

APRIL

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12 13

14 15 16 17 18

GOOD FRIDAY 20

21 22 23 24 25

26 27 28 29 30

WEDDING HOMILY

- 1) Song of Songs 2:8-10, 14, 16a; 8:6-7a
- 2) 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:8a
- 3) Matthew 19:3-6

FOCUS: If the love of God centers our lives and our relationships, it eventually conquers all.

The readings today speak to the meaning and form of love. Let's begin with the Gospel of Matthew, where there is a quote from the creation story. Jesus is asked about divorce, and his response is that divorce has to do with our hardness of hearts. This was not part of the original plan; it was not so from the beginning. For in the good of creation, male and female together are the image of God in the world, and marriage is a one-flesh union. Each person is incomplete without the other, without intimacy, without the good of sexuality.

So while it might seem odd to speak of divorce at a wedding, it is done so only to highlight the beauty of what is taking place: two people, man and woman, coming together in the sight of God and the community, to profess the same love for each other that God professes for us and all of his creation. And to know that, with the help of God, this love will flourish, and last.

The Song of Songs speaks about how much we long for the beloved. This is the great love poem of the Hebrew Scriptures that almost didn't make it into the Bible because it seemed too erotic for Scripture. Widely interpreted as a metaphor for the relationship between us and God, it is also filled with the playful delight and longing so characteristic of erotic love. Listen. *Arise, my beloved ... my beautiful one ... Let me see you, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and you are lovely.*

Finally, a word about the "love poem" from Corinthians. This chapter provides the foundation stones of a lifetime of love. You have been given to each other so you can learn how to love. It will not be easy. Jesus already warned us about our capacity for hardness of heart! Paul gives us a prescription for love: love is something ahead of us, to which we are called to respond with courage and generosity. Paul tells us what love *does*.

Love is patient ... kind ... not jealous ... not pompous ... not inflated ... not rude ... does not seek its own interests ... is not quick-tempered ... does not brood over injury ... does not rejoice over wrongdoing ... Love believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

Will you always be patient and kind with one another? Probably not, for we are all wounded. But love is patient; love is kind. Will you sometimes be rude, irritable ... insist on your own way? Yes. But if the love of God centers your life and your relationship, it eventually conquers all – including rudeness and irritability.

This text is a mirror in which we can see ourselves. We fall short of what love asks of us. We are made for love, for intimacy and for the delightful play of Eros, but always at the service of a love for which our hearts will always be restless. Today, you surrender and vow yourselves to this lifelong journey of love. You become sacrament for one another. Marriage is a participation in the love that animates the interior life of the Trinity, the same love which emptied itself and took the form of a servant in Jesus. This is why we can hope all things, because today you enter into a covenant of love that is bigger than the both of you, bigger than all of us.

FUNERAL HOMILY

- 1) Revelation 14:13
- 2) Romans 8:31b-35, 37-39
- 3) Luke 23:33, 39-43

FOCUS: Death may end an earthly life, but our story continues in our new life in Christ.

Death is so final. Even Jesus, the son of God, could not escape death. Yet our faith reminds us that while death may bring our life to an end, it does not end our story. Clearly, the thief hanging near Jesus on the cross believed this when he said: *Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom*. In his heart, he knew Christ would welcome him into his kingdom. Somehow, he knew and believed what we heard in the first reading from the Book of Revelation, *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord*.

This hope that death does not have the final word is comforting. It is a hope that is grounded in the belief, as Saint Paul concludes in his Letter to the Romans, that nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of Christ. What Saint Paul realized, when he wrote these words, is that the love of Christ even penetrates the veil of death, raising us to new life. And this love, which has no boundaries, is here in our midst today, waiting to be grasped and entered into. It is expressed in every mark of affection and every gesture of friendship with which we comfort one another.

Still, we mourn the death of N. And though the comforting words of consolation and the promise of *life everlasting*, as professed in the Apostle's Creed, are helpful, we still experience great mourning and grief.* After all, our lived experience is that a dead flower is no longer a living plant, a dead animal is no longer a living one. The Christian understanding of death seems opposed to everything we know about life.

And yet, it is not. For living a Christian life is integrally connected to death. We live, because Christ died for us. And while we will pass from this world in death, death will not have the last word because of Christ. We who live in Christ shall die in him, which means that when we profess that we believe in a life of a world to come, we know that we will, like Christ, be raised to eternal life. For those who remain in this life, the parting is difficult. For those who leave this life, their joy is complete.

The promise Jesus makes to the good thief hanging next to him on Calvary, *today you will be with me in Paradise*, is the same one he makes to each one of us who believes. Including N. That promise is: there is life after death. Yes, today we are marking the end of a life, the end of relationships we have had, the end of N's physical presence among us. But our story continues in our new life in Christ because nothing can separate us from God's life-giving love. And the love we share with N continues within the communion of saints, and the body of Christ unbroken.

*Alternatively: *look[ing] forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come* if using the Nicene Creed.

**YEAR C
WEEKDAYS I**

Monday, April 1, 2019
(Lec. 244)

- 1) Isaiah 65:17-21
- 2) John 4:43-54

MONDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: Let us pray daily for continuous growth in authentic faith.

Today's Gospel has a context we do not see as often as we see others. John tells us, *When [Jesus] came into Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all he had done in Jerusalem.* We are not told of any suspicions here – no hostile tests awaiting him. Conspicuously absent are the seemingly ever-present Pharisees.

Granted, Jesus' hearty welcome from the people stems most likely from their interest in him because of the signs he had performed. That seems to include the royal Roman official who comes to Jesus with the request that he heal his son, who was close to death.

Jesus' response is not immediately one of affirmation, but a bit of a scold: *Unless you people see signs and wonders you will not believe.* A harsh and strange response, perhaps, and one which is directed not just to the official, but to the entire crowd and community. But it makes sense, given Jesus' most recent experiences that had shown this to be true.

But this man is different. He had not been to Jerusalem; he had not seen any of the signs and wonders that Jesus has performed. He had only been told about Jesus and his healing powers. So, in spite of Jesus' answer, the official does not argue or give up, saying, *Sir, come down before my child dies.* Jesus responds, *You may go; your son will live.* Without any hesitation, the man believes in Jesus' word and returns home. He did not require a visible or physical sign. He trusted completely in Jesus' word.

This is a sign of authentic faith, and a point which John, in this Gospel passage, is making. Authentic faith means being open to the Good News (as was the official), believing in what we have not seen (as was the official), and having faith in God's word regardless of any visible evidence (as did the official). This is the true miracle of faith: to trust in the Lord's goodness for all our needs, and to see signs of that goodness as the fruit, not the foundation, of our faith.

So let us pray daily and earnestly for continuous growth in authentic faith, relying on the gifts of the Holy Spirit with steadfast faith, hope and charity.

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Tuesday, April 2, 2019

(Lec. 245)

1) Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12

2) John 5:1-16

TUESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF LENT
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Francis
of Paola, Hermit)

Gospel related: **CCC** 575, 583, 594

FOCUS: Jesus is the living water that satisfies all our needs.

Today's Gospel gives a good perspective on a phrase we might have heard before: *waiting on the Lord*. The poor man in this story is the epitome of someone who has been *waiting on the Lord*. He has been ill for thirty-eight years, and for an indeterminate amount of time he has been beside the pool hoping to obtain the cure found in its waters. He is faithful and determined, but is never able to make it to the water quickly enough.

Then Jesus comes along and asks the man if he wants to be well. It seems like a silly question, since the man has been there so long waiting for a cure, but of course it is not. For God never imposes himself upon us. We must say *yes* to his saving grace.

This incident could be seen as a metaphor for the salvation Jesus brought to all people. After waiting so long, humankind was graced by the presence of Jesus, fulfilling our collective and personal longing for the cure, the redemption, we believed was coming, but had not yet realized. The pool of water in the Gospel, similar to the flowing water we heard about in today's first reading, is no longer merely water, but a symbol of God's grace, now made manifest in Jesus. He brings all people the living water that brings our souls to life here on earth and then on to eternal life in Paradise.

For the man in the Gospel, and for all of us, there is no longer a need to *wait on the Lord* for the cure that brings us salvation. No more waiting, no special words to say, Jesus has what all of us are waiting for. Let us prepare ourselves to say *yes* and to be open continually to receiving his gift of living water, which brings us love and reconciliation.

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Wednesday, April 3, 2019
(Lec. 246)

- 1) Isaiah 49:8-15
- 2) John 5:17-30

Gospel related: **CCC** 574, 589, 594, 612, 635, 679, 859, 994, 998, 1038, 1063, 1470, 2824
CSDC 259

WEDNESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: Jesus and the Father are one, so that when we honor Jesus, we honor the Father.

