

AUGUST

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

**YEAR C
WEEKDAYS I**

Thursday, August 1, 2019
(Lec. 404)

- 1) Exodus 40:16-21, 34-38
- 2) Matthew 13:47-53

THURSDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Alphonsus Liguori,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 1034, 1117 **CSDC** 12

FOCUS: We say “amen” to the old, the new and what is to come.

There is an old Girl Scout adage that admonishes us to “make new friends but keep the old; one is silver and the other gold.” The wise scribe referenced in the Scripture today, who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven, also understands the value of both the old and the new. For a Jewish scribe in the time of Jesus, the old would have been the law and the prophets contained in the Scriptures – Scriptures like our first reading today.

In that reading, Moses erects the movable meeting tent, which was filled with the glory of the Lord. The children of Israel were guided in their journey by a cloud that never left them, the presence of the mighty God that protected them always, as they navigated to the Promised Land.

But a Jewish scribe in the time of Jesus who had true understanding would also recognize the value of the new, the value of the teacher who could lead them even further than the Promised Land, who could guide them in their pilgrimage to the kingdom of heaven. They would recognize Jesus. Jesus, whose message in today’s Gospel concerns the judgment at the end of time. A time where the final sorting is up to God and God’s angels.

We of the new covenant must be like the scribes: embracing old and new. Knowing the glory of the Lord will never leave us as we journey to the everlasting kingdom, but also recognizing that we must listen to the word that has come among us. To enter into and participate as much as possible in Jesus’ paschal mystery: in the pain of his dying on the cross, the despair of his three days in the tomb, the joy of his resurrection from the dead and the glory of his ascension into heaven, forever to reign in the most lovely of dwelling places.

We are, indeed, like the wise scribe when we listen to the old that is proclaimed in Scripture; when we eat the new that is the body and blood of the risen Lord. We remember, once again, that it is only the glory of the Lord that can truly lead us to eternal life, that it is only God who can judge us *at the end of the age*, and that our salvation is found only in the person of Jesus Christ.

And then when we say “amen” when presented with the body of Christ, we say amen to the old, the new and the what is to come.

* * *

Friday, August 2, 2019

(Lec. 405)

- 1) Leviticus 23:1, 4-11,
15-16, 27, 34b-37
- 2) Matthew 13:54-58

FRIDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.
Saint Eusebius of Vercelli,
Bishop;
Saint Peter Julian Eymard,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 495, 500 **CSDC** 259

FOCUS: Liturgical seasons and feast days help us remember all God has done for us.

In today's first reading, we hear about some of the major holy days and festivals that God gave the Jewish people, and the corresponding worship.

God commands the Jews to observe the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, recalling their exodus from Egypt. This helps ensure that each generation remembers what God did for them.

Similar to God prescribing holy days to the ancient Jews, the Church gives us a liturgical calendar with distinct seasons, and days of feasting and fasting. We tend to think about this during Advent and Lent, and Christmas and Easter, but less during Ordinary Time, in which we find ourselves now. But let's look at the gift of the liturgical year and how it tells us the story of our redemption.

First, what is "ordinary time?" "Ordinary" here does not mean "nothing special," or "commonplace." It refers to that which is ordered, or numerical: ordinal numbers. We organize these Sundays and weekdays to "take us through the life of Christ. This is the time of conversion. This is living the life of Christ ... [it] is a time for growth and maturation, a time in which the mystery of Christ is called to penetrate ever more deeply into history." (USCCB)

But our liturgical year does not begin with Ordinary Time. It begins with Advent: waiting for our Savior. Then through the Christmas season we celebrate Jesus' birth, the Epiphany and Jesus' baptism. Then Ordinary Time arrives, giving us the opportunity to live, work, pray and grow more intimately within the life of Christ, with special feast days and solemnities sprinkled throughout.

During Lent, we enter the desert with Jesus, and the Triduum lets us enter into his passion and death, the stillness and mourning of Holy Saturday, and the joy of the Resurrection. We celebrate Easter for fifty days, and at Pentecost, we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit and re-enter Ordinary Time. As the liturgical year comes to a close, Mass readings shift our horizon to the apex of salvation history: Jesus Christ, King of the universe, with whom, at the end of days, all believers will live in eternity.

But here we are today, in the midst of Ordinary Time. And in today's Gospel we enter into the life and mystery of Christ at a moment in which those in his hometown couldn't see him for who he was. The opportunity to hear this passage, reflect on it and let the word be opened for us and have an effect on us is as important as any feast. As the Israelites were instructed on the rituals of Passover, so we, too, in our liturgies worship God and ensure that each generation remembers what God has done for us.

So today, let us thank God for the gift of the liturgical seasons, including Ordinary Time, and ask the Holy Spirit to help us live the story of our redemption with faithfulness and purpose.

* * *

Saturday, August 3, 2019
(Lec. 406)

- 1) Leviticus 25:1, 8-17
- 2) Matthew 14:1-12

SATURDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor
of BVM)

FOCUS: John the Baptist always pointed the way to Christ.

Herod was distressed in today's Gospel because he was stuck. He had to keep the promise he made in front of all of his guests, but he didn't really want to kill John. Pride won the day, however, and this passage ends with John's disciples carrying his body off for burial and informing Jesus of John's death. Not only was John the Baptist the cousin of Jesus, but he was a prophet who prepared the way for him. John never tried to compete with Jesus for followers, or place himself at the center of attention. He always pointed toward the Redeemer. Everything he did was in order to lead others to Christ. In many ways, then, John the Baptist is one for all of us to emulate, as we reflect on our own relationship with Jesus.

In a beautiful icon of the Church known as *Mother of Perpetual Help*, the Blessed Mother is seen holding Jesus, as she presents him to the rest of the world. This is only one image of many that convey the beautiful and difficult truth that Mary lived that she was always going to give us her Son. From John and Mary, we are given amazing examples of what Jesus calls us to today: As disciples, we are to lead others to Jesus, and to present him to those who do not know him. There is a great need for us to continue this mission of the Church, this spreading of the Gospel. Reflecting on the final event of John's life reminds us that following Christ requires sacrifice – the degree to which varies from person to person. But for those who follow his path, we love without counting the cost.

As we contemplate the role of Mary and John, let us contemplate our own participation in faith. We consider how God is calling each one of us to give of ourselves: In what concrete way might we present Jesus to others? Our prayer might be: "Help me, Lord. Show me the path you want me to walk. Give me courage and strength to follow you, as I willingly give my consent to your will."

And then may our hearts and minds, transformed by the One we meet in the Eucharist, lead us to point everyone we meet back to him.

* * *

SUNDAY, AUGUST 4, 2019

(Lec. 114)

1) Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23

2) Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11

3) Luke 12:13-21

Gospel related: **CSDC** 325, 326

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Following Christian virtues leads us and others to the kingdom.

There is a simple, good and holy custom that exists among some. Whenever a funeral procession passes by, one pauses and prays for the person who has died, and for the family grieving their loss. Whether or not we have participated in that custom, it is doubtful any of us has ever witnessed a U-Haul following the hearse to the cemetery.

Why? Because of the old adage, “you can’t take it with you.”

Fool is not a word we are accustomed to hearing Jesus use. Jesus’ use of the word in today’s parable is done so to drive home a very important reality. If we are going to spend our lives chasing after things that in the end will not follow us in that U-Haul to the cemetery, instead of following after him, we may not like where we end up.

Jesus does not condemn the rich or call everyone to live in poverty. It is about balance. It is about perspective. Saint Paul puts it this way today: *Put to death . . . immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed that is idolatry.*

Another way to approach this would be to ask ourselves about our most fundamental and underlying motives for our decisions, behaviors and actions. Is it to serve others or simply to get ahead in life? If we approach whatever we do with the attitude of service to others, we will be rich beyond our imagination. If we approach our actions only with the attitude of, “bigger is better, status is important, success at the expense of others is part of the cost of doing business,” then we are headed toward spiritual poverty, which can produce catastrophic consequences.

