

SEPTEMBER

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**YEAR B
WEEKDAYS II**

Saturday, September 1, 2018
(Lec. 430)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 1:26-31
- 2) Matthew 25:14-30

SATURDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor of
BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 546, 1029, 1720, 1936, 2683 **CSDC** 259, 326

FOCUS: The greatest gift we have received from God is the gift of his beloved son, Jesus Christ.

Giving gifts is a sign of love and endearment, and even the smallest exchange, the gift of a smile or of time, for example, is important in relationships. The greatest giver of gifts, of course, is God, and his greatest gift is Jesus, his only begotten son. As the chosen recipients of this gift, how have we accepted and used it?

Saint Paul addresses the people of Corinth and encourages them to think about this by asking them to consider their calling from God – being chosen by him to be in Jesus Christ. The men and women of Corinth, like the Israelites before them, were not the most powerful in the world. They were not the wisest, nor the most revered. At least, not by worldly standards.

But God's power and wisdom are found in the least expected places. It is in Christ Jesus that God has chosen to display his divine love. Jesus is the gift freely given to the Corinthians, and to all of us, that allowed them in their lowly state to carry out God's plan. All who are weak, as well as those who are strong who accept Jesus, are called to reflect the humility of Jesus: *so that no human being might boast before God. It is due to him that you are in Christ Jesus.* For Paul, boasting in the Lord is a sign that all we do is for and by God's power, God's gifts. Where the world sees foolishness, weakness and lowliness, in Christ Jesus we are made righteous, sanctified and redeemed.

This message is borne out in today's Gospel passage, where Jesus tells the disciples the parable of the talents. Many scholars believe that in Jesus' day, one talent would have been equal to anywhere from \$300,000 to \$1,250,000 in today's world. This is not, however, a parable about growing our IRA or bank account. Instead, we can see it as a metaphor for God's gifts, of greater value than we could ever measure – freely given with the expectation that they will be shared with others, especially those who are in need of those gifts.

Jesus had a practical point to make for the disciples. He wanted them to use their gifts here and now so they would be prepared when the time came for the final judgment when he, the Master, would return to judge the living and the dead. The same advice applies to us. Let us discern our gifts, and let God's grace nurture them in our lives and in the lives of others. For, to paraphrase Paul, God chose us to change the world. And someday, we want to hear Jesus say to each of us, *Come, share your master's joy.*

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2018

(Lec. 125)

- 1) Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8
- 2) James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27
- 3) Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Gospel related: **CCC** 574, 581, 582, 1764, 2196

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Let us do more than simply hear God's laws, we are called to act on them in love.

Moses and Jesus are both wisdom figures in the Bible: Moses, by providing the voice for God's commandments to his people; Jesus, by giving human form to God's presence and modeling life in the kingdom of God. In the first reading, Moses wants to pass on this wisdom and calls on God's people to keep his commandments if they wish the Lord to continue to bless and guide them. In doing that, they also show the world their wisdom and the mighty power of their God. Those commandments set for them a higher moral standard than the rest of the world upheld, and challenged them to treat one another as their loving God treated them.

Jesus, who personifies God's wisdom, goes one step further in today's Gospel by helping them distinguish between God's commandments and human tradition. The Pharisees and scribes apparently equated those two things, and practiced the tradition with a disregard for the commandment.

Jesus recognizes their mistake and challenges them with Isaiah's prophecy: *This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.* The leaders have substituted their own judgment, and prioritized what has come from their own hearts, for the Word of God. But evil and sinful acts come from one's inner thoughts and not from outside. What God has given us cannot be wrong, but the thoughts and actions that we come up with defile God's law, and us.

James echoes this many years later in his letter: *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.* In other words, God's laws are not simply to be heard, as the Pharisees seemed to think, but acted on in love. We know we have a soul and a conscience, and we are responsible for all our actions. Our readings today alert us to that.

We are assured of divine blessings pouring down on us abundantly if we follow God's commandments faithfully. May this celebration of Eucharist, a memorial of the sacrifice that fulfilled the greatest commandment, inform and transform us for the greater good of the world. And may we honor God not just with our lips in prayer, but with our hearts in love and action.

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Monday, September 3, 2018

(Lec. 431)

1) 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

2) Luke 4:16-30

MONDAY OF

22ND WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

Saint Gregory the Great,

Pope and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 436, 544, 695, 714, 1168, 1286, 2443; CSDC 28

FOCUS: Jesus reconciles us with God the Father.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. We hear this announcement from Jesus in today's Gospel. He was in Nazareth where he had grown up as the carpenter's son. It was the Sabbath day, and they were at the synagogue. Jesus opened the scroll upon which were the words of the prophet Isaiah: He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind.

Jesus declared that he was the fulfillment of this Scripture, letting the hearers know that he was the promised Messiah. This would have been preposterous in the eyes of those present. Wasn't he just the local boy in the town, helping his parents and playing with other children? The townspeople had been hearing rumors of Jesus healing the sick and performing miracles. But they may have been astonished to hear him actually declare he was the Messiah.

Of course, Jesus knew what they were thinking and reminds them, *no prophet is accepted in his own native place*. Israel's history demonstrated that it never turned out well for Israel when they doubted God and turned away from him. Can we imagine those listeners looking at each other and becoming more annoyed with this local boy they knew so well? Who was he to make such bold statements? His comments made them so angry that they wanted to throw him off a cliff. It ended in an uproar, with Jesus slipping away unharmed.

They could not see beyond Jesus being just another person from their hometown. The promise of a Messiah had been theirs for centuries, and it must have been hard to fully grasp that Jesus was who God had promised. He wasn't there to chastise them, but to redeem them. His whole mission here on earth was to die for sinners, reconciling them with God the Father. That means Jesus came for the Nazarenes, for Israel and for us.

Is it hard for us to realize that Jesus is just as present now as he was that day in Nazareth? We are about to celebrate the Eucharist where we will receive the body and blood of Christ. Not symbolically, but really and truly fully present in body, blood, soul and divinity. We say "Amen" to that truth, and yet it can be easy to just go through the motions without acknowledging his true presence.

God loves us so much that he appeared in human history to redeem us, and he continues to be present to us in our daily lives: in the Word, in the Spirit and in the flesh. Today, let us resolve that we will truly see him as he is, and be open to what he says to us.

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Tuesday, September 4, 2018
(Lec. 432)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 2:10b-16
- 2) Luke 4:31-37

TUESDAY OF
22ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *The mind of Christ* helps us to live as God intends.

Today, we read Paul's admonishments to the Corinthians who were straying from what they had been taught. He points out to them – and to us – that it is the Spirit which allows us to understand *the things freely given to us by God*. In the Spirit, we grow in wisdom, and through the Spirit *we have the mind of Christ*. That is, we have the ability to be Christ-like in our thoughts and actions – to see the world in its spiritual realities, and not just earthly ones.

The spiritual realities are evident in today's Gospel passage from Luke. We see Jesus teaching *with authority* in the synagogue in Capernaum, and driving out a demon – an unclean spirit – who recognizes him as the *Holy One of God*. The people were astonished at his teaching, but they were *amazed* at his casting out of the demon. For the demon and Jesus recognized each other – something the people themselves were unable to do.

Driving out the demon without harming the man was evidence of Jesus' power and authority, but also his compassion. So, too, are we empowered to name evil in the world, and to call it out in the name of Christ. To have compassion for others, speaking *with words taught by the Spirit*. And to not be afraid to hold the *mind of Christ* and listen to the Holy Spirit speaking to our hearts, helping us to do whatever work we do as Christ would, in truth and love.

Let us pray for the grace to do all these things, strengthened by our prayers for each other and the nourishment of the Eucharist.

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Wednesday, September 5, 2018

(Lec. 433)

1) 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

2) Luke 4:38-44

WEDNESDAY OF
22ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: As laborers in God's field, we are blessed to know the Good News.

