

JULY

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WEDDING HOMILY

- 1) Genesis 24:48-51, 58-67
- 2) Romans 12:1-2, 9-13
- 3) John 17:20-23

FOCUS: That they may be one.

Undoubtedly, so much of a wedding's festivities are planned with tradition in mind. The bride and groom have been powerfully shaped by these traditions, often in the form of stories from their friends and families. Passed on from generation to generation, there is an incredible truth revealed in these stories about who they are. Indeed, our own salvation history reveals a powerful truth of who God is and what God calls us to in our lives. Our readings today offer us an inspiring lesson on the calling that gathers us together today.

In our first reading, we hear of the union of Isaac and Rebekah. While we do not hear the origins of the story directly, this passage is a key part of our salvation history. Rebekah agrees to marry Isaac, son of Abraham, and thus there is a fulfillment of God's covenant to Abraham. In their union, God is fulfilling the promise to Abraham to make his descendants as numerous as the stars. On a more intimate level, we hear that Isaac's love for Rebekah brings him strength in difficult times. *In his love for her Isaac found solace after the death of his mother Sarah.* By answering God's call to marriage, Isaac and Rebekah's love serves as an incredible witness to God's great love for us.

In the passage from the Gospel of John, we hear Jesus' praying to the Father that his disciples may be one. Although Jesus is not talking exclusively of marriage, his prayer certainly has implications for the sacrament. He prays, *And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me.* What is the significance of being one? Why is this such an important prayer from Jesus? When we think of oneness, we might think of common attributes such as unity, wholeness, strength and indeed, love. But Jesus is praying that we, as disciples, might be one in God the Father. The oneness of Jesus' prayer is not just what we commonly think of, but a whole other level. To become one in the Father is to grow closer in God's love. This is the incredible grace of the sacrament of marriage – God's presence is always present in the journey.

Jesus' prayer – that they may be one – is our prayer here today. This sacrament is a continuation of the grace found throughout our story as God's people, tracing back to Isaac and Rebekah and beyond. May the love of the couple we celebrate today not only bring them closer to God, but also be a powerful witness of God's love to the entire world.

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FUNERAL HOMILY

- 1) 2 Maccabees 12:43-46
- 2) 1 Corinthians 15:20-28
- 3) John 6:37-40

FOCUS: Christ rose from the dead, so that we might be raised on the last day.

The readings we heard today offer us a brief sketch of what Scripture tells us about life after death. Even before Jesus was born, the author of 2 Maccabees expresses a strong belief in the resurrection of the body. He interprets Judas' actions as an offering on behalf of the dead, so that they may be freed from sin and receive their reward. He explains that if Judas *were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death.*

One might say the same about us. Why do we gather to pray for members of our community who have died, if we do not believe that there is life after death? Like Saint Paul, we know that Jesus' death and resurrection changed the course of human history by reversing the punishment of Adam and opening the way to eternal life with God. If this were not the case, we would not be here.

In his first Letter to the Corinthians, just before the passage we heard today, Paul writes, *if Christ has not been raised, your faith is in vain* (15:17). But, he insists, Christ has been raised. He calls him the *firstfruits*, a harvest metaphor meaning that Christ's offering of himself in death consecrates the rest of us to the Father as well. Because Christ was raised, so will we be. Christ has gone ahead to make a way for us. When he returns, he will bring all who belong to him into the heavenly kingdom.

According to our Gospel reading, Jesus has been charged by the Father not to lose anything he has been given. God the Father wills *that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life* and be raised up on the last day. This was why the Son was sent into the world, and he will not reject anyone who comes to him seeking new life.

When faced with the death of a loved one, it can be hard to believe in resurrection. How can we hold onto hope, when suffering and death surround us? The mystery of the kingdom of God is that it is already present, but not yet complete. We come closest to the kingdom when we participate in the Eucharistic celebration – worshipping God with all the angels and saints.

N. belonged to Christ in life, and Christ will not lose him/her in death. When our lives on earth end, we can hope that s/he has made a path for us to follow and that s/he will greet us at the gates of the kingdom. Until that day, let us continue to pray for him/her and for all who have died, that at the end of their journey they will see God face-to-face.

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**YEAR C
WEEKDAYS I**

Monday, July 1, 2019

(Lec. 377)

1) Genesis 18:16-33

2) Matthew 8:18-22

MONDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Junipero Serra, Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC 2444**

FOCUS: Let our allegiance to Christ be our first priority.

Today's Gospel reading highlights two sorts of disciples. At face value, the scribe gives Jesus his total commitment, announcing that he will follow Jesus anywhere. Jesus gives a sobering response by effectively saying that the places he is headed are humble at best, as foxes and birds have better accommodations than him. The second disciple who approaches him, in contrast, asks for more time to tend to family obligations before following Jesus. Jesus makes what sounds like an insensitive rebuke, instructing the man to follow him *and let the dead bury their dead*.

These two encounters remind us of the paramount importance of placing Christ and his mission first in our lives. In Jesus' response to the scribe, we have an opportunity to think about the human tendency toward "flash in the pan" allegiances, and subsequent de-committing from situations and relationships when the going gets tough. But baptism into Christ requires continual commitment in good times as well as in the challenging times.

The second disciple stands as an example of just about everyone, and our daily obligations in life. We all have responsibilities to family, work or school that hold importance and urgency. Jesus' words remind us that following him must always come first. That is, a commitment to Christ *compels* what we do in the context of our families, work and school. And we need to guard against using our to-do lists as excuses for why we are not able to follow more directly the path to which Christ is calling each of us.

Faithfulness and commitment to Christ, and allowing him to be the prime mover of everything else we do, is the message here. Of course, it is important to pay the bills or do homework that will help us grow in knowledge. But they must be done in service to our relationship with God, where we set our sights on the Lord first and foremost, then subsequently order all other priorities.

So as we prepare to receive Christ in the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of our faith, let us resolve to take *forth* from here what we take *in* here, and allow the living Christ within us to be our first priority.

Saint Junipero Serra (1713-1784) Junipero Serra was a Franciscan missionary responsible for spreading Christianity throughout California when the West Coast was still mission territory. He founded or helped establish twenty-one missions, including San Diego and San Francisco. Junipero chose to walk from mission to mission, even though he had a walking disability and suffered from asthma. By the time his life's work was finished, he had traveled approximately 5,500 miles on foot.

Tuesday, July 2, 2019

(Lec. 378)

1) Genesis 19:15-29

2) Matthew 8:23-27

Gospel related: CCC 2610

TUESDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Keep our eyes on God and his will.

How often do we lose focus on everyday things? Probably several times throughout the day, as we are distracted from our tasks by a phone call, or a failed attempt at multi-tasking. How, then, do we keep our focus on what should be the most important thing in our life – God?

Focusing on God does not have to mean spending every minute in prayer, reading Scripture or meditating on the great mysteries of our faith – although these are all excellent practices for spiritual growth! Rather, it means keeping our entire selves centered upon and pointed toward our greatest good, and ultimate end, who is God. And once that laser beam sight line is set, we then order all other things in our life in proper relation to it.

We seek his will in all we do. We pursue holiness, knowing that heaven is our goal. We ensure that we leave space for him to work in our lives. We trust that no matter what other disturbances arise, God will not leave us. We may close our eyes to him, but he is still there. Unfortunately, so are the consequences of our losing sight of him.

In today's first reading, we hear of Lot's escape from Sodom before the Lord destroys the cities in the region. When Lot determines that he cannot make it as far as God asked him to go, he dares to ask God if another town is suitable. God, in his goodness and mercy, allows Lot and his family to go there safely. His wife, however, disobeys God's commandment and looks behind her – she takes her eyes off God's will for their family. As a result, she is turned into a pillar of salt.

This may seem like an extreme penalty at first glance, but she was not punished. She simply reaped the natural consequences of disobeying God and taking her eyes off of him. Her *disbelieving soul* (Cf., Wisdom 10:7) evaporated the breath of life within her. Sin always has negative consequences.

Sin is not the only reason we lose sight of God, however. We are human. Emotions and fear get in our way. Faulty knowledge or understanding can impede our progress. In today's Gospel, the disciples focus on the raging sea rather than on Jesus, who is there with them in the boat, although asleep. Sometimes in our lives it may seem like God is sleeping or otherwise absent from our struggles. But Jesus says to us as he said to the disciples: *Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?* The same God who has the power to calm the stormy seas can calm the storms we face in our own lives, if we simply go to him asking for him to save us.

As we encounter the Lord in the Eucharist today, let us pray that by receiving him we may be strengthened to keep God at the center – the focus – of our lives. May we seek God's will and not become distracted by the tumult around us, and may we trust that our loving God knows what we need and will protect us.