We must see each person, including ourselves, as equally contributing to the kingdom of God; each according to his or her abilities and blessings. Remember, God does not show favorites. We are all to be on the same path, for Christ is within each of us, guiding us and sometimes pulling us toward the finish line. So let us spend our time growing rich in the things of God and not of this world.

* * *

Monday, August 5, 2019
(Lec. 407)

- 1) Numbers 11:4b-15
- 2) Matthew 14:13-21

MONDAY OF
18TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.)

The Dedication of
The Basilica of Saint Mary Major)

Gospel related: **CCC** 1329, 1335

FOCUS: Just as Jesus showed us the Father, so are we to show Jesus to others by our words and actions.

The feeding of the five thousand was one of the most remarkable miracles of Jesus' time on earth. There is much to be learned about the generosity of God from this great event. But there is something else mentioned in this Gospel account that bears examination, too.

Matthew places this event immediately after Jesus has learned that John the Baptist is dead – murdered by Herod and his wife, Herodias. Following this news, Jesus goes off to be by himself. He is both fully divine and fully human, so we can presume he was mourning and that he wanted to pray, to deal with the loss of his relative and friend. John had been the one to announce his coming, and attest to his being the Messiah sent by God. And now he was dead. Not only would that have been a terrible loss to Jesus, but a reminder that he was facing the same fate.

But, even as Jesus slipped away to be alone in his grief, the crowds followed him. They wanted and needed him. And he took pity on them. He put his own needs and desires aside, and began curing those who were sick. Sometimes, in the light of the great things Jesus did, we lose sight of the fact that he has two natures. He shares with all of humanity the same needs for rest and nourishment. He mourned the loss of friends, either by death or betrayal. He experienced joy. Unlike the rest of us, however, he had a divine mission and never stopped giving for the sake of others.

In fact, the work Jesus did that day went on so long that it got to be evening, which is why there was a need to find food for this great crowd. Remember that Jesus not only fed more than five thousand people that day, he cured people as well. The Father's generosity was made manifest in the signs and miracles of Jesus, and in the abundance of leftovers.

Just as Jesus showed us the Father through his teachings, his miracles and the example of his life, so are we to show Jesus to others by our words, actions and sacrifices made in his name. It is unlikely any of us will ever cure a sick person or multiply loaves and fishes, but we can comfort those who are hurting, provide food to the hungry and do other works of mercy. In the process, we may need to sacrifice our time, our talent and/or our treasure, but that is what we are called to do as followers of the Messiah.

* * *

Tuesday, August 6, 2019
(Lec. 614)

**THE TRANSFIGURATION
OF THE LORD
- FEAST**

- 1) Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14
- 2) 2 Peter 1:16-19
- 3) Luke 9:28b-36

FOCUS: The Transfiguration is hope and life in the wake of despair and death.

The Transfiguration happens at a point in Luke's Gospel where Jesus has begun to talk more specifically with his disciples about the future. Luke writes that eight days prior to this event he had given his first prediction of the passion and outlined the conditions of discipleship. These conditions meant that those who truly wished to be his disciples must deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow him. These were hard things for his followers to hear, and likely were not fully understood by them.

It is not made known to us what, if anything, transpired in those eight days, but in our passage today Jesus *took Peter, John, and James and went up the mountain to pray.* And what do those three men do first? While Jesus begins to pray? They fall asleep. In the midst of this remarkable and miraculous event ... they fall asleep.

Granted, they do awaken to find Jesus in his glory, and Moses and Elijah standing next to him. Moses is there to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's law. Elijah shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises. But the disciples' slow-to-awareness, and Peter's suggestion they remain there and build tents for the three of them, are representative of their incomplete understanding of Christ's mission. Or the importance of what they have seen.

Then they hear the voice of God speaking from the heavens. Similar to the voice from above that announced the Christ at his baptism in the Jordan, God leaves no doubt as to the identity of his Son or the significance of the moment when he says, *This is my chosen Son; listen to him.*

Listen to him. Peter references this great command of the Almighty in our second reading, and then says, *You will do well to be attentive to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place.* For by now, as of his writing this letter, he has witnessed the Resurrection and the glory of what awaits all who have faith in – who listen to – Jesus. Jesus, who was shown to them in the same glory described by the Prophet Daniel when he saw *the Ancient One* on his throne, with clothing *bright as snow.* Jesus, whose Transfiguration is hope and life in the wake of despair and death.

In the darkest moments of our lives, Jesus' bright light shines. On our worst days, we people of faith listen to Jesus calming the stormy seas of our hearts, promising us that one day he will lead us to the safe harbors of heaven. The encounter with Christ changed everyone on the mountain that night. Not only can an encounter with Christ change us in the same way and for the better, it can impact all those with whom we come in contact, all those with whom we share how we, too, have become *eyewitnesses of his majesty.*

* * *

Wednesday, August 7, 2019
(Lec. 409)

- 1) Numbers 13:1-2, 25-14:1,
26-29a 34-35
- 2) Matthew 15:21-28

WEDNESDAY OF
18TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Sixtus II, Pope,
and companions,
Martyrs;
Saint Cajetan,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 439, 448, 2610

FOCUS: *How great is your faith!*

What a joy it would be to hear Jesus say to us, *how great is your faith!* That faith in the Lord's promises and power was not present in the Israelites in today's first reading. They worried about being able to enter into, live and thrive in the land that God had promised them. At the thought of what might befall them as they faced the inhabitants who were *huge, veritable giants*, they expressed themselves with grumbling, and *the whole community broke out with loud cries, and even in the night the people wailed.*

That is a pretty strong reaction to a generous gift from God. They did not trust what God put before them. God had rescued them, led them out of slavery and brought them to the edge of their geographical inheritance. And the Israelites behaved like children who scream and cry at what they are afraid of and do not understand. And so, the consequence was they had to wait to enter. They had to outgrow this fear and learn to trust. They had to mature in gratitude and fear of the Lord.

The woman in the Gospel also calls out in fear. Only her fear is of what might be lost – her daughter's life – not what has been promised, or what she might gain. She trusts. She believes. She has faith. And she does not let the reticence of Jesus, who was a metaphorical *huge, veritable giant* of a presence in the world, intimidate her. *Please, Lord, she says, even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters.* She, a Canaanite woman, not heir to the promise of Israel, understands that Jesus has come for the salvation of all.

How great indeed is her faith. And what a gift it would be to hear those words ourselves. The only variable that remains for us is whether those words would be in the form of a question: *How great is your faith?* Or as a statement of factual recognition: *How great is your faith!*

May we have the grace, fortitude and trust in God to ensure it is always the latter.

* * *

Thursday, August 8, 2019
(Lec. 410)

- 1) Numbers 20:1-13
- 2) Matthew 16:13-23

TUESDAY OF
18TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Dominic,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 153, 424, 440, 442, 540, 552, 553, 554, 586, 607, 869, 881, 1444, 1969

FOCUS: May we be faithful to God, and live in gratitude for his grace.

The Israelites did not have an easy time of it in the desert. Their caravan suffered, people died, their farm animals were unable to be fed. They gave up hope of survival, and they were frustrated with Moses and Aaron, their supposed faithful leaders. And worst of all – in the desert – *the community had no water*.

On the Lord's orders, Moses *took his staff from its place before the Lord*, struck a rock twice with it, *and water gushed out in abundance for the people and their livestock to drink*. The patience of the people had been tested. Moses had been tested. But with water, everyone was satisfied. Their faith in the Lord was restored, for the Lord had done good things for them.

In the Gospel, Jesus transforms Simon into Peter, the Rock on which the Church is built. From that rock, the source of living water gushes out in abundance for all of creation. The patience of the people had been tested. Peter had been tested. But with his great exclamation of our faith springing forth, that Jesus is *the Christ, the Son of the living God*, the kingdom of God takes root in the world. The Lord has indeed done great things for us.