In the first reading, we get the tender image of a God who calls out those imprisoned or in darkness – whether in an actual prison or in the prison or darkness of their own minds and hearts. God seeks to make the roads smooth for his children, protecting them from the elements of sun and wind, and leading them to cool waters. God declares his own love for the people he created – for all of us – to be as tender as that of a mother for her child, and even more faithful and reliable. God claims us as his own children, whom he looks after tenderly. This is indeed good news for all of us, especially for those who, in their own darkness or prison, feared the anger of God.

The Gospel gives us a vision of God as Father – specifically as the Father of Jesus, the Son. Jesus tells us of his unity with the Father: Jesus and the Father are one, so that when we honor Jesus, we honor the Father. As the obedient and loving Son, Jesus can do only what he sees his Father doing and seek in all things to do the will of God. God the Father gives the Son the *power to exercise judgment* – a *just judgment* that depends on the will of God.

Where do we, adopted children of God, fall in this complex relationship? We can accept the incredible love of God for us and strive, like Jesus, to be obedient sons and daughters to God, seeking only to do the will of God in our daily lives. While we can, of course, never be equal to God, we will be united with the Son in a special way in a few minutes as we receive holy Communion. In that time of unity, let us ask Jesus to direct our hearts to obedience; to love God through the love of our neighbors, in whatever way we are called to at each moment; and to accept with love God's will for us each day.

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Thursday, April 4, 2019
(Lec. 247)

- 1) Exodus 32:7-14
- 2) John 5:31-47

THURSDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF LENT

(Opt. Mem.
Saint Isidore,
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 548, 582, 702, 719

FOCUS: Like the ancient Jews, we may struggle to see God in everyday life, despite the miracles he accomplishes.

In the first reading, we hear God's reaction to the Israelites worshipping the golden calf. The Lord is angry that the Israelites behave as if they have essentially forgotten about him and all he had done for them. He threatens that his wrath will consume them, but Moses steps in and pleads on behalf of the Israelites, and God relents.

In the Gospel, Jesus states the reasons why the people should believe in him: John's testimony, the miracles he has performed and Scripture prophecies. Still, many cannot, or do not, believe in him.

It may be easy for us to sit here today and think, "How could the ancient Israelites not believe in God? They saw with their own eyes the incredible miracles God used to secure their freedom. If I were in their position, I certainly would not fall into the trap of worshipping a golden calf." It's also easy for us to think, "How could anyone who met Jesus not realize that he was the Messiah? If I had met Jesus, I would have believed immediately!"

But that's probably not accurate. For who among us does not doubt at times, or fail to see the everyday activity of God in our lives? God saves us from slavery to sin through Jesus' death and resurrection. Just as John the Baptist testified to Jesus' true identity, so, too, do the saints. The Scriptures continue to tell us who Jesus is, if we have ears to hear. And by our baptism we are enjoined to the body of Christ. Through the work of this body and the grace of the sacraments, we receive the gift of faith and grow in holiness so that we can believe, and never forget what God has done for us.

Today, let us make it a point to pray for the grace to see who God really is and how he works in our lives. Like the ancient Israelites, we can certainly be a *stiff-necked* people, but we can also trust in God's enduring faithfulness. Let's also beg God for forgiveness as Moses did, and ask him to *relent in punishing your people*. Let's commit to keeping our eyes and hearts open to see how God works in our lives, big and small.

Finally, let's pray for the strength to *seek the praise that comes from the only God*, asking the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts, words and actions in such a way that by our lives we can testify to the reality of God and the kingship of Jesus Christ.

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Friday, April 5, 2019

(Lec. 248)

1) Wisdom 2:1a, 12-22

2) John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

FRIDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF LENT

(Opt. Mem.
Saint Vincent Ferrer, Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC 583**

FOCUS: Jesus offers us true knowledge of the Father.

Our readings today begin with a striking setup. The Book of Wisdom shares a dialogue among the wicked, describing in detail their disapproval of the just one, the one who is chosen. They begrudge that he is set apart, that his life is not like others, and that he boasts that God is his Father.

After this lengthy discourse, the narrator states that this is coming from a place of ignorance due to their wickedness: *they knew not the hidden counsels of God*. Not only is this a powerful explanation of the wicked, but it is a striking phrase. What are the hidden counsels of God? Why is it so difficult to understand?

In John's Gospel, we hear echoes of the passage from Wisdom. People struggle to understand that Jesus is the Messiah. Indeed, they rely on what they think might bring them to true knowledge of the Messiah. For them, the key is whether they know where Jesus is from or not. And they do know where Jesus is from in a literal sense. When Jesus responds to them, he speaks to them on a deeper level. To know the Messiah is not about where one was born and grew up, but it has a deeper origin. Jesus is from the Father, and knows the Father. The hidden counsels of God are revealed in Jesus.

In this season of Lent, we are invited to consider the times in our lives when we struggle to understand the hidden counsels of God. Certainly, we can never fully understand God, but we are called to grow in our understanding. Are there times when we struggle to follow the different way of following God? Lent is a time of returning and repenting. Through our fasting, prayer and almsgiving, we can seek God's guidance in his counsel.

Jesus shows us the way to knowledge of the Father. Jesus says, *The one who sent me, whom you do not know, is true. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me*. When we wrestle with our conscience and discernment, we must look to Jesus. It can be challenging to recognize what it means to live a just life. But we are called in this season to grow closer to God. When we repent for the times that we might have felt on the outside, we ask God's grace to bring us closer to him. May God continue to help us as we find ways in this Lenten season to grow closer to the Father through Jesus.

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Saturday, April 6, 2019

(Lec. 249)

1) Jeremiah 11:18-20

2) John 7:40-53

Gospel related: **CCC** 574, 575, 588, 595

SATURDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: Jesus is the Lamb who was slaughtered, and his way is trustworthy.

Throughout the history of Israel, the prophets were continually rejected. Speaking the word of God that few wanted to hear, they were rebuked, chastised and often killed. Worst of all, such condemnation was at the hands of their very own people. Jeremiah is no exception to this prophetic trend, with his life threatened for bearing God's word to his fellow Israelites.

Jesus, the ultimate prophet, is the fulfillment of Jeremiah's words. He is the gentle Lamb, the sacrificial offering whose death takes away the sins of the world. This image of the lamb is a familiar one to us; the priest speaks these words at each Mass before we receive Christ's precious body and blood. However, we must remember that Christ did not become the Lamb of God merely to remove sin in some metaphysical sense. The sin he removed is personal: his death takes away *my* sin, *your* sin, *our* sin. Only love can do this.

It is no small feat that Jeremiah, facing death, could bear such hopeful words: *to you I have entrusted my cause*. This kind of trust – laying one's life completely in God's hands – implies knowing this God personally, and trusting that God is love. Jesus, facing his own suffering, will do the exact same as he approaches his passion and death.

As baptized followers of Christ, we share in Christ's prophetic office. In other words, we, too, are called to spread the good news of the kingdom of God, to teach and speak God's word, especially to those most in need. This prophetic road, paved by Jeremiah and ultimately by Jesus, includes inevitable suffering. Yet the way of the prophet is trustworthy because it is ordained by a God who himself died on our behalf, as the ultimate expression of love. Each one of us can say, Christ died for *me*; Christ loves *me*. As the end of Lent draws near, we set our focus on the passion of Christ, the Lamb who was slaughtered. Though the road ahead is daunting, may we remember that God's way, the way of self-sacrificial love, is trustworthy.

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SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 2019

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

(Lec. 36)

- 1) Isaiah 43:16-21
- 2) Philippians 3:8-14
- 3) John 8:1-11

Gospel related: **CCC 583**

FOCUS: As Jesus liberates the woman caught in adultery, so he wishes to free us from our sins and our guilt.

Guilt is one of the most common of all human experiences, and often the heaviest burden to carry. Some will use it to come to terms with their life choices and bring about renewal and change. Others will deny its reality even though it may burn like a fire within them or they may project it onto others, avoiding responsibility and the need for change. Some will even use it to punish themselves and so add to their pain.

The biblical perspective on guilt is evident in today's Gospel. Dragged before Jesus by the Pharisees and scribes, the woman is, by all appearances, guilty, and deserving of the punishment laid down by Moses that she be stoned. Other than the sin of which she is accused, we know nothing about her or her life's circumstances. We do not know her name, her family or the identity of her partner in the act. Alone, humiliated and at risk, she stands before Jesus awaiting her fate. Yet we know that she is a sinner not just because of the adultery, but because like all humanity, *she has fallen short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23).

