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YEAR C
WEEKDAYS I

Wednesday, May 1, 2019
(Lec. 269)

- 1) Acts 5:17-26
- 2) John 3:16-21

WEDNESDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Joseph the Worker)

Gospel related: **CCC** 219, 444, 454, 458, 678, 679, 706 **CSDC** 3, 64

FOCUS: Christians are called to be courageous in fulfilling their task to witness to Christ.

Courage is often defined as “the ability to do something that frightens one, or the strength to face pain or doubt in a difficult situation.” In addition to being one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, it is also one of the hallmarks of the true Christian believer.

In our first reading today, we see that courage at work in the lives of the Apostles as they preach the risen Christ. It’s important to remember that these are the very same disciples who, paralyzed by fear, deserted Jesus at the moment of his greatest need and even denied knowing him.

Here today we see a new version of these same disciples, now they are filled with courage and zeal as they persevere in the face of imprisonment and the threat of violence. They follow the instructions of *the angel of the Lord* to go preach, even if it is inconvenient or dangerous. Nothing will prevent them from sharing the Good News!

Of course the Good News is, as our Gospel passage tells us, the great and abundant love of God made manifest in the gift of his only begotten Son. John reminds us that this gift was bestowed not to condemn the world for all of its brokenness and sinfulness, but that all believers, all people of good will who seek the Lord, might have a share in God’s eternal life.

As we celebrate the courage of the first disciples we are reminded that we are each entrusted with a task from God, the mission to share the Good News that God so loved the world and that Jesus is the Light who has come into our world. Let us pray for that same courage in our lives.

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Thursday, May 2, 2019
(Lec. 270)

- 1) Acts 5:27-33
- 2) John 3:31-36

THURSDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER
(OBL MEM
Saint Athanasius,
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 161, 504, 690, 1286

FOCUS: As believers in Christ, may we truly follow him who is above all.

Today we remember Saint Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria and Doctor of the Church, who defended the faith against Arianism, and exhorted believers to follow, as John writes, *the one who comes from above* and is *above all*.

To understand this more clearly, let us imagine a great race. As soon as it begins, all who participate lurch forward toward the goal line – except for one participant. This one pays no attention to the goal itself, but instead races forward, sideways, down steep hills, in any direction that his impulse takes him, thinking all the while that the *act of moving* is itself worthy, rather than the *direction* in which he is moving. It would be a foolish exercise: a waste of time, a waste of talent, an exercise in futility.

Yet, according to Saint Athanasius, this is precisely what happens when a soul strays from God. Like the lost athlete, the soul has forgotten its true goal. Rather, it obeys its own base instincts; it hurries one way or another without any regard to what is good, pure and true. It is, as Athanasius says, as if the soul does not know that “she is made *not merely to move*, but to move in the *right direction*” (*Against the Heathen*, Part 1:4).

[It is appropriate that this same saint defended the divinity of Christ so vigorously during his life. At the time, under the influence of the Arian movement, many did not believe that the Son was of the same divine nature as the Father. Yet it is indeed Christ’s very divinity toward which we strive.]

We are called to become like Christ, called not simply to move, but to move in the direction of the divine. Athanasius writes, *For the Son of God became man so that we might become God* (Saint Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54, 3; CCC 460).

This end, this goal, is for every soul: to move toward Christ, to consider what is above – to become what is above – rather than what is below. John tells us in the Gospel, *The one who comes from above is above all. The one who is of the earth is earthy and speaks of earthly things*. For John, the choice is clear: either we accept Christ and the One who sent Christ, or we do not. Either we gain all that Christ offers, or we lose it all. So, too, for Peter and the Apostles, the choice is clear. When questioned by the authorities, they have two paths before them: either they will obey men, or they will obey God. They decide, *We must obey God rather than men*.

For Athanasius as well, the choice is clear. Either one keeps the goal in sight, moving in the direction of Christ, or one does not, and thus becomes as foolish as a participant in a race who moves in every direction – except toward the finish line.

May we, as believers in Christ, truly follow him who is above all. As we join together in this Eucharistic meal, may we refocus our soul on union with Christ – the one who brings his divinity into the midst of our very lives.

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Friday, May 3, 2019

(Lec. 561)

1) 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

2) John 14:6-14

Gospel related: **CCC** 74, 459, 470, 516, 1698, 2466, 2614, 2633, 2815 **CSDC** 1, 28, 555

SAINTS PHILIP AND JAMES

- FEAST

FOCUS: Like Philip, James, and Paul, we are called to pass on the faith that we have received.