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Wednesday, July 3, 2019

(Lec. 593)

1) Ephesians 2:19-22

2) John 20:24-29

Gospel related: CCC 448, 644, 645, 659

**SAINT THOMAS,
APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Let us honor Thomas the Apostle for his fidelity to Christ.

The story of Thomas the Apostle is familiar to all of us. Chosen as one of the original Twelve, Thomas is best remembered as the one who doubted; in fact he is often referred to as “Thomas the Doubter.” But there is more to this saint than one moment of doubt following the Resurrection. Indeed, to define him by that one momentary lapse would be to ignore the rest of his faithful life, his journey of faith in the presence of Jesus, or his own faithful ministry and preaching that would ultimately lead to his martyrdom.

The Gospel passage we hear today is one that we also hear annually on Divine Mercy Sunday during the Easter season. At its heart is not so much Thomas’ doubt, but Jesus’ loving response to his refusal to believe without seeing. Thomas was not present when the risen Lord first appeared and so was asked to rely on the secondhand word of others. But he demanded proof before he would believe.

It is into this moment of doubt that the risen Christ steps in with love and understanding. And as Thomas stands before Christ, he is given that proof! Yet notice how gently and lovingly Jesus takes him from his firm refusal to believe, to a moment of great faith. Offering peace and giving instruction, Jesus coaxes from Thomas one of the great declarations of faith: *My Lord and my God!* In that moment of encounter, Thomas is transformed.

Tradition tells us that Thomas preached the Gospel in places as far away as Persia and India. Indeed, Thomas paid the ultimate price of fidelity to Christ in the area we now know as Chennai, India. Jealous of his success in preaching the Gospel, local pagan religious leaders confronted Thomas and stabbed him to death with a lance.

Today, as we honor this Apostle for his fidelity to Christ, we are reminded that God never defines us by our weaknesses or our failures – never writes us off for our lack of belief. Instead, he is always available for us to encounter him – especially his real presence here in the Eucharist – and to be transformed, as Thomas was.

Thursday, July 4, 2019

(Lec. 380)

1) Genesis 22:1b-19

2) Matthew 9:1-8

THURSDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Independence Day
in United States of America)

Note: for Independence Day, any readings from the *Lectionary for Ritual Masses* (vol. IV), the Mass "For the Country or a City," Nos. 882-886, or "For Peace and Justice," nos. 887-891

FOCUS: When confronted with loss, the stories of Abraham and the paralytic can help us find courage.

Today's readings help us consider the themes of loss and of restoration. In Genesis, Abraham is asked to surrender that which is most precious to him: his only son. In the Gospel, a paralytic has already had something taken from him, his health, and it is restored by Jesus.

The loss of something dear to us is a painful part of life – perhaps some in our community are facing that right now. Loss can take on many forms: It could be work-related; an accident; a misunderstanding; an illness; a death. The loss of something precious can be debilitating. It can cause despair; it can leave wounds that deepen over time

What do we do in the face of such loss? How do we respond?

In the first reading, Abraham repeats one phrase in two different places. When God calls him, Abraham answers, *Here I am*. Later, when God's messenger calls him, he again answers, *Here I am*. Abraham is facing the loss of his precious son. By now he may be feeling the despair that many of us feel when we face loss; he responds very simply, *Here I am*.

The Gospel describes restoration, the restoration of health to a person who is paralyzed. Note that it is not because of the *paralytic's* (alone) faith that he is healed. Rather, Scripture tells us that others brought the paralytic to Jesus and that *Jesus saw their faith*. We do not know who is included in the word *their*, but what we *do* know is that the young man had to rely on others to carry him to Jesus. And the first thing that Jesus says is, *Courage, child*. Jesus' first words are to comfort and to reassure.

Both readings can provide a helpful framework for our own struggles. During a time of trial, it may be that the only thing we can offer to God are the words *Here I am*, and nothing more. We may be unable to "get ourselves to Jesus" when we feel we need it most, and so we need to rely on *others* to carry us, to bring us to the one who will heal, the one who will say to us, *Courage, child*.

As we prepare to celebrate the Eucharist, let us remember these reassuring words from our Lord. After this celebration, let us bring this encouragement to others.

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Friday, July 5, 2019

(Lec. 381)

- 1) Genesis 23:1-4, 19;
24:1-8, 62-67
- 2) Matthew 9:9-13

FRIDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Anthony Zaccaria, Priest,
USA: Saint Elizabeth of Portugal)

Gospel related: CCC 581, 589, 2100

FOCUS: Mercy does not deny sin but redeems it.

The Pharisees could probably win a prize for being the group we most love to hate in the New Testament. Still, it is hard not to defend them in despising the tax collectors. After all, these were Jews who not only collaborated with the Roman authorities that were occupying Israel, they also made their money by extorting more than was legally due from their own people. The Pharisees were just stepping back and calling them out.

Indeed, in Aramaic the word Pharisee means “separated ones.” The Pharisees separated themselves from “the impure,” or those who violated the law. They knew who the tax collectors and sinners in Jesus’ presence were, and considered themselves to be better and more holy. This is what Jesus is reacting to in his encounter with them – this self-aggrandizement of the Pharisees.

Go and learn the meaning of the words, I desire mercy, not sacrifice, he scolds, quoting the prophet Hosea. Hosea, whose prophecy also indicated the need for *knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings* (6:6). This was knowledge of God the Pharisees clearly did not have.

For if they had such knowledge, they would understand that even their own people who had sinned could be redeemed, could in fact be a chosen disciple of the Son of God. They would understand that their own outward sacrifice in following the letter of the law was not enough. They would recognize their own sinfulness as a part of that which evoked God’s mercy for the whole world.

For I did not come to call the righteous but sinners, Jesus says. God’s mercy is not an overlooking of sin, but his redemptive response to it. When we are merciful to others, we are not denying the reality of sin, but participating in the building of the kingdom brought about in Jesus Christ and alive in us through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We call one another to a higher standard. We love as we are loved.

We are all sinners. That’s the sad reality. But God is generous in his everlasting mercy. And that’s the Good News.

Saint Anthony Zaccaria (1502-1539) Anthony Zaccaria came from a noble family in Cremona, Italy, and became a physician and priest. He participated in the work of the Counter-Reformation. Through his vigorous preaching, missions and public penance, he sought to reverse the moral decline and decadence he saw around him. He founded three religious communities, one for men, one for women and one for married couples.

Saint Elizabeth of Portugal (1271-1336) As the queen of Portugal, Elizabeth was a model for peacemakers today. She intervened to prevent wars among European royalty, even riding a mule to stand between armies in one instance. Her fidelity and patient prayer succeeded in converting her husband, Denis, from his immorality and the two became influential mediators between countries. Upon his death, Elizabeth joined the Third Order of Saint Francis and spent the rest of her life caring for the poor.

Saturday, July 6, 2019

(Lec. 382)

1) Genesis 27:1-5, 15-29

2) Matthew 9:14-17

SATURDAY OF

13TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Maria Goretti, Virgin and Martyr;

Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: Jesus established a new relationship between God and us, one with the intimacy of parent and child.

Fasting can be a good thing for us to do. It can help us think better. It can be part of a diet that will make us more fit and healthy. It can be a form of sacrifice that is good for our soul and our relationship with God. But there is a time for fasting, and a time for celebrating. It is nearly impossible for us to celebrate and fast at the same time.

In today's Gospel, Jesus indicates that while he is with his disciples they are celebrating his presence. The time for solemnity and sacrifice will come, but Jesus is the Messiah the Jews have been waiting generations for, and rejoicing is the proper attitude.

The question about fasting was posed by the followers of John the Baptist. They are on the right path to God's kingdom, but they are not sure why there are such differences between Jesus' practices and John's. With his parables about the new wine in old wineskins and the torn cloak patched with new cloth, Jesus is telling all the listeners that he is ushering in a new set of practices, a new way of worshiping God.

First, it is a time of joy. Second, it is a time of change. The old way of worship has been good and appropriate, like the old cloth and the old wineskins, but they are no longer sufficient for what God has in store for those who will follow Jesus. The old ways had lost much of their meaning as they had become habits rather than conscious acts of adoration. They also did not truly honor and represent the relationship between God and humankind.

With the Incarnation of Jesus, humankind was raised to a new level of closeness with God. And, while some things would remain, like awe and worship, dependence and obedience, a new relationship was established. It brought us a new sense of intimacy and love. Not only was Jesus the Son of God, but through him we all were given the privilege of knowing ourselves as children of God. This new depth of relationship cannot be *patched into* the old way of communicating with God. It is a whole new approach. It colors every aspect of our lives. And it demands much of us, as well.

Fasting and tithing and following other rituals is not enough to make this deeper relationship work. God requires us to give our whole heart, whole mind, whole soul and whole strength to this relationship, and to show that we are giving these things by how we treat our neighbor. And that's why Jesus did not require his disciples to fast like the Pharisees. God asks a lot of us, but we never come out on the short end of the arrangement.

