

OCTOBER

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WEDDING HOMILY

- 1) Genesis 2:18-24
- 2) 1 John 3:18-24
- 3) Mark 10:6-9

FOCUS: The union of a couple in marriage reflects the great love of God on earth.

*And may it be the blessing you share
with all those you love, Who this day make merry
That in you the great love of God
Has found a home on earth.**

This verse, part of a blessing, captures much of what we celebrate today with the marriage of N and N.

All gathered here are part of this joyful occasion; it is we “Who this day make merry that the great love of God has found a home on earth.” Yes, today we celebrate the great love of God, who has found a home on earth in the couple before us.

The words we just heard from Scripture point to this great love – a love not of *word*, not of *speech*, but of *deed and truth*. A love that shows itself, not in what we say, but in *how* we live toward one another; how we accept one another; how we care for each other’s burdens; how we celebrate other’s joys – a love that will be shown to the world by how N and N live as a couple.

In providing an account of the creation of the first man and first woman, Scripture points to this love with a significant word. We heard in Genesis how God decides to make a suitable partner for the man. A suitable partner; a companion; and more than a companion. The word used is *ezar* (pronounced “AY-zar”). It is often translated “helper.” But it does not mean a helper like an apprentice, or an assistant. This very word is used, over and over again, to describe what *God is to us*. The psalms, for example, repeatedly use this same word, *ezar* – to provide a picture of God’s care for us. “I will lift up my eyes to the mountains, my help (my *ezar*) comes from the Lord” (Ps. 121:1-2); “Our help (our *ezar*) is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Ps. 124:8); “God is our refuge and our strength, an ever present help (a partner - *ezar*) in times of trouble” (Ps. 46:1).

Isn’t this also a description of what marriage will be for a couple whose focus is on God? – that each one will be a partner, a companion, to the other; that in times of trouble, one will be an ever-present help, *a reflection of God on earth* to the other; that in times of joy, one will be the ever-present companion to share that joy. Each will make it abundantly clear to the other – by their care, by their acceptance, by their mercy, by their love – how very much God loves them. Moreover, as a couple, they will be a symbol, a sign, a reminder of God’s love *to the world*.

On this wonderful occasion, N and N, congratulations! May you continue to show all “the great love of God, who has found a home on earth.”

**Written by Sister Jeannette Abi-Nader, HM, on the occasion of a community member’s 25th anniversary. Used with permission.*

FUNERAL HOMILY

Isaiah 25:6a, 7-9

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 11:25-30

FOCUS: We are called to lighten one another's burden of grief.

Today we are gathered to honor the memory and pray for the soul of N. We do so in natural human grief at our loss but also, as the readings tell us, in faith that N. will find an eternal home with God. Today's readings give us reason for hope and consolation.

The first reading from Isaiah tells us that God favors life over death. Isaiah looks to the day when God will *destroy the veil that veils all peoples* – the prospect of death. Before Jesus' death and resurrection, this veil was firmly in place as many people saw no hope after a loved one had died. With Jesus' resurrection, however, that veil is already being removed. While we will suffer sadness at the death of a loved one, we do so with hope, as Paul reminds us, that we, too, will rise again to enjoy eternal life.

In the Gospel, Jesus' promise of rest for those who come to him, weary and burdened, can be applied to those who have died. As we entrust N. to God's mercy and love, we have hope that he/she will now have eternal rest – everlasting joy and peace. But we who are left behind are heavily burdened with grief and sorrow at our loss. Jesus promises to make our burden light, too, if we agree to be yoked with him. Jesus, who wept at the death of his friend Lazarus, understands our grief and does not see it as a lack of faith. Our grief is an honest human reaction to the sudden loss of someone we love – and the knowledge that we will have to carry on for the rest of our lives without the physical presence of that person.

As we learn to adjust to this new life, we know that Jesus will be with us in the months and years to come when sadness takes ahold of us. By his presence and love, Jesus can make that burden light. We also know, as Christians, that Jesus' resurrection gives us hope of eternal life for our loved one and ourselves.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to take part in his mission, to help one another carry the burden of grief. We have a special role in one another's lives because of our shared grief – the role of support and comfort, and of accepting that support and comfort from others when we need it. We can also offer the hope of the Resurrection to one another while accepting one another's natural sadness. As we encounter other people who are grieving their own loss, we will be better equipped to help them, knowing that sometimes presence and a listening ear are enough.

**YEAR B
WEEKDAYS II**

Monday, October 1, 2018
(Lec. 455)

- 1) Job 1:6-22
- 2) Luke 9:46-50

MONDAY OF
26TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM)

Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus,
Virgin and Doctor of the Church)

FOCUS: Live in communion with the world by resting in communion with God.

We live in divided times. There is strife amongst nations, and within nations. Individuals see themselves as belonging to a certain ethnic group or economic class or political party, and woe to those who are not a part of those same groups. Is this what the Reign of God should look like – a place in which division is the norm? This could be the very question that underlies today's readings.

In our first reading, Satan tests God, challenging him that Job *will blaspheme you to your face*, if Job is stripped of everything. Satan seems certain that faithful Job will turn against God. In the face of great loss, however, Job says, *The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!* In his grief, Job doesn't condemn God, but rather, blesses God. How many people have lost something or someone valuable, and have questioned God, or even given up their belief in God? Not so with Job – it appears that he grows closer to God, rather than estranged. How strong his faith must be.

In the Gospel, the disciples are divided, for they want to know who is the greatest, and of course, there can only be one. In response, Jesus calls for them to welcome a little child as they would welcome him. In Jesus' time, a child had very low status. To welcome a child would be to demean oneself, but Jesus implies that he has the same status as a child – is he humbling himself, or raising the child up? The message is that worldly status is irrelevant, for that creates division. Seeing each person as the image of God is what matters, for all of creation is imbued with life from God.

Can the world divide us if we put our life in God at our center? In 2015, Pope Francis gave this advice to Vatican workers: *Take care of your spiritual life, your relationship to God, because this is the backbone of everything we do and everything we are.* Our faith is founded in the belief that we are all created by God, to love God and to love one another. This is what unifies us. This world may try to create division, but let us heed Jesus' words, that *whoever is not against you is for you*. Let us see the ways in which Jesus brings us all to his side. May the Eucharist enrich our lives to strengthen our common bonds, to look past division and to see how together we work for the fulfillment of the Reign of God.

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Tuesday, October 2, 2018

(Lec. 456)

1) Job 3:1-3, 11-17, 20-23

(Lec. 650)

2) Matthew 18:1-5, 10

Gospel related: CCC 329, 336, 526, 2785

TUESDAY OF

26TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

The Holy Guardian Angels)

FOCUS: God and the angels are with us; we are never alone.

Many children have irrational fears: the bogey man, monsters under the bed, etc. As we grow up, some of those irrational fears are dispelled, but it seems that we never completely escape that feeling of fear. Rather than the bogey man, we begin to fear loneliness, isolation or failure, whether it be in work, relationships, athletics or life in general. These fears are not necessarily irrational, but almost always present a false reality in which we are all alone and need to do this all by ourselves – which couldn't be further from the truth. Our opening prayer in Mass today asked God, "send your holy angels to guard us... that we may always be defended by their protection and rejoice eternally in their company." Each of us is blessed with the enduring presence of an angel who is charged with guiding and protecting us as we journey through this world. We are never alone. We never have to fight alone.

We are never alone. We know from Scripture and from Church teaching that angels are very real, that they do exist, and that they are present to us always, but most especially in our moments of need. Saint Basil taught that "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life" (CCC 336). In those moments that we fear isolation or loneliness, we should take comfort and consolation in these words. Despite what we might feel in the moment, God will never abandon us, and has sent us angels as a reminder of this truth. Those angels are a connection between God and us, for our *angels in heaven always look upon the face of [the] heavenly Father.*

We also do not fight alone. The angels are not simply bystanders. In those moments where we struggle, are tempted or feel crushed by the burdens we carry, we may be tempted to cry out, "I'll never be able to do this!" The irony of this is that it may be true: we can't do it ourselves. But we don't have to because God and the angels are with us; all we need to do is become aware of their presence and ask for their help.