We are still a pilgrim people, not unlike the Israelites in the desert, but not entirely the same either. We have our own moments in the wilderness where we suffer, yet we are never without the living water of Christ and his Church. We may have frustrations and falter in the *virtue* of hope, but we are never abandoned or separated by God from the Hope that is in *him*.

So as we continue our journey toward the place God has prepared for us, may we be faithful to him, and live in gratitude for the grace that abounds and surrounds us. We do this so that someday we, too, may say to Christ, face to face, you are *the Son of the living God*.

* * *

Friday, August 9, 2019
(Lec. 411)

- 1) Deuteronomy 4:32-40
- 2) Matthew 16:24-28

FRIDAY OF
18TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross,
Virgin and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 226, 363, 618, 736, 1021, 2029, 2232

FOCUS: As we recall the deeds of the Lord, we are reminded of who we are.

The Book of Deuteronomy, literally the *Second Law*, is often depicted as being full of cold historical facts and laws that relate solely to the Jewish people of old. But now and again we see a gem like today's first reading that reminds us of God's salvific will and what the Lord has done for Israel, with its implication for all who seek him in faith.

In that passage in which Moses addresses the people, he not only reminds them that it was the Lord who *chose them* and liberated *them* from slavery in Egypt with mighty signs and wonders, but also reminds them that by entering into that covenant relationship, they, too, had undertaken to play their part in this new relationship. It was to be a covenant relationship that would bring rights and responsibilities for Israel in all her generations. Key among these rights and responsibilities was the duty of Israel to keep God's statutes and commandments, and to teach them to succeeding generations. Only then would Israel prosper and retain the land that lay at the heart of the covenant relationship.

In today's Gospel, in which Jesus makes his first prediction of his passion and death, Jesus sets out his conditions for discipleship – what he sees as the rights and responsibilities for all who would seek to come after him and to be his disciple. Like Israel of old, Christian disciples, too, must know what is expected of them. They must be ready to take up their crosses and follow him; be ready to lose their lives in order to gain life; and be ready to forsake and forfeit this world for a share in the world to come.

In words that are sobering to the ears, Jesus teaches his disciples that each will receive according to their conduct – in other words, how they embrace these rights and responsibilities. So the one who is faithful will receive the rewards of the Lord's faithfulness, and likewise, the one who is invested in the things of this world will receive the passing rewards of this life. Sobering! Yes! But a timely reminder to all that we will only prosper (in the fullest sense of the word) if we seek to inhabit the land of Christ's passion, death and resurrection, and if we share that land with others and pass on our faith willingly to succeeding generations.

Today, we celebrate one of the martyr saints of the modern era, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Better known as Edith Stein – Carmelite nun, convert and victim of Auschwitz, this philosopher found Christ in her studies and in her experiences during the Great War. She lived this Gospel passage by taking up her cross and losing her life, but gaining the crown of life.

* * *

Saturday, August 10, 2019
(Lec. 618)

1) 2 Corinthians 9:6-10

2) John 12:24-26

Gospel related: **CCC 2731 CSDC 570**

**SAINT LAWRENCE,
DEACON AND MARTYR
- FEAST**

FOCUS: We can sow sparingly or abundantly for the kingdom.

Today, we hear much about wheat and seeds, their fruit, and sowing and reaping. Paul writes to the Corinthians: *Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.* It seems to be a fact of spiritual life and even everyday life: we get out of something what we put into it. If we attend school and study hard, we'll benefit from our years in school, but if we hold back on our studies and don't focus our energies on them, we're likely wasting our time. The more we sow God's word in the world, the greater amount of goodness there is for reaping.

Jesus goes even further, encouraging his followers to allow the word to live in them, and to die to themselves so that Christ the Living Word in them can transform them into something greater than themselves. Saint Lawrence, whose feast we celebrate today, literally gave his life for the sake of Christ – faithfully standing up for his faith in the face of persecution by the Roman Emperor Valerian and dying a martyr's death. By dying to self for the sake of the Gospel, he transformed himself into a saint and bore fruit through the inspiration of countless people who have heard his story.

God asks us to be generous with the most important gift he's given to us: our life. Truly, our lives are not our own, since we were created by God the Father and redeemed by Jesus. But God lovingly entrusts our lives to us to see how we sow his word. It is worth it for each of us to take some time this week to reflect on how well we do this. By God's grace, do we generously give ourselves to others, *without sadness or compulsion* – whether to the community at large, family members or the people we encounter at work? Or do we hoard the gift, refusing to die to self and reaping sparingly?

Most of us won't give our lives literally as martyrs, but we can all die to ourselves when we are called upon to do so. Let us pray this week for the grace to sow abundantly for the good of all. For as Paul says, *The one who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your righteousness.*

* * *

SUNDAY, AUGUST 11, 2019

(Lec. 117)

- 1) Wisdom 18:6-9
- 2) Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19 or 11: 1-2, 8-12
- 3) Luke 12:32-48 or 12:35-40

Gospel related: **CCC** 764

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Blessed is that servant whom his master finds at work.

In today's Gospel parable, the master is away at a wedding feast. In Jesus' telling of this story, he focuses on those who await the master's return. They have been given instructions and are expected to carry them out.

The servants do not know when the master will return. They wait and *make preparations [and] act in accord with his will*. And they are ready. If we put ourselves in the place of the servants with Jesus as the master, here we will find the Good News of the Gospel.

For being ready for Jesus' second coming is less about any actual time and place, and more about what we choose to do while we wait. We, too, have been given instructions and commandments, and there is no time to waste in preparing and participating in God's kingdom. Through the grace of baptism we have been grafted into Christ, giving us, as Wisdom says of our ancestors, *sure knowledge of the oaths in which [we] put [our] faith*. This is the faith which *is the realization of what is hoped for*: redemption in Jesus Christ. It is this faith that gives us the desire, as it gave Abraham, to obey God's call, and the courage to journey wherever God has prepared for us to go.

At the end of the Lord's Prayer during Mass, the priest prays in part, "Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil ... that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin ... as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ." This prayer, "developing the last petition of the Lord's Prayer itself, asks for deliverance from the power of evil for the whole community of the faithful" (GIRM 81).

So with prayer and action, we prepare ourselves and one another for the return of our master. We do whatever it means, individually, for each one of us to *sell [our] belongings and give alms; to gird [our] loins and light [our] lamps*; to defend our house from thieves. Let us know God's will, and follow it soberly and attentively. Let us do these things, by God's grace. And we shall rejoice when we once again see the Son of Man.

* * *

Monday, August 12, 2019
(Lec. 413)

- 1) Deuteronomy 10:12-22
- 2) Matthew 17:22-27

MONDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Jane Frances de Chantal,
Religious)

Gospel related: CCC 554, 586

FOCUS: Uniting ourselves in Christ brings hope during times of trial.

Today's Gospel reading mentions two events in Jesus' life that seem unrelated. First, Matthew recalls Jesus' foretelling of his death: *The Son of Man is to be handed over to men, and they will kill him.* Matthew describes the reaction of the disciples: *they were overwhelmed with grief.*

In the second part of the Gospel, collectors of the Temple tax approach Peter about whether or not Jesus pays the tax.

It seems odd for Peter to have to move so quickly from one overwhelming thought, the death of his beloved Lord, to such a worldly care, whether or not to pay the Temple tax. We can imagine him thinking to himself, "How can I reply to a question about taxes at a time like this?"

Yet isn't this what our lives consist of so often? At times, we can go about our day without thought to serious issues; yet other times these issues confront us so suddenly that we are "overwhelmed with grief." In these times, it is as if time *should* stand still; the world should stop to notice the suffering, the grief. But the world does not stop. The practical obligations keep going, whether we are ready or not.

Jesus tells us we are to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. Yet we still have worldly responsibilities. And perhaps that is a good thing, especially in times of great trial. Grief can overwhelm us to the point of not wanting to do anything but worry, to give in to despair. Yet we still have to function in this world, even when we feel it should stop.