Saint Maria Goretti (1890-1902) - Maria Goretti of Italy is the patron saint of youth and young girls, and of all rape victims and abused children because she chose martyrdom over submitting to sexual harassment and rape. Her forgiveness of the attacker who stabbed her to death led to his repentance and eventual life as a monk after his release from prison. She was canonized by Pope Pius XII in 1950.

SUNDAY, JULY 7, 2019

(Lec. 102)

1) Isaiah 66:10-14c

2) Galatians 6:14-18

3) Luke 10:1-12, 17-20, or 10:1-9

Gospel related: **CCC** 765, 787, 2122, 2611 **CSDC** 259, 492

**FOURTEENTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: *The Kingdom of God is at hand*, and that requires something of everyone – repentance and faith.

Jesus is God. He can do all things. Does he need the help of the seventy-two he sends out two by two in today's Gospel? No, and yes. No, because he saves the world all by himself. Yes, however, because he wants humanity to assist him in building the kingdom and bringing salvation to all humankind. He is setting in motion the building up of the Church that will take up the reins of leadership after he has ascended into heaven.

Jesus sends these men out to heal the sick, forgive sins, cast out demons and announce the kingdom of God. The harvest is plenty, the laborers are few. By chapter ten of Luke, which we heard from today, Jesus has already begun his final journey to Jerusalem – and to Calvary. Jesus knows his days are numbered, but the whole world must be touched by his message.

The chosen ones are told to travel lightly. All they can carry with them besides the clothing on their back is total trust in the providence of God to meet their needs. Hospitality would be the measure by which they would gauge the success or failure of their mission. Where God's word was welcomed, people would also welcome those who preached it. Likewise, where the Gospel was rejected, these disciples would shake the dust from their feet and move on to other towns. History shows acceptance and rejection from Jewish and Gentile communities alike.

The underlying truth of these instructions, it seems, is this: Whether people want to listen or not, regardless of whether they come to believe it or not, *the Kingdom of God is [in fact] at hand*. And this fact requires something of everyone – repentance and faith. Jesus has given the disciples power over *serpents and scorpions* – they have nothing to fear if they trust in the Lord. The same is true for all who believe.

Remember that Jesus said, *the harvest is abundant but the laborers are few*. The laborers are you and me. They are not some "other people." So let's start the work of the kingdom today by traveling lightly, shedding the excess baggage of sin and worry, and depending on God to complete the great work he has begun in us.

Isaiah said, *The Lord's power shall be known to his servants*. This explains the unparalleled success of the early Church's first missionary excursion. From Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, all will experience the comfort and love of a merciful God thanks to the preaching of a chosen few.

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Monday, July 8, 2019

(Lec. 383)

1) Genesis 28:10-22a

2) Matthew 9:18-26

MONDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We may struggle, yet at all times God is faithful.

As people of faith, we are continually called to place our trust in God. Yet, like the men and women in today's readings, we may struggle to fully and freely do so.

In the first reading from Genesis, God speaks to Jacob, promising land, plentiful descendants and protection for his risky journey to Haran. Jacob is delightfully surprised to hear from God, but does not fully trust God. So he makes a deal: *If* God follows through with his promises, *then* the Lord shall be his God. Jacob wants proof before he is willing to trust.

In the Gospel, an official interrupts Jesus' speaking, and begs Jesus to come and lay hands on his dying daughter. The official wants to trust, but he is worried. He needs to see immediate action. Jesus gets up and goes with the official to his house. Jesus offers reassurance: *The girl is not dead but sleeping*. Sure enough, the girl rises as Jesus takes her by the hand.

On his way to the official's home, Jesus passes a hemorrhaging woman. She does not call out, create a commotion or demand that Jesus act. Rather, she simply reaches out her hand in trust. By merely touching the tassel of Jesus' cloak, she is cured. She receives affirmation from Jesus for her great trust: *Courage, daughter! Your faith has saved you!*

These are biblical examples of the struggle to fully and freely place our trust in God. Sometimes, like the hemorrhaging woman, we courageously reach out in trust. Other times, like the desperate official, we need immediate action and reassurance. Or, like the obstinate Jacob, we wait for proof before we will trust.

We may struggle, yet at all times God is faithful. Jacob is blessed as promised, the official's daughter is raised and the woman's hemorrhage is healed. This is the Good News.

Though our capacity to trust may waver, God does not waver in his blessings. God's fidelity is not dependent on ours. He was faithful first. Let us bear this good news in mind for times when we worry and hesitate to trust. All we need to do is reach out our hands in trust, as did the hemorrhaging woman.

We are called to place our trust in the God who created us, called us through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saved us through Jesus, and remains with us in the Holy Spirit. May our coming together in this Eucharist strengthen us with courage to place our trust ever more fully and freely in our faithful and trustworthy God.

Tuesday, July 9, 2019

(Lec. 384)

1) Genesis 32:23-33

2) Matthew 9:32-38

TUESDAY OF

14TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Augustine Zhao Rong,

Priest and Companions,

Martyrs)

Gospel related: **CCC 2611 CSDC 259**

FOCUS: Jesus is the promised Messiah, and he sends us on a mission to proclaim his kingdom.

In today's first reading, Jacob wrestles with *some man* throughout the night. We learn that this was a divine being, who gives Jacob a new name, *Israel*, because he has *contended with divine and human beings and [has] prevailed*. He is the father from whom the tribes of Israel will rise, and his life is a microcosm of the Israelites' journey through history. A journey that we know is accompanied by God's promise of redemption.

In our Gospel reading today, the descendants of Israel, the recipients of God's promise, are present in the crowds. Jesus pities them, because they are *troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd*. When Jesus casts out a demon from a man who was mute, the Pharisees fail to accept Jesus' healing as God's work. The crowds are amazed, but no one recognizes Jesus as the Messiah promised to their ancestors.

So Jesus says to his disciples, *The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few*. And in a few verses after today's reading, Jesus will send the Twelve Apostles themselves on a mission to *the lost sheep of the house of Israel* to teach and heal in his name (10:6). This mission will later include the Gentiles. And here we are. Two thousand years later, the Catholic Church still carries on the mission that Jesus gave to the Apostles, to make disciples of all nations. From the time of Moses, through Abraham and Jacob-Israel, and then by the sacrifice of Jesus, God has remained faithful to his promise of redemption.

Jacob faced the mysterious man alone during the night. We meet Christ in the daylight in baptism, surrounded by witnesses. And as Jacob saw God face-to-face and lived, so we, too, are here to meet Jesus Christ face-to-face in the Eucharist. Jacob left his wrestling match blessed and wounded, bearing a visible mark of his encounter with the divine. When we receive the Eucharist, we, like Jacob, are transformed; we are healed and nourished by our encounter with the body of Christ.

So as did Jacob, let us accept our mission – Christ's mission – to teach and heal in his name. To bear the face of Christ in our families and communities, workplaces and schools. To go first to those whose need is greatest. And then, when we, too, see God face to face, we can say as Jacob did, *my life has been spared*.

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Wednesday, July 10, 2019
(Lec. 385)

- 1) Genesis 41:55-57;
42:5-7a, 17-24a
 - 2) Matthew 10:1-7
- Gospel related: **CCC** 543

WEDNESDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God's loving mercy is a gift offered to everyone.

The twelve sons of Jacob became the fathers of the twelve nations of Israel. Their lifeblood became the cultural and spiritual foundation for the Jewish people. Yet, they were far from perfect. They were a family rife with jealousy, grief and brokenness. And eleven of them had sold the twelfth, Joseph, into slavery. It is no wonder, then, that Joseph struggles when he is reunited with his brothers in Egypt. Joseph had to be reconciled to his brothers, and he wept at the enormity of the task.

The Twelve Apostles of Jesus were the first proclaimers of the Gospel. Like Jacob's sons, they were far from perfect. Of the Twelve called in the Gospel passage today, one of them betrayed Jesus and had to be replaced. Another denied Jesus, and all the rest but one, John, abandoned him at the cross.

Twelve sons established the nations of Israel. Twelve Apostles helped establish the kingdom and built the Church that Christ founded. In biblical numerology – that is, the study of the importance of numbers in the Scriptures – “twelve” signifies perfection, or completion. It also signifies God's power and authority. And what all of this can tell us today is that God brings perfection and completion out of imperfection. His power and authority are not limited or constrained by human fealty or frailty.

All the world came to Joseph to obtain rations of grain, for famine had gripped the whole world. And Joseph, seeing the suffering of all who came, dispensed the rations to all the people. First to the Egyptians, and then to anyone who sought relief. At a much later time, all the world came to be in need of redemption, for sin and darkness gripped the whole world. And God, seeing the suffering of all who called out to him, dispensed his mercy to all the people, in the person of Jesus Christ. First to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and then to every people who repented and believed.

