDC** 52

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

- SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: The Trinity is about relationship, unity and love.

Last Sunday at Pentecost we celebrated God, the Holy Spirit. Next weekend on the feast of Corpus Christi, we will commemorate the real presence of God, the Son, in the Eucharist. Today, we celebrate the very essence of God and the definition of what it means to be a Christian, in the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity.

There are religions which believe in Jesus that do not recognize the Trinity. It is important that we understand an essential truth – you cannot have one without the other. As we pray in the Glory Be prayer, the Judeo-Christian God has been, and always will be, the one God in three persons. There have been heresies and false teachings about who God is and what it means that he is a Trinity. This solemnity allows us to be clear in our own minds and hearts regarding who God is and how his divinity affects our humanity.

The Trinity is about relationship, unity and love. Indeed, it is the unceasing love of the Father and the Son that generates the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit for all eternity. The Trinity is a model for us, the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. Saint Paul tells us today that since we refer to God as Abba, then we are all his sons and daughters, brothers and sisters in Christ. Inasmuch as we seek relationship, unity and love in the Church, then we are truly seeking the path that will lead all of us to God's kingdom, where we will see him as he truly is.

We hear this day from the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus, celebrating his heavenly homecoming, his mission accomplished, is returning to heaven forty days after his resurrection. He gives his final command to the Apostles that they should go out to all the world, baptizing new disciples, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Notice, Jesus doesn't tell them to baptize in the "names" of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Rather, he purposely uses the singular, demonstrating that the three are in fact one.

This solemnity of the Trinity suggests many rich truths about our Catholic Christian faith: just because we cannot fully explain or comprehend something does not make it false or myth – just mystery. The same God Moses refers to in Deuteronomy was then and will always be a Triune God. Moses only knew him as I AM, but we can be sure that the Triune God who spoke to him at the burning bush was the same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the same Father of the Son Jesus; and the same God who invites us to relationship with him today.

The word "Trinity" does not appear in Scripture, though all three persons are identified in it. The Church Father Tertullian was the first to use the term, more than a century after Jesus rose from the dead. His work and that of others who followed, such as Saint Augustine, gave us a theological language and understanding of what was originally revealed in Scripture. We stand on the firm foundations of two pillars: Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

These two pillars make present and preserve the purity of the faith, and help us grow in our understanding of it. As we discover more about who God is and how much he loves us, we come to a better understanding of who we are called to be and how much love we have been given to share.

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Monday, May 28, 2018

(Lec. 347)

1) 1 Peter 1:3-9

2) Mark 10:17-27

Gospel related: CCC 1858, 2728

MONDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are a work in *progress*, but we must be faithful to the *process*, so that we will inherit eternal life.

Sometimes it feels as if Jesus is stating the obvious. Sometimes it feels like he is talking directly to me or directly to any one of us here today. Take today's Gospel passage as a perfect example: *Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God!*

Now, we know Jesus was not a fisherman, rather he was the son of a carpenter. Yet he knows how to hook the disciples and therefore how to hook us.

The disciples take the bait when Jesus throws out that simple statement. They question, *then who can be saved?* Can't we just see Jesus smiling when they are probably wringing their hands as they ask this? Then again, he states the obvious: *For men it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.*

Jesus' interaction with his disciples follows his encounter with the man who had many possessions. This man was sincere in seeking an answer; he just wasn't prepared for the answer he received.

When it comes to our prayer lives, perhaps we are sincere in seeking counsel from Jesus, but we are not always prepared for the answer we receive. It may just take us a little time – a long time even, – to come around and see something the way Jesus sees it for us. In the end we trust, we acquiesce and we follow where he is trying to lead us.

Perhaps the man Jesus encounters is each one of us. Perhaps he, like us, is a work in progress. We do not know if he ever accepted Jesus' answer to his question or not. Maybe that is intentional on the part of the evangelist. What we do know is that Jesus is most interested in how we choose to answer this same question: *What must I do to inherit eternal life?*

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Tuesday, May 29, 2018
(Lec. 348)
1) 1 Peter 1:10-16
2) Mark 10:28-31
Gospel related: CCC 1618

TUESDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Looking beyond ourselves allows us to see things in perspective and embrace God's loving plan for us.

But many that are first will be last, and the last will be first.

What does it mean to be first? Does it mean being successful in business? Living in a big house with a luxury car parked outside? Does it mean being better looking, smarter or more talented than others?

We humans tend to be short-sighted. We get taken in by appearances. It's easy to get caught up in what the world tells us is valuable. We allow ourselves to be influenced by our need to feel important and to look good in the eyes of others – especially family and friends.

There's nothing wrong with developing and using our God-given abilities or admiring others for theirs. However, thinking that makes them – or us – more important or worthy of love is a mistake. Our talents don't make us valuable in God's eyes. After all, he's the one that gave them to us. Being human, and made in God's image, is what gives us dignity and worth.