When understood in strict legalistic terms, sin is usually seen as the breaking of rules and regulations – she was a sinner because she committed adultery. But for Jesus, sin is a bigger concept when understood in spiritual and relational terms – it is our alienation from God, from others and from ourselves. Its origins lie in our prideful and rebellious hearts, and so all humanity is sinful and in need of God's forgiveness and healing.

What makes the passage even more provocative is that the scribes come to Jesus not out of concern for the law, but in the hope that they might put him to the test. Would he uphold the law or demonstrate compassion? Either way he would alienate someone.

To this day, we will never know what Jesus wrote in the dirt – was he playing for time or giving the scribes time to think again before he turned the tables on them? But his response to their demands has echoed through the centuries: *let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her*. Outflanked and silenced, they are without words and slowly – one by one – they slip away.

For most folks the story could have ended there, but Jesus goes one step further by offering her not just forgiveness but a new beginning. Instead of condemnation, he challenges her to turn her life around and sin no more.

What happened ultimately to this woman we will never know, and perhaps it's just as well for the real focus here is on God's mercy and forgiveness. In this encounter, Jesus opened the door for her to a new way of life, but the decision to walk through was hers alone. We see it over and over again – Jesus invites but does not coerce, he challenges but never infringes on our freedom. For love that is not freely given is not true love, and it is true perfect love that God wants us to experience and share.

Monday, April 8, 2019

(Lec. 251)

1) Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62
or 13:41c-62

2) John 8:12-20

Gospel related: **CCC** 2466

MONDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: Jesus is *the light of the world* and calls us to follow him.

In Jesus' time, the Torah, the law of Moses, was considered by Jews to be the light of life which illuminated the path of the one who followed it. Yet in today's Gospel, Jesus claims that it is *he* who is *the light of the world*, and all who follow *will have the light of life*. Let us pause and think about this for a moment. The law of Moses consisted of hundreds of laws. Rather than giving us a new set of laws to follow, Jesus asks us to follow *him*. No wonder the Pharisees were a bit upset with him. He testified on his own behalf, and there was no one who [for them] could verify that testimony.

But Jesus tells them his testimony *can* be verified – through the Father who sent him. And here is the paradox for the Pharisees: they will only truly know the Father when they know Jesus. The same is true for us. In order to follow him, we must know him first. We come to know him through the Gospel proclaimed: learning what Jesus was about, what he taught, the miracles and healings he performed, and, most important, his suffering, death and resurrection through which he reconciled us to the Father. But is that the same as knowing Jesus the Lord?

Ultimately, it is through personal encounters that we truly come to know others, including Jesus. One of the most important ways for us to encounter the risen Lord is in the sacraments, and through the gift of faith. In baptism, we are marked as Christ's own, and in reconciliation and the Eucharist, we are able to be forgiven and transformed so as to grow in our relationship with him. Through prayer, we nurture our relationship. And in all of this and more within the Church as the body of Christ, we attain the graces to follow him and walk in the light of life.

The Lenten season is a wonderful time to rededicate ourselves to this relationship: to spending time in prayer, to reflecting on how we pray, overcoming obstacles to prayer and maybe trying a new practice of prayer. Sometimes, all it takes is to commit to putting in the time, even if it's just a few minutes.

Jesus is the light of the world – anything else covers us in darkness. How could we *not* choose to follow him?

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Tuesday, April 9, 2019
(Lec. 252)

- 1) Numbers 21:4-9
- 2) John 8:21-30

Gospel related: **CCC** 211, 603, 653, 1693, 2812, 2824, 2825

TUESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: Sin can destroy us, but sin itself is destroyed when the Lord is lifted up.

The term “lifted up” can have many different meanings. For example, when visiting sick friends in the hospital we “lift up” their spirits just by being there. But “lifting up” can also take on deeper significance, as we see in today’s readings. In the Book of Numbers, the Lord sends poisonous serpents among the Israelites, who were grumbling about the *wretched food* God was providing them. But they repented, and God instructed Moses to make a serpent and lift it up on a pole. All who looked at it after being bitten were saved.

In our Gospel from John, Jesus points to his upcoming death, whereby he is mounted on a cross and “lifted up” as the Son of Man, to die. And we know that through Jesus’ death and resurrection, sin is destroyed and eternal life granted to all who follow his path. In an earlier chapter, John actually references today’s first reading, saying: *just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life* (John 3:14-15).

We are now three-quarters of the way through Lent, and it is a good time to reflect on our relationship with God. Are we lifting the Lord up above all other things in our lives, through prayer, fasting and almsgiving? If we are slacking, we need to “lift up” our game. If we are struggling, we need to ask the Lord to “lift *us* up” so that we may not die in our sins. This is not supposed to be easy. Scripture does not promise an easy road to heaven, but it does offer divine assistance.

We will hear Jesus’ passion at Mass this Sunday and again on Good Friday. We will be drawn into that grueling series of events from the Agony in the Garden through Jesus’ crucifixion. As brutal as those last hours were for Christ, he knew he was not by himself, as we heard him say in today’s Gospel: *The one who has sent me is with me. He has not left me alone.* Let’s keep that thought in our minds in the closing days of Lent. As Jesus was never alone, so we, too, are never alone. He is with us in our difficult days, and is ever-present to “lift us up.”

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Wednesday, April 10, 2019

(Lec. 253)

1) Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95

2) John 8:31-42

Gospel related: CCC 89, 549, 588, 601, 613, 1741, 2466

WEDNESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: *The truth will set you free* is the promise of Jesus.

Today's readings speak about freedom and truth. In the first reading, King Nebuchadnezzar challenges three men to turn away from their God and bow down to the golden idol. Though threatened with being thrown into a white-hot furnace, they refuse to abandon their beliefs. They know the truth of who God is, and they will not act against him. God then sends an angel to free them from the heat of the fire and protect them from harm. Their faith and salvation become a powerful example to others who are now able to see what is true, and seek out the God of Abraham.

In John's Gospel, we hear the words, *the truth will set you free*. Reminiscent of the story from the first reading, the truth involves knowing who God is, and believing in him. And, like the three men who walked through the fire, we are set free by the one whom God sends to save us. Only this time, it is not an angel but God's own son. Jesus is pointing out that the Father sent *him*.

Through Jesus Christ, we come to know God the Father. Through Jesus we are set free: from eternal death and hellfire. This is the truth. And in this truth is a spiritual freedom, one found only in the belief and trust in God. Jesus says to those who were following him that if they *remain in [his] word*, he will set them free.

The freedom Jesus mentions here, and that which is central to the larger Gospel message, is a freedom from the slavery of sin, from death and from aimlessness. Those who embrace the truth of God's word, who follow Jesus, become members of God's family. Disciples of Christ are freed from doubt and fear of death, as we become bearers of God's truth to others and are assured of eternal life.

Jesus goes among the people to spread the Gospel, and we who know and live in this truth are invited – no, commanded – to do the same. The Gospel message, and Jesus' salvific action, are meant for all. We come here to be nourished by word and sacrament, and then to "go and announce the Gospel of the Lord." We have the moral and legal freedom to do so; may we always have the grace and will to share that truth and freedom with others.

Thursday, April 11, 2019
(Lec. 254)

- 1) Genesis 17:3-9
- 2) John 8:51-59

THURSDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF LENT
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Stanislaus,
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 473, 574, 590

FOCUS: God's covenant with Abraham finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Today's readings are fundamental to our understanding of salvation history by drawing the connection from Abraham to Jesus.

Abraham is the first person with whom God established an everlasting covenantal relationship, and is the common ancestor of the Hebrew people, and us. In today's reading from Genesis, we hear about this covenant: God changed Abram's name to Abraham, meaning the Father of Nations. Abraham's descendants would give rise to the twelve tribes of Israel that comprised the Jewish nation. Yet God had said he would make nations, plural, of Abraham. God intended to bring *all nations* to himself, and he accomplished this through the blood sacrifice of his only son, Jesus Christ.

The death and resurrection of Jesus overcame the effect of original sin and gave all of humanity the opportunity to be reconciled with God. It was through Jesus, a direct descendant of Abraham, that the covenant with God found its fulfillment and Abraham became, in a spiritual sense, the father of many nations.

Beyond the physical genealogy that we have been discussing, there is more to unpack from the Gospel reading. Jesus reveals to the Jewish people his divine nature. The people had expressed doubts when Jesus said that he had seen Abraham. To those who questioned him, Jesus asserted that, *before Abraham came to be, I AM*. Jesus was very directly demonstrating his relationship to the Father as the incarnate Son of God. There was no allegory, or symbolism, but a bold assertion of the identity of Jesus.

God's work in our redemption has been constant. Beginning with Abraham, and then his descendants, and from that progeny, God incarnated himself so that all humanity could finally be reunited to him. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit and the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, we are no longer, ever, alone. Let us revel in the wondrous work of the Father, and rejoice in the tremendous love he has for us all.