Joseph wept at the enormity of his task. Jesus agonized in the garden over the trials he was to face. But God, and all of heaven, rejoices in the repentance and reconciliation of each one of us. Jesus offers healing mercy. Remember that we are not alone. Even our spiritual ancestors struggled to get it right. The fathers of the Jewish nation sold their own brother into slavery! Still, God continued to reach out and forgive them. If God can forgive and heal those relationships, then God can heal us, too.

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Thursday, July 11, 2019

(Lec. 386)

- 1) Genesis 44:18-21,
23b-29; 45:1-5
- 2) Matthew 10:7-15

THURSDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Benedict,
Abbot)

Gospel related: **CCC** 1509, 2121, 2122, 2443 **CSDC** 184

FOCUS: Our redemption calls us to love.

Today we memorialize Saint Benedict, who in the sixth century founded the great Abbey of Monte Cassino in Italy. There he wrote “the Rule,” which has guided the Benedictine way of life since. Focused on a life of asceticism, prayer, work, community life and study, Benedictine monks did not set out to evangelize other peoples as much as to construct an existence around the *Quaerere Deum*, or “the search for God.” The search for God was an interior one, undertaken not as if he cannot be found, but as a life lived in such intimate relationship to God that one prefers nothing to the love of Christ.

Our readings today offer us two different views of this search for God. In the first reading, Joseph’s family finds redemption after a long, tumultuous journey. Their family had deep wounds of division, which probably felt insurmountable to Joseph. His brothers’ jealousy had driven them to sell him into slavery. We hear how they have come to truly know the pain they have caused. Judah earnestly describes to Joseph the suffering they have gone through, not realizing he is actually speaking to Joseph.

When Joseph sees the powerful transformation after so many years, he is profoundly moved and reveals his true identity. There is tremendous power in their conversions of heart. Their family has been redeemed through profound healing, and demonstrates the magnitude of love. In their quest for putting God first and foremost in their lives, they have answered the call to follow God more closely.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells his Apostles to announce the kingdom of heaven. To do that, they are told to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and drive out demons – great signs to perform, but not easy tasks. In their work, they are told to minister humbly, not charging for their services and not to bring anything excessive. We do not hear in this passage of their reaction, but we can certainly appreciate our own feelings of doubt as we hear Jesus’ call. And yet, we know how the story has evolved. We know of the great things that have been done in the two thousand years since this call was first made.

As we listen to Matthew’s Gospel, we might be struck by the sharpness of Jesus’ instructions to the Apostles. Here he is, sending them out to do the profoundly important task of proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Jesus acknowledges the potential challenges they might face, including rejection. As baptized Christians, we might also feel intimidated by the hardships that lay before us in our call to discipleship. And here is where Saint Benedict’s life and spirituality can be of assistance.

Today, as followers of Christ, we, too, are called to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and drive out demons. How are we to accomplish this? First, we are called to listen to God in our lives. Second, we consider who the sick, the hopeless, the marginalized are in our world today and we minister to them. In other words, we prefer nothing to the love of Christ.

Every time we gather at the Eucharistic table, we are reminded of our redemption in Christ's sacrifice. As we are sent forth from Mass, we witness to Christ's transformative love in our families and in our world. We are called to live that truth, and to bring the hope of Christ's sacrifice and redemption to our world.

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Friday, July 12, 2019

(Lec. 387)

1) Genesis 46:1-7, 28-30

2) Matthew 10:16-23

Gospel related: CCC 161, 728, 764, 1821

FRIDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The Father's love is a reuniting love.

The Book of Genesis provides an interesting portrait of an ancient version of the dysfunctional family. Leading up to today's passage, Jacob's family had hit an all-time low: first, his beloved son, Joseph, had been sold into slavery in Egypt – and by his very own brothers! Second, a devastating famine hit, and Jacob's remaining sons had to travel to Egypt to acquire food. While there they were forgiven by, and reconciled with, their long-lost brother, Joseph, who was a governor in Egypt.

Today, we heard God instruct Jacob to travel to Egypt where he will be reunited with his son. Jacob does meet his beloved son along the way, in Goshen, and the image of their reunion is striking: father and son weeping in one another's arms, full of relief and joy at the conclusion of years of separation and disunity. The message is clear: No dysfunctional family is beyond repair; no relational chasm is too wide for the healing love of God.

What, then, are we to make of today's Gospel, in which Jesus warns that *Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child: children will rise up against parents and have them put to death*? Jesus' warning to his disciples is blunt: Their allegiance to him will lead to persecution and division, likely from their very own families. Yet amid Jesus' frightening prediction, there is hope. *When they hand you over, Jesus says, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*

Throughout Scripture, we are reminded of the extravagant love of God, who is likened to a father yearning and searching for his child. Upon being reunited with us through his Son, the Father and Son give us the Spirit, and in doing so, no separation remains. Jesus' disciples needed this reassurance as they struggled to come to grips with the trials that awaited them. No matter what persecutions lay ahead, the Spirit would be there to guide them.

The same love of the Father is present to us amid our own family struggles. The same Spirit provides words even when our families are torn apart. Though following Jesus requires radical allegiance and perhaps unanticipated sacrifices (sometimes even separation from one's loved ones), we can hold fast to the examples of Jacob and Joseph, of God the Father and Christ the Son because all separation – even that produced by death itself – is eradicated by God's love.

We experience this most profoundly in the Eucharist, of which we are about to partake. Christ who died for us is also risen – and is present to us and within us. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of the sacrament, we are transformed and sent to be the presence of God's love to the rest of the world. May we always have the fortitude and wisdom to do so.

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Saturday, July 13, 2019

(Lec. 388)

- 1) Genesis 49:29-32;
50:15-26a
- 2) Matthew 10:24-33

SATURDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Henry;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 14, 305, 363, 765, 1034, 1816, 2145

FOCUS: Be not afraid, for God cares for us, even in the face of suffering and evil.

Our first reading today features the conclusion of the story of Joseph and his brothers. At the climax of this dramatic story, the brothers return to Joseph and beg his forgiveness. This is a big ask for them, for after attempting to murder Joseph, selling him into slavery and lying about his death to their father, they have a lot for which they need to be forgiven! Joseph's forgiveness ensures their survival and the lineage of the patriarch Jacob. Along with this pivotal act of forgiveness, Joseph offers both a profound insight, and an exhortation: *Even though you meant harm to me, Joseph said, God meant it for good ... Therefore have no fear.*

In the face of evil, Joseph sees that God has taken care of him and even used these events to bring about God's good will. Scholars have identified Joseph's insight as critical for interpreting God's relationship with his people in the Old Testament. Just as hard times befell Joseph, the Israelites also suffer many things: wandering in the desert, evil kings, enslavement in Babylon and much more. Through these experiences of suffering, persecution and abandonment, Joseph's insight offers a key to the Israelites: Even when others might try to harm them, God can use evil to bring about good, so they need not be afraid.

In today's Gospel, Jesus addresses his disciples whom he is sending out on mission. He knows they will suffer persecution, just as he has. Three times Jesus exhorts his disciples, *do not be afraid!* He knows well what challenges they will face, yet he knows, too, the One whose mission they are going to accomplish. Jesus knows the Father, who in his sovereign care counts each hair on our heads. Jesus tells his disciples – those in today's Gospel and all of us – *do not be afraid!* We each have struggles and sufferings that are real, some of which may be present to us right now. Our God who sees all, knows all, and can work through all, loves us and is working things for our good, even in the midst of suffering and evil. Let us heed the Lord's words and cast off our fear, clinging to the One who can and will save us, today and always.

* * *

SUNDAY, JULY 14, 2019

(Lec. 105)

1) Deuteronomy 30:10-14

2) Colossians 1:15-20

3) Luke 10:25-37

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

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We owe God our full-hearted “yes.”

Today’s Scriptures present us with a challenge: to live out our Christian lives wholeheartedly, to love God with everything that is in us, and to put aside our own comfort and ease in the service of our neighbor – especially at the moment we see our neighbor in need.

In the first reading, Moses presents us with this deep challenge as he tells his fellow Israelites to return to God *with all your heart and all your soul*, listening to God and obeying God’s commands. In the Gospel, the scholar seems to understand this demand when he tells Jesus that the way to eternal life is to *love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.*

This is a tall order, and it calls on us to examine our conscience. It asks us to think about all that we do each day, and ask ourselves whether or not we are indeed loving God and neighbor absolutely and completely. We might consider how we give this love in the midst of our busy lives, when we have children to take care of, jobs that call on much of our attention each day, and responsibilities to our friends and our community.

One way to do this is through love and service to our neighbor – especially at difficult and inconvenient times. That was certainly the case in Jesus’ parable in the Gospel. The Samaritan probably had his own plans for the day as he walked along the road. Yet the moment he saw the robbers’ victim lying on the road, severely injured, he dropped his plans and responded. He showed incredible care for this stranger, his neighbor, even changing his plans to return the next day to ensure that this neighbor was looked after.