The ancient Greeks took their athletic competitions very seriously and the Corinthians were no exception. This great city was home to the famous Isthmian Games, second only to the Olympics, bringing thousands of tourists to Corinth every two years. Perhaps that is why they so quickly joined team Paul or team Apollos regarding their understanding of Jesus as the Messiah. Apollos, after all, who showed up in the city after Paul had left, was extremely eloquent.

But while rivalry in sporting events may be harmless, the same cannot be said for those who labor in God's field. Jealousy among God's co-workers, Paul chastised, reduced the Corinthians to infants in Christ, unable to eat the solid food of deeper wisdom they craved from the Apostle. Choosing allegiances to religious leaders showed the childishness of these early Christians, immature enough not to realize that both Paul and Apollos were, like themselves, merely humans – ministers through whom they became believers, yes – but humans just the same.

Had the Corinthians truly matured into spiritual people, they would not have been distracted by the corporal nature of judgment and division. They would have left behind their human perception of Paul and Apollos as separated rivals and embraced the spiritual perception of them as fellow servants. They would have understood that it was the message proclaimed by both of them that was important – not the messenger.

As Luke reminds us, Christ himself tirelessly proclaimed the Good News, tirelessly worked to grow the kingdom of God in town after town, tirelessly embraced his purpose as the Son of God to heal and preach and forgive. His ministry to all was continued by Saint Paul, and continues today. The Good News is meant for everyone.

In God's eyes, there is no one unworthy of the Gospel message. And so we, too, are called to share it. And it is the message that needs our allegiance, not the earthly messenger. We, too, take our athletic competitions very seriously. We, too, struggle with jealousy and rivalry. So we might ask ourselves: Do we pledge allegiance to something higher, or other, than God? To a priest or a parish or a position? Or do we recognize that it is God's message, and it is he who is tending the field?

To grow beyond spiritual infancy, we must always see the spirit in each other. We must reject the human tendency to judge and separate and choose sides. We may have been inspired by a compelling preacher, but that was God's truth speaking. We may be ourselves working for the greater good, but it is God's field. And in God's field he is in charge. And in God's field we are all blessed to know the Good News.

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Thursday, September 6, 2018

(Lec. 434)

1) 1 Corinthians 3:18-23

2) Luke 5:1-11

Gospel related: **CCC** 208

THURSDAY OF
22ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Be ready to say yes to God whenever he calls.

There are many layers to this account of the call of Simon that can help us as we consider our own call to discipleship. The passage opens with a description of the crowd pressing in as Jesus gets into one of Peter's fishing boats and instructs him to pull away from the shore. From a short distance, he begins to teach the crowd. After his teaching, Jesus asks Peter to move out farther from the shore and continue fishing, even though Peter and the others had been working all night and had caught nothing.

We, too, listen carefully, as the crowd did, to the Word of God and, like Peter, move in trust after we have had an encounter with Jesus. Notice that Jesus stays with Peter, as Peter does what he asks. Whatever Jesus asks of us, we can be confident that he will be with us – right in the boat with us – as we carry out his will. In this passage, we have active listening, obedience and submission to God's will, trust without knowing what the outcome will be, great joy in the abundance of God, and finally, our discipleship mission.

So many layers to this account! If we listen carefully to this Gospel, perhaps God will show us what we need to learn. Perhaps we need to listen – truly listen – even when we are weary and worn out. Perhaps we need to heed God's call to "go and do," even when it seems hopeless to us. Perhaps we need to have more confidence in God, and his love for us. We are not unlike Simon Peter, James and John who were astonished and quite nervous when they witnessed his power in supplying the abundance of fish. But Jesus reassured them when he said, *Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.*

As these words ring out to the Apostles, we, recognize they are meant for us, too. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, we are called in courage to let our faith be visible, vibrant and effective in attracting others to Christ. We offer our "empty boats" to him, trusting that he will fill them as he strengthens us to give witness through our testimony of faith, by our words and our actions. What if Peter had not trusted Jesus? What if he had simply docked his boats for the day? To think of all that would have been lost! Let us pray that God will always find us ready, willing and able to respond when he calls.

Friday, September 7, 2018

(Lec. 435)

1) 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

2) Luke 5:33-39

FRIDAY OF
22ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus illuminates the new covenant – love of God and one another.

Change is not easy. Our old ways feel familiar, safe and convenient, while change is often unpredictable, risky and stressful. To change, we must be open-minded and trust that a new way is better.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is asked why his disciples do not fast. He responds by asking them if wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them. Fasting is a sign of mourning; it is inappropriate to fast at a wedding. He tells them that the bridegroom will eventually be taken away – then they will fast.

Jesus elaborates on this question at a deeper level. Recognizing the conflict existing between himself and the religious leaders of his time – the struggle between practice of the old faith and acceptance of the new – he explains how a new piece of cloth cannot be used to patch a tattered cloak, and how old wineskins cannot hold fresh wine. Jesus didn't come to mend the old covenant; he came to bring us a new one. Like fresh wine, he was bursting the seams of the religious world view.

Jesus understands what is happening, saying, *no one who has been drinking old wine desires new, for he says, "The old is good."* The people of Israel had adhered to Mosaic law for over a thousand years. It would have been difficult for them to replace their beliefs and traditions with the new ways Jesus taught. But "being difficult to do" is never a reason or excuse for not listening to the Word of God. Paul asserts that the Lord *will bring to light what is hidden in darkness*. Jesus illuminates what was hidden by the rigidity of the old covenant – love of God and one another.

The new covenant demands that we change, too. We must be open to a new calling – one that replaces sin with love and doubt with trust. Every day we are called to conversion. Every day we are called to listen to God's Word and allow it to illuminate our path. We are new wine, in new wineskins. May we pour ourselves out for the sake of the world, as Jesus did.

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Saturday, September 8, 2018

(Lec. 636)

1) Micah 5:1-4a or
Romans 8:28-30

2) Matthew 1:1-16, 18-23 or 1:18-23

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 430, 437, 452, 486, 497, 744, 1507, 1846, 2666, 2812 **CSDC**
378

**THE NATIVITY OF
THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
– FEAST**

FOCUS: God saves.

This is one of those wonderful feasts on which we honor Mary. Nine months ago, we celebrated her Immaculate Conception – when Saints Anne and Joachim conceived their daughter without the stain of Original Sin. Now we celebrate her birth, for this holy child had been chosen to be the Mother of God.

But in truth, this day is not just about Mary. Like all days of our liturgical year, we are celebrating the facets of the Paschal Mystery – the life, passion, death, resurrection and glorious Ascension of Jesus Christ – and our participation in it. Today's readings carefully remind us how God's plan of salvation for the world would artfully unfold.

The prophet Micah recalls how God had chosen the insignificant town of Bethlehem-Ephrathah, a small city six miles south of Jerusalem and the hometown of King David, to be the site of the Savior's birth. The Savior would *stand firm and strengthen his flock by the strength of the Lord ... his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth*. Most importantly, *He shall be peace*.

In the Gospel, Matthew methodically provides the lineage of Jesus. He lists three groups of fourteen generations each, from Abraham to Mary and Joseph. It was Mary, the betrothed of Joseph, who conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and gave birth to the long-awaited Messiah.

This divine plan is heralded by angels throughout the life of Jesus – they announce his conception, they announce his birth to the shepherds, they attend to him as he fasted in the desert and they stand by him during his the agony in the garden. Their song of praise continues in heaven and in the Church (CCC 333). And what do the angels say to Joseph in today's Gospel? *Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins*. There it was! How could Mary and Joseph refuse? Jesus in Hebrew means "God saves." The name would be Christ's identity and his mission (CCC 430).