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Friday, April 12, 2019
(Lec. 255)

- 1) Jeremiah 20:10-13
- 2) John 10:31-42

Gospel related: CCC 437, 444, 548, 574, 582, 589, 591, 594, 1562

FRIDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: Praise the Lord, who is always with me.

There is a great depth of despair and hopelessness that the prophet Jeremiah describes in today's first reading. Perhaps some of us have experienced such a thing. Whatever the cause or the origin of it, despair is a very dark and lonely place, as Jeremiah described in his experiences.

Yet Jeremiah also provides us with a blueprint, a formula, for finding true hope once again: praising the Lord for being with us and never allowing our enemies to triumph. Entrusting our cause to the Lord who *has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked*.

Jeremiah's praise is more than justified, for as we know, the Lord has indeed rescued us – in his son, Jesus Christ. Jesus, who in today's Gospel is telling the people this very good news, but who is not believed. In fact, those surrounding him want to stone him for blasphemy.

But Jeremiah's wisdom of God echoes true again in Jesus' ministry, and in the simple reality of our discipleship: the Lord is not only with Jesus, but as Father he is one with him, *like a mighty champion*. His *persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. In their failure they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion*.

This almost sounds like a tag line or a motto for a modern- day sports celebrity. A bit of boasting that sounds too good to be true, so we just nod and smile at the hyperbole. But we dismiss any truth of the matter for the claimant, for the very reason that it is in fact true for God: no human being can actually do what Jeremiah says. Only God.

Those who live a life of discipleship, live in Christ. And like Christ, we will have joys in this life, and we will suffer. We will have persecutors, and we will eventually die. And like Christ, God our *mighty champion* will raise us up to new life with him. Our persecutors, and death itself, will not triumph. In fact, rather than the light of Christ's light they will have *lasting, unforgettable confusion*.

There is no confusion for us who are here to celebrate these sacred mysteries. We believe and profess in the hope of which Jeremiah speaks, and which Jesus Christ fulfills. Jesus, who with the Father gave us the Holy Spirit, who is always with us.

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Saturday, April 13, 2019
(Lec. 256)
1) Ezekiel 37:21-28
2) John 11:45-56

SATURDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF LENT
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Martin I,
Pope and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 58, 60, 548, 596, 706, 2793

FOCUS: God will not abandon us.

The Prophet Ezekiel today reminds us that even in the midst of our sinfulness, and the division it has wrought, God will not abandon us. Sin can be understood as separation, disharmony. When we turn away from God it brings discord and division. That is because God is himself the source of all unity, all goodness.

The people of Israel understood that, in this way, the division of the Davidic kingdom and their later exile was brought upon themselves. They had failed to make God the true king of the nation and their hearts. Instead, by choosing to prioritize and worship false idols, they had turned from the path of unity and holiness. Nevertheless, God is faithful to his people; he blesses them and gives them every good thing. The idols, however, will not and cannot be faithful. Rather, our idols will always fail us. Only in God can we find lasting happiness and true fulfillment. When we choose to place anything before our God, to give allegiance to anything less than God himself, we find that it cannot save us, cannot make us holy, cannot make us happy.

Yet, again, Ezekiel reminds us, God will not abandon us. Instead, *the nations shall know that it is I, the Lord, who make Israel holy*. God will bring his children back from their wanderings. He will gather them together again under the reign of the new and eternal David, even coming himself to dwell among them forever. This is exactly what happens in the person of Jesus.

In Jesus, God takes up his dwelling among us, even while we are still sinners. In Jesus, the division and discord that is born of our false worship is wiped away and all the children of God are gathered into one. We cannot do this on our own. Left alone we, like the people of Israel, are too often tempted and confused to follow after the goods of this world. We think like Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin in today's Gospel: what is most expedient, what is easiest, what will cause the least trouble.

But God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and God's ways are not our ways. God does not promise us an easy way, but he does promise to be faithful and to walk with us the whole way. May we pray today that Jesus take up his dwelling in our hearts, casting out the idols, and drawing us together as one in him.

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SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 2019

(Lec. 37)

1) Luke 19:28-40

(Lec. 38)

2) Isaiah 50:4-7

3) Philippians 2:6-11

4) Luke 22:14–23:56 or 23:1-49

Gospel related: Luke 19:28-40 **CCC** 559 **CSDC** 193, 379 or Luke 22:14-23-23:56 **CCC** 162, 333, 440, 441, 443, 532, 551, 552, 591, 596, 597, 607, 610, 611, 612, 621, 641, 643, 730, 765, 787, 894, 1011, 1021, 1130, 1365, 1328, 1381, 1403, 1429, 1570, 2045, 2266, 2600, 2605, 2612, 2616, 2635, 2824

FOCUS: We remember the suffering of Christ and are called to accompany others in theirs.

Each year on Palm Sunday, we recount the story of Jesus' passion. We hear about the events leading up to his arrest; the agony of his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane; the passing of his case back and forth between Pilate, Herod and the Sanhedrin. We imagine what it was like for the very Incarnation of God to be judged by human beings. Each year, we are invited to enter into this story, to remember it, to accompany Jesus during these trials.

It is not the pleasant escape that we might find when we watch a movie or read a book. Rather, with his eyes we see the crowd whom he loves, shouting for his very death. With him, we witness his closest friends abandon, deny or watch from a distance. We see the cruelty of rulers and soldiers who mock him, beat him and gamble for his garments. We are asked to remember the horrible death he endured, a public and agonizing death of being nailed to a cross.

It is an unpleasant business, the suffering of Jesus and of the world – for Jesus' death and resurrection did not remove suffering from our lives or the lives of those we love. And it can be terrifying to experience suffering ourselves or to walk with someone who is in distress. And we have choices when we do. We can be like Peter who denies, or the soldier who jeers; we can be an acquaintance who watches, or Pilate who washes his hands of the matter.

Or we can be like Joseph of Arimathea, who refuses to participate in an unjust persecution, or like the women who do not run from the agony of Jesus' death, but tended to his broken, lifeless body. Perhaps we will be like the centurion who praises God, even in the midst of darkness.

It is much easier, in the midst of affliction and suffering, to find a distraction: to turn on the television, to shop for the newest gadgets, to escape. Yet each year, Palm Sunday puts suffering squarely in our midst. Why? Because our suffering, and the suffering of the world, are bound to Christ's. We are asked to enter into our Lord's passion – to walk with him, to accompany him as he faces utmost cruelty, injustice, pain, abandonment, so that we may walk with others who suffer. We are asked to accompany them, to be for them what some of the more admirable people were for Jesus in his darkest hour.

So as we enter into Christ's passion and partake of his victory found in the Eucharist, let us pray for the grace to see what is before us, to open our hearts to those who need us and to accompany those who suffer. Just as Christ did, and continues to do, for us.

Monday, April 15, 2019
(Lec. 257)

MONDAY OF
HOLY WEEK

- 1) Isaiah 42:1-7
- 2) John 12:1-11

Gospel related: **CCC 2449 CSDC 183**

FOCUS: Jesus invites us to become servant leaders to continue the mission which he has started.

A new manager was charged with turning around a stagnant business. One of the first questions she asked her new employees was, "Why is this business failing?" The employees, after some deliberation, all pointed to their former supervisor. He never paid any attention to them or their ideas, focusing only on himself. He was brash, selfish and distrustful of everyone. The only time he interacted with the staff was when he wanted them at his beck and call. The new manager didn't need long to piece together what she had to do. She needed to create a new culture, beginning with herself, modelling servant leadership.

As we continue this Holy Week, our Scripture readings remind us of Jesus' leadership style. The prophet Isaiah, who foreshadows Jesus' reign, makes it clear: Here is my *servant*. He is someone who shall bring justice to the nations, who is humble and gentle. He will be like a covenant, a divine contract between God and God's people, offering mercy to the outcast. He will be a light, a prophet to those in darkness. He will be a servant leader.

As a servant leader, Jesus exhibited faith in those who were his friends and disciples. After he had raised Lazarus, he fled away to the country because there was a plot to kill him. But he returned to the house of Lazarus, Martha and Mary soon afterward, trusting that they would not betray him. Perhaps knowing that he would need strength to walk in the face of the challenges before him, Mary anoints his feet with costly oil. In Jesus' time, anointing was given for protection, for strength and for healing. As his follower, Mary would have wanted her friend and teacher to be able to lead her and all his people in the best way possible. And that way is the way of service.