As we celebrate this feast of the Holy Guardian Angels, may we become ever more aware of these simple truths: we are never alone and we never have to fight alone. God has blessed us with angels that we may *rejoice in their company.* God has blessed us with angels that *we may always be defended by their protection.*

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Wednesday, October 3, 2018
(Lec. 457)

- 1) Job 9:1-12, 14-16
- 2) Luke 9:57-62

Gospel related: CCC 544

WEDNESDAY OF
26TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Following Jesus is a joy and a challenge.

The words of Jesus in today's Gospel, as he lays out the responsibility of discipleship, provide an opportunity to examine our own perception of what it means to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. Certainly, there are many of us who, proceeding along this journey, might willingly state, as his followers did, *I will follow you wherever you go*.

But what does that entail? Jesus tells his disciples, *follow me*, and then explains that in order to do that, the first priority is to *proclaim the kingdom of God*. All else pales in comparison. So when Jesus says that *No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God*, we might ask ourselves if we understand and live out what that means.

Each of us must face this question straight on and ask God what following him looks like for our own life. It takes a careful ear to hear what God asks of us. For the followers of Jesus in his time, they had to be on the move in order to spread the word of salvation to all. It was both a physical and metaphorical removal of themselves from any attachments. Today, a turning away from our attachments in order to follow Jesus and proclaim the Gospel may be as simple (and difficult) as letting go of material things, or letting go of fear that is holding us back.

Whatever holds us back limits our freedom to proclaim the kingdom to others. We may have difficulty fully trusting in God's plan for us. God invites us to have faith. To be fit for the kingdom is to let go, in order to discover. It is to move forward with a passionate desire to lead others to Christ. We can do that wherever God places us.

Jesus is not promoting irresponsibility, but rather giving a proper ordering of priorities. In following him, all else falls into place. When we go on mission with him, and we are all in, without hesitation, we help to bring about the kingdom. How each of us does so may look different by degree, status or culture, but in essence it is the same: being fit for the kingdom means a willingness to follow Jesus – faithfully.

That we are here, proclaiming our belief in the Triune God, and partaking of the Eucharist, is a testament to our basic understanding of Jesus' words today. May the graces we receive here allow that understanding to grow and flourish in our lives and in the world around us.

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Thursday, October 4, 2018
(Lec. 458)

- 1) Job 19:21-27
- 2) Luke 10:1-12

THURSDAY OF
26TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Francis of Assisi)

Gospel related: CCC 765, 2611, 2122

FOCUS: When we respond to God's call, we're given all we need to share the Good News of his love with others.

When Jesus sent seventy-two disciples to spread the Good News of God's kingdom, he told them to take no money or possessions with them. He instructed them to extend peace to others, to accept whatever hospitality was offered and, if rejected, to move on without retaliation.

What an appropriate Gospel reading today, on this Memorial of Saint Francis of Assisi. Hundreds of years after those first disciples were sent out, Saint Francis, in responding to God's call, lived out those instructions.

Son of a well-to-do merchant, Francis had an easy, fun-loving lifestyle as a young man. However, after suffering a serious illness, he gave up the emptiness of self-indulgence to follow God's plan for his life. At first, Francis began building up God's kingdom literally, by repairing chapels. As God led him to a deeper understanding of his mission, Francis grew in both love and humility.

Choosing poverty, Francis let go of possessions and the obligations they bring. That freed him to become a channel of God's peace. He lovingly shared that message of peace with everyone he encountered, including lepers, robbers, prostitutes, and even a Muslim Sultan. Francis was humble enough to ask for, and accept, hospitality and charity from others in order to accomplish his mission. He suffered his share of scorn and rejection, but was not deterred because he was anchored in God's love.

Like those disciples who have gone before us, we're called to carry the message of God's love to those who hunger for it. While we may not be required to live in the extreme poverty that Francis did, we are challenged to let go of whatever distracts us from sharing God's love with others.

We may not feel fondness for everyone, but we can treat all those we encounter with courtesy and respect. When our efforts are rejected, we're free to move on without retaliation. We can leave the consequences of other people's choices in God's hands and focus on our own choices and responsibilities.

It's a tall order. Of course we can't do it alone. Like Saint Francis, we need the wisdom and strength of God's Spirit. We can nourish ourselves through prayer, reading Scripture, and especially through the Eucharist. We also need the support of fellow believers, our family of faith. After all, Jesus didn't send the disciples out alone, but sent them out two by two. God gives us all we need to spread the Good News. It's up to us to accept his gifts and respond.

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Friday, October 5, 2018
(Lec. 459)

- 1) Job 38:1, 12-21;
40:3-5
- 2) Luke 10:13-16

Gospel related: CCC 81, 858

FRIDAY OF
26TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos,
Priest)

FOCUS: Let us listen to God when he speaks to us.

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus assailing the towns encircling the Sea of Galilee for rejecting the message delivered by his followers. For in doing so, they were rejecting him, as well as the One who sent him. Jesus made it very clear to these towns that their lack of repentance would result in complete condemnation.

In our first reading, even Job himself knew and did not reject the one who would eventually send Jesus: the Lord God Almighty. Job had had an intimate conversation with God after he'd cried out to him in his despair at having lost all that mattered in his life. And while God made it very clear to Job that he had not the tiniest bit of comprehension of the glory of God – that Job was not present at creation, could not navigate the cosmos, and would never have any idea how to keep it all in perfect motion – Job did not reject God. Unlike the contemporaries of Jesus' disciples, Job listened. He recognized the mighty deeds of God and repented.

Job realized, in all his misery and pain, that God – God's own self – had spoken to him. The God who is present in the netherworld as well as the heavens, the God who formed his inmost being, the God who knows even his thoughts from afar, cared enough to actually speak to him.

The people of Galilee heard the Lord speak to them as well, but they did not recognize him. They did not accept his messengers. They did not repent. And so they were condemned.

Being a follower of the one true God can be a difficult task, and being in a relationship with him in no way makes us immune to loss and pain, to suffering and despair, to rejection and loneliness. But it is in listening to God, in recognizing God's messengers in our lives, that we remember that we are most wonderfully made by a God whose right hand holds us fast, even when we are too numb to feel it.

When we partake in the Eucharist, as we will shortly do, we are reminded that God loved us enough to send us his own self. We are reminded that being a true disciple means we will be guided by him along the everlasting way of love.

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Saturday, October 6, 2018
(Lec. 460)
1) Job 42:1-3, 5-6, 12-17
2) Luke 10:17-24

SATURDAY OF
26TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Bruno, Priest;
USA: Blessed Marie-Rose Durocher,
Virgin;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: CCC 787, 1083, 2603

FOCUS: Jesus shows us who the Father is.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says that no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son reveals him. We come to know the Father through Jesus, who took on our nature so that we might be reunited with the One who made us: to know him and to love him. Of course, there is a difference between *knowing* God and *knowing about* God.

In our first reading Job has known about God for a long time. He has even worshiped him, but did not really *know* God. He made some assumptions about God, but until he gave himself over completely, he could not actually know him. By the end of the reading we see that Job did come to know God intimately – like a child knows his father. And once that more complete knowledge was his, he repented and was greatly rewarded.

It was because of this knowledge that Job felt the need to repent. He was already loyal in the face of other people's criticism of God, and he never lost faith. Still, when he came to know God more fully, he saw his own shortcomings of faith; he realized more deeply the love God has for all he created, and saw how much he had underestimated the power and majesty of God – the Supreme Being.

In the Gospel, the seventy-two disciples returned from their mission with a different idea of God than they had when they left. Still, that understanding was limited and lacking the depth to which Jesus would call them. He taught them that God's greatness is sometimes manifested in fantastic cures and conversions, but that these things are what God *does*, not who *he is*.

Who did Jesus show them – and us – the Father is? The Father is, as Job says, the One who *can do all things, and that no purpose of [whose] can be hindered*. He is the *Lord of heaven and earth*, who created us in his image, sustains us in his love, and reached out to us to save us when we could not save ourselves.

Today, let us consider our own relationship to the Father and Son, and reflect on whether we are content to know only *about* God, or whether we allow ourselves to be transformed so as to come to *know and love him*. Let us humble ourselves before the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and seek the help of Jesus in truly knowing the Father and how much he loves us.

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SUNDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2018

(Lec. 140)

- 1) Genesis 2:18-24
- 2) Hebrews 2:9-11
- 3) Mark 10:2-16 or
10:2-12

Gospel related: **CCC** 699, 1244, 1261, 1627, 1639, 1650, 2364, 2380, 2382; **CSDC** 217

**TWENTY-SEVENTH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: To understand marriage we must first understand God's design for family life.