How do we do this practically? The Gospel provides guidance. Jesus says about practical matters in times of distress, do what is in front of you: "Pay the Temple tax." What this means for us is to acknowledge the practical matters that need to be tended: wash the dishes; change the diaper; show up for work. Find others who are suffering and care for them as God cares for them: Acknowledge our own suffering and bring aid to those who suffer now.

As we prepare to approach the table of the Eucharist, let us remember Jesus' suffering, let us unite our suffering to his, and let us pray to be strengthened so that we can attend to practical matters, especially the care of others.

* * *

Tuesday, August 13, 2019

(Lec. 414)

- 1) Deuteronomy 31:1-8
- 2) Matthew 18:1-5, 10, 12-14

TUESDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.
Saints Pontian, Pope,
and Hippolytus, Priest,
Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 329, 336, 526, 605, 2785, 2822

FOCUS: The Lord desires that not one of us be lost.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells his followers to be like a child to enter the kingdom of God. What does it mean to be childlike? It means having a great openness before God. A virtue of humility – not false humility – that recognizes our own limitations and depends on God to lead us where we need to go and to seek us out when we are lost.

Children often realize their own powerlessness. As adults, this realization is harder. We can struggle to depend on anyone for help, much less God. Oftentimes, we don't realize how much we need God until we are faced with a problem. As the Israelites prepared to enter the Promised Land, they certainly realized how much they needed God. In the first reading, Moses reminded them to be brave and steadfast. He tells them to trust in God's power because God will not fail. Moses knew that his people would be challenged and would need to rely on God.

Likewise, we have our own needs. We are powerless in different ways, and it is essential for us to depend on God's strength and love for us. A child must depend on her parents for everything. Even when her parents give her freedom, they do so with a watchful eye, ready to step in when needed. Just so, God is ready to help us when we are in need. For, *it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost*. Let us hear that again: the Lord desires that not one of us be lost.

God has prepared a place for us in his kingdom. Let us strive not to be the greatest, but the most reliant on God. For he will never fail or forsake us.

* * *

Wednesday, August 14, 2019
(Lec. 415)

- 1) Deuteronomy 34:1-12
- 2) Matthew 18:15-20

WEDNESDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Maximilian Kolbe,
Priest and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 553, 1088, 1373, 1444, 2472 **CSDC** 52

FOCUS: May we be obedient to God's will and have faith in his promises.

Today the Church celebrates the memorial of Saint Maximilian Kolbe. A priest, scholar, founder of monasteries, publisher and devoted son of the Blessed Mother, he is most known for his martyrdom at Auschwitz. There, he voluntarily took the place of a man who would be starved to death because that man had a family.

This is the essence of the Christian life, is it not? Dying to self for the sake of another, in some shape or form – in ways large or small. This was also the principle of Moses' life. He led his people to the Promised Land, even as he knew, toward the end, that he would not enter it. God had provided everything the Israelite people needed up to that point; he never abandoned them. He kept his promises. And he provided for Joshua to take Moses' place in leading them to *the land which [he] swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that [he] would give to their descendants*.

Thirty days the children of Israel wept for Moses. He whom the Lord knew face to face. He [who] had no equal in all the signs and wonders the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh. To have lived well, as Moses did – to be mourned and missed as he was – is something to which we can aspire.

In fact, the Gospel calls us to that. The entirety of the Gospel message for sure, but also in some of the instructions we heard Jesus give his disciples today. They center around building up the body of Christ. Jesus' words, *If your brother sins against you*, refers to fellow disciples. It presumes a community of believers. So if one sins against another, it weakens the whole. When this happens, strive for unity: correct one another in charity. And if one-on-one doesn't work, rely on fellow believers and your local church for advice and prayer.

In an analogous sense, then: give over any selfishness to selflessness. Die to self for the sake of something better; live well in community, and pray for one another. We are not called to be Moses or Saint Maximilian Kolbe. But we *are* called to follow their example of principled living.

By God's grace, and with the transforming power of the Eucharist, may we have perfect love and obedience to God's will and have faith in his promises.

* * *

Thursday, August 15, 2019
(Lec. 622)

- 1) Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab
- 2) 1 Corinthians 15:20-27
- 3) Luke 1:39-56

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

**THE ASSUMPTION
OF THE BLESSED
VIRGIN MARY
- SOLEMNITY**

(Holyday of Obligation)

FOCUS: Mary is an example of perfect service.

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Mary's Assumption into heaven. The catechism states that Mary, "when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory" (CCC 966). The importance of today's solemnity lies in the fact that just as she had an uncorrupted soul free of sin, so, too, was her body uncorrupted when lifted into heaven. And she became the first of all who will come to participate in Christ's resurrection.

Luke quotes Mary as saying that all generations will call her blessed. In today's Gospel the word "blessed" is used four times – three by Elizabeth and once by Mary. Despite Mary casting herself as a *lowly servant*, we are alerted to the fact that Mary has been chosen by God for a very special role in salvation history.

And in fact, here we are two thousand years later celebrating the close of her earthly life. She is indeed blessed, and we, too, are servants. We pray daily as a Church for her to intercede for us with her Son. The Second Vatican Council acknowledged this role of hers saying, "she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth" (LG 62).

There's much we can take from Mary's life as a servant of God, and some of that comes right out of today's Gospel. In displaying her humility, she places great value on the works of God, and in a roundabout way presents a guide for us. We are obviously not God, but we, too, can show mercy. We are not God, but we, too, can help the lowly. We are not God, but we, too, can feed the hungry. As a matter of fact, her words foreshadow Jesus' words to do just that – help the poor, clothe the naked and feed the hungry. All of these actions we are instructed to do as Christ's servants.

So in reflecting on today's solemnity, let's take to heart Mary's humility, and her recognition of the needs of those less fortunate.

* * *

Friday, August 16, 2019
(Lec. 417)

- 1) Joshua 24:1-13
- 2) Matthew 19:3-12

FRIDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Stephen of Hungary)

Gospel related: **CCC** 796, 922, 1579, 1605, 1610, 1614, 1615, 1618, 1620, 1644, 1652, 2053, 2336, 2364, 2380, 2382 **CSDC** 209, 210, 217, 219

FOCUS: The Lord is always there for us as we navigate life's daily trials.

In the first reading, Joshua has a message for the people from the Lord. It is an accounting of the history of their covenant, and all the things God has done for them in faithfulness to it. God was always there for them throughout their journeys. He provided a land for them to make a home. He freed them from enslavement, saved them from their enemies, drove away armies and provided food and shelter when they needed it. God made a covenant with his people that he would never break, and this was the overarching premise of the words he gave to Joshua.

The Gospel deals with another kind of covenant: that between a man and a woman in marriage. The Pharisees understand the connection between their history as God's people, and the union of man and woman: both unbreakable covenants, the second a visible sign on earth of the first. Yet, they decide to test Jesus on this, asking him if it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Jesus will not be baited. Instead, he affirms the sanctity of the covenant of marriage. He reminds the Pharisees that, *What God has joined together, man must not separate.*

For some, this passage from Matthew's Gospel may, understandably, be uncomfortable to hear. In our modern world, the rate of divorce is as high as fifty percent. We all know someone who has experienced the pain of a failed marriage, and we are troubled because this may be the cross they are bearing as a disciple of Christ. It may be hard to hear the Good News in the midst of this. But it is there. It is there in the upholding of the importance, beauty and inherent covenantal connection to God in marriage. Why else would we care about it so much? Why else would it be so painful when it falls short?

And that's why this reading speaks to all people: married couples, even those in successful relationships, those contemplating marriage, and those who have forsaken a marriage for a religious one. If we refocus the message, it is clear that Jesus places significant value on the state of matrimony. As God would never destroy our covenantal relationship with him, so does he desire that we do not destroy ours with one another.