But the Good News did not end in Nazareth and Bethlehem. Because this Virgin bore a Son, God's plan of salvation was set in motion. In his public ministry, Jesus preached the mercy and love of God. By his passion and death, he took away our sins. By his Resurrection, he won for us eternal life. Miracles done in the name of Jesus remind us all that God continues to save. In the sacraments, especially baptism and Eucharist, Jesus' sacrifice perpetuates. We continue to invoke Jesus' name in prayer.

What's our role in all this? Like the angels, our role is to share that wonderful message of salvation. Like Mary and Joseph, our role is to cooperate in God's salvific plan. Like so many before us, our role is to live a life of obedience to our baptismal call. Here and now, in our midst, God continues to save his people.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2018

(Lec. 128)

1) Isaiah 35:4-7a

2) James 2:1-5

3) Mark 7:31-37

Gospel related: **CCC** 1151, 1504

**TWENTY-THIRD
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Let us open our ears to the Gospel message.

A late-night comic does this routine every once and awhile where he and a guest will impersonate teenage girls saying “Ew” to a variety of things. Well, that could be our collective response to Jesus putting his finger into the man’s ears and then spitting on the man’s tongue. That’s right, “Ew.”

All joking aside Jesus’ outward actions today are symbolic, the miracle is not. Jesus placing his finger in the man’s ears symbolically represents opening his ears to sound. Spitting on the man’s tongue symbolically represents loosening, if you will, the man’s tongue. The miracle resides in the power of God, in the person of Jesus Christ, who releases the man from his infirmities, saying: “*Ephphatha! Be opened!*”

Be opened. Right to the heart of the matter – be opened! How is Jesus challenging us to be opened? To open our ears to the Gospel message rather than refusing to hear it; to open our lips to proclaiming the Gospel message rather than remaining silent.

We might be inclined to say the man in today’s Gospel had an excuse, but do we? There is no excuse for us when it comes to hearing Jesus speak to us and sharing what he has to say with others. Coming here to church makes very little sense if we are coming with no intention of listening or repeating what we hear God say to us.

Most likely, no one here would consciously or deliberately have this be our mindset – unconsciously or self-consciously might be another matter. Unconsciously because we allow ourselves to become so busy about so much that our well-intentioned desire to hear and act upon the Word of God gets sidetracked way too easily. We are self-conscious, perhaps, because we are a bit timid when it comes to sharing our love of God at school, in the workplace or with neighbors.

Is it possible we are being called today to clean out our ears and strengthen our voices when it comes to living our faith among others? Is it possible we are being invited today to review what we listen to and what words come forth from our mouths? Is it possible God is once again inviting us to healing? The answers are: yes, yes and yes.

Ephphatha! Be opened! Yes, let us be open to the Word of God touching our hearts today. Let our tongues be free to lift up another’s spirits, and bring truth to falsehoods and kindness to our families and others.

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Monday, September 10, 2018

(Lec. 437)

1) 1 Corinthians 5:1-8

2) Luke 6:6-11

Gospel related: **CCC 581 CSDC 261**

MONDAY OF
23RD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Acting with love and compassion honors God and his commandments.

Saint Paul urged Corinthian believers to get rid of *the yeast of malice and wickedness*, and instead build up a life of truth and sincerity. Malice refers to motivation. It implies an attitude of spite, hatred, meanness.

In today's Gospel, we see the scribes and Pharisees, who were scrupulous about not breaking the law, closely watching Jesus *to see if he would cure on the Sabbath so that they might discover a reason to accuse him*. In other words, they were out to get him. We could safely infer that they were filled with malice toward Jesus.

Dedicated to observing the letter of the law, these religious experts seemed to have lost perspective. The Ten Commandments had been given to their Hebrew ancestors to teach them to love God, above all, and to keep them from harming each other. The purpose of the commandment about resting on the Sabbath was to keep the day holy and honor God, who rested on the seventh day of creation (Ex. 20:8-11).

In today's Gospel account, concern seems to have shifted from honoring God to meeting technical requirements about not working on the Sabbath. We know that the man's right hand was withered. In a society where most people earned their living by manual labor, this would have had a serious impact. So Jesus boldly healed the man's hand in full sight of all. Filled with contempt for Jesus rather than compassion for the man's disability, the malice of the outraged scribes and Pharisees persisted.

Rather than turning a blind eye to suffering, acting with love and compassion is a more appropriate way to honor God's holy day. Jesus told this to those gathered at the synagogue, then demonstrated it by healing the man. Paul echoed this by calling out the immorality in the Corinthian community. Truth and sincerity – and challenging each other in love about evil, sinful deeds – is the way of Christian discipleship.

Outward religious observations don't count for much if our hearts remain hardened and we don't live our faith. It's easy to get caught up in the externals of our faith and overlook the heart of what God calls us to do. We can't participate in his kingdom of love unless we welcome others into it. We also can't fully participate in his kingdom of love unless we speak and live with truth and sincerity. We may not be able to restore withered hands, but we can reach out our own hands to help heal loneliness. We are not sinless, but we can encourage one another in our striving to live a moral life. We can walk with each other, open to God's grace and practicing God's mercy. And we can spread God's kingdom one loving contact at a time.

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Tuesday, September 11, 2018

(Lec. 438)

1) 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

2) Luke 6:12-19

Gospel related: **CCC** 695, 1116, 1504, 1577, 2600

TUESDAY OF
23RD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: By our baptism as living saints, we are to model righteousness and be bearers of God's mercy.

Today's theme is what it means to lead, within our Church. In the first reading, Saint Paul admonishes the Corinthians for taking their grievances with each other and allowing them to be settled by people outside the Christian community, rather than finding leaders within their own community to help them. In the Gospel, Jesus names the Twelve Apostles and then comes down the mountain with them to stand among the crowd of people who seek him out to hear him and be healed.

In our own minds, who do we picture when we think of leadership in the Church? Certainly, those in ordained ministry are successors to the Apostles and therefore leaders – some of them more visible than others. But let us take a moment to ponder the fact that by our own baptism, whether we are young people in school, or wise people who have “been around the block,” we have also inherited the three-fold identity of Christ as priest, prophet and servant king. Christians, by definition, are “Little Christs,” or “Little Anointed Ones,” called to missionary discipleship in whatever environment we find ourselves. All of us, then, are called to lead: by example, by prophetic witness and as bearers of God's mercy.

It has been said that the Church is a sacrament of reconciliation for the world. That means that when the Church is at her best, we are models of God's mercy by the way we treat each other and reconcile differences. It means that our neighbors, co-workers and friends find it easy to work with, study with or live near a Catholic Christian because of our patience and peaceful collaboration. If our friends and neighbors do not have this knowledge about us, then maybe we need to re-evaluate how we lead our lives – and whether we are leading others toward God.

It really is the simple things that matter, and add up to the larger things. This is what Paul describes to the Corinthians, and Jesus is about to prescribe in tomorrow's Sermon on the Plain. Rephrased, we can ask: How can we model God's mercy in the way we settle disagreements in our home about our finances or family priorities? How can we model God's forbearance in our parish when we disagree about the genre of music to use or where to place the furniture? How can we model God's patience in our neighborhoods when crazy drivers cut us off on the road or yell profanities out the window?

When we live our baptismal vocation as Christians, we will find that we have the grace to lead others, through our loving example. Whether or not we explicitly preach the Beatitudes as Jesus will do in the Gospel tomorrow, our lives must bear witness to our Gospel values and, in turn, witness to others the grace of God that permeates and emanates from Christian community life.

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Wednesday, September 12, 2018

(Lec. 439)

1) 1 Corinthians 7:25-31

2) Luke 6:20-26

WEDNESDAY OF

23RD WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

The Most Holy Name of Mary)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2444, 2546, 2547 **CSDC** 325

FOCUS: Let us cultivate an attitude of worldly detachment that can lead us to complete dependence on God.