This great love for God and neighbor is a “simple” command that we all know can at times be difficult to follow. Moses reminds us that God’s law is written within our hearts. All we need is to listen to God as he speaks within our hearts, and respond fully to what we are told to do at each individual moment. This could mean praise and adoration of God – or responding to the immediate situation: calling a friend whose mother died, listening to a child’s tale of woe or helping the stranger at our door.

As we approach the altar, let us pray for open, loving hearts and minds, ready to respond immediately out of total love for God to whatever is demanded of us at each moment.

* * *

Monday, July 15, 2019

(Lec. 389)

- 1) Exodus 1:8-14, 22
- 2) Matthew 10:34–11:1

MONDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Bonaventure,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 858, 1506, 2232 **CSDC** 193

FOCUS: Let us choose Jesus.

Today we celebrate the memorial of Saint Bonaventure, a Franciscan scholar of great intellect who made Jesus the center of everything in his life. He was a master of theology who taught the Bible and medieval theology, and produced many works, including commentaries, on Scripture and the early Church.

It is fitting, then, for the Church to have these readings today – even as there are other optional readings for the day – as they put before us an opportunity to honor Saint Bonaventure by trying to reconcile some difficult concepts.

For example, Jesus' words in today's Gospel may sound harsh at first: bringing the sword and causing division in families. How can that be good? It is good because it destroys the false peace of sinners. Christ's presence brings about a division between the faithful and the unfaithful. Notice that his presence "brings about" the division, that is, it makes it visible. It doesn't actually cause it. It is we who cause it by taking our place on either side of the double-edged sword: the word of God pierces us to the soul and we either accept it, or we do not.

But Jesus' words are not all negative. For those who accept the word of God, for those who are receptive and welcoming to godly people in their lives, reward and peace are theirs. If we serve others simply because they are doing the Lord's work, God will reward us in the next life. That should be an encouragement to each of us!

When we forget what God has done for us and for his people across the ages, our hearts can become hardened like the pharaoh's heart. While we don't make such drastic, cruel decisions as the pharaoh did, there are many small ways in which we choose sin. The question is how to avoid choosing comfort, power, stability or even peace when we are instead called to put God first. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI shares these wise words in his encyclical *Spe Salvi* (*Saved by Hope*): greatness means "to be filled by God" (l. 33). Jesus himself tells us that we must take up our crosses, even losing our lives for his sake.

So today, let's each take a moment to reflect on the good things God has given us and thank him. Then, let us ask the Holy Spirit to show us the places in our lives where we choose the easier path rather than the godly path. As we approach Jesus in the Eucharist, let us pray that he will strengthen us to carry our crosses and consistently choose him.

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Tuesday, July 16, 2019

(Lec. 390)

- 1) Exodus 2:1-15a
- 2) Matthew 11:20-24

TUESDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Our Lady of Mount Carmel)

Gospel related: **CCC** 678

FOCUS: God's work in us will transform our lives.

The psalm in today's reading is poignant: *I am sunk in the abysmal swamp ... the flood overwhelms me*. The imagery is clear and the sentiment relatable. We have all felt that sinking, overwhelming feeling – the “where will I turn?” questioning. There is a powerlessness in these moments of struggle where the world, and the conditions around us, are simply out of our control. It is hard, but we need to accept with humility that we are not the savior of the world and we need not try to save ourselves.

For the psalm also gives us the place to go: *Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live*. The failure of the towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida to do this is, in essence, why Jesus reproaches them in today's Gospel. They have seen the signs, but they have not repented. They are drowning in sin, but they have not turned to the Lord. Adding insult to the injury of their obstinance, they do not even measure up to the pagan cities of the Old Testament that were on the verge of being destroyed, and yet would have turned from their evil ways had they seen the signs and deeds Jesus performed.

Like the psalmist, when power and control is stripped from us, when we are left with nothing, we praise God when we cry out to him in our need. That is when we are most open to hearing God's call and allowing ourselves to be transformed by it. But we need to acknowledge and recognize him first – repenting of the ways we have failed him – and that is something the citizens of Chorazin and Bethsaida did not do. We are not told why this is the case, but in looking at ourselves we could easily identify pride, arrogance and selfishness as reasons for why we may not do so.

Today we have a chance to reflect upon what, if anything, is keeping us from either reaching out to God in our need, or hearing God's call. Whatever it is, let us pray for the grace to remove that obstacle and truly *turn to the Lord in [our] need*.

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Wednesday, July 17, 2019

(Lec. 391)

1) Exodus 3:1-6, 9-12

2) Matthew 11:25-27

Gospel related: CCC 151,153, 240, 443, 473, 544, 2603, 2701, 2779, 2785

WEDNESDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Let us look more closely and see the God who is present among us.

It is easy to imagine that God is somehow distant, hidden or removed from our sight. In a world so often marked by pain, suffering and evil, it may be that many times we fail to feel God's presence or we doubt his action. Perhaps this all-powerful Creator gives life to this universe, but does he really care about what happens to it? About what happens to us? While it is true that God is completely beyond us in power, knowledge and even goodness, this is not the whole truth. The God of the Bible, and especially the Father that Jesus reveals to the Church, is also close and he does care – enough to become personally involved in the stories of his children.

Today's readings are a beautiful witness to God's desire to be close to his children. In the oft-told story we hear in today's reading from Exodus, God draws close to Moses with a remarkable display of power in the midst of a bush burning but not consumed. God reassures Moses that he will be with him on the journey to free the children of Israel from Egypt. God tells Moses that he is *the God of [Moses'] father ... the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob*. He tells Moses that he knows the story of his children, that he has walked with these great ancestors and that even now he hears the *cry of the children of Israel*. This is a God who is not distant or removed, but who loves his children enough to enter into their story, walk alongside them and fight for their good.

In the Gospel, Jesus gives praise because he knows the Father and he can make the Father known. Indeed, in the person of Jesus, God has literally come down from his throne to enter into the fullness of humanity – to walk among his people and win a victory even over death.

These readings also offer us an answer to why it is so easy to imagine that God is distant or removed from us, even if the reality is just the opposite. Jesus gives praise to the Father for revealing these things to the *childlike* while they remain hidden to *the wise and the learned*. In order to see God who is right here with us, we must take up an attitude of curiosity and openness akin to a child experiencing the world with all its wonder. The sight of the bush that is *on fire* but *not consumed* strikes Moses with this childlike curiosity and wonder. God is revealed to Moses when Moses comes to look *more closely*. Let us, too, look more closely, and see the God who is present among us.

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Thursday, July 18, 2019
(Lec. 392)
1) Exodus 3:13-20
2) Matthew 11:28-30

THURSDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.)
USA: Saint Camillus de Lellis,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 459, 1615, 1658

FOCUS: *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened.*

Today's readings begin with a pivotal moment in salvation history, a turning point in God's relationship with us as human beings. In this reading from Exodus, we stand with Moses as he encounters God and asks, *Who are you?*

Fortunately, God does not leave us to figure out who he is on our own. Throughout Scripture, and in the most complete way possible in the person of Jesus Christ, God reveals his true identity. Today's readings give us a glimpse of the answer to that profound question: Who are you, God?

I am concerned about you ... I have decided to lead you up out of the misery of Egypt.

I will give you rest ... I am meek and humble of heart.

What comfort we find in God's words to us. He invites us to draw near, to walk side-by-side with him, allowing him to carry our burdens with us.

Terrible, painful things still happen, but Jesus speaks into our brokenness. He does not promise ease and perfect comfort. He responds that he, the eternal Word who created all things, is meek and humble of heart. He will not stand above us, but rather, in his perfect humility, will walk with us, will carry our burdens with us. *My yoke is easy, and my burden light*, he tells us.

This is the truth of God's identity. He saves. He is concerned with our suffering. He acts to help us. He draws near to carry our burdens. When we struggle to believe, to see these truths, let us look to the witness of those who have gone before us. *The Lord remembers his covenant for ever*, the psalmist and the millions who have prayed these words through the centuries proclaim. Let us look to the table where we gather. "I am here," the Eucharist tenderly announces, "This is my body, my blood, given for you." *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened.*

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Friday, July 19, 2019

(Lec. 393)

1) Exodus 11:10–12:14

2) Matthew 12:1-8

Gospel related: CCC 581, 582, 586, 590, 2100, 2173

FRIDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: As Israel was liberated through the Passover, we are liberated through the sacrifice of Christ.

As we continue to hear from the Book of Exodus, today, the Lord gives instructions, not just about how the ancient Israelites were to prepare for their exodus from Egypt, but how succeeding generations were to commemorate and celebrate this seminal moment: Passover. To this day, Passover is one of the most important religious festivals in the Jewish calendar, and Jewish people all over the world continue to celebrate it in line with these instructions. In doing so, they commemorate their liberation from slavery and how that liberation continues to define them.