For people of faith, marriage has but one meaning, purpose and design – that given to it by God. God – who created and celebrated the first wedding when he presented Eve to Adam as his perfect companion and suitable partner.

And yet as we know, married life can be both loving and challenging. Each year millions of marriages are celebrated and sadly, millions of marriages break down, often with pain and mutual recriminations. As Church, we are not immune to this pain and suffering, and in fact gives credence to the beautiful teachings that underpin our theology of marriage. If it were not sacred and beautiful, its breakdown would not hurt.

Jesus was not going to be caught out by the Pharisees as they tried to force his hand on the thorny issue of divorce and the Mosaic Law. Neither was he going to short-change his listeners, for as Hebrews tells us: *He "for a little while" was made "lower than the angels," that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.* More plainly, he became one with us so that we might understand in a deeper way God's redemptive plan for creation.

Therefore, instead of getting caught up in the competing arguments, Jesus simply sidesteps the question and instead affirms the ancient Scripture in Genesis that men and women were made for each other – called to be united as one body. Together, as husband and wife, they are to strive to be suitable partners for each other, forsaking all others.

This is a hard teaching. And his audience then may be very similar to his listeners today: human beings with different experiences, trying to live a life of faithful discipleship in a world of imperfection and brokenness. So today, instead of simply laying the teaching out there, perhaps it would be better to ground and support it with the words of our Gospel acclamation: *If we love one another, God remains in us and his love is brought to perfection in us.* For true marital unity is not something we can achieve on our own, but only when we are united with Christ and when we treat each other with a Christ-like love and compassion.

Today, as we gather, there are a thousand untold stories in the lives of those who stand beside us in our journey. As the Scriptures are proclaimed and broken open, let us rejoice with those who live God's design for marriage and who know his many blessings. For those who struggle, let us love and support them to attain this goal; and for those who suffer the pain of marriage breakdown and divorce, let us help them to discover hope – for no situation is beyond redemption.

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Monday, October 8, 2018
(Lec. 461)

- 1) Galatians 1:6-12
- 2) Luke 10:25-37

Gospel related: **CCC** 1293, 1825, 2083, 2822; **CSDC** 112

MONDAY OF
27TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *Lord, who is my neighbor?*

Let's picture ourselves out on a walk or a run. We have our earbuds in and are listening to our favorite tunes when we go around a bend in the road and come across a man half-beaten to death. Nowadays, we have our cell phones with us and we can call an emergency number. We can offer words of comfort, cleanse some wounds or offer a drink of water while waiting, but we're aware that once the authorities arrive they will assume further responsibility for "our neighbor."

The Samaritan in today's Gospel didn't have that option. Even if he did, he might not have gotten the assistance we would because of where the incident took place. The Jews and the Samaritans in Jesus' time were bitter enemies, and he was in enemy territory on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho – the road between the high holy ground of the Jewish Temple and the town where the Israelites first entered the Promised Land centuries earlier. It was *not* Samaria.

It likely stuck in the craw of the Jewish legal scholar to have the hero turn out to be, in his mind, "one of the bad guys." This is what happens when we test God as the lawyer did. He thought he had set himself up nicely when he correctly answered Jesus' question about how to inherit eternal life – love God and love your neighbor.

But the legal scholar had to ask just one more question in an attempt to justify himself. It took him to a reality he didn't want to visit – the Samaritan treated the victim as his neighbor, while the priest and Levite did not. The lesson taught here is one that applies to us as well – God's way is the right way.

In today's first reading, Saint Paul emphasized to the Galatians that the Gospel he preached was the true Gospel because it came to him *through a revelation of Jesus Christ*. The Good Samaritan parable is also about that revelation –that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is "love God and love your neighbor."

We hear God's word and partake of his body and blood so that we, too, might proclaim this same Gospel in word and deed. Whether we are the Samaritan, or the one in need of the Samaritan's help, in the kingdom there is no division. Let us prepare ourselves to love one another.

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Tuesday, October 9, 2018
(Lec. 462)

- 1) Galatians 1:13-24
- 2) Luke 10:38-42

TUESDAY OF
27TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Denis, Bishop,
and Companions, Martyrs;
Saint John Leonardi, Priest)

Gospel related: **CSDC** 260

FOCUS: Jesus is inviting us to a personal encounter with him, and he waits for us in the Eucharist.

Often in gatherings of friends or family, one or two people seem to disappear from the crowd as they flit between the table and the kitchen and the door. They are so concerned with making sure that everyone's needs are taken care of that they are not really present to their visitors. And then, eventually, the party is over and the hosts realize that they barely chatted with guests, much less enjoyed their company.

Each of us has probably been that person, and so we can sympathize with Martha. It seems like Jesus is being unfair, as if he is choosing Mary's side. But look at it instead as an invitation: an invitation for Martha to join her sister at the feet of our Lord, listening to him.

Just like Mary and Martha, Jesus is inviting all of us to a personal encounter with him. *All* of us – the busy, the quiet, those of other faiths and those with no faith at all.

When Saint Paul encountered Jesus, everything changed for him. He immediately stopped persecuting Christians and began traveling as a missionary, preaching the Good News to the Gentiles.

People were amazed that *the one who once was persecuting us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy*. Isn't that an amazing witness?

Just like Paul, Jesus is inviting us into a personal encounter.

But how can we encounter Jesus now? In the word we hear proclaimed. In his body and blood: either through reception of the Eucharist, or in adoration.

Jesus' invitation may not be the blinding revelation Saint Paul had, but if we are open to hearing him, he can still work through us to bring the Gospel to others.

As we prepare for the Eucharistic celebration, let us pray that the Lord will help us to welcome Jesus into our hearts, as Martha welcomed him into her home. Let us ask Jesus to help us listen to him, as Mary did. Let us pray he helps us bring the Gospel to others, as Saint Paul did.

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Wednesday, October 10, 2018
(Lec. 463)

- 1) Galatians 2:1-2, 7-14
- 2) Luke 11:1-4

Gospel related: CCC 520, 1425, 2601, 2632, 2759, 2773, 2845

WEDNESDAY OF
27TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The Lord's Prayer is ever-ancient and ever-new as we offer it to him, with all that we are in the present.

We have our children memorize the Lord's Prayer from an early age, along with many devotional prayers, such as the rosary. The Lord's Prayer is so important that it is recited at every liturgy.

In the early Church, the Christian community chose to withhold teaching the Lord's Prayer to those interested in becoming Christian until they were baptized. Saint Ambrose of Milan considered it a "pearl of great price," and from the earliest times, there were theological and practical reasons for sharing the prayer this way. Not least of which was that, in those days of the Roman Empire, the prayer that Jesus taught us was treasonous! Christianity proclaims one God in heaven, and – contrary to state doctrine at that time – that God was not Caesar. Christians had to be so committed to their faith that they would risk their lives just to pray.

Today, there are places where Christians face these grave trials in practicing their faith. Yet they proclaim the Lord's Prayer in earnest. For most of us who live in relatively Christian, or pluralistic, cultures, our trials can seem comparatively mundane, and as this prayer is so commonplace, we run the risk of taking it for granted. We run the risk of seeing it as fading wall paper, rather than our spiritual mantra, holy plea and radical directive.

Yet, the Lord's Prayer is immensely challenging in ways great and small. For example, though a simple task, what an immense feat of faith it is to truly rely on the Lord for our daily bread. Most of us tend to rely on ourselves first. But perhaps in our Christian duty to be *mindful of the poor*, as Saint Paul points out today, we are to invest in each other, especially the least among us, and rely on God's providence for our own futures.

It is a healthy exercise to meditate on each line of the prayer so as to keep the prayer truly in our hearts and relevant to our lives. For example, "Our Father who art in Heaven." What does that mean to us? Why is it significant that we start out with the word "Our" and not, "My"? How we answer those questions gives us great insight into how we approach a relationship with God, and our lives of discipleship.

As we come together around the altar, let us be mindful of what the Lord has given us – both in himself and in the words to approach him with our needs. May both of these gifts empower us to, as our psalmist says, *Go out to all the world, and tell the Good News.*

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Thursday, October 11, 2018
(Lec. 464)

- 1) Galatians 3:1-5
- 2) Luke 11:5-13

THURSDAY OF
27TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint John XXIII, Pope)

Gospel related: CCC 2613

FOCUS: Have faith in God and perseverance in prayer.