“How fortunate you are to be poor, to be hungry, to suffer, to be reviled.” Probably not something that we would say to anyone. Being poor means hardship and struggle. And who actually enjoys experiencing hunger? Not what we would consider a “fortunate” experience.

But fortunate is what Jesus calls them. Why?

Because the poor in Jesus’ time had no recourse to anyone other than God; there were no social support systems and programs to apply for if we were down on our luck. And while there were scriptural and Mosaic tenets regarding care, they did not always provide in the way God intended them to provide. When Jesus speaks to the blessing of poverty, he is speaking to the reality that it is only when we realize the false security of wealth, education, family and friends that we in turn know the importance of God. Physical poverty, or spiritual poverty – or both! – strip away the pretense that God has nothing to do with our flourishing.

This is the dependence Jesus himself experienced on the cross. He was stripped of everything, even his clothing; he experienced agony and thirst, mockery and the abandonment of his friends. There was nowhere else to turn except God. And while we may not wish for such an experience, there is grace in knowing that at our darkest moment, we would truly know what it means to fall completely into God’s loving care.

So should we walk out of church today and sell all our belongings, embrace poverty and throw ourselves on God’s mercy? We could do that, and some are called to live such evangelical poverty. But not all of us are called to such a radical path. So what is there to do?

Paul offers us advice. Recognizing that we do not know when the Lord will return – nor do we know when the Lord will call us home – Paul advises us on how best to remain prepared. He calls for an attitude of worldly detachment that allows us to build lives that revolve around the Lord rather than the things of this world. If we do so, we will be able to cultivate that dependence on God and be counted among those Jesus calls *blessed*.

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Thursday, September 13, 2018

(Lec. 440)

1) 1 Corinthians 8:1b-7, 11-13

2) Luke 6:27-38

THURSDAY OF

23rd WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

Saint John Chrysostom,

Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 1458, 1669, 1789, 1970, 2842

FOCUS: We are called to heroic love, surrendering to the needs of others.

Both of today's readings call us to a heroic level of love – that is, the virtue of charity – to bend humbly to the needs of others for the sake of the others. Paul reminds us to take great care with people who seem to have less understanding of the spiritual life than we do, or who might be more scrupulous than we are. Even if we know that certain actions are not against God's laws, Paul urges us to refrain from them if they cause scandal or destruction to others. The spiritual welfare of our brothers and sisters is more important, in this case, than whether we ourselves are right or wrong. This is an act of love for those who otherwise might be hurt or even lost.

The Gospel is a call to love even those whom we might consider enemies – those who want to use us for their own benefit or take what is rightfully ours. Jesus calls on us to go beyond what we're asked for – to turn the other cheek, give an extra tunic, walk an extra mile, and to do so freely and with an open heart. Actions such as this, performed freely out of love, strengthen us to behave as children of God – the God who freely gave of himself to become human and die for our salvation. Far from weakness, our bending to the other out of love is an imitation of Jesus, our Master.

But while we are, in fact, children of God, we are also human beings with human weaknesses. Practicing the love that Jesus asks of us demands – well, practice! Before we can love others in big ways, giving the shirt off our back out of love to someone who means to do us harm – we can work on showing humble love and service to the people in our lives, the people we love. It might mean going out of our way to do a favor for a friend, or taking the time that we don't really feel we have to listen to the problems of a co-worker.

Perhaps, when we can show humble service to the people we love, we can stretch our hearts to love everybody – even the people who oppose us or have hurt us. Paul reminds us of this relationship we have with everybody on earth – because all on earth were created and loved by God. As Paul says, there is *one God, the Father, from whom all things are and for whom we exist*. Looked at in that light, we are all brothers and sisters, all part of the same family – the family of God.

* * *

Friday, September 14, 2018
(Lec. 638)

**THE EXALTATION
OF THE HOLY CROSS
– FEAST**

- 1) Numbers 21:4b-9
- 2) Philippians 2:6-11
- 3) John 3:13-17

Gospel related: **CCC** 219, 423, 440, 444, 454, 458, 661, 679, 706, 2130 **CSDC** 3, 64, 259

FOCUS: Today we pay special homage to the cross and give thanks to God for his gift of salvation.

No other symbol has given so many people the hope and comfort the cross has given and continues to give. From the beginning, the irony of this has been clear. The instrument of shame, pain and death was transformed by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Today, we pay special homage to the cross and give thanks to God for his gift of salvation.

This feast day is called the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. *Exaltation* is not a word heard often in conversation. It is a dramatic word, saved for special occasions. It not only indicates praise and importance, but also includes an element of lifting or elevating, in both a physical and reverential sense. When we exalt someone or something, we draw attention to the person or the object. And this is what we do today. Why? Because *by Christ's holy cross he has redeemed the world.*

So, how will we exalt the cross today? Being here at Mass is one way. The Mass, among other things, is a remembrance of the passion and death of Christ, so every time we participate in this celebration we draw attention to the Holy Cross. Making the *Sign of the Cross* is another way we exalt the Holy Cross. That simple prayer, which many of us say without much thought, is actually a testament to our belief in the power and grace given to humankind through the sacrifice of the cross.

Many people wear a cross as a necklace. Today is the day to show it proudly as a way of exalting it, and giving thanks for what it represents. If you have a crucifix on the wall or on a table at home, today would be a good day to take note of it and maybe even find a way to give it more prominence than it normally has. By the way, a crucifix is an especially appropriate type of cross for today's feast, since it is a cross that includes the *Corpus*, or figure of Jesus on it. Not all Christians follow the Catholic tradition of including the Corpus, but for us it is a reminder of the true humanity of Jesus and the suffering he endured for our salvation.

As our reading from Philippians says, *he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave ... he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.* Today, let us take the time to acknowledge that incredible gift, and to lift high the cross in ways that will be truly meaningful.

* * *

Saturday, September 15, 2018

(Lec. 442)

1) 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

2) John 19:25-27 or

(Lec. 639)

Luke 2:33-35

Gospel related: (Lec. 442) **CCC** 149, 529, 575, 583, 587, 618 (Lec. 639) **CCC** 495, 501, 726, 964, 2605, 2618, 2677, 2679

SATURDAY OF

23RD WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

Our Lady of Sorrows)

FOCUS: Our Holy Mother intercedes and assists us in being strong during trials.

Today is the Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows, a day when we meditate on the seven sorrows Mary endured as the mother of our Lord. In our Gospel reading, we witness one of her early grief-stricken moments when she and Joseph took their newborn, Jesus, to be presented at the Temple.

When they arrived, Simeon, a righteous and devout man filled with the Holy Spirit, blessed them and said to Mary, *this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel ... and you yourself a sword will pierce.*

Simeon's proclamation was a prophetic commentary about Jesus' crucifixion and the heartache Mary would experience. The joys of being the mother of Jesus would be joined by the pain of seeing Jesus being mocked, tormented and ultimately executed. Mary's love for God and her inner conviction of her role in God's plan ultimately gave her peace and strength that can come only from the Father himself.

Our Blessed Mother had more sorrows during her life. Sometime before Jesus was two years old, she and Joseph fled from Israel to Egypt because Herod threatened to slaughter all male babies under the age of two. Later, when Jesus was twelve years old, he became separated from his parents during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. These events were terrifying for her, bringing distress and fear. But her refuge was this: God was with her and consoled her during these incidents.

This is the good news our Father has given to the whole world. Christ came for the salvation of all humanity. Mary serves as our role model of endurance. She had total assurance that she was part of God's plan. We also have that same promise. In the first reading, Saint Paul reminds us that we eat the bread and drink the cup of God's salvation.