Servant leadership comes with a cost. Whenever we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, we celebrate the sacrifice that Jesus offered for our sake. Not many of us will be asked to hand over our lives for those we love, but as members of the body of Christ, we do actually emulate Jesus' model of servant leadership. By listening to the needs of others, by helping them, by encouraging them, we are servant leaders in the mold of Jesus. When we value the dignity of each person, and treat all people with trust and respect, we honor the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf. When we act justly, love humbly and walk with Jesus on the way to the cross, we affirm that we have accepted his mission to help bring about his reign here on earth.

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Tuesday, April 16, 2019

(Lec. 258)

1) Isaiah 49:1-6

2) John 13:21-33, 36-38

Gospel related: **CSDC** 196, 580

TUESDAY OF

HOLY WEEK

FOCUS: Let us seek the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit.

For Jesus and his Apostles, experiencing the Last Supper in the Upper Room was an experience of both sadness and joy. Jesus knew that he was about to be betrayed. His arrest was imminent, a trial was to follow and he would be abandoned by his disciples as he was put to death.

The Apostles misunderstood where Judas was headed, and failed to grasp the meaning of Christ's words that the time had now come for *the Son of Man [to be] glorified, and God [to be] glorified in him*. Peter told Jesus that he would do anything for him, only to renege on his promise during the Lord's passion.

Where and how can we find the strength and the courage to avoid such decisions and to understand what we are meant to learn?

As did Peter and the remaining Apostles, except for Judas, it is when we seek the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we will acquire them: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. With them we have the grace of prayer, and the strength of resolve to avoid temptation and maintain our promise of obedience to the will of the Father.

Through our baptism, we receive the promise that the Holy Spirit will be with us until the end of time. We are better for it when we take heed of that promise and seek his gifts and fruits. We will receive much spiritual assistance, so much so it will surprise us. May God continue to bless us.

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Wednesday, April 17, 2019

(Lec. 259)

1) Isaiah 50:4-9a

2) Matthew 26:14-25

Gospel related: CCC 610, 1339

WEDNESDAY OF

HOLY WEEK

FOCUS: Surely it is I, Lord, who shall follow you.

The stage is set and the Passion Play is about to unfold over the next three days. Today, we have the “prologue” to the events leading up to the Triduum. The room is readied for the Lord’s Supper, and the betrayal has been put into motion.

In today’s Gospel, we hear the familiar story of Judas, who chose to give Jesus up for thirty pieces of silver rather than stand with him in his greatest moment of need. We also hear about the disciples’ reaction when Jesus proclaims that one of them will betray him. They are distressed. The other eleven, not knowing that the betrayer is Judas, say to Jesus, *Surely it is not I, Lord?* But Jesus neither confirms nor denies their queries. He does, however, answer Judas directly. Judas, who knows exactly what he has done and has the gall to ask the same question, is given confirmation of his betrayal by Jesus.

Now isn’t this an interesting scene! The eleven who will not betray Jesus are clearly upset, each one wondering, presumably in anxiety and fear, if somehow he will be the one. *Surely it is not I, Lord?* Even though nothing in Scripture up to that point indicates that any one of them had even considered the thought, they still ask. One wonders what they must have thought about themselves, and the power of Jesus, if they felt the need. *Surely it is not I, Lord?*

And yet.

It seems plausible that one lesson here is not so much that Judas asked and was the only one to hear an affirmative answer, but that *everyone asked*. Even those who, by all accounts from our perspective, did not need to. They asked because they knew they were not perfect; they knew they were sinners. And they loved Jesus and did not want to do anything to cause him harm. Yet by asking, by seeking Jesus’ knowledge and counsel, they showed themselves to be open to a course correction of their behavior. They gave themselves the opportunity to hear whether they were indeed standing with Jesus, or against him.

As we prepare to enter into these most sacred days where salvation becomes a reality for all who seek it, we might examine our hearts when it comes to our willingness to stand beside Jesus. We profess that we do, and we are careful to avoid sin, but could we not follow the example of the disciples and ask Jesus anyway, regarding any betrayal of him: *Surely it is not I, Lord?* And then let us be completely open to hearing the truth of the response, and to changing course if we are headed in the wrong direction.

When it comes to the passion and death of Jesus, as a fallen humanity, we are all responsible. It is for each one of us that Jesus paid the ultimate price so we all may one day be reunited with the Father. We know we are not perfect – we are sinners. And yet Jesus offers us the opportunity to join him in this sacred meal, just as his disciples did, and be reconciled to him. Giving us the grace to more often say, about who shall follow him, “surely it is I, Lord!”

Thursday, April 18, 2019

(Lec. 39)

- 1) Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14
- 2) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
- 3) John 13:1-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 423, 447, 520, 557, 609, 616, 622, 730, 1085, 1269, 1337, 1380, 1524, 1694, 1823, 2843 **CSDC** 484

**THURSDAY OF
HOLY WEEK
(HOLY THURSDAY)**

FOCUS: In the Sacred Triduum that begins this night, we realize all that our Lord has done for us.

Tonight begins the Passover of the Lord. Holy Thursday is act one in the three-part drama that is the Passion of Jesus Christ. The Passover is a central theme in the readings for the Mass of the Lord's Supper. Jesus is the Passover Lamb. He is the Lamb worthy to be slain. He died on the eve of the Passover when that very night the Passover Lamb would be consumed by all God's children. Their meal recalls how God saved their ancestors with the Blood of the Lamb. During his passion, Jesus the Passover Lamb sets all people free from sin, by the shedding of his blood. He is the priest, the altar, the lamb and the sacrifice.

In the second reading, Jesus performs the traditional blessing of the bread and wine at supper, transforming it into his own flesh and blood saying, *Do this in remembrance of me.* In this action, Jesus at the Last Supper institutes the ministerial priesthood and the Eucharist, the means by which he will remain with his followers long after he has died, risen and ascended into heaven.

But it is after supper that Jesus gives us another command to follow. He and his Apostles had likely traveled among caravans with tens of thousands of other Jewish faithful coming up to the Temple at Jerusalem to observe all the sacred rites of Passover week, one of which is the preparation meal. Foot washing was a tradition in preparation for the Passover feast, but it was usually carried out by a servant.

Jesus was the host but also a servant, and that he would take this task upon himself gives further evidence of his humanity and humility. He commands that we, too, be servants of one another: *If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.*

Do you realize what I have done for you? Jesus asks Peter. Do we? In the busy-ness, distraction and distress of daily living, the Sacred Triduum that begins this night provides us a much needed opportunity to realize all that our Lord has done for us: the offering of his life, giving us the Eucharist and the priesthood, offering us the forgiveness of sins and the promise of new life. Perhaps we will more fully realize what Jesus has done for us when we return here tomorrow for the Good Friday Service of the Lord's Passion and venerate the cross on which he gave us his all and loved us to the end.

Pope Saint John Paul II once remarked with regard to Holy Thursday:

"We find ourselves amazed and overwhelmed, so deep is the humility by which God stoops in order to unite Himself with man! If we feel moved before the Christmas crib . . . what must

we feel before the altar, where, by the poor hands of the priest, Christ makes his sacrifice present in time? We can only fall to our knees and silently adore this supreme mystery” (Cf. Letter of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II, “To Priests,” for Holy Thursday 2004, §2).

Tonight, with Christians everywhere, and during these holy, quiet days of Triduum, we can only fall to our knees and silently adore the Lamb by whose blood we have been saved.

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Friday, April 19, 2019

(Lec. 40)

1) Isaiah 52:13–53:12

2) Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

3) John 18:1–19:42

Gospel related: **CCC** 217, 440, 478, 495, 501, 544, 549, 559, 575, 586, 595, 596, 600, 607, 608, 609, 624, 641, 694, 726, 730, 964, 1225, 1432, 2471, 2561, 2605, 2618, 2677, 2679

**FRIDAY OF
THE PASSION OF THE LORD
(GOOD FRIDAY)**

FOCUS: Because of our sin, we are in need of healing; so we are in Jesus' hospital.

In yesterday's celebration of the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, we encountered something quite extraordinary. We encountered Christ's loving and self-giving hospitality. We saw and experienced it in a very close, personal way last night as we recalled Christ's hospitality to all his disciples in the washing of the feet and in the giving of the Eucharist. Christ's hospitality toward us is not just about being a thoughtful or attentive host – his hospitality goes far deeper.

This kind of hospitality puts the needs of the other at the very center of the gracious host's attention. In Christ-like hospitality, the cares, concerns, burdens and joys of the other become the very focus of Jesus' attention and care. So the feet of weary travelers are washed – travelers who walk along the path of discipleship. Food of the finest kind is given to sustain our journey. All of this done in such a way as to recall that Christ's hospitality puts our needs at the very center of his ministry, attention and love.