Here is why, as a society, we need to do a better job of holding marriage in high esteem. Why we need to form one another, especially our children moving forward, in and for the sacramental life. Not just in marriage, but in all we do. Marriage in particular, because it is a solemn vow before God, to our spouse, in the presence of

the larger community, that we will live out this sacrament to the best of our ability. But our communal life must be such that each one of us is participating in the Church's life of grace, growing in virtue, the recipient of examples to follow, and willing to live a sacrificial life. For how else can we promise to support others in their marriages, let alone be prepared for it ourselves?

Our marriages matter to God. They are life-giving, and can truly be a sign of God's love for his people. For those who choose to marry, a long and successful marriage is the ultimate goal, even knowing it will be filled with both joy and challenge.

As we look at both of these readings together, there is common ground. It is clear that no matter what we face in life, God is there to help us with our struggles. Just as he did with the people of Israel, he will lead us through the difficult times and be a light in the darkness. We are graciously assured, as we recited in the responsorial psalm, that *His mercy endures forever*.

* * *

Saturday, August 17, 2019
(Lec. 418)

- 1) Joshua 24:14-29
- 2) Matthew 19:13-15

SATURDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor
of BVM)

FOCUS: *Decide today whom you will serve.*

The first reading is a beautiful description of a covenantal ceremony between God and his people. Joshua is the leader of Israel. Settled in the Promised Land, they still were not without challenges. Because of their lives being more stable, they became complacent. So Joshua decided to call the people to him with his final words of encouragement and exhortation.

He warned them to not slip into worshipping false gods but to remain faithful to God. *Decide today whom you will serve ... As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord*, he proclaimed. The nation of Israel swore they would serve only God. Joshua said he would hold them to it, and built an altar to commemorate their declaration. Throughout history, Israel did continue to follow God, although not without difficulties. They followed him imperfectly. Through it all, God continued to care for them and call them to higher standards in their relationship with him.

In today's Gospel, Jesus said, *Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these*. The inference one can make is that children have clean hearts and are usually sincere, without a lot of pretentiousness. Matthew's point in writing this may have been to address the question of infant baptism within the early Christian community. Regardless, the greater point, it seems, is that from the very first moment of our existence, God calls us into relationship with him, and no one should be prevented from responding – from following Jesus. From choosing, as Joshua said, to *serve the Lord*.

Each generation, each individual person, has the opportunity to choose whether or not to follow and *serve the Lord*. God does not force himself upon us. Nor does he ever abandon us, no matter how we respond to his generosity. This long history, this deposit of faith is, hopefully, being passed onto the next generations. It is appropriate that we teach and encourage each young person to continue to follow God and the Church. To know our history – to know our heritage as chosen ones of God.

Decide today whom you will serve.

* * *

SUNDAY, AUGUST 18, 2019

(Lec. 120)

1) Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10

2) Hebrews 12:1-4

3) Luke 12:49-53

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

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Choose Christ's message and unite our lives with his.

Today's first reading is another version of a familiar scenario: a prophet ignored, derided and mistreated. In this case, it is Jeremiah who prophesied in Jerusalem during the reign of Zedekiah. For many years he had warned the people of Judah about an oncoming disaster. Often referred to as the *weeping prophet*, Jeremiah scolded the Jewish leadership of the day for its failure to worship the one true God alone, and for its reliance on military alliances over trusting in the Lord.

Of course, no one wanted to hear these words of doom and gloom. In fact, determined to silence him forever, but to avoid having his blood on their hands, those in power contrived to have him arrested and imprisoned in a muddy cistern. There, they hoped he would be forgotten and would die.

As a prophet, Jeremiah brought division. Not because God sought to instigate such, but because people choosing whether to listen to and follow God's word – or not – necessarily divided the community. With a message no one wanted to hear, Jeremiah knew that his fidelity to the Lord could possibly result in death and yet he did not shy away from obeying God's call.

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus tells his disciples that he has come to establish not peace but division. He describes how his message will divide communities and pit family members against family members. Relationships will suffer, and he himself will suffer death. As with every previous prophet, those who heard – and still hear – Jesus' message had the choice to heed it, or ignore it. *That* is what divides. Because when we enter into Christ's baptism with him, we are united to him. And with each other.

Today, our lives as Christians are often marked with the same kinds of turmoil as our ancestors. Just as the cross is never too far from the empty tomb, so struggles and suffering are part of the human experience. Yet as Christians we are challenged to keep our eyes firmly fixed on the Lord – never losing sight of his presence and his offer of grace. We are challenged to choose Christ's message, uniting ourselves to and drawing strength from all those who walk the pathway of the Christian life with us.

* * *

Monday, August 19, 2019
(Lec. 419)

- 1) Judges 2:11-19
- 2) Matthew 19:16-22

MONDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint John Eudes,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2052, 2053, 2075, 2400 **CSDC** 22, 181

FOCUS: Christ invites us to go deeper into relationship with the living God.

The first reading, from the Book of Judges, describes the state of the Israelite people a generation removed from when *the God of their fathers, [had] led them out of the land of Egypt*. They are worshipping false gods despite the fiery goading of the judges. They improve for a while under the judges' rule, then backslide at each one's death.

This is why God sent his Son. Prophets, judges and kings had failed to help the Israelites keep the covenant. And God, who would never fail to keep it, desired that his people be once and for all reunited with and reconciled to him.

This is the message that Christ brings, and the young man who approaches Christ has faith in this message. He has a relationship with God. In his desire to grow in faith he earnestly asks Jesus: *Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?* By referring to Jesus as his teacher, he implies a closeness and trust. Jesus answers, *If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments*. This is not surprising to the young man. What is surprising is that he knows intuitively that there is [now, with the arrival of Jesus] more to the answer. And so after affirming that he does what is commanded, he asks a further, very interesting question: *What do I still lack?*

What a great question for all of us. "What do I still lack, Lord, in my efforts to gain eternal life?" The answer for us is most likely the same as for the young man, paraphrased as: trust and faith. It is not that we each literally have to sell all we have, but that whatever possessions we own – material or spiritual – cease to have priority in our life in comparison to Christ. None of our belongings will satisfy our deepest longings. Only a relationship with God can do that. Only faith can satisfy. The invitation to us is the same as the one Christ made to the young man – to go ever deeper in our faith. And that takes faith and trust.

So let us accept Christ's invitation, and may our encounter with him in the Eucharist and every sacrament give us the grace we need to enter ever more deeply into communion with him, and to follow him as perfectly as we can.

* * *

Tuesday, August 20, 2019
(Lec. 420)

- 1) Judges 6:11-24a
- 2) Matthew 19:23-30

TUESDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Bernard,
Abbot and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 226, 276, 308, 765, 1058, 2053 **CSDC** 181

FOCUS: *Who then can be saved?*

For men this is impossible, but for God all things are possible. This answer to the question regarding salvation in today's Gospel, in essence, means this: we cannot save ourselves. In practice, because it requires a divine power we do not have. In actuality, however, because God has already saved us. God who sent his only Son so that we might be saved and have eternal life with him. This is truly good news!

We do, however, *participate* in our salvation. That is, we respond to God in faith and accept the grace that he gives us. Grace, which is a "participation in the life of God" (CCC 1997). Grace, which is "favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life" (CCC 1996).

And this is where we sometimes get confused, and begin to lack faith. We look at the road before us as disciples and think there is no way we can do it. (Of course we can't! Not alone, and not without God's grace!) Gideon felt the same way, "there is no way that I can do what God is calling me to." Gideon asks, how can this be possible? *My family is the lowliest in Manasseh, and I am the most insignificant in my father's house.*

But God is not looking at Gideon's merit, nor reading his resume. God has chosen Gideon for a specific purpose, and therefore will be with Gideon in his effort. All will be possible. That's grace.

This is the same message in today's Gospel. The road we walk to salvation is not easy, and choosing to be a disciple means doing things that may seem impossible. We feel unequipped. But we are far from unequipped if we have faith that God is with us on the journey – if we are seekers of and receptive to his grace. God is not looking for the most powerful or the richest. Rather, God is calling all who are willing to follow him and his commands; who are open to his word and receptive to his gift of faith; who will rely on him.