To be a Christian is to believe in Jesus Christ, entrust our lives to him, and pass on the faith that we have received as a gift. Today, we celebrate two Apostles, Philip and James the Less* – two of the men who were foundational to the Christian faith and who first handed down the faith to the early Christians. [*The title “the Less” is traditionally used to indicate that this James is the son of Alphaeus and not Zebedee.]

Today’s readings show us briefly how Jesus touched the lives of Philip and James – and how they witnessed to the living, resurrected Jesus. In the first reading, Paul recounts to the Corinthians how the risen Jesus appeared to several witnesses, including James. After having walked closely with Jesus for three years and seeing his glorious, resurrected Lord, James went on to witness in turn to the people of his day and, like all of the Apostles except John, was martyred for his faith.

In the Gospel, Philip is the Apostle who questions Jesus, who asks Jesus to *show us the Father*. His request leads Jesus into a beautiful description of his unity with God the Father, and to the prediction that the Apostles and, by extension, all of Jesus’ followers, will do “greater works” than Jesus himself – through Jesus’ own power.

Both James and Philip are, among the Apostles, relatively little known and little mentioned, and yet they helped to lay the foundation on which Christians down through the centuries would come to know Jesus, give their lives to him and tell the next generation.

We, as Jesus’ twenty-first-century followers, are next in line. We are called, as Paul was in the first reading, to hand on ... *as of first importance what [we have] received* of the Gospel. In our present-day Church, we might be as little-known as James the Less and Philip, yet we are still called as baptized Christians to spread the Good News of Jesus to the next generation. Parents are the first teachers of the faith to their children. We can also teach the next generation as aunts and uncles, catechism teachers, involved parishioners, neighbors, or others involved in the lives of children. We are also called to teach the faith through our own lives of faithful witness.

How will we *hand on as of first importance* the faith we have learned?

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Saturday, May 4, 2019

(Lec. 272)

1) Acts 6:1-7

2) John 6:16-21

Gospel related: **CSDC** 453

SATURDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Let us build the kingdom of God without fear.

Happy Easter!

It has been two weeks since Easter Sunday, and we are still at the beginning of the Easter Season. Has the joy of Easter inspired us to share our faith and the love of God with others? Or maybe enough time has passed since Easter Sunday that the proverbial honeymoon period is over, and we find ourselves like the disciples in the first reading, dealing with practical issues of living in community with flawed humans like ourselves.

Even though, through our baptism, we are reborn into new life with Christ, we still face trials as individuals and as a community. As we heard today, even the early Church had to address injustice within the Church. Thousands of years later, we can still relate to darkness looming overhead. This darkness can be war or natural destruction in far-off places that we hear about in the news, or failures within our own schools, neighborhoods or communities. And, of course, the abuse and evasion of responsibility within our own Church. Sometimes we can feel alone and adrift, like the disciples may have felt in the Gospel reading as they sailed across the sea in stormy weather. We may feel at a loss for how to reverse the tides of hate and iniquity in our world.

And yet, Jesus calls us to himself – calls us to hope. Jesus shows up in the most unexpected places and tells us, *Do not be afraid*. Why would he say that? What is so bad about fear? After all, doesn't fear give us a healthy respect for danger? Yes it does. But while that is true, fear can also overtake our lives, keeping us from moving forward in loving and virtuous ways. This is what Jesus wants us to avoid.

Studies of first responders show that overcoming fear for personal safety can enable them to gain the training required to save lives. Safety experts would tell us that, in fact, worry and fear-based paralysis can actually be less safe than acting. Recognizing fear, then courageously working through difficult situations in order to receive and share God's love, is the goal of casting our fears aside.

When we cast our fear aside, when we heed Jesus' loving call to not be afraid, then we refuse to allow a fear of failure to keep us from trying to act outside our comfort zone. We do not let the power of the fear of humiliation keep us from witnessing our faith to our friends, family, and coworkers. Instead of potentially denying them the joy of the Gospel that we have experienced in our own lives, we offer them our own example of trusting in the Lord to calm the tides of our fears and difficulties.

So in this Easter season, let us resolve to turn to Christ and open our hearts to the Spirit of courage to give us the inspiration, consolation, creativity, and joy that we need to build the kingdom of God. And to build it without fear.

SUNDAY, MAY 5, 2019

(Lec. 48)

- 1) Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41
- 2) Revelation 5:11-14
- 3) John 21:1-19 or 21:1-14

Gospel related: CCC 448, 553, 618, 645, 659, 881, 1166, 1429, 1551

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

FOCUS: Through the Eucharist, we receive God's divine love so that we may be witnesses to Jesus' mission.