That should not be lost on us today as we have recalled his passion. We encounter Jesus' hospitality once more. We hear in the word "hospitality" a root word that is crucial today: we hear "hospital." We know that hospitals are places where people who are sick go in order to become better. They are shown the hospitality of doctors, nurses and other health care professionals in order to help the one who is sick to heal and make a full recovery.

We are in Jesus' hospital now. For in his passion which we recall today, Christ has turned his full attention to healing the most grave of all illnesses: the sickness of sin. In extending his hospitality to us in this way, Christ puts our desperate need for healing and new life at the very center of his attention. He does it in such a way – with such hospitality – that he literally offers his entire being so that we might be healed of what makes us sick – the sins that keep us from the fullness of God's kingdom. In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah states it beautifully: *He was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins ... by his stripes we were healed.*

And so we are in Christ's hospital now – we are here as people who need health, healing and wholeness – as people who need holiness. As we stand together at the foot of his cross, Christ lavishes his loving attention upon us so that in his hospitality, with the gracious gift of all he had to give, we, too, may be healed.

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Saturday, April 20, 2019

(Lec. 41)

HOLY SATURDAY

- EASTER VIGIL

Nine readings are assigned to the Easter Vigil: seven from the Old Testament, and two from the New. If circumstances demand in individual cases, the number of prescribed readings may be reduced. Three selections from the Old Testament, both from the Law and Prophets, should be read before the Epistle and Gospel. In any case, the reading from Exodus about the escape through the Red Sea (reading 3) should never be omitted.

- 1) Genesis 1:1–2:2 or 1:1, 26-31a
- 2) Genesis 22:1-18 or 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18
- 3) Exodus 14:15–15:1
- 4) Isaiah 54:5-14
- 5) Isaiah 55:1-11
- 6) Baruch 3:9-15, 32–4:4
- 7) Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28

New Testament Readings

8) Romans 6:3-11

9) Mark 16:1-7

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 626, 640, 641, 643, 652, 2174

FOCUS: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?”

Tonight we finish an intense journey that began forty days ago in the desert of temptation and repentance and brings us to the cross. Before we celebrate the end of the journey with its startling and glorious conclusion – the resurrection of Jesus from death to an eternal, transformed life – we journey through salvation history. God has always been with his people: establishing a covenant with them, freeing them from slavery, speaking words of love, acceptance, forgiveness and encouragement through the prophets.

Paul, addressing the people of the new covenant, reminds us that just as we died with Christ Jesus through baptism, so will we rise again with him in his Resurrection. Finally, the Gospel proclaims the greatest news in human history: Jesus Christ has risen. This abrupt change from darkness and despair to life and hope is worthy of the next fifty days we will devote to celebrating it.

Yet, even on this night of joyful “Alleluias,” we might face the same question that the women were asked at the empty tomb: *Why do you seek the living one among the dead?* As Christians living two thousand years after the Resurrection, why do we so often return to sin, darkness, despair and an ordinary, uninspired life after celebrating the good news of Jesus’ resurrection? Is the resurrection of Jesus and the promise it gives to us of eternal life just a long-ago event that we habitually celebrate every year?

It’s helpful to remember that the Scriptures are meant to address each of us in our own time and place, in our individual and particular situation, just as they addressed the people of Jesus’ time. We are meant, as we live through each Lent and Easter under new life circumstances, to see these events as new and as still shaping our lives. As we celebrated Holy Week this year, we re-enacted some of the events from Jesus’ last days: his procession into Jerusalem and the foot-washing at his Last Supper; we repeated the words of his denial

by Peter and that of the crowds in his suffering, death and burial. Yet now we celebrate his Resurrection.

In the next fifty days, we can live afresh through the appearances of Jesus, the discoveries of the early disciples, and the mission work of Paul and the other Apostles. As Jesus appeared to them, let him appear to us – where each of us is at this very moment. Let the Lord call us – like Peter, Philip, James, John and Paul were – to preach the Good News to the people we encounter in our daily life. Let God put before us the spiritual and emotional healings we can bring to them.

As we begin this glorious season of Easter, we no longer seek the Living One among the dead, but bring his new and transformed life into our hearts, minds and souls – and from there, to the hearts, minds and souls of those around us. Jesus is risen. He is risen indeed.

SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2019

(Lec. 42)

- 1) Acts 10:34a, 37-43
- 2) Colossians 3:1-4
or 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8
- 3) John 20:1-9
or Luke 24:1-12 (41)

Gospel related—John: CCC 515, 640; Gospel related—Luke: CCC 626, 640, 641, 643, 652, 2174

EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD - SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: By dying he has destroyed our death, and by rising, restored our life.

The Gospel writers often provide the most fascinating details as they record what they witnessed or heard. Thousands of years later, we know particulars that give great life and vibrancy to the narratives. From the infant Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes to the Jesus who ate supper with his disciples in an upper room and prayed in a garden while they slept. Jesus, whose persecutors wove a crown of thorns, scourged his body, gave him vinegar on a sponge and pierced his side. Jesus who walked, slept, ate and drank – who suffered and died. We are constantly reminded of the human nature of this divine person of the Trinity, whose “humanity appeared as ‘sacrament’, that is, the sign and instrument, of his divinity and of the salvation he brings” (CCC 515).

Today’s Gospel, too, is full of specific details – Mary Magdalene goes to Christ’s tomb *on the first day of the week ... early in the morning, while it was still dark*. She sees that the stone had been removed, she runs to tell Simon Peter and John, and they race to the scene. They see an empty tomb, discarded burial cloths and a separate cloth for his head which had been neatly rolled in a separate place. Still grieving from the loss of their Lord, they only begin to piece together the details and recall his predictions that he would be raised from the dead.

On this great Easter Day, it would be understandable if we “got lost in the details.” We can too easily focus on the stone rolled away, the empty tomb and the abandoned burial cloths. But we know what the larger context is, and truly we can rejoice that Jesus overcame his tortuous death and that God raised him from the dead.

How do we do that? Perhaps the greatest insight may be found in today’s Preface to our Eucharistic Prayer. In a few moments, we will hear these words: *by dying he has destroyed our death, and by rising, restored our life* (Preface I of Easter). This is the summation of God’s plan of salvation. This is the great Paschal Mystery of our faith. This is the heart of every liturgy we celebrate.

For today we do not merely *recall* what happened two thousand years ago on a cross and in a humble rock-hewn tomb, we *participate* in this continuing sacrificial mystery. We rejoice that Jesus suffered, died and rose *for us*. We rejoice because his sacrifice was once, *for all*. Today, we rejoice because he *continues* to save his people. Our risen Lord is here among us still – in word and sacrament, priest and people.

And like those first witnesses to the Resurrection, *he commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead*. Today and every day, let us give God thanks and praise for such a spectacular gift as eternal life! And let us be so grateful that we spend each day of our lives so as to be worthy of so great a gift.

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Monday, April 22, 2019
(Lec. 261)

- 1) Acts 2:14, 22-33
- 2) Matthew 28:8-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 640, 641, 645, 654

MONDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus calls us to encounter him, to be not afraid and to proclaim the Gospel.

We know the tomb was empty on Easter morning. Even the guards did not dispute that fact, and Peter says to those gathered that they *are all witnesses*. And a witness is someone who testifies to what he or she has seen.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are *overjoyed* at what they have seen, running to *announce the news*. By our baptism, we, too, are called to this. And by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we *can* do this, for we, too, encounter the risen Jesus – in prayer, in our relationships with others, and most of all in the Eucharist. While it might be daunting, it helps to remember what Jesus said when he met Mary Magdalene and the other Mary: *Do not be afraid*. Joy, and the transforming power of the Eucharist, make overcoming fear possible.

We see this in the first reading. Peter's response after encountering the risen Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit is to proclaim fearlessly the truth of Jesus' death and resurrection, quoting from the psalms (specifically Psalm 16) as evidence for the Jewish community. He wants them to realize that all messianic prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus, including that the Messiah would be raised from the dead.

As Catholics, we believe in the risen Jesus. We have received the Holy Spirit, both in baptism and in a special way at our confirmation. We, too, are called to "be not afraid" and to proclaim the Gospel. We can follow the example of the two Marys, and of Peter. They first identify who Jesus is, acknowledge that he was killed, and rejoice that God raised Jesus from the dead and *exalted (him) at the right hand of God*.

We have a choice as to what to do with the knowledge of the empty tomb; as to how we will respond to the Resurrection. But we are not left alone in that choice, for the Holy Spirit is present among us to assist us. Jesus calls us to encounter him, to be not afraid, and to proclaim the Gospel. If we do these things, we can experience the great joy of Mary Magdalene and the confidence of Saint Peter. We don't have to travel to Galilee to see Jesus; we can see him right here, at every Mass, in the Eucharist.