Although Passover may seem foreign to us as Christians, when looked at closely we can see its connection to the Eucharist in Mass. The Gospels tell us that Jesus was celebrating Passover with his disciples when he instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He left it not just as a perpetual institution but as an eternal one, available to all succeeding generations and peoples.

This is important because central to the celebration of Passover is the slaughter of the paschal lamb – unblemished and shared by all. How impossible not to think of Christ as the Lamb of God, innocent and without sin, who has been sacrificed, and whose body and blood we share in holy Communion, marking us out as God's chosen people, the Church.

While we may not stand with *loins girt* or with *staff in hand*, there is certainly some similarity in our procession to the altar to receive. There, nourished by his flesh and renewed by his precious blood, we are liberated from all that would separate us from God and set us on the pathway to our promised land – the eternal kingdom.

Our Eucharistic celebration is *our* liberation moment, for here in recalling Christ's passion and death – his sacrifice – and making it present in our lives, our eyes are firmly set on the life to come. Here we transcend human time and participate in God's time, experiencing his mercy and his offer of life.

We see this in today's Gospel. Embodying the very mercy of God, Christ reminds us he is the *Lord of the Sabbath*, and that our focus should be grounded in sharing and witnessing to the eternal mercy and love of God.

But unlike Passover, there is no need for Christ to make his sacrifice over and over again. Instead, at each Mass, the one, unique and eternal sacrifice is recalled, celebrated and re-presented in an unbloody manner so that each generation may partake and share in the saving work of Christ.

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Saturday, July 20, 2019

(Lec. 394)

- 1) Exodus 12:37-42
- 2) Matthew 12:14-21

SATURDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Apollinaris,
Bishop and Martyr;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC 713 CSDC 261**

FOCUS: Chosen by God; chosen for love.

Let's talk today about being *chosen*. The quote of the prophet Isaiah found in the Gospel of Matthew today serves as testimony that the coming of Christ was foretold long before he was born. But it also points to a very important characteristic of Jesus as revealed in the words, *Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom I delight*. Jesus was not simply an ordinary, wise, prophet, but one whom the Father loved and *chose* for a certain work. "Consubstantial with the Father as to his divinity, and consubstantial with us as to his humanity ... he was begotten ... for us and for our salvation" (CCC 467).

If we recall that this notion of being chosen was applied to the Israelite people of the Old Testament, we are reminded that God has always set people apart to fulfill his plan. Now we might think that God is being preferential in choosing the Israelites, leaving the rest of us out of the picture. We might want to plead, "What about us, Lord?" But that is not the case at all. The chosen people, the Hebrews, were set apart to be an example that would help draw all people to God. Their intimate relationship with God was, at times, a bit shaky because they were not always faithful to their responsibility, but God never left them.

So what about you and me? Are we also chosen? Are we set apart for a special task? Yes, each of us is chosen by God to do whatever he calls us to do. Through the sacrament of baptism, we are newly created children of God. When the water is poured over us (or we are submerged in it), our new life in Christ, one in which we share in his mission, takes form. We, too, are chosen.

As recipients of God's love – *my beloved in whom I delight* – we can trust that God calls every one of us into his love, as his chosen people, to draw others to him. He has shown us what discipleship means: the entirety of the Gospel message proclaims it! How each one of us lives that out in our particular time, place and circumstances, however, is worthy of contemplating in prayer.

And God, who never left the chosen people of Israel, never leaves *us*, his chosen ones, either. Through the Holy Spirit and the presence of Christ in word and Eucharist, we are edified and fortified in our own particular mission – a mission of love for the sake of God and his kingdom. Let us pray for the grace to be faithful to it.

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SUNDAY, JULY 21, 2019

(Lec. 108)

- 1) Genesis 18:1-10a
- 2) Colossians 1:24-28
- 3) Luke 10:38-42

Gospel related: **CSDC** 260

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Called to be both Martha and Mary.

A true story: Once upon a time a young mother with three young children in tow found a pew toward the back of the church. She regularly did this so that she could make a graceful exit if one of her children needed the bathroom or started to squirm a little too much. A few minutes later, an older parishioner came up to the young mother and announced that she was sitting in her seat. She quietly moved over, knowing her escape route had now been compromised.

Almost as if on cue, when the first reading began, one of the children started crying. The older parishioner who forced her way into “her pew” started glaring at this young mother. Thankfully another older parishioner, sitting right behind her, leaned forward and quietly offered to watch the two other children while she took care of the one who needed her attention at the moment.

Thus, the Martha and Mary debate seems to continue even today: doing what is most important in the right moment. Do we listen to Jesus or tend to his needs? In the story above, one older parishioner wants to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear what he has to say without being disrupted. The other parishioner seems more concerned with meeting the needs of a distraught mother. In this instance, we might say that the parishioner who came to the aid of the mother did so because she was already hearing exactly what Jesus had to say, and she acted on it.

As a Church, we continue to struggle with how to make anyone and everyone welcome in our midst regardless of their circumstances. The Eucharist we gather to celebrate is an incredible gift given to us by a God who loves us beyond words. Both Martha and Mary’s talents are needed within us so that we can bring others to Christ – so we can bring others to the Lord’s Table.

If we grow complacent in our responsibility in not only hearing the word of God, but in acting upon it, the Church will suffer. Let none of us be responsible for turning away anyone who comes to our doors seeking Christ. Let us hear with urgency God’s word spoken here today and let us act upon it. We can be both Martha and Mary at the same time.

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Monday, July 22, 2019

(Lec. 603)

SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

- FEAST

1) Song of Songs 3:1-4b
or 2 Cor 5:14-17

2) John 20:1-2, 11-18

Gospel related: CCC 443, 640, 641, 645, 654, 659, 660, 2174, 2795

FOCUS: We are witnesses to Christ's death and resurrection.

The saint whom we honor today was a wealthy, Jewish woman from the town of Magdala, a fishing town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. This Mary, who traveled with Jesus and his followers (Luke 8:2-3), has been confused with Mary of Bethany (Lazarus' sister) and an unnamed "sinful woman" who anoints Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-50). She was not a former prostitute; this was an error that arose in the Middle Ages, and which the Church officially corrected in 1969.

Mary Magdalene is mentioned twelve times in the Gospels; the Evangelists record that she was a witness to Christ's crucifixion, burial and resurrection. Indeed, in today's Gospel, we recall that she was the *first* witness to the Resurrection, and ran to tell Peter and John, and then the other Apostles. So she rightfully earns the title "the Apostle to the Apostles." Thus, on June 3, 2016, Pope Francis elevated this liturgical day from the rank of obligatory memorial to the rank of feast, specifically to equate it with the days that honor the Apostles.

In today's readings, we encounter Mary Magdalene in her darkest hour of grief. She is weeping. It is *still dark* – literally, because it is pre-dawn and, figuratively, because she has lost hope. She is intending to anoint Jesus' body – a ritual that was not done on the day of his death because of the looming Sabbath. But she discovers that the stone has been rolled away and that his body is gone. She runs to tell Peter that someone has *taken the Lord from the tomb*. Still crying, she looks inside the tomb to find two angels who ask her why she is weeping.

She turns to see the risen Lord, whom she mistakes for a gardener. He calls her by name and at that she recognizes him. *Rabbouni*, she replies! Jesus appears in his resurrected body. His humanity is no longer confined to earth, he is no longer limited by time and space, but he appears to those he wills in order to awaken their faith (CCC 645). And what does he ask Mary to do? He asks her to go and tell the other disciples what she has seen. He instructs her to tell them, *I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. Mary went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord,' and then reported what he told her.*

And here, in this brief encounter, we can see the summation of our own life with Christ. We see a clear snapshot of the paschal mystery – Christ has died once for all (2 Corinthians 5:14-15) and his resurrection assures *us* of new life (CCC 654). Even in the darkest despair of our own sinfulness, he calls us by name. He reminds us that his Father is our Father, too; he is our brother. And Christ instructs us what to do next – filled with hope, emboldened by sacramental encounters with him, we are to go out and *share* that Good News with others. *The love of Christ impels us* to do no less.

Tuesday, July 23, 2019

(Lec. 396)

1) Exodus 14:21–15:1

2) Matthew 12:46-50

Gospel related: CCC 764, 2233

TUESDAY OF

16TH WEEK

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Bridget, Religious)

FOCUS: With faith in the Gospel, we all are united.

Whenever we come upon an outstretched hand in a biblical narrative, we know something powerful is happening. Today, we come upon this gesture in both readings: Moses stretches out his hand, and so does Jesus. Both have powerful meaning.