The good manners we learned from our parents have conditioned us to cringe when we hear someone call another person stupid. As a result, we are taken aback when we hear Saint Paul use this word twice in our first reading. Needless to say, he was more than a little upset with the Galatians, because they were putting their salvation in jeopardy.

As believers, we are called to follow the laws laid out in God's word. We follow the Ten Commandments. We follow the beatitudes. We follow the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. We do so because of our faith. Hopefully, our faith, our love of God and our love for others is our motivation for following both civil law and religious law.

We follow Jesus' teachings not because we have to, but because we want to follow his way. We desire the salvation that has been offered. When we live our faith, good things happen. It is when we fail to follow Jesus that we stumble – we sin. Best we stay on the righteous path.

Jesus teaches us about persistence in today's Gospel. He assures us that our prayers are heard and answered. We know our prayers are heard, but sometimes we think they're not answered. Too often, we place before the Lord a want, not a need, and expect Jesus to tend to that want in the manner and way of our choosing. For example, "Lord, just give me the lottery numbers and I will help so many people besides myself." Well, that is not going to happen!

But if we have a true need for the Lord's guidance we pray, "Lord, help me with a difficult situation at work." If we pay attention to Jesus' response rather than our own solution that keeps failing, we will be given insight into a different way, a more loving way to meet the challenge before us at work. This takes faith, as Saint Paul tells us. This takes perseverance, as Jesus teaches us.

Today we remember a gentle giant of the Church, Pope Saint John XXIII. He was a man who persevered in prayer, listened to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and led the Church through a time of holiness and renewal that continues to this day.

Like him, and as the Scripture today exhort us, let us not grow too comfortable in the way things are. Rather, through prayer and a strong faith, let us work for the way things might be, bringing about the kingdom here on earth and attaining it for ourselves in eternity.

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Friday, October 12, 2018
(Lec. 465)

- 1) Galatians 3:7-14
- 2) Luke 11:15-26

Gospel related: CCC 385, 700 CSDC 325, 326

FRIDAY OF
27TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The love of Christ conquers evil.

One of the greatest mysteries of our faith is the existence of evil. Saint Augustine, a renowned spiritual father of the Church, once said, "I sought whence evil comes and there was no solution." His own painful quest would be resolved only by his conversion to the living God (CCC 385).

Today's Gospel doesn't explain the origin of evil, but Jesus does tell us how to conquer it. Like Saint Augustine, we must turn to Christ.

Our Gospel begins after Jesus drives a demon out of a mute person. While many are amazed, there are those who accuse him of allegiance to Beelzebul, *the prince of demons*. Others demand more signs. Jesus responds by pointing out the absurdity of their thoughts – why would Satan battle against himself? Then he tells the crowd it is *by the finger of God* – the same finger of God that wrote the Ten Commandments – that he conquers evil.

How does the Lord conquer evil? Through Christ's death and resurrection, he takes away the sin of the world. This doesn't mean we become sinless or free from committing sins, just that Christ has remitted our eternal punishment for them. So when we sin, and repent, the Lord forgives.

However, leaving behind past sins is not enough. False security makes us even more susceptible to Satan's domination. We must fill those empty spaces, where sin once resided, with love. Otherwise we create a void where, as Jesus warns, an unclean spirit will return with *seven other spirits more wicked than itself who move in and dwell there*. Ultimately, it's by replacing sin with Christ's love that the enemy is defeated. This is full conversion – the way God wants us to live our faith.

In today's reading, Paul reminds the Galatians that *the one who is righteous by faith will live*. For much of their lives, the Galatians lived under strict Mosaic law. However, as Paul points out, *no one is justified before God by the law* because none of us are free from sin. The blessing of Abraham is extended to us through Christ Jesus; we receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Jesus says *whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters*. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we partake in the ultimate expression of love as Jesus joins each of us to his body, blood, soul and divinity. This is the source and summit of our Christian life (CCC 1324). United with Christ, the devil is powerless against us.

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Saturday, October 13, 2018
(Lec. 466)

- 1) Galatians 3:22-29
- 2) Luke 11:27-28

SATURDAY OF
27TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: Through our baptism, we have been clothed in Christ.

Our readings today illustrate how God has always had a plan for his chosen people. In the first reading, Saint Paul reminds the people of Galatia (which was part of what is now Turkey) that before Christ, people were under the Old Testament law. That means they had to follow exactly what the law of Moses proclaimed in order to find favor with God. But with Christ's birth, passion and resurrection, we have been given the choice to follow God's way, by grace through our faith in Jesus. Through our baptism, we have been *clothed* in Christ. We have become one in Jesus, and free to follow his will as well as his example.

Our short Gospel reading is from Luke. We are transported back to Jesus' time on earth when he was teaching and ministering to those in need. The crowd was amazed after witnessing him casting out demons. One woman joyfully declared, *Blessed is the womb that carried you*. Jesus does not deny that our Mother Mary is blessed, but informs the woman, as well as the crowd, that those who hear the word of God and keep it also are blessed. He's referring to all believers from his time on earth as well as through the centuries of Christian faith. And that includes us here today.

We are part of God's family, just like the Israelites were, and just like his disciples and followers were when Jesus walked on this earth. And according to our Gospel reading, we, too, are blessed if we hear God's word and follow it. So, the charge for each one of us here today is this: we are hearing God's word right now and he wants us to participate in his salvation for the world.

The choice, then, lies within our power. Should we choose to embrace all that Jesus teaches, we will be blessed. That is God's promise. And we do have that choice. Through faith, we are the children of God. Today, let us encourage each other to follow Jesus even more closely and faithfully than we did yesterday. The blessings are more powerful than we can ever fully understand.

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SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2018

(Lec. 143)

- 1) Wisdom 7:7-11
- 2) Hebrews 4:12-13
- 3) Mark 10:17-30 or
10:17-27

Gospel related: **CCC** 1618, 1858, 2728

**TWENTY-EIGHTH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: God allows us to choose – day by day – the path that we will follow.

Today's readings present us with examples of people making choices. Solomon, in the first reading, clearly chooses God's gifts of prudence and wisdom over other gifts that might be tempting to others: power, riches, and even health and beauty. Guided by the spirit of wisdom, he sees beyond the desirability of the things of this life to perceive the beauty of God's wisdom – a beauty that might be hidden to others. The rich young man in the Gospel, responding to the draw of Jesus, seeks to go beyond the basics of his faith that he practiced from his youth to follow Jesus, but the price is too high for him. He is not yet ready to give up his wealth and prestige.

It is so easy to get caught in the same trap as the rich young man. After all, what he had – wealth, possessions, power and prestige – are held up and respected in many cultures of our world. Solomon's values – and those of Christians – are much less visible and obvious. Many would label the rich young man as foolish to give up all the advantages he had always enjoyed to follow a preacher.

In contrast, the Apostles – who admittedly had less to give up than the rich young man – were more easily willing to give up all they had to follow Jesus. Yet, they also took a risk – giving up their trades and a way of life that they knew and that had become comfortable for them – in order to follow Jesus. Like the rich young man, they were drawn to Jesus, but unlike him, they were able to give up the familiar to follow Jesus.

Jesus continues to call the people of our world to follow him, to take on his values and those of the Gospel, to prefer God to riches and pleasure. The key is to listen prayerfully for Jesus' call in life, and to follow him in that call. He could be calling today's young men to priesthood, or young men and women to religious life or to the vocation of marriage. Jesus might offer others the path of a difficult life as a physician, requiring a great deal of personal sacrifice for the healing of others, or the path of an educator who dedicates his or her life to teaching and guiding students. God aligns each call with the interests, personalities and gifts of the recipient and with the needs of the world.

But God does not offer us these choices only once in a lifetime. Each day is filled with countless choices, from how we respond to a particular situation to the books we read, the attitudes we take on each day, or the ways we spend our waking hours. We here present have made a wondrous choice: to allow God to transform us in word and sacrament. So as we listen carefully in prayer and allow the Spirit – God's wisdom – to guide us, and soon partake of the Eucharist, let us commit to making choices that reflect *only* the values of the Gospel – the values of God's law.

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Monday, October 15, 2018
(Lec. 467)

- 1) Galatians 4:22-24,
26-27, 31-5:1
- 2) Luke 11:29-32

MONDAY OF
28TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Teresa of Jesus,
Virgin and Doctor of the Church)

FOCUS: For freedom Christ set us free.