Imagine that we are in the first century, and know that Jesus will soon be leaving. Like any anxious member of a group, we ask, "Who's going to lead us when you're gone?" Jesus replies, "Peter!" We can't believe it. How can Jesus select the person who denied knowing him, not once, not twice, but three times? He would not follow Jesus to Golgotha. And yet, he's the one who is supposed to lead Jesus' sheep. Peter might not stand out to us at that time as a first choice, but this is the man Jesus chooses to be the leader of the young Christian community.

Peter is flawed, and he might not be completely trustworthy. But redemption awaits him. He becomes a leader who is not afraid to voice his beliefs in the face of adversity. When he is brought before the authorities and reminded that he is not supposed to be talking about Jesus, Peter emphatically denounces their authority, obeying only God's authority. In following Jesus, Peter furthers Jesus' mission. And in doing so, he is honored by God the Father.

In the Gospel, Jesus and Peter have an exchange about love. For English speakers, we only have the one word – *love*. But the Gospel is written in Greek, and there are several words for *love*. Jesus asks Peter if he loves him, using the Greek word *agapas*, which is divine love. Peter responds that he does love him, but instead of using the term *agapas*, he uses the term *philo*, which is brotherly love. This happens again with the same result. Finally, Jesus asks Peter if he loves him with that brotherly love, and Peter replies that of course he does.

Peter, again showing his limitations, is not able to say that he loves Jesus with divine love because he is limited by his humanity. It takes God's grace to be able to exude divine love, and that comes in the fruit of the Spirit at Pentecost. Only when he is imbued with divine love does Peter become capable of leading Jesus' flock.

When we partake of the Eucharist, we, too, become filled with that same divine love. But that love is not meant to be hidden, it is meant for us to share. When we leave this church today, will we be able to go out and live our lives signifying that we, too, follow Jesus?

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Monday, May 6, 2019

(Lec. 273)

1) Acts 6:8-15

2) John 6:22-29

Gospel related: CCC 698, 728, 1296, 2835

MONDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: We are called to witness to the transforming power of God.

All those who sat in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel. Hearing these words regarding Stephen, from the first reading, probably strikes fear into anyone who has, or has worked around, children. Because we know that, sometimes, when a child looks at us with the face of an angel, we better check out what that child has been doing! The “angelic face” signifies that something is amiss; that the little one is trying to look innocent in the face of any misdeeds.

But if we hear the words that way, we are likely doing so in a way the author did not intend, for Stephen had carried out no actual misdeeds. Instead, Luke tells us that it was *false witnesses who testified*: men who reported on Stephen’s activities from, indisputably, bad faith. They referenced factual behavior, but falsely attributed malicious intent to them. Perhaps this is why the Sanhedrin studied Stephen’s physical appearance so closely: to see what they could ascertain from his demeanor.

The “angelic face” the Sanhedrin saw did not convey “innocence” in the sense we have discussed. Instead, they saw the power and majesty of a being *who glorify[ies] God without ceasing* (CCC 350) and who *serve [Christ] especially in the accomplishment of his saving mission to men* (CCC 351). That is what it means to have the face of an angel. And frankly, it ought to have struck fear in the hearts of the Sanhedrin, for it was a witness to *the work of God*. The redemptive work of God in Jesus Christ in which the Sanhedrin, and many others, still did not believe – to their eternal detriment.

The crowd in the Gospel is more open to the message. They have heard Jesus instruct them, *Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life*. And so they ask him, *What can we do to accomplish the works of God?* The answer: *believe in the one [God] sent*.

Stephen knew this, and in his conviction he was a faithful witness. He spoke with great wisdom, and allowed the Holy Spirit to speak in and through him. He was transformed spiritually, and physically. This is the grace and power of Christ: it is not just a message of “fact”; it is transformative Good News. We have all experienced it in some way: sacramentally, of course, but also through God’s presence in everyday life: maybe it was at the birth of a child; through the healing of an illness; in the stillness of a deathbed or the wonder of creation. Perhaps it was in the strength given through a friend; peace in the midst of conflict; words when we were left speechless; love when there was doubt.

We are inherently changed by what we receive in faith and grace, and we can literally change the world for the better when we go forth and share the Good News of the Lord.

So, in this Easter season as we are renewed witnesses of the Resurrection, may our witness be such that others will also experience the power of God, and see around them faces that are *like the face of an angel*.

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Tuesday, May 7, 2019

(Lec. 274)

1) Acts 7:51—8:1a

2) John 6:30-35

Gospel related: CCC 423, 1094, 2835

TUESDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The Jesus we receive in holy Communion is the same living Jesus whom Saint Stephen saw and died proclaiming.