It is safe to say that we, too, have times in our lives which are difficult and maybe even overwhelming. Someone we love, or even ourselves, may become very ill. A family member may disappoint or hurt us dreadfully. Financial ruin could bring devastation more than we think we could endure. Let us resolve today that we will always trust God as we look to Blessed Mary as our role model, and ask her to intercede for us. She held firm, never wavering. Scripture tells us that no one, and nothing, is stronger than God. We can trust him – always.

* * *

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2018

(Lec. 131)

1) Isaiah 50:5-9a

2) James 2:14-18

3) Mark 8:27-35

Gospel related: **CCC** 459, 472, 474, 557, 572, 649, 1615, 2544

**TWENTY-FOURTH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: The story of Peter, with all its twists and turns, is one that every Christian can learn from.

Peter is rightly recognized as a great saint. Many see themselves reflected in his flawed humanity and find hope in the fact that, despite all his struggles, he ultimately became a saint. But what makes Peter a great saint is not his flaws, but his deep faith in Christ. It is the fact that he finally came to embrace the truth of Jesus' words: *Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.*

This truth is evident when we recall that it was Peter who denied and deserted Jesus in his time of need. There, the one who declares Jesus to be the Messiah proved himself to be a fair-weather friend. So great is Peter's misunderstanding of Jesus and his mission that he even felt able to rebuke him. But in one of the most shocking Gospel interactions, Jesus turns on Peter in the strongest way: *Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.* Strong words indeed! But deserved by Peter for he is totally out of step with Christ.

As we hear this Gospel, it is good for us to ask what we believe about Jesus. If we simply see him as a prophet, can we truly believe in the reconciliation offered through his cross and Resurrection? Or are we like Peter, happy to confess that he is the Christ but unable to embrace the fullness of what that means?

To imitate Peter it is best to see his whole story – his post-denial regret and tears, his declarations of love at the Sea of Galilee and his post-Pentecost courage to preach the risen Christ. These are what make Peter great and worthy of our admiration. We can learn much from Peter. And although we might be attracted by his flawed humanity, we should not ignore the work that God has done in strengthening and empowering him to be a disciple and evangelist.

Like Peter we, too, need to let Christ change us if we are to let go of the human way of thinking. Yes, it's difficult but necessary. Baptism is never just a moment in time or a cultural expectation, but the beginning of a relationship with Christ. And it's a relationship that lasts all of our lives and calls us to be always open to Christ and his Word.

Monday, September 17, 2018

(Lec. 443)

1) 1 Corinthians 11:17-26, 33

2) Luke 7:1-10

MONDAY OF

24TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Robert Bellarmine,
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

FOCUS: Christ is fully present under the appearance of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper.

Today's first reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Corinthians is the earliest written account of the institution of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. What Saint Paul describes with concise, yet specific detail are, in fact, the words we hear as part of the Eucharistic Prayer every time we celebrate Mass – a narrative, which Saint Paul notes, he *received from the Lord*.

In language that is familiar for all of us, Saint Paul describes how, *the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my Body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my Blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.*

Yet the language that is so common to us must have raised many skeptical eyebrows for the early Church. After all, Saint Paul was not advocating that Christians get together merely as a sign of friendship and to share a meal. He is actually chastising the Church in Corinth for not making a greater distinction among their gatherings, one that elevates their assembling for Eucharist to a higher, more profound, setting. For Saint Paul, it is not simply a meal. No, he is specifically noting that we come together to partake of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist. And these words are as scandalous a mystery as the Christian claim of the Incarnation.

As Christians, we claim belief in the Incarnation, believing in a God who chose to become fully human out of love for his creation. And as Catholics, every time we gather for a Eucharistic celebration, we also proclaim the fact that God chose the Lord's Supper as the means through which he could remain visibly and tangibly present among us forever.

Let us not take this incredible gift of Love for granted!

* * *

Tuesday, September 18, 2018
(Lec. 444)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 12:12-14,
27-31a
 - 2) Luke 7:11-17
- Gospel related: **CCC** 994, 1503

TUESDAY OF
24TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: All of us are called and gifted.

In the first reading, Saint Paul beautifully describes the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. All of us are called and gifted, each in different ways. The Church flourishes when each of us uses our God-given abilities for God's glory, honor and praise. The Apostle was emphasizing unity in a time when people were deeply divided on cultural, religious and economic grounds. We are one in Christ Jesus. The Church is now, and always, a beacon for unity and hope in such times of divisiveness.

The gift of healing was one of the many Spirit-driven gifts mentioned by Paul. Of all Jesus' gifts, this one perhaps drew the most attention and he used it freely to help people who were lost. The widow of Nain in today's Gospel is not Jewish and yet Jesus tells her, *do not weep*, for he intends to save her and her son that day. It is yet another sign that he is the Savior of all peoples, not just those of Jewish faith.

It is the boy who is given his life back, but in a way, the mother, too, is resurrected. Having no husband and now with her son also dead, her prospects were grim. Women couldn't own property or work outside the home. Without her son to work and earn a wage, she would live out her days in abject poverty. Jesus gives hope to the hopeless and restores the child to the mother, and the mother to the child.

Jesus raised three people from the dead before he went up to Calvary. Two of the three were Gentile. He wanted people of every race, country, culture and language to know that *God has visited his people*. As Church, we "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord," as we leave Mass – hoping similarly that people will experience the life, love and mercy of God through us.

* * *

Wednesday, September 19, 2018

(Lec. 445)

1) 1 Corinthians 12:31–13:13

2) Luke 7:31-35

WEDNESDAY OF

24TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Januarius, Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 219, 423, 440, 444, 454, 458, 661, 679, 706, 2130 CSDC 3, 64

FOCUS: Love is capable of changing everything.

Today's first reading is one of the most well-known and oft-quoted in the Bible. From weddings to funerals, 1 Corinthians 13 is a popular choice for a variety of occasions. There is just something so profound and so lyrical about these words of Saint Paul, the words extolling the importance of the greatest of all virtues: love. In the end, it is what we are called to do.

We know the greatest commandment: that we love God with all our hearts and all our minds, and that we love our neighbor as ourselves. Saint Paul reminds us that this love is about loving not just those who love us back, but also those we may find difficult to love – our enemies; the poor and marginalized; the sick, the old, the infirm; those whose political views are different from our own; those who are different from us by race, creed or religion.

Love is patient, love is kind, Paul writes. The Church speaks to the importance of this over-arching love we are called to express, and the great blessing it brings to us and the greater body of Christ. This transformative power of love can change hearts, lives and societies. When people learn they are loved by God, *they learn not to be satisfied with only themselves but to encounter their neighbor in a network of relationships that are ever more authentically human* (CSDC 4). This, then, changes rules, relationships, even the structure of society. People become empowered to bring peace to conflict, love in the midst of hatred, *justice where there prevails the exploitation of man by man*. The greatest of these is love because love is capable of changing everything.

Paired with this poetic and memorable description of love in 1 Corinthians is today's Gospel from Luke, in which Jesus admonishes *this generation* for judging John the Baptist and himself. They do not understand the message and do not want to acknowledge its truths. And Jesus knows that some of them never will. Yet, Jesus tells us, wisdom will prevail.

We know this to be true, because we know that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, sent by God who loves us despite our shortcomings and our imperfections. God of love, who has spoken to us, his people, throughout our history. God of perfect love, who still speaks to us in many ways, through his Son and the Spirit; through the Word; and through other people and in situations in which we may find ourselves.

So rather than be as the spoiled children who ignore the message because it is not what we want to hear, let us pray for the grace to live what we know – to be open to the words God speaks to us and to act on them with the same love he gives to us.

* * *

Thursday, September 20, 2018
(Lec. 446)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 15:1-11
- 2) Luke 7:36-50

THURSDAY OF
24TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM

Saints Andrew Kim Tae-gŏn, Priest,
and Paul Chŏng Ha-sang,
and Companions, Martyrs)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2712

FOCUS: We are loved by a merciful and forgiving God.