Jesus tells the crowd in today's Gospel that *there is something greater than Solomon here... and there is something greater than Jonah here*. Those statements would have been attention-getting, if not downright shocking to his listeners, who would have known their Scripture and their history.

Jesus refers to the story of Solomon, of whom there was none greater in wisdom, and whom even queens – who were not part of the nation of Israel – came to consult. And he refers to Jonah, whose faithful prophecy and preaching caused the whole of Nineveh – also not part of Israel – to repent and convert. And now this man Jesus is telling them – the children of Abraham, of the covenant of Israel – that what stands before, and surrounds, them is even greater than all of that. They seek this sign of God's favor and promise, and yet they miss what is right in front of them: Jesus, who is the Incarnate presence of God's abundant love.

Christ's message to the crowd is the same as that found in the history to which he refers: hear the word of God; listen to it; repent. Otherwise, as he refers to them, they are just as outside of the nation of Israel as those to whom Solomon spoke wisdom and Jonah preached repentance. They are an *evil generation* that is not only unfaithful to the original covenant, but blind to the new one. *And at the judgment the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it.*

Paul's words today, from his Letter to the Galatians, directed to those who have heard God's word and believed, gives us further indication of that which is greater than both Solomon and Jonah. *Therefore, brothers and sisters, he says, we are children not of the slave woman but of the freeborn woman. For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.* Christ's presence is the reality that we are no longer subject to death and sin, but eternal life.

Indeed this *is* greater than anything that has come before.

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Tuesday, October 16, 2018
(Lec. 468)

- 1) Galatians 5:1-6
- 2) Luke 11:37-41

TUESDAY OF
28TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.

Saint Hedwig, Religious;
Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, Virgin)

Gospel related: CCC 579, 588, 2447

FOCUS: The greatest commandment is to love God, our neighbor and ourselves.

In our first reading, Paul is addressing Gentile converts living in the area of Galatia. There was disagreement in the early Christian communities about whether or not Gentiles had to adhere to the Jewish law, specifically that of circumcision, before becoming Christian.

In this regard, Saint Paul explains that it is through the Holy Spirit, by faith, that they will establish a right relationship with God, through Jesus. Not by circumcision. Adherence to the Mosaic law had been a necessary component of the covenant with God, but Jesus – the new covenant – was now the fulfillment of the law. Thus, the essence of the Mosaic law – love of God and love of neighbor – is expressed in relationship with God through the Spirit, by faith in Jesus Christ through love of God, neighbor and self.

In our Gospel passage, we hear another discourse regarding law. Jesus knew that the Pharisee at whose house he ate was hypocritical in his own living out of the Mosaic law: Pharisees followed the letter of the law in matters that could be seen by others. Yet, on the inside, their hearts were full of ill will. So Jesus chastised him, and all Pharisees, for this. His solution, give alms to the poor and be washed clean on the inside, was a way of connecting the love of God with the law. For only if love is the summit and source of our actions are we truly following what God commands.

This is the essence of the Good News: Jesus fulfilled the law, and commands us to do as he did – to love God, to love neighbor and to love oneself. As Eucharist, he himself is the source and summit, and when we partake of him we are given the grace to live as he commands, which leads to eternal life.

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Wednesday, October 17, 2018
(Lec. 469)

- 1) Galatians 5:18-25
- 2) Luke 11:42-46

WEDNESDAY OF
28TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Ignatius of Antioch,
Bishop and Martyr)

FOCUS: Let our lives be guided by the Spirit.

Jesus says, *Woe to you!* two times in the Gospel today. He is warning the Pharisees and the scholars of their hypocrisy. Many of them had become quite full of themselves and their status as scholars of the law of Moses. In their pride, they had become obsessed with wearing the trappings and reaping the benefits of their status. They were more devoted to the superficial signs of their power than to growing in their love for God.

Insensitive to the needs of the people who looked to them for judgment and guidance, they pronounced judgements that were *hard to carry*, and they did *not lift one finger* to help the people they served. They also misled others who looked to them for guidance and example. Others become contaminated by interacting with them, like those who walk unknowingly over *unseen graves*.

Jesus' anger stresses the importance of not only knowing God and his law, but also of living and acting according to his law of love for God and for others.

Paul's Letter to the Galatians today provides a perfect complement to Jesus' warning in the Gospel. Paul lists the fruits of the Spirit – *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*. These are the qualities that disciples of Jesus should exhibit. Jesus knew that living as his disciples would be challenging, and so he promised, and sent the Spirit for us. The Spirit provides these fruits that enable us to meet and overcome the challenges we face.

If we are *guided by the Spirit*, and make our love for God a priority in our lives, his Spirit becomes the law that forms our attitude and guides our behavior toward others. And when we commit and strive to live according to the Spirit, those fruits will multiply and attract others. Our lives will have the *light of life*, as our psalmist says, and others will seek its source – the God we love.

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Thursday, October 18, 2018
(Lec. 661)

- 1) 2 Timothy 4:10-17b
- 2) Luke 10:1-9

Gospel related: **CCC** 765, 2122, 2611; **CSDC** 259, 492

**SAINT LUKE,
EVANGELIST
- FEAST**

FOCUS: *The Lord stood by me and gave me strength.*

The Evangelist who wrote the Gospel of Luke wrote both the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. And in both prefaces, Luke addresses a certain *Theophilus*, who would appear to be the generous patron who supports the writing of both texts. We can imagine that considerable resources would have been needed to provide the materials and labor needed to compose these texts. Luke had a generous patron who is truly a “lover of God,” which is what “theo-philus” means. In the preface to the Gospel, Luke speaks of the work he’s done gathering texts, listening to eyewitness accounts and exploring everything with fresh eyes; he records the deeds and words of Jesus. The resulting Gospel is an *orderly account* of Jesus’ life and works.

So, when today we hear Jesus’ advice to his followers on entering the town and how to act, we listen attentively to his words of wisdom. This wisdom was helpful for his followers – some practical advice when going out to do ministry to the places Jesus plans to visit. He sends the seventy-two before him to prepare the way; they are commissioned to preach and teach. The *harvest is abundant*, Jesus says. People are eager to hear what they have to say. And although they are sent by Jesus himself, some are rejected.

Anyone engaged in ministry can relate. Their work is not always appreciated or welcomed. Jesus warns of this early on. *Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves.* Innocent lambs facing threatening wolves – quite a striking image. In other words, believers working on Jesus’ behalf – preaching, teaching, building the kingdom – will face challenges.

Yet, we must persist. Jesus set before us this example, and gives advice on how to handle this type of rejection. Shake off the dust, leave, and continue on to minister in new places, to new people. After all, the *harvest is abundant*. Jesus assures us in the work we do, *the kingdom of God is at hand*. Despite what happens, this work is righteous. Persist. Keep at it. We hear this echoed in the Letter to Timothy, *But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the proclamation might be completed and all the Gentiles might hear it.*

We’re not in this alone. God gives us strength when we’re challenged. In Jesus’ own death and resurrection, remembered in this sacrament, he offers the greatest witness to God’s love.

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Friday, October 19, 2018

(Lec. 471)

1) Ephesians 1:11-14

2) Luke 12:1-7

FRIDAY OF

28TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM USA:

Saints John de Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues, Priests,
and Companions, Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 342, 678

FOCUS: Our help, and our hope, is in the name of the Lord.

In today's culture, the word hope is often thrown around as synonymous with what amounts to positive thinking or optimism, as if looking at the world through happy, colored glasses would make everything okay – or at the very least, better. While well-intentioned, this understanding of hope may tug at our emotional heartstrings, but it lacks depth and, ultimately, perspective.

For those of us who *hope in Christ* – as Saint Paul described in today's first reading from Ephesians – hope is deeply rooted in reality, no matter how dark that reality seems or how unpleasant.

Surrendering to this hope is first and foremost based on the truth that God is, indeed, in *this* reality we face, in the here and now. When we hope in Christ, we draw strength and confidence from the *word of truth* we have heard with our heart. God is here. He is in this moment, as it is, walking with us. We know that all is well, not because things will turn out as we think they should, but because we trust with all of our might, and a good deal of grace, that God remains with us.