When Moses stretches out his hand in today's reading from Exodus, he does so at God's command in order to save his people from slavery in Egypt. With Moses' hand outstretched, the waters of the sea first part to let the children of Israel cross the sea bed. Then Moses stretches out his hand again and causes the sea to fall down upon pharaoh's army. The Israelites are freed from oppression and injustice to be formed as a new community under their saving God.

Though not as dramatic as the Exodus, Jesus' gesture in today's Gospel is just as powerful. When Jesus is asked to give attention to his mother and brothers, Jesus instead stretches out his hand to his disciples and declares that his family includes *whoever does the will of [his] heavenly Father*.

Through the hands of God's servant Moses and God's son, Jesus, we are formed as God's community. We are established as a redeemed community, free to be family in Christ, open to all who seek God and do his will.

It is not necessary to be born into this community. We do not need certain credentials, status or background in order to belong. Freed from restrictions, all who obey God's commands are welcome to be a brother, sister or mother in Christ. In this community, blood relations are not needed to be called family. With faith and belief in the Gospel, we all are united.

For our Church to be this kind of welcoming, family-like community is especially important now as parishes are merging, Catholic immigrants and refugees are arriving into our communities, and new neighbors may be looking to enter into full communion. Let us be attentive to those around us, and welcome one another like family in Christ.

We have been reminded by the word of the power of our saving God in forming us as his community. May coming together at the table of the Eucharist deepen our unity as a family doing the will of our Father in Christ.

Saint Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373) Bridget was a mystic who experienced visions of the crucified Christ beginning when she was seven. Inspired by her visions, she became committed to works of charity for unwed mothers and their children. After her husband of twenty years died, she gave up her possessions and entered the Third Order of Saint Francis. Bridget dedicated the rest of her life to reforming religious life and establishing the Bridgettines. She is the patron saint of Sweden and co-patroness of Europe.

Wednesday, July 24, 2019
(Lec. 397)

- 1) Exodus 16:1-5, 9-15
- 2) Matthew 13:1-9

MONDAY OF
16TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Sharbel Makhlūf,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 546, 1724

FOCUS: Even in the deserts of our hearts, God spreads a table of abundance.

“Can God spread a table in the desert?” The desert is known for its scarcity in all things, the one exception being sand. There is no food, no water, no shade. In short, the desert is one of the most inhospitable places on earth, and it is here that Moses and Aaron led the Israelites.

True, the Israelites no longer were under the rule of their Egyptian taskmasters, but the desert was similarly demoralizing for them, according to our reading today. When the belly aches and the throat is dry, little else matters; even slavery – on a full stomach – becomes appealing. It is no wonder, then, that the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, questioning the goodness and power of the Lord. “Can God spread a table in the desert?”

In the least hospitable place on earth, God indeed spread a table for the Israelites. Quail fell from the sky; bread covered the sand. It would be easy to see the miracle in this story as God’s abundant provision amid the scarcity of the desert. Yet the even greater miracle is that God provides in spite of the Israelites’ ungrateful hearts. Most parents don’t respond to a child’s whining by giving in, by catering to the child’s wants in the midst of an unappreciative attitude. Yet this is precisely what God does! That’s because it is precisely *who God is*: the ultimate giver of gifts.

We must keep this attribute of God in mind as we consider today’s Gospel. The parable of the sower often is reduced to a reflection on our personal receptivity of the seed. Are we the path, the rocky ground, the thorny soil or the rich soil? Yet when one reads this parable in light of the first reading from Exodus, it becomes clear that these questions miss the point. This Gospel, frankly, is not about us.

Once again, God, the ultimate giver of gifts, is on display. Like a parent throwing caution to the wind out of love for his or her child, God scatters the seed *everywhere*. It matters little how desolate or scarce the desert may be; there is no type of soil, no human heart that goes untouched by God’s generosity. We must remember that even when we or those around us mirror the grumbling Israelites, even when we resemble the rockiest, thorniest of soils, the Lord responds to us with munificence, for this is God’s nature as the undeniably generous sower. Indeed, God *can* spread a table in the desert. And not just any table, but a table of abundance.

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Thursday, July 25, 2019

(Lec. 605)

1) 2 Corinthians 4:7-15

2) Matthew 20:20-28

Gospel related: **CCC** 440, 601, 605, 622, 786, 2235 **CSDC** 193, 379

SAINT JAMES

APOSTLE

- FEAST

FOCUS: Christian people embark on a pilgrimage of humble service, leading to the One who gives life.

Today, we remember the Apostle James, whose legacy includes the Camino de Santiago, that great pilgrimage across northern Spain. We are all pilgrims who have embarked on the great journey of faith and life. We are not traveling as though on holiday, for that means going to places of comfort. To go on pilgrimage means to let go of the familiar, and to journey to places untried, unknown. It is a risk to set forth in search of something magnificent. When we set forth on pilgrimage, we go in search of God!

Pilgrimage calls us to three realities that may unsettle us, but lead us closer to God. The first is that we are humble pilgrims. Remember today's Gospel which speaks of Zebedee's sons. Though Matthew does not name them, Mark tells us they were James and John. Their mother approached Jesus, demanding that her sons be exalted in heaven next to Jesus. Like many mothers, the wife of Zebedee is looking out for her children. James does not mutter, "Mom, please, I can take care of myself," so we might infer that he is allowing her to advocate for him. Are we humble enough to allow our loved ones to care *for us*? To advocate, intercede or pray for us?

The second reality comes from Saint Paul, who contends that we are *earthen vessels*. In the creation story, God made the first humans out of the ground. Artisans replicate this process when they sculpt dirt and water into earthen vessels. But we are much more than clay pots. We are imbued with life, breathed into us by the Creator, and sustained by the Holy Spirit. Nothing we have is of our own making. Everything comes from God. All that we are comes from God. Pilgrimage is a journey back to the One who makes our empty lives whole. Pilgrimage is a journey back home.

The last reality asks a simple, yet complex question. Jesus asks James and his brother John if they can drink from his cup. Of course they can, they respond. But Jesus underlines for all of the disciples what he expects of them. If they want to be great, they must be humble and emulate their teacher, who came *not ... to be served, but to serve*. As we journey toward God, can we be humble servants, ministering to others, putting their needs first? If so, then our exaltation may be great in heaven.

Jesus asks us if we can drink from his cup, the one that will be set on the altar in a few moments. To drink from that cup is to continue the pilgrim journey, to be cared for in humility, to accept that our lives come from God, and to attend to the needs of others before our own wants and desires. May the grace to do so be *bestowed in abundance on more and more people ... for the glory of God*.

Friday, July 26, 2019

(Lec. 399)

- 1) Exodus 20:1-17
- 2) Matthew 13:18-23

FRIDAY OF
16TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saints Joachim and Anne,
Parents of the
Blessed Virgin Mary)

Gospel related: **CCC** 29, 1724 **CSDC** 325

FOCUS: Following the Ten Commandments allows God's people to walk in righteousness with him.

There is so much richness in today's readings! In the first reading from Exodus, God's gives the Ten Commandments to the Hebrews after their harrowing escape from Egypt. The Gospel then underscores how essential it is for us to also follow God and lead the lives to which he has called us. Let's look at these readings more closely.

After Israel had been in bondage for so many years, the commandments were given to them as a foundation for behavior and morality. They mandated how to honor and be in relationship with God (1-3), and how to honor and be in relationship with one another (4-10). They helped to unite Israel as a nation, and provided a compass for living lives pleasing to God. Adherence to these commandments, and the other Mosaic laws, demonstrated to the world that God was their God, and that they belonged to him.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the sower about sowing seeds on different types of ground. The Israelites were a "rich soil" for seed, that is, God's commandments. They heard the word and understood it, and it came to bear fruit and eventually yielded the twelve tribes of Israel.

That history, as well as our own Christian story, tell us that not only is our Father full of bountiful love, but he is also merciful and kind. As we receive Jesus in the Eucharist shortly, let us resolve to follow him closely with determination to imitate him in all that we do.

Saturday, July 27, 2019
(Lec. 400)

- 1) Exodus 24:3-8
- 2) Matthew 13:24-30

SATURDAY OF
16TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC 827**

FOCUS: God saves.

Most of us can identify with the Israelites in today's first reading. They were absolutely certain they would be able to follow God's commandments and do *everything that the Lord has told [them]*. After all, it was a covenant made in blood with the Lord! Yet, while the Lord cannot fail, we can and do.

The Gospel also attests to this weakness in our humanity. A few verses later than the passage we heard today in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus interprets the weeds as *children of the evil one* sown by *the devil* (Cf., Matthew 13:38-39). The *Catechism* adds to the parable, stating: "All members of the Church, including her ministers, must acknowledge that they are sinners. In everyone, the weeds of sin will still be mixed with the good wheat of the Gospel until the end of time" (#827).