What is the good news in our lives that we would want to shout from the housetop for all to hear? It may be a little thing or a big event in our lives. Babies are born. Weddings take place. Lives are committed to Christ in ordination or religious vows. We recover from illness. Telling good news is good for us as well as for those hearing it. Relationships are deepened when we take the time to let others into our lives. People are drawn closer to God when they see the goodness of God reflected in our lives.

This is how the kingdom of God is built. Jesus commanded his disciples to go out to all the world and share the Good News, the Gospel. Share God's Word so that all will come to see God's handiwork and thereby believe and be saved.

In today's first reading, Saint Paul, writing from Ephesus, reminded the Jewish/Christian community in Corinth of the Gospel that he had preached to them. Aware of divisions among them, he gave them assurance that they were being saved through the Gospel which they had received. Paul restated what he had previously handed on to them: the foundation of our Christian faith, the Paschal Mystery, *that Christ died for our sins ... that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day;... that he appeared ... to more than five hundred brothers*. Paul also reminds them that it is only by God's grace that he is what he is – that it is by God's grace he has preached and that they have believed.

The portion of the Good News that Jesus reveals in today's Gospel is that we are loved by a merciful and forgiving God. Jesus knows the Pharisee has his own roster of sins, yet is unable to recognize them. In contrast, the unnamed woman in the story is known publicly as a sinner. Her sins are unknown to us. We know only the outward signs of her remorse: standing behind the feet of the reclining Jesus, using her tears to bathe his feet and her hair to wipe them dry. Then kissing and anointing them.

Jesus tells us that her many sins are forgiven because she has shown great love. Her faith has saved her. Her story is good news not only for her, but for us as well. God loves and saves the sinner, and the sinner who loves God will be forgiven. Through the Paschal Mystery, we have been saved. Our belief in that, lived out in a life of faith like the faith of the woman in the Gospel, is news too good *not* to share.

* * *

Friday, September 21, 2018

(Lec. 643)

1) Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13

2) Matthew 9:9-13

Gospel related: CCC 581, 589, 2100

**SAINT MATTHEW,
APOSTLE AND
EVANGELIST
– FEAST**

FOCUS: Let us nourish others as we ourselves have been nourished.

Jesus loved to eat and drink with all sorts of people. Food and drink are often involved in the stories of Jesus' ministry. It may be a parable about the rich man giving a banquet, or it may be making breakfast for the disciples after his Resurrection. It could be when he was establishing the Holy Eucharist, or when he was enjoying a wedding banquet, or when he taught about saving sinners. Whatever the setting, often there was food. Today's Gospel is another case in point.

Jesus calls Matthew from his customs post to follow him, and then has a meal with him, tax collectors and other sinners. Because sinners were, well, *sinners*, it was shocking to the religious leaders to see this rabbi being so friendly with them. But Jesus explains that these folks are precisely the ones he wanted to save. Just as a doctor cannot do his work if he does not place himself in the company of sick people, Jesus needed to be around sinners to do his work of salvation. And he often did this work while he and others ate and drank.

For probably as long as, if not longer than, recorded history, sharing a meal has been an effective way to break down barriers. Food is such a universal thing: everybody eats and drinks. It provides a setting for socializing. It is fundamental to our well-being. It is non-threatening. Storytelling and table fellowship provided great platforms for Jesus to touch the hearts and minds of the common people, including us today. Through these simple ways of relating with others, Jesus set the pattern for how his Church should work. It set the tone that Paul talks about in today's first reading: *living with all humility and gentleness ... bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

So now, as we continue our Eucharistic banquet, in which we are nourished in mind, body and spirit, let us take note that we are doing as Jesus did. But once we leave here, will our words and actions continue to mirror those of Jesus?

When we sit down with others to eat and drink, let us remember that this is how Jesus reached so many people. Let us try to do as he did and use these social times to show the Father's love and to bring the kingdom of God into the hearts and minds of those around us. For as we have been fed, so may we nourish another.

* * *

Saturday, September 22, 2018

(Lec. 448)

1) 1 Corinthians 15:35-37,
42-49

2) Luke 8:4-15

Gospel related: CCC 368, 1151, 2668, 2731, 2847

SATURDAY OF

24TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Saturday in honor of

BVM)

FOCUS: We hold inside us both the earthliness of Adam and the Spirit of Jesus.

On the first day of fall, the thoughts of many turn to raking leaves, unpacking sweaters and harvesting gardens. The tiny seeds that were planted when the days were getting ever longer, instead of quickly shorter, have sprouted and then burgeoned into giant greenery bearing fruits and vegetables. Those seeds bore no likeness to what they produced. Who would have ever guessed that small, withered-looking kernels would become such beautiful creations?

So, too, our resurrected selves, proclaims Saint Paul. So, too, these weak and corruptible bodies may someday become glorious and heavenly ones. The Corinthians were concerned with what kind of physical body the resurrected dead will have, and how logistically that was going to happen. Saint Paul explains that what they are now bears no resemblance to what they can someday become in Christ Jesus. Humanity was rescued from death by the resurrection of the Lord, and is no longer under the sin of the first Adam. Jesus Christ, the last Adam, has given us new life.

The first Adam was but a *living being* but the last Adam is a *life-giving spirit*. We all contain within us both the earthliness of Adam and the Spirit of Jesus. The question becomes which of the two we cultivate: the one that lies on rocky ground or among thorns, and is choked by the anxieties, riches and pleasures of life? Or do we prepare a bed of rich soil, embracing the word *with a generous and good heart ... bear[ing] fruit through perseverance?*

We today are no different from the crowds following Jesus or the Corinthians listening to Paul. It is easy to get caught up in the details of our busy lives, listening with joy to the Word of God on Sunday, but falling away to the temptations of the world during the week. If we are not attentive in prayer and a life directed toward God, the seeds we plant with care may fail to prosper.

But as the earth revolves and the season changes from summer to fall, so, too, can we change our orientation to the Son: from earthly to heavenly. We can move from the shadow of the first Adam, weak and corruptible in sin, to the light of the last Adam, powerful and glorious in love. And when the final harvest comes, we will bear fruit in the eternal kingdom as a resurrected people.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2018

(Lec. 134)

1) Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

2) James 3:16 – 4:3

3) Mark 9:30-37

Gospel related: CCC 474, 557, 1825; CSDC 379

**TWENTY-FIFTH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Sin kills and destroys; but *the Lord upholds my life*.

Anyone who has ever tried to clean up glitter after any kind of crafting event – especially one that also involved glue, and included the participation of small children – probably understands an underlying thread of today's readings better than most. Like sin, glitter spills out in a dizzying array of temptation, is nearly impossible to fully clean up, and manages to find its way into every possible nook and cranny of our lives.

We find ourselves asking the rhetorical question, “how in the world did glitter end up *there?*” as we spot it on clothing or furniture far away from the original source. We know how it got there – glitter is evil! But seriously, we know it ended up there because that's what glitter does: it goes everywhere, and touches everything. And it seems as if it would take God's direct intervention to fully rid ourselves of the mess and disorder – of its consequences and never-ending effects.

Our question is not unlike the ones James is asking today, *[w]here do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? He knows the answer, of course: Is it not from your passions that make war within your members? James is talking about sin – the dis-ordering of our desires and actions, and the consequences and effects of original sin. It goes everywhere, and touches everything.*

This entire passage from James is commentary on sin, and includes a reminder that the solution is the one prophesied in Wisdom, and fulfilled in Christ: *the wisdom from above [who] is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity.*

Jesus Christ, who saves us from sin because we cannot save ourselves. Jesus Christ, who tells his disciples, who do not understand, that he will be *handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death [he] will rise.* Jesus Christ, who instructs us to order our desires and actions in service to one another. Jesus Christ, fully divine and fully human in all things but sin, who yet can understand our struggles with sin. Exactly the direct intervention by God that we needed.