As Christians whose hope is in Christ, we claim and proclaim the Gospel of our salvation. We don't need to be afraid, Jesus reminds us in today's Gospel, because God our Father sees us, he notices our every need, and he claims us as his own. We are his children, who can therefore, with confident hope, claim our inheritance, and be *sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*.

Saints John de Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues, whose feast we celebrate today, understood and lived this type of confident hope throughout their lives. They heard God's call to the priesthood, and eventually to proclaim the Gospel of hope to the missions of North America, and they said *yes*, over and over, until this *yes* called for their martyrdom. As has been true throughout history, the Church in North America sprang from the blood of these martyrs, faithful Christians who dared to *hope in Christ* with their entire beings. Their stories challenge us to surrender ourselves to hope, allowing God to shine through our lives. We are not all called to be martyrs, but we are all called to holiness. We are all called to answer the same, *yes*.

Our help, and our hope, is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

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Saturday, October 20, 2018
(Lec. 472)

- 1) Ephesians 1:15-23
- 2) Luke 12:8-12

SATURDAY OF
28TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(USA: Opt. Mem.
Saint Paul of the Cross, Priest;
Saturday in honor of BVM)

Gospel related: CCC 333, 1287, 1864

FOCUS: The joy of God is mercy.

Pope Francis wrote, *The joy of God is mercy, the joy of God is forgiveness! Here is the entire Gospel!* (*Happiness in This Life*, 2017). Today's readings give us some ways to consider that.

The reading from Ephesians shows us that Paul is full of joy at the faith of the people, and he offers them hope of even better things to come. He expounds on God's mercy, declaring the hope and inheritance they have through Christ. Christ, who was raised from the dead and now sits *far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come*. Christ, the Incarnation of God's mercy, and the *fullness of the one who fills all things in every way*.

Then, in the Gospel, we learn at least three aspects of God's mercy and how it brings joy. First, anyone who acknowledges Jesus before others, Jesus will acknowledge in heaven; he knows our name and remembers what we do. In our faithful witness to the Gospel, God's mercy is ours – freely given.

A second glimpse of God's mercy is found in Christ's proclamation that there is only one sin that is unforgivable: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. If blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is the only unforgivable sin, that means every other sin we might commit is forgivable. Even when we sin and fail in our lives of discipleship, Christ's mercy awaits us in our repentance and seeking of forgiveness, because in doing so we acknowledge him as our Lord.

Finally, if we are ever persecuted for our belief in Jesus, the Holy Spirit will be with us, telling us what to say to our accusers. He rewards our steadfast faith in him by being with us even in our darkest moments. His mercy endures forever.

Much can be written about, and heard, regarding the mercy of God. But it is in our participation in the Eucharist that we have the most perfect example; the one which brings the joy to which Pope Francis referred. For the joy in the mercy of the Eucharist is the promise of eternal life. This is indeed the Good News.

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SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2018

(Lec.146)

1) Isaiah 53:10-11

2) Hebrews 4:14-16

3) Mark 10:35-45 or 10:42-45

Gospel related: **CCC** 536, 608, 618, 1225, 1551, 1570; **CSDC** 193, 379

**TWENTY-NINTH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: In the kingdom of God, even suffering can have a new purpose and meaning.

Our reading from Isaiah's Songs of the Suffering Servant, while short, can often be easily overlooked as we rush to comment on the somewhat audacious and self-centered demands of the disciples in the Gospel. But Isaiah actually sets the scene for the Gospel passage by addressing the question of human suffering. As people of faith, suffering seems to go against our basic image of God as loving and caring, and in the face of the many expressions of suffering we are often left with the question – how could God let this happen?

Throughout history, many philosophers have attempted to answer this thorny question; for some, suffering is a divine punishment, for others a test or an opportunity to strengthen faith or to show heroic virtue or fidelity. Yet in the end, it remains a mystery – beyond our comprehension. As Christians, we often seek an explanation from Scripture. Isaiah tells us that *the Lord was pleased to crush him in infirmity*, and Hebrews tells us that Jesus was *similarly ... tested in every way*. At first glance neither sounds helpful, but when we look again through the eyes of faith, we see that these words are not simply meant to explain suffering, but to help us realize that even in suffering there can be good.

The suffering of the Servant is not without purpose or meaning, for the prophet tells us that through suffering *he shall justify many*. The term *justification* is central here. It's a term that implies that one has been acquitted and restored to right relationship with God, and that another has paid the price. Christ, in his suffering, has paid the price so that we can *confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help*.

Discovering meaning in suffering is also an element in today's Gospel passage. Having basked in the glory and fame of Jesus, the disciples want a little more – a place of status and glory in the kingdom. What they are surprised to hear is that authority and leadership in the kingdom is not about glory but about self-giving – even to the point of suffering and possibly one's death. Clearly this is a reversal of their world view.

So if discipleship and authority have a new meaning in the kingdom, is it too much to conclude that suffering, too, may have a new meaning? While it cannot be avoided or even fully explained, we can begin to use it for a greater purpose: we can learn from it and, as people of faith, join our suffering to those of the Suffering Servant whom we now recognize as Christ. Perhaps, then, our sufferings might not seem so inscrutable or meaningless. Perhaps, then, we might become Christ to others – an image of the Servant in the midst of our world. What gives us final hope is that not only did Christ experience suffering, as we do, but he ultimately overcame it in the Resurrection. Our hope is that we now can share in that triumph.

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Monday, October 22, 2018
(Lec. 473)

- 1) Ephesians 2:1-10
- 2) Luke 12:13-21

MONDAY OF
29TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint John Paul II, Pope)

Gospel related: **CCC** 549; **CSDC** 325, 326

FOCUS: Let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in good works.

In Jesus' parable, he tells of a rich man who planned to store up *good things* from his bountiful harvest so that he could spend years relaxing. However, that night the rich man died and all his preparations were for nothing, because he was *not rich in what matters to God*.

Why was the rich man a fool? He relied solely on himself and not on God.

That is not to say that we should be irresponsible with our finances or that it is wrong to enjoy life and relax. But we must also strive to do the things that matter to God – following his commandments, loving others and loving him.

And what we own and accomplish in our lives, no matter how great or small, is tiny compared to what our generous God has freely given us: forgiveness and new life in Christ.

Saint Paul teaches us that God loves us so much – he loves you and me and each of us so much – that he desired to draw us into relationship with him. Through our baptism, we were buried with Christ and rose with him. Through this same grace, we will be seated in heaven so we might be able to see *the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus*.

God is more generous than we can possibly imagine. He lavishes graces upon us, his children, not because we are good, but because he is good. Even in the midst of our sins, he loves us. In each of our lives, the Lord has reached out to us in mercy to bring us to new life in Christ.

Saint Paul points out that the grace of God saves us; we cannot earn our own salvation. Therefore, *no one may boast*.

As Catholics, however, we do not hold to a doctrine of *sola fide*, or faith alone. Our faith and love of God should produce fruit – that is, good works. Saint Paul says that very plainly: *For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them*.

As we begin to prepare our altar table to receive Christ in the Eucharist, let us thank God for his abundant blessings, and thank him for granting us the grace to be saved. We also ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in good works. We pray we may remain humble as we remember that everything is a gift from our generous God.

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Tuesday, October 23, 2018
(Lec. 474)

- 1) Ephesians 2:12-22
- 2) Luke 12:35-38

TUESDAY OF
29TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.)

Saint John of Capistrano, Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 2849

FOCUS: As members of God's household, let us continue to serve God and God's people faithfully.

Our readings for today offer some beautiful reflections on our identity as Christians. Paul, in his Letter to the Ephesians, writes that, because of Jesus' sacrifice for all of us on the cross, we are no longer alienated from God or *from the community of Israel*. Jesus has brought us all together, so that we are *no longer strangers and sojourners but members of the household of God*. Even more amazing, together as a Christian people, we have been made into a *dwelling place of God in the Spirit*.

This might seem like a lofty image of the Christian family, yet Paul reminds us throughout this beautiful passage that all of our identity is based on Jesus. Jesus not only became our peace, but continues to hold us together as one body, as one temple of the Holy Spirit. Without Jesus, and without the entire body of Christ, our fellow Christians, we could not claim the lofty status of temple or citizens with the saints in heaven.