Whether we like it or not, we are a mixture of goodness and sin, virtue and vice. As we continue on our journey as Jesus' disciples, with God's grace, we have good days when we are patient with our family, friends and co-workers, and generous with our time and money. But on a bad day, the habit and mindset of sin can so easily slip back into our lives, and we find ourselves battling jealousy, resentment, impatience and anger – sinful traits that we may have thought we had put behind us.

But here is the hope of the Good News. We can take comfort in God's unrelenting patience and knowledge of us. Despite the failures of the Israelites, God saves. Despite our failures, God saves. And, cherishing the wheat that he has nurtured in our lives, he shows immense patience, giving us every opportunity until the end of our lives for conversion and transformation.

As we deal with the weeds in our lives, let us continue to trust in Jesus, our kind master gardener, taking advantage of his graces through confession, prayer and Eucharist. In a few minutes, as we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us entrust our soul – weeds and wheat – to him. He will nurture us and help us until the final harvest, when he will gather us together unto himself.

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SUNDAY, JULY 28, 2019

(Lec. 111)

- 1) Genesis 18:20-32
- 2) Colossians 2:12-14
- 3) Luke 11:1-13

Gospel related: **CCC** 443, 520, 728, 1425, 2601, 2613, 2623, 2632, 2671, 2759, 2761, 2773, 2845 **CSDC** 453

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus invites us into an intimate relationship with the Father.

We live in a world where the internet has become an essential communication method. Friends and family members no longer have to wait days or weeks to receive a letter; communication is almost instant. Although the ease and speed of internet messaging is a blessing, it may also reduce the intimacy and sensitivity that generally comes with face-to-face conversations, making it easier to be less tactful in our internet dialogue.

When Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, he is giving them something much more than a speedier form of communication. He is providing them with an intimate way to communicate with God, and he spells out the expectations that come with this new way of relating with God. Consider for a moment the words Jesus suggests we use when we pray. *Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us, and do not subject us to the final test.*

In these few words, Jesus is teaching his disciples, and all future generations who make this prayer, that God is our Father, who loves us as a parent and seeks an intimate relationship with us. Whereas past generations relied on patriarchs and prophets to speak on our behalf, through Jesus we discover that we can communicate directly with God.

Even though we are sinners, we, too, can presume to speak to God. Even though we may have done dreadful and terrible things, God continues to love us, forgive us and draw us closer.

But the Lord's Prayer also reminds us: If we are children of God who have experienced the Lord's forgiveness, we are expected to *forgive everyone in debt to us*. This call to forgive is challenging. It begins with simple acts of kindness and a desire to forgive our neighbor when they have offended us.

Our resolve to live the Lord's Prayer will be tested, but the same Jesus who taught us how to pray also gave us the Eucharist, his body and blood, so that we are nourished and strengthened for the daily challenges we will face.

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Monday, July 29, 2019

(Lec. 401)

1) Exodus 32:15-24, 30-34

(Lec. 607)

2) John 11:19-27 or

Luke 10:38-42

Gospel related: **CCC** 579, 2447 **CSDC** 260

MONDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Martha)

FOCUS: God calls each of us to different kinds of service.

Today we celebrate the memorial of Saint Martha, whom we hear about in the Gospel. Jesus is traveling through her town and Martha graciously offers him hospitality, and probably extended this hospitality to the disciples who traveled with him. With all these guests at her home, Martha proceeded to do what any good host would do: serve them, probably feed them, all of which would require much work.

So far, Martha offers another good example of the kind of compassion and hospitality Jesus teaches and exhorts his followers to practice.

But in her busyness, Martha falls victim to what many of us fall victim to as well. With much to do, the tasks consume and preoccupy her, leading her to forget why she's doing all this work in the first place. She sees her sister, Mary, listening at the feet of Jesus, and rather than rejoice that her guest of honor seems to be engaged and enjoying the moment, she feels resentful. She complains to Jesus that her sister isn't by her side, helping her with the tasks she herself chose when she invited Jesus to stay at her home.

Jesus' words call Martha back to attention. Martha has forgotten that her service is not only providing a moment of respite to Jesus, but is also enabling her sister Mary to do a good service by listening and learning at the feet of Jesus. It may not be the service Martha wants Mary to do or the one Martha thinks is important at this time, but it is what Mary needs to do at this time and what the *Lord* wants her to do at this time.

In our own lives, there are tasks we have chosen to perform in service to the Lord. And it can be easy for that work to start to consume us and become more about us and all the good things we are doing rather than about the Lord. This distraction can lead us to look at others' work and find it lacking, or not measuring up to what we believe it means to serve the Lord.

But we must remember that the Lord calls each of us to different types of service. For some, this might be active, for others, more contemplative. Whatever work we are doing – and it may vary from active to contemplative depending on the needs of the moment and our particular gifts – the Lord invites us to perform it attentive to his presence, and to rejoice if our service draws others closer to him.

We contemplate, and take in, Christ in the Eucharist, so that we might go forth and act in service to one another. As we do so, let us remember Saint Martha and be open, as she was, to Christ's word in our lives.

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Tuesday, July 30, 2019
(Lec. 402)

- 1) Exodus 33:7-11;
34:5b-9, 28
- 2) Matthew 13:36-43

TUESDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Peter Chrysologus,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 333, 1034

FOCUS: Repentance is necessary if we want to be bundled with the wheat.

To better understand today's Gospel from Matthew, we need to flip back a page or so. There, Jesus tells a parable of a farmer who planted wheat in his field, only to have an enemy come and secretly plant tenacious weeds among the wheat. As the wheat began to grow, so did the weeds, so the farm workers asked the landowner if he wanted the weeds pulled up immediately. They were told *no*, because the landowner knew the weeds in question were the type that both looked very similar to the wheat, and had roots which intertwined with the wheat's roots. Pulling the weeds up early would only result in pulling young wheat out as well.

In today's Gospel, the disciples ask Jesus to explain the parable, and he does. Jesus is the sower, and the world is the field. Good seeds become wheat: *the children of the Kingdom*. Weeds are sown by the devil and are *children of the Evil One*. And *at the harvest [at] the end of the age*, the wheat and the weeds will be separated: those who have lived righteously will enjoy the fruits of heaven, while those who have not will suffer the fires of hell.

So why not pull the weeds? Why do the weeds have to grow among us? Why doesn't God pull them up early? Because, as Saint Isidore says, sinners are not cut off while there is still a possibility of repentance (Mitch and Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew*). God in his abundant mercy gives us until the last day of judgement to exercise our free will, and to repent of any sin so as to embrace him fully.

And aren't we grateful for this chance at repentance – for an opportunity to bear fruit! This Gospel doesn't mean we should ignore evil, but it does say we will not eliminate it. We should avoid becoming intertwined with it; instead we should help others overcome sin.

When Jesus comes again, the weeds will be separated from the wheat. Let's take a close look in the mirror and ask: If Jesus were to come today, would we be bundled with the wheat, or the weeds? If we see ourselves with the weeds, let us make a plan to do something about it.

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Wednesday, July 31, 2019

(Lec. 403)

- 1) Exodus 34:29-35
- 2) Matthew 13:44-46

WEDNESDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Ignatius of Loyola,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 546

FOCUS: Jesus calls us to a life centered on the will of God, and Saint Ignatius modeled such a life for us.

We hear in today's first reading that the face of Moses had become radiant from his conversation with the Lord on Mount Sinai. He shared all that he had heard from God with the people gathered there, and then he veiled his face, because its radiance had made them afraid. In the Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples that the kingdom of heaven is a treasure beyond measure: *a pearl of great price*. The person who understands its true value would sacrifice everything to obtain it.

Both readings provide context for appreciating Saint Ignatius of Loyola, whose feast day is today. He radically changed his life to follow Jesus.

Born to a wealthy family in Spain in 1491, Ignatius spent many years as a soldier. He seemed happy with his life of adventure and excitement until he was seriously wounded in a battle with the French armies. He was bedridden for many months as he recuperated. To fill the hours, he read.

The only books available to him were about the life of Jesus and the lives of the saints. Over time, he began to think about his own life choices and was inspired to change. He had visions of the Blessed Mary with her Son, the Trinity and Christ's presence in the Eucharist. He beheld, as Moses did, the radiance of God and was filled with a deep desire to serve him. When he was healthy again, he gave himself over to a new life devoted to finding God in all things.

He tried to lead a life where he was "God-centered" instead of "self-centered." He gave up everything for the *pearl of great price*, continuing to study and draw together others who were like-minded. He founded an order of priests and brothers named The Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits. They are still a presence today throughout the world, living the principles that Saint Ignatius embraced so many years ago.

We, too, behold the radiance of God in the Eucharist, as we receive him into our bodies. And we, too, ought to give everything we have toward our "purchase" of that *pearl of great price*. So let us pray for the intercession of Saint Ignatius as we go forth proclaiming the Gospel with our lives. May we find God in all things, and follow him wherever he leads.

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