Let us pray today that as we are nourished by the Eucharist, we may truly encounter the risen Christ in our hearts and hear his words, *Do not be afraid*. And let us pray that we may be blessed with the courage to share the Good News of the Resurrection.

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Tuesday, April 23, 2019
(Lec. 262)

- 1) Acts 2:36-41
- 2) John 20:11-18

Gospel related: **CCC** 443, 640, 641, 645, 654, 659, 660, 2795

TUESDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The Holy Spirit is at work in our lives.

Today's readings provide two of the many instances of the work of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. The actions of the Holy Spirit, the third person of God's holy Trinity, can be readily observed in the world and within our own lives.

We see the effects of the Spirit's power in the first reading. This passage is an excerpt of a longer discourse delivered by Saint Peter to a Jewish audience in the aftermath of the descent of the Holy Spirit. Just hours before this speech, the Apostles were fearful of the audience to whom they now boldly proclaimed the Messiahship of Jesus. The Holy Spirit had empowered the Apostles to overcome their fear and speak the truth persuasively. He had given Peter the courage and the discernment to know that it was time to begin the work of spreading the Gospel. Then the Spirit further enabled Peter's abilities to accurately and persuasively communicate the Good News to a potentially hostile audience.

In today's Gospel, we hear how the Holy Spirit worked in the life of Mary Magdalene. Through the work of the Spirit, she was able to recognize the resurrected Lord Jesus whom she had earlier mistaken for a gardener. It was the Spirit who enabled her to have the courage to relate what she saw to the other Apostles, no matter what they may have thought of her testimony.

In each of these narratives, Peter and the Apostles, and then Mary, respectively, allowed the Holy Spirit to work in and through them. Their example shows us how to have our own life in the Spirit. We can look to the Holy Spirit to first open our hearts to recognize the Lord and his will for us, as the Holy Spirit did for the Apostles and disciples on that first Easter morning and that first Pentecost. We can ask him for the courage to carry out the mission we have been given. Finally, we can rely on the gifts of the Holy Spirit to perfect our abilities to live our baptismal vocation. Thus, we can become true instruments in the hands of the Lord.

Our psalm response today was, *The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord*. This is true! And not just because everything that exists was created by God, and God creates only that which is good – but also because the Holy Spirit resides here among and within us. The Spirit literally fills the earth, and so the earth is indeed *full* of God's goodness. As we prepare ourselves to celebrate the gift of our salvation, let us give thanks for all the goodness that surrounds us.

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Wednesday, April 24, 2019
(Lec. 263)

- 1) Acts 3:1-10
- 2) Luke 24:13-35

Gospel related: **CCC** 112, 439, 552, 555, 572, 601, 640, 641, 643, 645, 652, 659, 710, 1094, 1166, 1329, 1347, 2625

WEDNESDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Christ is with us always.

Today's Gospel opens on a note of what we could envision as disillusionment. Two of Jesus' disciples, in the aftermath of Good Friday, are leaving the city of Jerusalem, headed to Emmaus and *looking downcast*. Yes, they have heard the stories about the women going to the tomb and finding it empty, yet in their grief it doesn't seem to occur to them that they might be right and their report of Jesus rising might just be true.

As they travel, they discuss the week's events and then another joins them on the way. Challenged about their pain, they are invited to tell their story: their hopes about Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, the events of his death, even the rumors of his Resurrection.

Initially, they do not recognize that their new fellow-traveler is Jesus. Physical sight can often be insufficient to pierce the darkness of grief. But as they share, their hearts begin to burn with an interior recognition that will flare into full knowledge with the breaking of bread. Now they have a story to tell, one that propels them back to Jerusalem, full of hope!

The Emmaus story is a wonderful model for prayer. Beginning with silent accompaniment – Jesus silently walks with the two – inviting them to share their struggles and needs, their grief and joys, and showing us that there is a time to be silent and a time to speak. Then he invites them to listen as he breaks open the word – exchanging the bad news of life for the good news of eternal life.

As Christians, Jesus is not just an historical figure, but a living and life-giving divine person who encounters and engages us in the events of life – walking beside us even if at times we do not recognize him. As followers of Christ, we are called to be a people of hope – a hope founded in the belief that God has been faithful to his promises, and through Christ is present with us in a new and dynamic way.

Nowhere is Jesus' presence more real than in the Eucharist. So as we walk our own path today, whether it happens to be away from Jerusalem or toward it, may our hearts "burn within us" to know of Christ's presence among us.

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Thursday, April 25, 2019
(Lec. 264)

- 1) Acts 3:11-26
- 2) Luke 24:35-48

Gospel related: **CCC** 108, 112, 572, 601, 627, 641, 644, 645, 652, 702, 730, 981, 999, 1120, 1122, 1304, 2605, 2625, 2763 **CSDC** 52, 491

THURSDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: We are amazed and joyful at the Resurrection and touched by the power of the risen Christ.

When we lose someone we love, how we long to be with that person again, to touch them, to talk with them. This longing is fulfilled for the Apostles when Jesus appears to them in today's Gospel. Oh, the great joy they must have felt! At first they are surprised and frightened, but they soon realize this is not a ghost. This is Jesus, their teacher and friend, in his resurrected body, able to prove it by the wounds on his hands and feet. They can touch him, talk to him, be with him again!

Just like old times, Jesus and the Apostles eat together and talk about what has been happening. Jesus opens their minds so that his suffering and death make sense to them now in the light of Scripture. As much as they would like, the Apostles cannot linger in this joyful reunion for long. The risen Christ has a mission for them: they must go out as witnesses of the Resurrection and continue his preaching of repentance and forgiveness to all nations.

In the reading from Acts, the Apostles are doing just as Jesus commissioned them to do. They are healing in his name and preaching to the crowd about the power of the risen Christ. The One who suffered has been raised from the dead, and faith in his name brings strength and healing. He calls us to repentance and conversion, and grants blessing and refreshment to all who listen.

Like the crowd, we hear about the Resurrection, but we do not get to touch the risen Lord in the exact same way the Apostles did – in his human, resurrected form. But like the crippled man who was healed and others like him who hear of the Resurrection and have faith, we, too, can be touched by the power of the risen Lord. He touches us through his healing and strengthening, blessing and refreshment, forgiveness and call to conversion. He touches us in every grace, and in every sacrament. And, most perfectly in the Eucharist, we are able to touch him in a particular way.

With joy we look forward to the time when we, too, may embrace Christ in the fullness of our resurrection and be with him for eternity. Until then, we consider how the power of *his* Resurrection touches us today. We may not be witnesses to the risen Christ in human form, in resurrected body, but we are witnesses of his power at work in our lives. We can spread this good news of the Resurrection, as the Apostles did, and share our joy with those we encounter today at work, at home or elsewhere in the community. When we do, we may even witness the power of Christ working through us to touch and bless someone else.

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Friday, April 26, 2019
(Lec. 265)

- 1) Acts 4:1-12
- 2) John 21:1-14

Gospel related: **CCC** 448, 645, 659, 1166

FRIDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: We are called to make the presence of the risen Lord known in our world.

In today's readings, we hear two stories about the power of the risen Lord's presence. In the Gospel, Jesus himself is present to his disciples in his resurrected body. They recognize him when he provides a catch of fish and eats breakfast with them.

Even after he has died and been raised, Jesus continues his work of healing, restoring and nourishing. The post-resurrection Jesus does this in person, directing his disciples where to cast their nets and preparing a meal for them. It is after this meal that Jesus will restore his relationship with Peter by asking him three times whether he loves him.

The events described in our first reading happen later, after Jesus has returned to the Father and sent the Spirit. Here, Jesus' presence is made known by the works performed in his name by the disciples, who are filled with the power of his Spirit. It is the Spirit that fills Peter as he assures the *leaders of the people and elders* that it is only by the name of Jesus that they are able to heal, and that it is only in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, that we can be saved.

We receive this same Holy Spirit at our baptism, and with it the mission to continue Christ's work of healing and restoration. We are called to proclaim the Good News. In a moment, we will share a sacred meal of thanksgiving and receive this same presence of the risen Christ, who nourishes us with his own body and blood. These are the gifts we have been given, not merely for our own salvation, but for the salvation of the world. Let us seek where in our world healing in Jesus' name is needed. Let *us* look for where we can proclaim the hope of the Resurrection.

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Saturday, April 27, 2019
(Lec. 266)

- 1) Acts 4:13-21
- 2) Mark 16:9-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 643, 645, 659, 888, 977, 1223

SATURDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: God will give us the courage to boldly proclaim the Gospel if we are open to receiving Jesus into our lives.