This absolutely does not fit the paradigm of the most likely to succeed, which our world promotes. Our worldview says it should be the people with the most talent, riches or power who can succeed. But Jesus says it will be hard, nearly impossible for these people to succeed on the path of discipleship. Why? Because if it is the case that they are where they are without relying on God, without ordering their temporal goods toward

the eternal good, then those talents, riches and power mean nothing. Without grace, they are nothing.

To those who put their hope in God, not in wealth or things of this world, God promises eternal life. May we have the grace to always do just that.

Wednesday, August 21, 2019
(Lec. 421)

- 1) Judges 9:6-15
- 2) Matthew 20:1-16

WEDNESDAY OF
20TH WEEK
(OBL MEM
Saint Pius X,
Pope)

Gospel related: **CSDC** 541

FOCUS: God is a more generous king than any we might appoint over ourselves.

Today we heard two parables that challenge and provoke our thought. They invite us to consider that we may not be the best ones to rule over our lives, and to instead live with gratitude and responsibility for the gifts God has given us.

The first comes from the Book of Judges, where throughout, it is made clear that God is the only just king of Israel. Despite this, Abimelech had desires to be king and Jotham, who tells the parable, has recently escaped Abimelech's wrath as he slaughtered his way to the throne. So in telling this parable to the citizens of Shechem, Jotham is warning them about the consequences of seeking such a human king. When the trees in his story seek another tree to reign over them, the trees which bear good fruit decline. They understand the gift they already have. The trees are left with only the buckthorn, a fast-growing weed.

In the Gospel, the laborers in Jesus' parable feel that the landowner is not fair. He hires the last group only one hour before evening and yet he pays them the same as those who worked all day. We can easily understand why the first workers *grumbled against the landowner*.

We, too, may be tempted to seek out that which we have not been given – jobs, relationships, possessions, responsibilities, or even ministries. We believe it is only just, right or fair that we possess these things. But when we insist on getting our own way, we take up the position of the laborers grumbling against the generosity of the landowner – or worse, we take the place of Abimelech seeking the very throne of God.

In both these parables, we are called to give thanks for the generous gifts we have received and to use them for the glory of God and the good of others. To live with both this gratitude and responsibility is challenging. It means refusing to succumb to the temptation to seek more for more's sake. It means refusing to make ourselves king over our own lives, and instead letting God have his throne.

God's ways are not our ways and God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). God's generosity is surprising and provoking. He gives to those we don't think deserve it, and sometimes those whom we might reward seem to receive very little. But who are we to be envious because God is generous? We know that, in the end, *all things work for good for those who love God* (Romans 8:28). Indeed, we who are sinners might do well to be thankful that our God is a king who is not fair to us. Instead he is the king of mercy, more generous than we could ever imagine.

Thursday, August 22, 2019
(Lec. 422)

- 1) Judges 11:29-39a
- 2) Matthew 22:1-14

THURSDAY OF
20TH WEEK
(OBL MEM
The Queenship of the
Blessed Virgin Mary)

Gospel related: **CCC** 546, 796

FOCUS: God invites us to participate in the freedom of his kingdom.

In the first reading, we encounter Jephthah, a warrior who serves as an instrument of deliverance for God's people. However, in the face of a major battle, Jephthah loses confidence and makes a rash vow which leads to terrible consequences: he must offer his daughter to God as a burnt offering. [We should note that this oath is a violation of God's law given in Deuteronomy, explicitly forbidding child sacrifice.] And so, we see that Jephthah is not a hero here, but rather, his daughter is (who is never named in the Scripture).

She endures this injustice, protecting her father who must keep his vow in order to continue his part in this story of deliverance God is working. She offers herself at the service of this saving work. This is not a story condoning Jephthah's action, but a story of his daughter's faithfulness, a faithfulness which points in a particular way to the perfect faithfulness of our Holy Mother Mary. Mary, who offered herself not as a burnt offering, but as a faithful servant to God's saving work.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the wedding feast, which is compared to the kingdom of God. Guests are invited to this feast, but many ignore or reject the invitation, sometimes violently. So the king just brings people to the feast. And among them is a man who was not prepared for the invitation or his subsequent presence. He was not wearing the proper wedding garment! Unlike Jephthah's daughter, and Mary our Mother, he was not prepared to participate in God's saving work. As Jesus says, *many are invited, but few are chosen*.

Today, as we celebrate the Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we, too, are invited to the wedding feast of the kingdom of God. God is inviting us to be a part of his generosity, his deliverance, his goodness. The kingdom of which Mary is Queen is a kingdom where we allow God's will to shape our decisions, even when that "yes" is costly, as it was in a particular way for Mary and in a different way for Jephthah's daughter. We are asked to be prepared for that invitation, to trust our King, to allow our King to clothe us in Christ, to transform our hearts and our minds, to give us the strength to participate in God's deliverance. Our God is here, inviting us in to participate in the freedom of his kingdom. Let us say "yes" as we receive him in the Eucharist today.

* * *

Friday, August 23, 2019
(Lec. 423)

- 1) Ruth 1:1, 3-6, 14b-16, 22
- 2) Matthew 22:34-40

FRIDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Rose of Lima,
Virgin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 581, 1824, 2055, 2083 **CSDC** 112

FOCUS: Living out the two great commandments can bring joy to our lives and make a difference in the world.

What is the best way to live your life? Jesus tells us the answer in no uncertain terms when, confronted by the Sadducees who desire to test him, he cites the two greatest commandments: total devotion to God and love of neighbor. These two commandments work together. If we truly dedicate our hearts, souls and minds to God, if we truly listen to God, we will be led to a life of service to others within the circumstances of our daily lives. We will make daily choices that are pleasing to God and beneficial to those around us.

Many of us are familiar with this beautiful summary of the commandments and strive to live it out. But what do these simple but often difficult commandments look like when they're lived out?

The first reading, the beginning of the story of Ruth, is a beautiful example of someone who lives out these twin commandments. Ruth, a Moabite woman, a Gentile, devotes her life to her mother-in-law, Naomi, refusing to leave her side and adopting not only Naomi's native country, but also her God.

Just as violence, hatred and revenge evoke a similar response in others, so do loyalty, kindness and generosity. Ruth's willingness to leave her own land out of love for Naomi brings her many blessings – including marriage to the good and generous Boaz. Her blessings extend through generations; she is one of the few women listed in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. Through her generous faithfulness to Naomi, she became an ancestor of Jesus, our Savior.

Ruth is only one example of countless people down through the ages who have lived out Jesus' great commandments. Some of us may be lucky enough to have a few Ruths in our lives, people who, through dedication to God and love of others, make their world a better place. Think of the teacher who spent extra time with you to help you understand a lesson, or your grandparents or parents who sacrificed for you, or the neighbor or friend who is always ready with a meal or a smile when you need it.

People who live out Jesus' commandments often don't make headlines or a spot on the news, simply because they live the way we are all expected to – with decency, love, kindness and generosity. Yet we all know these people and benefit greatly from having them in our lives. As we leave this sacred time and place to continue with our lives, let us re-dedicate our hearts, souls and minds to those same two commandments: loving our God and our neighbor, and allowing God to bring blessings and benefits to those around us.

Saint Rose of Lima (1586-1617) - Rose of Lima is the first saint born in the Americas. Named Isabel, her extraordinary beauty earned her the nickname of "Rose." At an early age, she dedicated herself to God. To discourage suitors, she cut her hair, and rubbed pepper and lye on her face to mar her complexion. Rose devoted her whole life to prayer and caring for the poor. As a member of the Third Order of Saint Dominic, Rose spent her last eleven years praying, fasting and embroidering lace to sell to provide alms for the poor.

Saturday, August 24, 2019
(Lec. 629)

- 1) Revelation 21:9b-14
- 2) John 1:45-51

**SAINT BARTHOLOMEW,
APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Come and see Jesus.

In the first reading, we have John's description of an angel telling him he will show him *the bride, the wife of the Lamb*. And so John is shown *the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God*. It is a glorious vision, gleaming and radiant, and includes the wall protecting the city – a wall whose foundational stones include the inscribed *names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb*. What John sees is the Church of Christ, regal in its divine beauty, whose faith is apostolic to its core and faithfully handed down.