Jesus also adds humility to our status as he compares us to servants in today's Gospel, called to be ever faithful and vigilant until the return of the master. While we are called to be one in prayer as the dwelling place of the Spirit, we are also called to be one in service – to each other and to the wider world, to whomever and wherever Jesus, our Master, might call us. As Jesus demonstrated throughout his life, we are to balance our service with prayer. Through our prayerful communion with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, we are given the inspiration, guidance and strength we need to serve others – the people in our lives and within our reach who are in need.

As we continue to be vigilant and faithful servants in this life – balancing prayer and service – we can be assured that one day Jesus will call us to take our place as citizens of heaven, even then keeping in mind always the needs of those who are on their way home.

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Wednesday, October 24, 2018
(Lec. 475)

- 1) Ephesians 3:2-12
- 2) Luke 12:39-48

WEDNESDAY OF
29TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Anthony Mary Claret, Bishop)

Gospel related: CCC 2849

FOCUS: We are called to walk in the footsteps of the Master.

In light of today's Scriptures and today's memorial of Saint Anthony Marie Claret, let's take a moment and reflect on what it means to be a servant-leader. This is not a term used in everyday conversation, especially when it comes to leadership styles. We might hear instead, "she is a consensus builder, or, he is an autocrat." Or, "she is hard to work for"; "he is the best boss I have ever had."

Many of us might not remember that one of the titles for our Holy Father is "Servant of the servants of God." He is called to be a servant-leader fashioned after Jesus' own leadership style. Likewise, the clergy and all pastoral leaders are called to model their leadership style after that of Jesus. In fact, everyone here is called to model our leadership style after that of Jesus. As faithful disciples we, too, are called to be servant-leaders, for there can be but one Master – and that is the Lord.

What does it mean to be a servant-leader? It means to not ask anyone to do something we are unwilling to do, or have done, ourselves. Asking the kids to take out the trash has credibility not because of our authority as a parent, guardian or babysitter, but because we are willing to take the trash out too. Asking employees to do the so called "heavy lifting" is most effective when we are right there doing the lifting with them.

Imagine if our civic leaders adapted their leadership styles to that of a servant-leader: how much we could accomplish together! Jesus gives two different examples of servants in today's Gospel: a prudent and faithful one, and an unwise and unfaithful one. The saint we memorialize today, Saint Anthony of Claret, was clearly the former. He took the call to be a servant of the Master to heart. He was a servant-leader, never forgetting his humble beginning as a weaver. He is the founder of the Claretian Order, which to this day continues the work of evangelization and outreach to the marginalized.

This understanding of service and servant-leadership is important to our own work of evangelization. Saint Paul reminds the early Christians once again that the Church is to be a big tent, open to all – Gentile and Jew – not just to a select group of people. When we model a welcoming Church, we follow in the master's footsteps. When we walk the walk and don't simply talk the talk, others will want to learn from us how to follow the quintessential servant-leader of all time, our one and only Master, Jesus Christ.

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Thursday, October 25, 2018
(Lec. 476)

- 1) Ephesians 3:14-21
- 2) Luke 12:49-53

Gospel related: CCC 536, 607, 696, 1225, 2804

THURSDAY OF
29TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Unite in prayer for the Gospel.

Paul begins his address to the Ephesians today: *Brothers and sisters: I kneel before the Father ... that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory, the strength of the Spirit, the love of Christ in their hearts, and to be filled with the fullness of God.* He desires for them what anyone who cares for another in Christ would – that they may truly believe and embrace God's plan of salvation in Christ.

It is a powerful image, really, to know that Paul was on his knees in prayer for those he loved and ministered to. And we might consider that perhaps he does the same thing still, in heaven, for us here today. Praying for us and interceding for us in the hope that we, too, would come to know the fullness of God that he now knows.

Hearing Paul's words, and knowing of his prayers, is comforting, especially when we pay attention to the words we hear from Jesus in the Gospel: *I have come [not] to establish peace on the earth ... but rather division.* He promises that households will be divided, with parents against children and in-laws against in-laws.

It is clear from Jesus' message, and from what history has proven, that the proclamation of the kingdom will be both received and rejected by humanity. There will be dissension, and the blazing, refining fire will purify some and leave others as ash. And this is why prayer for one another is so important.

Paul's prayer is directed at a community that has already accepted the Gospel, but that does not mean they don't need fortification in their resolve to live it. Nor does it mean that his prayer is confined to that time and place in human history – for God's time is not our time. Paul's prayers, and ours, are meant to draw all to the Gospel. They are meant to allow Christ's message to be heard, and to bring those who hear it through any division and to the peace of Christ that is not of this world.

In every Mass we pray for each other, and for the needs of others and the salvation of the world. As we do so here today, may we remember those who have gone before us united in prayer, and give thanks for the power of prayer that is united for the Gospel.

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Friday, October 26, 2018
(Lec. 477)

- 1) Ephesians 4:1-6
- 2) Luke 12:54-59

FRIDAY OF
29TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Through our baptism, we are called to be humble, gentle, patient and loving toward others.

When we have a difference of opinion with someone or when someone challenges our work, many of us respond by raising our defenses and preparing our counter-arguments. We raise our hackles so to speak, and are ready to argue, to justify, to defend. We might not be as inclined to listen, to seriously entertain the other person's argument or position.

Today, Jesus asks us to do just that: to let go of that argumentative inclination. We may not be on the road to face a magistrate, and we may not be facing prison, but persevering in our need to be right, or refusing to accept that it is possible that we have been at fault also has its costs. Such costs can continue to haunt us for years, particularly when these arguments occur in the context of our closest relationships.

The approach Jesus asks us to embrace instead is one of dialogue. It is only by truly listening with an open heart and mind to the other that we can find common ground and come to a mutually agreeable understanding.

Not only does Jesus' approach make sense, it also is in keeping with the practice of the virtues of humility, gentleness, patience, and love which Paul talks about in the first reading. For it takes the combination of all these to listen to another person without rushing to fill the space with our ideas and thoughts, without striving to show how smart and knowledgeable we are by pushing forth our way of seeing things.

And how can we become such examples of gentleness, humility, patience, and love? It is only when we are able to remember that there is something greater for which we are made: participation in the body of Christ. And this body, into which we were incorporated at baptism, is animated by a Spirit of unity, not division, and is held together by the bond of peace, not conflict and discord, and it offers us a share in God's eternal love.

In light of this great gift we have freely received, what is so important about winning an argument? About being right? Especially when they lead us away from what truly matters – from our ultimate destiny and hope.

Brothers and sisters, as we come to the table of the Lord, let us do so hungry for that nourishment that will strengthen us in our resolve to become the people we are called to be: gentle, humble, patient and loving.

Saturday, October 27, 2018
(Lec. 478)

- 1) Ephesians 4:7-16
- 2) Luke 13:1-9

SATURDAY OF
29TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: We are equipped for building up the body of Christ.

In today's Gospel, we hear of two separate incidents in which people are tragically killed. Galileans were killed by Pilate, and eighteen people died in the collapse of a tower at Siloam. It would be easy for Jesus' audience to think these individuals were somehow *greater sinners than all other Galileans*, or *more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem*. But Jesus disabuses this notion, and tells them the victims were no more sinners than anyone else. He echoes Ecclesiastes: that rain falls on rich and poor the same way; both good and bad happens to both good and bad people.

Sin itself is not the issue, but repentance. We are all sinners – that almost goes without saying. But do we all repent? Jesus points to every person's need for repentance. He illustrates this with his parable of the fig tree, showing us that bearing fruit for God goes hand-in-hand with repentance. Bad things will continue to happen, but good things can come from our cooperation with God, through the loving example of Jesus.

We can imagine ourselves in the parable. For all of our human history to that point, we, the fig tree, have not produced fruit. The vineyard owner – God – has noticed the lack of production and tells the gardener to cut it down. The gardener, Jesus, beseeches God, the owner, on behalf of the fruitless tree, to give it one more year to respond to his care. The owner agrees. And here we are. Jesus has indeed become our mediator and advocate.

And this is the two-step process Jesus will use to make us – the tree – healthy. He will tear out the ground around our roots, the sinful soil from which we have used up the nutrients for what we want, that which has fed our own desires and egos. And he will replace it with healthy, rich soil, which contains humility and love – nutrients we need to bear fruit.

So the Good News is this: We cannot control all that happens in our lives and we cannot avoid calamity and hardship, but we can – through humility and repentance – return to God, through the help of Jesus, and bring about good in this life. We cannot escape suffering and death in this life, but we can unite ourselves with Christ, who has defeated death, and live eternally with him.