As far as we know, no one has ever died from an abundance of glitter. The same cannot be said of sin. (Though we might comfortably say of both that many people have lived lives of great joy without it.) Sin kills and destroys; but *the Lord upholds my life*, says the psalmist. We always have a choice whether to heed the attraction toward sin, or toward Jesus. Let us pray that the grace of God we receive in Word and sacrament may sustain us in our endeavors toward only that which is good – that our lives may reflect not the glitter of sin, but the light of the Son.

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Monday, September 24, 2018

(Lec. 449)

1) Proverbs 3:27-34

2) Luke 8:16-18

MONDAY OF
25TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Let your light shine for all the world to see.

No one who lights a lamp conceals it with a vessel or sets it under a bed; rather, he places it on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light. These few short lines in the Gospel of Luke speak volumes about our responsibility as disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all the world. The idea of concealing a light under a bed in order to hide it from others is obviously ridiculous. “Who would do that?” we might ask. For all we know, the disciples had the same reaction. The ridiculousness of the image is the point, of course. The good news of salvation is for everyone. Whenever a person receives it, it is meant to be shared with others.

So the ridiculous is also the sublime. Using the imagery of light as a metaphor for faith is genius, for light fills the space that it comprises. As light, faith should bring clarity to our lives, direct our paths and provide visibility to the saving gift of Jesus. Allowing it to be obstructed, or hidden, light – as with faith – adds nothing to the landscape surrounding it, if it is not used for its intended purpose. The gift of faith is something that God extends to every single living human being. It would be worth our time to prayerfully consider what God is asking us to do with our faith.

The first reading from Proverbs today helps us with this. We hear that we should do good for others *when it is in [our] power to do it for him*. We should not put off our neighbor in need, but help them *at once*. We are to live in the light of virtue – refraining from plotting harm, refusing to quarrel, and choosing just, upright and humble actions over envy and perversity. In other words, living in the light of faith: a faith that commands virtue over vice, and love over indifference. The faith that God offers to us in Jesus Christ.

The light of Christ in faith is given to us at our baptism, and we spend a lifetime feeding its flame. May it always be strong, and shine as if *on a lampstand*, visible to all who care to see.

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Tuesday, September 25, 2018

(Lec. 450)

1) Proverbs 21:1-6, 10-13

2) Luke 8:19-21

TUESDAY OF
25TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God calls for Christians to care for one another in loving and substantial ways.

In this Gospel passage from Luke, it is a little jarring at first to hear Jesus seemingly disrespect his mother, whom we now recognize as our own mother, our Blessed Mother, Queen of Heaven and Earth. People who are trying to help Jesus alert him to the fact that his relatives, including his mother, are waiting for him. We might expect him to reply, "thank you," or, "please, tell them to meet me somewhere." Instead, he responds that his mother and brothers are *those who hear the word of God and act on it*.

This seems to insinuate that his blood relatives have no greater claim on him and his attention than the throngs of eager disciples around him. But once we get over our reaction to his words, we realize that Jesus is not insinuating anything negative. Instead, he is articulating something quite positive, and inclusive of the kingdom of God.

It helps to recall that in Jesus' day, the family was the primary source for one's socioeconomic welfare: food, clothing, shelter, health care and retirement. With his simple statement, Jesus has expanded the definition, and responsibilities, of family. Whoever hears the word of God and acts on it is our family, and we are commanded to love and care for them.

So what does all this mean for us today as modern Christians? What does it mean that our family bonds are no longer simply defined by bloodlines and last names, but by baptism and discipleship? Is it truly more than just a rosy sentiment that all of us gathered here today are brothers and sisters in Christ?

If we are to take care of each other in the community as we would our own mother or father, sister or brother under the direction of God our heavenly Father, first we have to ask ourselves some simple and basic questions. Do we adequately know the people we claim as family and friends? Do we know their names, their personalities? Do we know them well enough to know their blessings and their challenges? Once we build trusting relationships that allow people to open up to each other about their needs, it is then that we can truly support one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let us recommit ourselves to caring for each other as Christ calls us to by starting new friendships and/or deepening the friendships we have here in this community. Let us invest our resources in each other, confident that the Lord will provide for all needs within our community today and forever.

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Wednesday, September 26, 2018

(Lec. 451)

1) Proverbs 30:5-9

2) Luke 9:1-6

WEDNESDAY OF

25TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saints Cosmas and Damian,

Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 551

FOCUS: *Your word, O Lord, is a lamp for my feet.*

The light of the Word guides our journey. What a beautiful image the psalmist gives us to contemplate as we hear today's Gospel. Throughout his ministry, Jesus prepares the disciples by calling them to a life of devotion. He entrusts them with authority over demons and the power to cure disease. Then, he trusts them to continue his mission radiating the light of the Gospel.

As modern-day disciples of Christ, we, too, must be prepared to respond to the call of discipleship. Through education and formation, we learn more about our faith and grow closer to the Lord through Scripture, the sacraments and prayer. We continue this process throughout our lives; there's always more to learn and experience. The better formed we are, the more we offer as we share the Word of God with others.

In the Gospel, Jesus reveals that discipleship requires a life of worldly detachment. Our reading from Proverbs explains why. The speaker says he wants *neither poverty nor riches*. If he is given wealth, he may get distracted and think he no longer needs God. If he is poor, he may curse the Lord for his poverty. Getting by with "just enough" is inconsistent with our consumer-driven culture, but it allows us to focus on what is at the heart of our mission – the Word.

Jesus acknowledges that our mission won't be easy. But as Proverbs says, *[e]very word of God is tested*. It is tested and found sufficient – *providing a shield to those who take refuge in him*. Nothing can add to or detract from it, and we know, through the Paschal Mystery, that nothing can overcome it. We will encounter humiliation and conflict, but the Word remains. And when we face these difficulties, Jesus says to shake the dust from our feet in testimony against those who do not welcome us. Those who are closed to the Gospel cut *themselves* off from salvation. It is not failure on the part of the disciple.

The light of the Word illuminates our path; it is a lamp for our feet. For some, this journey will lead to far-away lands; others may move from village to village. Some may never venture past the boundaries of their hometown. Wherever our feet go, God will light the way.

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Thursday, September 27, 2018
(Lec. 452)

- 1) Ecclesiastes 1:2-11
- 2) Luke 9:7-9

THURSDAY OF
25TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Vincent de Paul, Priest)

FOCUS: Jesus makes all things new.

According to Ecclesiastes, none of anything matters. The days, the sun rising and setting, the movement of the rivers, the lives we live, none of this matters. *All things are vanity*. This ancient writer gives voice to what many of the modern world believes. *Nothing is new under the sun!* This feeling is not reserved only to this time and text alone.

Biblical scholars place the writing of Ecclesiastes in the third century B.C. How are these ancient words still able to articulate what we feel in the twenty-first century? Ask a few people on the street, or inquire from a handful of teens if they feel this is true. Using different words, many would express the same feelings. It's all the same, there is no hope. The days begin and end. People are born and then they die. Tragedies increase and never seem to end. It's the same every day.

But in Luke's Gospel proclaimed today, we hear the Good News. Luke's Gospel account of Jesus and the Church is dominated by a distinct historical perspective. In today's reading, we hear the words of Herod the tetrarch. And we can date this reference through the textual footnote. He is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. He ruled over Galilee from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39.

With this textual data, we know that something new under the sun *did* occur. God's divine plan for us is being accomplished. Jesus, through the events of his life, fulfills all the Old Testament prophecies. Jesus is born of a particular woman in a particular time and place. He has come to bring change and to challenge the judgement we hear in the first reading. Jesus comes into the world and saves us all. And this salvation is now extended to all humanity. Salvation history is our human history. Ecclesiastes doesn't have all the information. Only God knows the complete story.