Today we celebrate the feast of one of those Twelve Apostles: Saint Bartholomew. Identified by most scriptural scholarship as the man called Nathanael in some accounts, we hear in today's Gospel the account of his becoming a disciple. Philip is so excited about getting to know Jesus that he went and *found Nathanael and told him, we have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus ... from Nazareth*. Notice how Philip reads the Old Testament as pointing to Jesus, the long-anticipated Messiah.

Nathanael however, is skeptical: *Can anything good come from Nazareth?* Perhaps he expects the Anointed One will come from the center, Jerusalem, not from the periphery, the margins. No matter Nathanael's reason for doubting Philip's words, Philip's response to that doubt was an imperative: *Come and see*.

Nathanael, *aka* Bartholomew, does go and see. And he becomes a proclaimer of the Gospel in far lands – though it is somewhat disputed exactly which ones. Some historical documents put him in India (which was a name for an area larger than what is now considered India), while some traditions hold he was in Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, Armenia and on the shores of the Black Sea (www.newadvent.org).

Regardless of exactly where he ended up, we know how he started. Nathanael's encounter with the Lord changed everything for Nathanael. Personal encounter with Jesus Christ will change everything for us as well. When we respond to the invitation, *come and see*, Jesus looks into each one of our hearts and invites us into the intimacy of discipleship – deeper friendship with the Lord. If we do this, like Nathanael, we, too, will see greater things. And we may have the privilege of carrying the Gospel message to others.

Come and see Jesus, meet Jesus and you will know for yourself that he is the One.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 25, 2019

(Lec. 123)

- 1) Isaiah 66:18-21
- 2) Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13
- 3) Luke 13:22-30

**TWENTY-FIRST
SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Let us commit to building our relationship with the Lord.

There is a story of a novice monk who entered a monastery where the vow of silence limited all speaking to two words every ten years. After this novice completed his first decade, the abbot asked him: "What are the two words you would like to speak?" The monk said: "Bed ... hard," and the abbot said, "I see." Ten years later, the monk returned to the abbot's office and was again asked the same question: "What are the two words you would like to speak?" "Food ... stinks" said the monk. "I see," replied the abbot. Yet another ten years passed, and once again the abbot asked the monk the same question: "What are your two words now?" "I ... quit!" said the monk. "Well, I can see why," replied the abbot. "All you ever do is complain."

This monk had spent thirty years in the monastery, immersed in the Scriptures, listening and studying Jesus' teaching, attending liturgies and most importantly receiving the Eucharist – eating and drinking Jesus' body and blood – and yet somehow still missing the point of it all. His interests were not in things associated with the kingdom that Jesus speaks about, but rather in those temporal things that mattered to him. By placing his needs first, he failed to see the value of the discipline that the author of the letters to the Hebrews suggests will bring *the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it*.

His story illustrates how our attitude, and failure to act from a place of God's love, can dampen our awareness of it. For God's love, kindness and fidelity are bursting out in everything around us. If we are to proclaim the Good News to all the world, it begins by aligning our works and thoughts with the message of the cross, which truly proclaims the steadfast kindness and fidelity of God. We profess this faith when we speak two words, "I believe." Or when we affirm our belief with one word: "amen."

In a moment we, like the monk in the story, will eat of Christ's body and drink his blood. Let our "amen" in receiving him indicate not just that we believe in who he is, but that we are committed to building our relationship with him, such that we never hear the words from him, *Depart from me... I do not know where you are from*. A relationship built here on earth will allow us to *recline [with him] at table in the kingdom of God* for all eternity.

* * *

Monday, August 26, 2019
(Lec. 425)

- 1) 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5,
8b-10
 - 2) Matthew 23:13-22
- Gospel related: CCC 586, 2111

MONDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: May we enable and empower others in their faith.

Scribes and Pharisees were the religious leaders at the time of Jesus. They were scrupulously adherent to the Torah, or the Law of God, so much so that they wanted to make violating the law virtually impossible by adding more precepts and laws! However, in doing so, they lost sight of the original meaning or purpose of God's law, as Jesus points out to them in today's passage.

Jesus calls these religious leaders *blind guides*, who put lesser good – such as the Temple gold – above God and the priorities of God. They mislead their followers, and make it almost impossible for them to worship properly.

Contrast that "leadership" in faith with that to which Paul, Silvanus and Timothy refer to in Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians. Here they give thanks for and commend the people of Thessalonica *for turn[ing] to God from idols to serve the living and true God*. And for the fact that, *in every place your faith in God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything*. In other words, Paul and his companions need to add nothing to what the Thessalonians believe, or share. The fullness of the Gospel, and the law fulfilled in Christ, is within them. Unlike the Pharisees, the disciples do not hinder the people in worship and evangelization. They guide with perfect sight: they teach and empower.

As we turn to the Eucharistic table, let us pray for the grace to be the right kind of guides for one another in our communion in Christ.

* * *

Tuesday, August 27, 2019
(Lec. 426)

- 1) 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8
- 2) Matthew 23:23-26

TUESDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Monica)

FOCUS: Let us purify our hearts.

“Intentions matter.” “It’s what’s on the inside that counts.” “Be pure of heart.” Our culture has many different expressions reminding us that although what we say and do matters, the disposition of our inner selves is also important.

In the Gospel, Jesus challenges the Pharisees on their actions: what they do, and what they fail to do. Calling them hypocrites, he points out the laws they follow – tithing and washing – but tells them they *have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity*. He scolds them for attending to appearances of upholding the ritual law, that is, cleansing the *outside of cup and dish*, while failing to attend to *inside of the cup*: the purity of their motives, intentions and hearts.

Imagine using the same cup every day and never washing the inside. Even if the outside looks clean to others, the inside would quickly become disgusting with layers of residual coffee, tea or milk. Soon, the inside of the cup would be so dirty that it would contaminate anything poured into it, and therefore anything that would be ingested from the cup.

Similarly, an impure heart can contaminate our good deeds. What then pours forth from us is not only corrupted in origin, but it corrupts and affects who receives it. Note that Jesus does not tell the Pharisees to stop following the practices prescribed by ancient Jewish law. Instead, he adds that it was not enough: *these you should have done, without neglecting the others*.

In contrast, in the Letter to the Thessalonians, which is from Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, Saint Paul emphasizes the way in which they were able to minister. *We drew courage through our God*, he says. *Our exhortation was not from delusion or impure motives, nor did it work through deception. But as we were judged worthy by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, that is how we speak, not as trying to please men, but rather God, who judges our hearts*.

Jesus’ words, and Saint Paul’s letter, challenge us to be pure of heart. It reminds us to speak and act in a way that seeks to please God, not others. If our sharing of the Gospel comes from a place of genuine love of God, we won’t be preoccupied with flattering speech, praise-seeking or greed. Instead, our intentions will be pure: to spread the love of Jesus Christ and to share the Good News that Jesus died to redeem all who believe in him. If we truly love God with our whole hearts, that love should naturally spill over to loving our neighbors. If we truly love our neighbors, we should want to share the Gospel with them.

This is a truth that was known to Saint Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine, whom we memorialize today. She loved her son, knew he needed to be reined in from his worldly behaviors, and understood nothing more fully than that the Gospel message was the way to salvation. Pure of heart, she prayed constantly for her son's conversion, and we know those prayers were answered.

So as we prepare to receive the Eucharist, let us ask Christ to purify our hearts and our intentions so we too may serve him out of love of God and neighbor.

* * *

Wednesday, August 28, 2019
(Lec. 427)

- 1) 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13
- 2) Matthew 23:27-32

WEDNESDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Augustine,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

FOCUS: May we walk in a manner worthy of our calling.