In Paul's Epistle, he reminds us that we are equipped *for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ*.

May we bear good fruit.

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SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2018

(Lec. 149)

1) Jeremiah 31:7-9

2) Hebrews 5:1-6

3) Mark 10:46-52

Gospel related: CCC 548, 2616, 2667

**THIRTIETH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: The Lord removes our blindness that we may see and serve Christ in each other.

Today, Jeremiah promises God's chosen people that they will soon return from exile in Babylon. God renews his covenant through the prophet. As all are gathered together for their return to Jerusalem, they will come with *the blind and the lame in their midst*.

Blindness was thought to be a curse from God. Those who could not see could not work. If you could not work, you could not feed your family. Bartimaeus, our protagonist in the Gospel, had endured great poverty due to his condition. What was his life like? Could he sustain a wife and a family? Had he become a burden to his father Timaeus? Whatever the case, he cries out *Son of David, have pity on me*. So many people who *could* see Jesus did not believe he was the Son of God. Bartimaeus, who has never seen anything, truly makes an act of faith in calling out to the Lord. Not only does the blind man demonstrate great faith, but also great determination, as he refuses to allow the others to prevent him from attracting Jesus' attention.

Jesus the High Priest so beautifully described in today's Letter to the Hebrews, who deals *patiently with the ignorant and erring*, grants Bartimaeus' greatest wish. In doing so, he restores him to life. The Lord does the same for us when he removes the blindness that afflicts us – those hard-to-see places in our lives that seem to keep us from seeing suffering or need around us.

Notice that when Bartimaeus is healed, he does not immediately return to his village and family. Instead, *he received his sight and followed him on the way*. He became a disciple, wishing to follow Jesus, and perhaps share with others the good fortune he has received. Bartimaeus, sight restored, could say with Jeremiah, *Shout with joy for Jacob ... proclaim your praise and say: The Lord has delivered his people*. We pray that the Lord will deliver all of us from blindness to sight, from death to new life. Once we see the world and those around us through the new eyes of faith, then we can truly find and serve Christ in one another.

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Monday, October 29, 2018
(Lec. 479)

- 1) Ephesians 4:32–5:8
- 2) Luke 13:10-17

Gospel related: **CCC** 582; **CSDC** 261

MONDAY OF
30TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We, like the infirm woman, are children of God whom Jesus wants to set free.

Child of God. Daughter of Abraham. These phrases can seem abstract – like nice ideas rather than tangible realities – until we put faces to them.

The crippled woman in today's Gospel was a daughter of Abraham – a member of God's chosen people – truly a beloved child of the Father. We don't know if she felt aware of her dignity as a daughter of the Lord, but for any number of reasons, she was at the synagogue that Sabbath day when Jesus was there. Our Lord recognized her burden, and he set her free of her infirmity.

Jesus is also here in our church, and he waits in the tabernacle under the guise of bread and wine to set us free of our infirmities. What weighs on our souls? Pain? Habitual sin? Feelings of unworthiness? Give them to Jesus. Hear him call you a son or daughter of Abraham, a child of God.

But know that being a child of God comes with a responsibility to act a certain way. Saint Paul says, *You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.*

As children of God, we are called to imitate Christ. That's a pretty high standard, and sometimes it can be intimidating to even try. But we should also take note of what Saint Paul isn't saying – he's not saying "Be God." The woman in today's Gospel wasn't trying to solve her problem herself; she simply showed up and was open to an encounter with Jesus.

As beloved children of God, we should strive to act the part. But how? Saint Paul says to *live in love, be kind ... compassionate, forgiving*, give thanks. Avoid all kinds of immorality, impurity and greed. While that is helpful, it is rather superficial if it is not tied with our faith. But Saint Paul ties it in clearly: we love others because Christ loves us. We forgive others, because God has forgiven us.

We recognize the light and the dignity of our brothers and sisters, and take action to help each other and better their lives, even if reaching out may cause others to scorn us, as they did Jesus.

That is how we can live as *children of light*, as the beloved children of God. And when we are the woman in today's Gospel, we should at once stand up and glorify God. Today, let's each pray that we can open our hearts to allow Jesus to heal our infirmities, and that we will continue to live as a beloved child of God.

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Tuesday, October 30, 2018

(Lec. 480)

1) Ephesians 5:21-33 or
5:2a, 25-32 (Lec. 122)

(Lec. 480)

2) Luke 13:18-21

Gospel related: CCC 2660

TUESDAY OF
30TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The kingdom of God grows through prayer and our love for one another.

It's easy to get lost in the daily grind of our everyday lives. School, careers, family and other obligations demand our time and attention. When this happens, it's easy to feel disconnected with God. We may feel there's very little time to pray, read Scripture or maintain relationships with others at church. The kingdom of heaven can seem far away – a destination we hope to reach only when we pass from our life on earth.

Jesus teaches us that the kingdom of God isn't a distant place. It's here now and continues to grow every day. Like a mustard seed, it starts small then develops into a *large bush*, where birds come to dwell in the shelter of its branches. Like yeast combined with flour, it spreads throughout our world. The tiniest amount helps us rise and transforms us into something new.

Jesus was sent to establish God's kingdom on earth. As his disciples, we continue this mission. We have been entrusted to help build the kingdom! One way we do this is through family.

Family emerges from the sacred bond between husband and wife. Paul tells wives and husbands to be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Their love should reflect the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church. From and in this union springs life – allowing the kingdom to grow.

Prayer is another way we can help to establish the kingdom of God. "Prayer in the events of each day and each moment is one of the secrets of the kingdom revealed to 'little children,' to the servants of Christ, to the poor of the Beatitudes" (CCC 2660). The catechism goes on to say, "all forms of prayer can be the leaven to which the Lord compares the kingdom" (2660).

We unite ourselves with Christ's mission when we celebrate the Eucharist. As we prepare for this sacrament, let us pray, as Pope Francis suggests, "for the grace of docility to the Holy Spirit." Indeed, he went on to say: we are often "docile to our whims, our judgments," and we think: "I do what I want." But "the kingdom does not grow in this way," and "we ourselves do not grow." It is, rather, "docility to the Holy Spirit that will make us grow and transform as the yeast and seed" (October 2016).

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Wednesday, October 31, 2018
(Lec. 481)

- 1) Ephesians 6:1-9
- 2) Luke 13:22-30

WEDNESDAY OF
30TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are called to live our Christian discipleship to the best of our ability.

Each of us has a vocation to holiness. Whether it be lived as a spouse, mother or father, a priest or religious, or as a single individual, we all have our own unique challenges to fully living the Christian life.

The difficulties arise when we consider the vast scope of living according to the teachings of Christ, while we are beset by the problems, temptations and dilemmas that we encounter in the world. Today's readings offer us guidance on the application of discipleship in the context of our daily lives.

The first reading from Ephesians is straightforward in its instruction: Paul exhorts children to obey their parents, and parents to be patient with children. He demands the same mutual respect among slaves and masters. Paul's words can be considered in our own family dynamics, and in our modern-day professional relationships. Everyone in the working world has a "superior." Even if one is an entrepreneur, or the CEO, one still has an obligation to the customers or investors. Paul's words instruct us that we must be honest and diligent, even if the "superior" may not be watching. God still watches, and he expects that we will conduct ourselves virtuously at all times.

The Gospel is less specific in its approach than the epistle reading. Here, Jesus is answering the question as to how many people will be saved. His words clearly indicate that how we are in relationship with God, and how authentically we believe, will factor in to our ability to enter the kingdom. And that will be determined, among other ways, by how we treat one another – even and especially when the only one who can see us is God. Jesus never said that it would be easy, hence his description of the gate as narrow. We are called to diligently endeavor to follow Christ within our state in life and to the very best of our ability.

One key to this is a continuous examination of how we live our lives. The sacrament of reconciliation is a very useful tool in this area. It gives us a quiet moment when we can reflect on how we conduct ourselves across the spectrum of the roles we fill in our discipleship, and our striving for holiness. We can gain pardon from God for where we have fallen short, and gain insight on where we can improve or what habits must change to create wholeness between our beliefs and actions. In addition, we will gain the grace necessary to recognize issues where they arise and be able to take corrective action. It will take effort, but partnered with God in this way, we cannot help but succeed in entering the narrow gate.

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