In today's Gospel, Jesus makes it clear that following him means exchanging short-sighted rewards for those that endure. It takes time and effort to look beneath the surface for what has true and lasting value. It takes wisdom and grace to use the gifts we have for good, and not for reasons of pride. It takes faith to believe that what we have here on earth is but a foretaste of what God has set aside for us in the next life.

It takes courage, too. It's risky to be true to our own principles instead of going along with other people – especially when those other people are near and dear to us. No one likes being rejected or feeling like an outsider. But Jesus assures his listeners that those who let go of ego-driven goals and relationships in order to share the Good News will receive *a hundred times more* in this present world.

We do not walk this path alone, however. God gives us a community of believers so we can stand together and encourage each other. The reward is eternal life – but eternal life begins here and now when we embrace eternal values. There is joy in a shared journey – in accompanying each other in the life of discipleship. There is comfort in mutual prayer, and strength in love. There is a taste of heaven in communion.

May God's grace call us to be first in love, last in sin and forever in his presence.

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Wednesday, May 30, 2018
(Lec. 349)

1) 1 Peter 1:18-25

2) Mark 10:32-45

Gospel related: CCC 474, 536, 557, 608, 618, 649, 994, 1225, 1551, 1570 CSDC 193, 379

WEDNESDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Ransomed by Christ, we have been born anew.

It can be difficult to overcome the many challenges to our faith. Catholics – in fact, all Christians – face persecution in many parts of the world today. And the secular culture in which we live offers a wide array of temptations that can lead us away from following Jesus. What are we to do?

Our Scripture readings today offer some solace and guidance. In our first reading, Saint Peter is addressing the Gentile converts in Asia Minor, offering hope as they struggle to live their newfound faith in an unfriendly world. He reminds these new Christians that they received new life through the sacrifice of Jesus. They gave up the undesirable conduct of their pagan ancestors and have been purified by the truth. Their duty is to love one another with a pure heart. Quoting the prophet Isaiah (40:6-8), Peter tells them that they too, like grass and flowers, will die away, but Christ, the word of God, will live on. And because of their baptism into Christ's body, they, too, will live on in him.

Our Gospel passage finds Jesus going up to Jerusalem with his disciples. For the third time, he tells them that he will be handed over, suffer, die and rise on the third day. Immediately, James and John ask Jesus to let them share in his glory, because, as is often the case, they do not fully understand Jesus' message. They want the privilege of being at his side, without realizing what it will take to get there – despite their assurances that they will share in drinking his chalice. So Jesus reminds them, and us: if you wish to be great, you will humble yourself. You shall not lord yourself over others, but be as their servant.

Love one another with a pure heart, in humility and as a servant. This is guidance, sure, but it may be a little hard to understand how these words offer us solace in the face of challenges to our faith. But it's not about what we can or cannot do, but what God can do. We have received new life through Jesus Christ, and through the grace of our baptism and continued life in the Church we will overcome, in the end, anything this world throws our way.

There is no escaping the trials of this world, but they no longer defeat us, for we have the promise of eternal life in Christ.

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Thursday, May 31, 2018

(Lec. 572)

1) Zephaniah 3:14-18a
or Romans 12:9-16

2) Luke 1:39-56

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

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

FOCUS: All that God gave us in the first covenant pours forth into the new one.

Today's Gospel account is about two very significant mothers: the Blessed Virgin Mary, pregnant with Jesus; and her cousin Elizabeth, pregnant with John, whom we would come to know as John the Baptist. In this passage, the two are seeing each other "great with child" for the first time.

It is a lovely account, but it is much more than that.

This is where we hear Mary's great prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God, the *Magnificat*. *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, she says; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.* The Latin name for this prayer, *Magnificat*, stems from the Latin translation of this text: "my soul *magnifies* the Lord." What an image! Mary is not just *saying* something about God – proclaiming his greatness – but she is, literally, making God more visible: she is *magnifying* him. By her obedience to God's will, she is bringing forth God the Son, and helping him to reveal the Father to the world.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel, Mary continues, for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever. As Mary says these words, she is in the presence of John the Baptist, still in his mother's womb, who is the one who will prepare the way for her Son in the future. John has already leapt in his mother's womb at the sound of Mary's voice. It is, in essence, the first meeting of Jesus and John.

This is the tremendous 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. If we imagine an hourglass, and we pay particular attention to the neck through which everything must pass from one glass container to the other, we can see the immensity of this moment in history.

Because of this encounter, all that is in the Old Testament begins now to pour into the New Testament. All that God has given us in the first covenant now is pouring forth into the new one.

This is why we celebrate this Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary today. Because, to use an overworked word we hear a lot these days... this is truly awesome!

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