By presenting the time of Jesus' ministry and the establishment and growth of the Church as a distinct period of salvation history, the evangelist demonstrates that God is still in charge, actively creating and shaping the world. Ecclesiastes says, *the eye is not satisfied with seeing nor is the ear satisfied with hearing*. And the Gospel bears this out, as we hear Herod ask, *Who then is this about whom I hear such things?* And we learn that *he kept trying to see him*.

So when we have doubt, when we feel alone, when we think it's all the same and nothing ever will get better, rest assured God is in control. And Jesus, who fulfills every need, awaits us in glory.

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Friday, September 28, 2018
(Lec. 453)

- 1) Ecclesiastes 3:1-11
- 2) Luke 9:18-22

FRIDAY OF
25TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Wenceslaus, Martyr;
Saint Lawrence Ruiz and Companions, Martyrs)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2600

FOCUS: It is right and just to use wisely the time that God has given to us.

For a certain generation, today's first reading cannot help but be associated with the song "Turn, Turn, Turn" by the 1960s band The Byrds. Their song came during a time of heightened anxiety in the United States, which was in the midst of the Vietnam War. Many young people turned to this song, enamored by its themes of peace and tolerance. Their hope was that a time of conflict would transform into a time of harmony.

Time is a concept that controls our lives. We cannot go back and recapture time that has already occurred, nor can we reach into the future to a time that has not yet come to pass. The only time we have is the present time.

People throughout history have used time in so many ways, as we heard in our first reading. Human history has seen times of great creativity, while other periods have seen devastating destruction. What we as humans sometimes fail to keep in mind is that time is a gift given to us by God. What we do with that gift of time connotes our respect for God, who is not bound by the limits of time. If we truly believe in the goodness of God, then we ought to use the time we have to give glory and honor to him.

Today, we remember several saints, including Lawrence Ruiz, the first martyr from the Philippines. He was active in the Church, and used his time as a calligrapher. However, when he was accused of murder, he fled the Philippines by seeking refuge on a boat taking priests to Japan. At that time, the Japanese were persecuting all Christians. As they landed, Lawrence and the priests were detained, and because they did not renounce their faith, they were tortured.

Before he died, Lawrence exclaimed that, "I am a Catholic and wholeheartedly do accept death for God. Had I a thousand lives, all these to Him shall I offer." Here, we have a man who knew that his time on earth was coming to an end. But, if he wanted to save himself, all he had to do was turn away from God. His faith gave him strength to turn from his time on earth to being with God in heaven.

No one knows what will happen with our remaining time here on earth. But, we can look back on our lives and recall the way we have spent our time. Have we used our time to work for peace and love, or have we used our time to foster hatred? Have we professed Jesus as the *Christ of God*, as Peter did in today's Gospel, or have we kept it from others? As we approach this Eucharistic table, let us ask God for some insight into what we ought to do with our remaining time. And may the body and blood we receive give us the strength and confidence to do it.

Saturday, September 29, 2018
(Lec. 647)

- 1) Daniel 7:9-10 13-14 or
Revelation 12:7-12ab
- 2) John 1:47-51

**SAINTS MICHAEL,
GABRIEL AND RAPHAEL,
ARCHANGELS
– FEAST**

FOCUS: The angelic host, arrayed for battle, is evidence that God will fight for our salvation.

In the Opening Prayer of today's feast, angels are described as belonging to the marvelous order that ministers between the heavenly and earthly realms. They are spiritual, heavenly beings who carry out God's will among humankind, watching over us even as they minister before the Lord. Today we celebrate three of the archangels – Michael, Gabriel and Raphael – who are named in the pages of Scripture and whose missions have played an important part in the great drama of human creation and redemption.

Saint Gregory the Great once said that “almost all the pages of the sacred books bear witness to the existence of angels and archangels”; they are so numerous that God himself is known as the Lord of hosts.

The archangels we celebrate today, whose names each end in *el* – the Semitic name for God – have a specific identity and role in the drama of salvation. We focus on and give thanks for those roles and ask these servants of the Lord to continue to protect and guide us. In the first reading, we hear about the battle between good and evil when Michael expelled the forces of Satan from the heaven. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of the angels serving the Son of Man.

Michael, the fearless warrior, is the most prominent of all three. Translated as *Who is like God*, his name reminds us of his heroism and unquestioning loyalty to God. Known as the protector of the Chosen People, he is also the one who will announce the final judgment and resurrection.

Gabriel, meaning *God is powerful*, is the supreme messenger. Throughout Scripture, he is entrusted with messages that would change the course of human history, from his foretelling the birth of Samson in the Old Testament, to announcing the birth of the Baptist to Zechariah, and, of course, to announcing the birth of the Savior.

Raphael is often referred as the angel of prayer. His name means *God heals*, and is said by scholars to embody the angelic ability to be present before humanity while never ceasing to be present before the Lord. Thus, he is often presented as the model for spiritual integration of the outward and interior loves.

So why celebrate these princes of the angelic hosts? Perhaps the answer lies in our Mass prayers. In addition to their roles of serving the Lord and protecting us, they worship before the Lord and encourage us as we advance along the way of salvation. Each time we celebrate the Eucharist, we join the angels in their song of praise and exultant adoration. They teach us how to worship, and they give us confidence and hope in an eternal happiness with God.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2018

(Lec. 137)

- 1) Numbers 11:25-29
 - 2) James 5:1-6
 - 3) Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48
- Gospel related: **CCC** 1034

**TWENTY-SIXTH
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Are we preparing for what is coming?

As the liturgical year once again rapidly comes to a close, our days will get shorter, our nights will get longer, and our Scripture readings will continue to point us toward the end times, judgment and the kingdom of God. We should be careful, in these familiar times, not to miss the point.

Joshua protests to Moses in our first reading that Eldad and Medad were not present when the Spirit of God came and rested upon the elders, so they should not be prophesying. Moses essentially tells Joshua that he's missing the point, saying, *Would that all the people of the LORD were prophets!*

Along comes John in the Gospel who protests to Jesus that someone not in their company was using the power of his name. Jesus essentially tells *him* that he's missing the point. *Whoever is not against us is for us*, he says.

So what *is* the point? We might think of it this way: how are we doing in our preparation for our personal end of time experience, namely our death? If Jesus returned today, would we be comfortable with him judging how we are doing with the Father's creation, with the gift of life, with the gift of faith? Would we be prepared today to enter into the kingdom of God?

These questions are not meant to drag us down or put us all on some sort of guilt trip. Quite the contrary, for each of us is called to live each day to the fullest. It is how we interpret living to the fullest that bears examining. Chasing after material things is not living to the fullest. Chasing after the things of God is.

James drives this point home for us today, reminding us that earthly treasures have no value and will not last – that injustice toward others is known to God and will serve, among other things, as testimony against us. Now, having a great house, a new car and the latest technological gadget are nice things to have. Having a close relationship with God, our spouse, our children, parents and neighbors is even better. There is nothing that says we can't have both. However, the things we pursue cannot come at the expense of the relationships in our lives, most importantly our relationship with God.

Joshua missed that point, in his assumption that where Eldad and Medad physically stood was more important than where they stood with God. John missed that point, in his assumption that if the man driving out demons in Jesus' name did not have a visible relationship with Jesus (that is, *he does not follow us*), then he must not have any relationship to him at all.

We have no excuse if we miss the point. We know that our relationship with Jesus, and our relationship with the Father through Jesus, is the foundation of everything else. If our relationship with God is strong, then other relationships in our lives grow stronger. Then we, too, can be prophets for the Lord, performing mighty deeds in his name. And when the day of our death comes and we do have to answer the question, "Are you prepared today to enter into the kingdom of God?" we can answer using Jesus' own words: *Because [I] belong to Christ, amen ... [I] will surely not lose his reward.*