In the first reading, the Temple authorities were *amazed* to see that the Apostles healed a man, and yet they felt threatened by this power. They could not recognize the truth that Jesus is the way of life. In the Gospel, the Apostles also had trouble recognizing the truth. It is interesting, then, that the Gospel concludes with Jesus commissioning the Apostles to spread the Word of God. When the reading begins, the Apostles have trouble believing in Jesus' resurrection, but it ends with them being entrusted with that very belief.

The Apostles transformed from unbelief and confusion to being bearers of the Good News. They were changed because they received Jesus into their lives, and his presence renewed their hope and courage. This transformation is the same one that Christians today are invited to experience. However, we can sometimes be like the Temple authorities or the Apostles when they first heard of Jesus' resurrection.

We, too, may encounter the truth but fail to believe. Admittedly, it is difficult to know what is true in today's world. There are times in life when we are like the authorities, who were afraid of or confused by Jesus. Then there are times when we, like the Apostles, are too distracted, grief-stricken or hurt to realize that the presence of God is near. In these times, we can look to others to help us discern what is true, and to encourage us when we feel unsure. In these times, we can lean on the community of faith gathered at Mass. For it is in this context of the Eucharistic celebration that we have the chance to encounter the real presence of Jesus.

Encountering Jesus and receiving him into our lives has the power to transform our hearts from fear to courage – from confusion to clarity. Jesus appeared to his Apostles in today's Gospel to admonish and encourage them, but also to share his presence. Jesus commanded his Apostles to spread the Good News of salvation, but they were ready to do so only when they had encountered Jesus.

Likewise, we must first receive Jesus into our own lives. We are all in different stages in the journey of faith. Today, some of us here may be ready to proclaim the Gospel right now, while others are simply longing for an encounter with Jesus. Wherever the journey takes us, we have the opportunity to experience Jesus' presence in the Eucharist today. Let us receive Jesus today, and know that when the time comes he will give us the strength and courage to boldly proclaim his word.

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SUNDAY, APRIL 28, 2019

(Lec. 45)

- 1) Acts 5:12-16
- 2) Revelation 1:9-11a,
12-13, 17-19
- 3) John 20:19-31

Gospel related: **CCC** 442, 448, 514, 575, 643, 644, 645, 659, 730, 788, 858, 976, 1087, 1120, 1287, 1441, 1461, 1485, 2839 **CSDC** 491

**SECOND SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

**or
DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: Jesus' peace liberates us from our prison of fear.

In the readings for the Mass today, fear is contrasted with confidence. In the first reading, despite the signs and wonders performed by the Apostles, some are unable to join them as believers, while others confidently are added to the number. A similar fear is evident in the seven churches of Asia in the reading from Revelation when John acknowledges their distress, and speaks with confidence about his testimony and imprisonment on Patmos.

John's confidence comes from his encounter with the risen Jesus in today's Gospel. This encounter carried the greeting, *Peace be with you*. Now this greeting is more than just a wish or a hope. It is a statement. It does not mean "may peace be with you." It means "peace is with you." The immediate effect of Jesus' presence and words is shown in their "rejoicing." And for this reason, John and his fellow Apostles have confidence that Jesus' peace will abide with them, providing the strength to face any fears life may present.

Thomas, who was not with them when Jesus appeared to the others, refuses to believe their testimony. While we do not know the exact reason Thomas was not present with the Apostles when Jesus came, nor why he does not believe what he is told, we *do* know what happens when Jesus appears again.

This time, Thomas is present and professes his belief in the Resurrection after touching Jesus' wounds. But, before Jesus invited Thomas to touch his wounds, he greeted him with, *Peace be with you*. Again, this simple phrase, as it did for the other Apostles, instilled within Thomas a sense of confidence that would ultimately lead him to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world.

We all face encounters, events and people that can create distress and leave us fearful. But Thomas, John, Peter and the other disciples teach us today that Jesus came to liberate us from our spiritual and emotional prisons of fear. Jesus invites us to embrace the peace he offers and join with the other believers, who walk with confidence knowing the peace of Jesus dispels any fears. Jesus' desire for us to enjoy his peace is echoed in his words when he told Sister Faustina, in one his appearances to her: "My child, life on earth is a struggle indeed; a great struggle for my kingdom. But fear not, because you are not alone" (*Diary*, 1488).

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Monday, April 29, 2019
(Lec. 267)

- 1) Acts 4:23-31
- 2) John 3:1-8

MONDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER
(OBL MEM

Saint Catherine of Siena,
Virgin and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 432, 526, 581, 591, 691, 720, 728, 782, 1215, 1225, 1238, 1257, 1262, 1287, 2790 **CSDC** 50, 484

FOCUS: Signs of God's presence are around us.

How often do people in distress yearn for a sign from God to give them consolation in troubled times? Something goes wrong in life, and they reach out to God for help, for comfort, and for making right whatever has gone wrong. There are times when they might receive the sign they are looking for, to know that God has listened to their pleas. But other times, they do not receive a sign. They become more despondent because their situation has not improved, and also because they believe that God has not listened to their cry for mercy.

In our first reading, the Apostles and their disciples are disturbed by the adversity shown them by the chief priests and elders. They are perhaps frightened at what might happen to them. So they pray to God for signs that God is with them. The ground shakes, they are filled with the Holy Spirit and they become emboldened to preach the Good News. How much more of a sign could they have asked for?

Signs like that do not happen every day, nor do the signs that Saint Catherine of Siena, whom the Church celebrates today, experienced. She experienced God as perhaps no other person has, or ever will again. Her ecstasies overwhelmed her physically and spiritually, and she could have no doubt that God was with her, even in the most turbulent times of her brief life.

Catherine of Siena recognized these signs that God was with her because she truly believed that God was with her. But Nicodemus, the Pharisee in today's Gospel, is unable to see what is right in front of him. Nicodemus came to Jesus *at night*, in the darkness. He did not possess the faith required to see God's glory, and so he was in the dark, unable to witness or understand Jesus' signs.

Some people long for signs from God, like the proverbial lightning bolt coming down from the heavens, to prove that God has heard their prayers. But God gives us signs every day that we don't always see. It may be something as simple as witnessing a raindrop on a leaf after the rains have come down. Or it may be a ray of light lancing its way through a window. These small signs are ways that God is with us.

If we open ourselves to understanding how these simple events are signs that God continues to nourish our lives, then we know that God is truly with us, no matter what is happening in our world. As Easter people, baptized and born again of water and the Holy Spirit, we take joy that God gifts us with signs that he is always with us.

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Tuesday, April 30, 2019
(Lec. 268)

- 1) Acts 4:32-37
- 2) John 3:7b-15

TUESDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Pius V,
Pope)

Gospel related: **CCC** 423, 440, 505, 526, 591, 661, 691, 728, 1287, 2130 **CSDC** 50

FOCUS: With humility, let us be of one heart and mind, giving generously and asking Jesus to help us understand.

Today's readings separately give us insight into the early Church, and tell of Jesus instructing Nicodemus, a Pharisee. Together, these readings remind us of an important Christian virtue: humility.

"The virtue of humility consists in keeping oneself within one's own bounds, not reaching out to things above one, but submitting to one's superior," as Saint Thomas Aquinas writes (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, book 4).

In the early Church, as we just heard in the passage from Acts, the Christian community was truly united, both in their belief and purpose. Furthermore, they understood that everything they owned was a gift from God; they willingly shared all they had with each other by selling their assets and giving the proceeds to the Apostles, who then distributed the money as needed.

That lifestyle certainly would have required humility. Early Christians understood that all were of equal dignity, and they were willing to sacrifice their own wealth or comfort to ensure that everyone had what they needed. They kept everything in perspective. We see them submitting to their rightful superiors, the Apostles as leaders of the community, to oversee that *there was no needy person among them*. What was the result? *With great power the Apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all*.

What a powerful witness we could be if we stood together with *one heart and mind*! What a moving testimony we could be if we, like the early Christians, dedicated ourselves to ensure that there is no needy person among us!

Nicodemus illustrates humility in another way. During a conversation with Jesus, he finds himself facing some confusing ideas. But in humility, he asks Jesus to explain – and Jesus does. What a great model for us, when we struggle with a Church teaching, a complex Bible passage or a troubling situation, to take that to Jesus in prayer, and quietly wait for his response. Humility isn't having low self-esteem, but rather realizing what we are – precious children of God, yes, but also creations, not the Creator. We are flawed and sinful and we need Christ. We cannot attain holiness on our own, but we can trust in Jesus who is the Way.

Today, let us pray for three things: that we may have the gift of humility; that we will respond generously to the needs of others; and that we will humbly approach Jesus in prayer and ask him to help us understand what we do not know. May the fruit of our prayers be a powerful witness to the Lord Jesus.