Jesus uses very harsh language today in addressing the scribes and Pharisees, referring to them as *whitewashed tombs*. What an interesting turn of phrase. Not the usual insult we hear today. What does it mean? It means to *appear beautiful on the outside, but inside [be] full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth*. To outwardly *appear righteous, but [be filled] with hypocrisy and evildoing*.

This characterization is almost Shakespearean in its imagery and ridicule. And it certainly helps us to understand more vividly Saint Paul's exhortation to *walk in a manner worthy of ... God*. For we have received God's word, not simply through the testimony of mortal humans, but as Christ the Living Word of God, who lives within those who have shared it with us, and who now lives and works in us. We are not filled with dead bones and filth, but a Spirit of love and hope. Our walk in the world should reflect this reality. It should be worthy of, and point to the glory of God.

We began this walk in baptism, but our conversion to Christ is an ongoing event, not limited to a single moment in time. We are in a constant cycle of stripping away that which impedes us to follow Christ more authentically. We dare not try to simply whitewash over our sinfulness. We must break loose of bad habits, flawed thinking and uncharitable acts toward one another.

Saint Augustine, whose memorial the Church celebrates today, recognized this in himself when he began to read Scripture. Convinced by God's word, he was baptized during the Easter Vigil on April 24, 387 at the age of thirty-two. But his corpus of writings show that he understood conversion to be a life-long process. Once a great sinner, he became a great saint and Doctor of the Church.

His conversion and subsequent contributions to the faith should give each of us hope that we, too, through reconciliation to the Father, are able to impact the faith life of others. Walking in a manner worthy of God is not easy. In fact, it will lead to our own persecution at times. Others will want us to live by social norms that are contrary to our Gospel values. This battle between what is right and not right, just and unjust, moral and immoral is as old as the world in which we live. But if we remain protagonists in the story of salvation, and do not succumb to the role of the antagonist, we will find ourselves to be not whitewashed tombs, but a true temple of the Holy Spirit.

* * *

Thursday, August 29, 2019

(Lec. 428)

1) 1 Thessalonians 3:7-13

(Lec. 634)

2) Mark 6:17-29

Gospel related: **CCC** 523

THURSDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM)

The Passion of Saint John the Baptist)

FOCUS: As an encouraging community of faith in Christ, we are able to endure distress and affliction together.

Today's reading from Mark is one of the most disturbing stories in the Gospels. In this dark and dreadful scene, we see the kind of evil that Jesus and his disciples were up against. A foreshadowing of Jesus' passion, John's passion shows the extent to which enemies of God will go to defy his will and destroy his prophets. What Herod has in store for Jesus, as we know, is even worse.

We can imagine this scene, and have a sense of its darkness and dread because we, too, have experienced evil. Suffering exists in this world, because evil exists in this world. Whether it be in our own lives or the lives of others we know, we are aware that evil exists and that the enemies of God continue their efforts to defy and destroy. Physical and moral evil lead to all kinds of suffering and despair. Like John arrested and bound in prison, we may feel very much alone and afraid.

Another saint who suffered at the hands of God's enemies was Paul, whose Letter to the Thessalonians we heard in our first reading. In his mission to spread the Good News to all nations, Paul was beaten, imprisoned and eventually martyred. Because we have some of his letters, we see how Paul was able to endure such times of darkness and dread.

In the passage we read today, Paul found reassurance through the faith of his brothers and sisters in Christ. He had been distressed and afflicted, but now he could live, knowing the Thessalonians were standing firm in the Lord. He felt joy on their account, and gave thanks to God for the faithful in Thessalonica. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians in their faith, and they, in turn, encouraged him in his. Faith as a community in Christ was how they endured.

This is an important function of the Christian community: to encourage one another in faith, especially during times of darkness and distress. When we are imprisoned in suffering or despair, the faith of another is like a light breaking through the darkness of evil, so that we can find and hold onto our faith. Every time we shine a light through encouraging words, deeds or prayers, we build up the faith of one another. As a community of faith in Christ, we are able to endure distress and affliction together.

Coming together today for this liturgy is an important source of encouragement in our faith. As we pray together to be filled with the light of faith, we share this light with one another. This light of faith is the Holy Spirit, given to us by Christ, whom we prepare now to receive in the Eucharist.

Friday, August 30, 2019

(Lec. 429)

1) 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

2) Matthew 25:1-13

Gospel related: CCC 672, 796, 1618

FRIDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The Lord, comes to us each day, offering us grace regardless of our preparations and efforts.

Today's Gospel passage is one of many times in Scripture in which we are reminded to be prepared – for something. In this case, to be prepared for Christ's return, for we know neither the day nor the hour when the bridegroom will arrive. We ought to take these admonitions seriously, without giving in to too much trepidation and insecurity. Are we ready to meet Jesus? If we are honest, the most likely answer is no, of course not! But that is why God does not leave us to our own devices.

While it is commonplace to read this parable as if everything rests on the preparations and efforts of the virgins, what if we look at it through a different lens, one where the emphasis is not on the grand and scary arrival of the bridegroom or our need for heightened vigilance? For at the heart of every Gospel story is God's grace, the free gift God gives each of us not because we deserve it, but because God loves us.

In other words, everything does *not* in fact rest on our preparations and efforts. Although we may not always be the most prepared or best family or community member, the ones who love us most still love us and we receive the grace to love them in return. It is not perfect. We each have a long way to go before we reach our goal of being the ideal person in relationship to another. Yet there *is* enough grace for that day. And one day at a time, we can be growing into a more prepared, more Christ-centered, more grace-filled person.

The same is true of our journey with Jesus. We never will reach that level of complete preparation that allows us to stand before the Lord brazen and barefaced. Regardless, God does provide grace – grace that washes us anew each and every day, grace that enables us to do some good *today*. Even if we are unprepared, even if we have a long way to go, Jesus still comes to us and invites us to his wedding feast. Come and eat.

* * *

Saturday, August 31, 2019
(Lec. 430)

1) 1 Thessalonians 4:9-11

2) Matthew 25:14-30

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

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

FOCUS: May we have the grace to take what we have been given and increase it for the sake of the world.

Anyone here who has ever had a performance review at a job, received a graded exam or paper back from a professor, been coached in a sport, or simply raised by parents – can probably relate in some way to the parable in today's Gospel. Here we have someone in authority who gives his subordinates responsibility for a particular assignment and set of duties. When he returns, he evaluates their efforts. And we get to watch.

Well done, my good and faithful servant, the master says to two of his three servants. *Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities.* “Ooh,” we say. “Those guys are good! They win ‘Employee of the Month’. They should start their own business!”

You wicked, lazy servant! the master says to the third servant. And he took back what he had originally given to the servant, and then had others *throw [the] useless servant into the darkness outside.* “Ouch,” we think. “That’s a little harsh. There’s going to be an HR complaint about the master’s actions for sure. Maybe even a lawsuit!”

Given our own experiences as an employee, student, athlete or child, we would all hope that the feedback we receive would sound a lot more like that given to the first two servants, rather than the third. “Well done” and “good and faithful” are much more affirming (and motivating) than “you wicked, lazy, useless servant.”

Here’s the thing, though. This feedback wasn’t arbitrary. It was in direct response to the way these three carried out the master’s commands. By taking what was essentially a gift to them, given to each according to his ability, and then either investing in and multiplying, or hiding and hoarding it, these three servants demonstrated their worthiness for continued inclusion in that landowner’s community. They showed whether they could do the job required of them – or not.

In the kingdom of God, each one of us has been given grace and gifts according to our ability. That’s what the master has handed us, his servants. And we know what is required of us: to invest and multiply these gifts for the sake of the kingdom. As Paul writes to the Thessalonians, *we have been taught by God to love one another* (that’s our investment), but we are urged *to progress even more* (to multiply, or increase, in love).

Someday, someone will tell stories about how we led our lives. And our master will greet us when he returns. May we have the grace to take what we have been given and increase it for the sake of the world and the good of the kingdom, so that we, too, may one day hear: *Well done, my good and faithful servant.*