What does the Eucharist mean to us?

Is it merely a symbol, a reminder about the Last Supper? Or is it truly the body, blood, soul and divinity of the risen Jesus Christ? The catechism teaches that “The Eucharist is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life’” (CCC 1324). Today, we are going to focus on a particular aspect: the Eucharist as the bread of life. Just as we need food to nourish our bodies, we also need the bread of life to nourish our souls on our journey as we strive to reach heaven.

His real presence in the Eucharist is what Jesus is referring to in today’s Gospel when he says, *I am the bread of life*. The Church teaches us that when we receive Holy Communion in a state of grace, we are united more deeply with the Lord (CCC 1416). This Lord with whom we are united is the same Jesus for whom Saint Stephen died.

Stephen’s martyrdom occurs right after a long discourse summarizing salvation history. Stephen begins with Abraham, reminding the Sanhedrin that their people had a long history of turning away from God, killing the prophets and finally killing Jesus himself. It probably wasn’t a surprise when they decided to kill Stephen, too. But Stephen, like all the martyrs after him, did not waver. He knew that Jesus offers us eternal life through himself.

Stephen, a leader in the infant Church, would have received Jesus himself in holy Communion. The grace he received through the sacrament surely strengthened him in those final moments. Stephen consumed the bread of life – Jesus – and allowed Jesus to consume his heart in return. The Jesus that Saint Stephen saw sitting at the right hand of God is the same Jesus we all receive in the Eucharist. The living Son of God offers us himself to give life to the world, to Saint Stephen, to you and to me.

Today, let us ponder this great mystery as we prepare to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. Let us pray that we, too, may receive all the graces and strength of the sacrament as we welcome the risen Jesus into our hearts and on our tongues.

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Wednesday, May 8, 2019
(Lec. 275)

- 1) Acts 8:1b-8
- 2) John 6:35-40

Gospel related: **CCC** 161, 606, 994, 989, 1001, 2824, 2835

WEDNESDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The Christian life, amidst all its suffering, involves paradoxical joy.

The earliest followers of Christ were scattered, disciples were being murdered and buried, and skepticism of the Jesus movement reigned in ancient Israel. Nevertheless, there was great joy in the midst of these first Christians. Certainly the Christian life is one of paradox.

As twenty-first century Christians living amidst the pervasive prosperity Gospel [that is, the false belief that God simply increases wealth and health as a reward based upon increases in our faith], it can be easy to fall into the trap of believing that following Jesus makes everything easy or our lives better. God has a plan for our good, after all, and at first glance it seems like this plan should include our comfort, our security, our good health, perhaps even our growing wealth.

Yet Jesus speaks of a very different kind of Gospel, one attested to by the lives of the earliest Christians in today's first reading. This is not a gospel of prosperity, but instead one of inevitable suffering: blessed are the poor, the meek, the mourners, the persecuted. In the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus, it is the last who shall be first.

Sometimes the suffering in our lives and those around us can feel unbearable. Where is God amidst such hardship, and where is the Christian joy that we are called to have? Yet, like the earliest Christians, we cling to Jesus' promise from today's Gospel in the face of suffering: everything will be raised up on the last day. This does not mean that our days on this earth will be consistently happy or that we should put on a joyful face when inside we are hurting. Instead it means that we trust that God *does* have a plan, that it *is* a plan for our good, but that we will not necessarily experience or understand fully God's good plan for us on this side of heaven.

So, where is God? Where is the joy our hearts desire? God is everywhere, but God *especially* is in our suffering, bearing our hardships and weeping alongside us. We need only look to Jesus on the cross to see this. But any glance at the cross must be accompanied by an even longer gaze at the empty tomb, for it is Christ's resurrection that allows us to trust his promise that nothing shall be lost, all shall be raised. Herein lies the paradox of our Christian faith: that life could come from death, that hope and joy are possible even in the midst of pain. That is the real Gospel, the good news that we cling to.

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Thursday, May 9, 2019
(Lec. 276)

- 1) Acts 8:26-40
- 2) John 6:44-51

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 259, 591, 728, 1001, 1355, 1406, 1428, 2835, 2837

THURSDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: God comes to us so that we can come to him.

Today's first reading treats us to one of the more dramatic conversion stories in Scripture. The Ethiopian eunuch goes from reading the Book of Isaiah, unsure of what it means, to being baptized by Philip in the span of a single encounter. The eunuch's conviction is inspiring after Philip preaches the Gospel to him – as soon as he sees some water the eunuch asks, *What is to prevent my being baptized?* This story of coming to faith is quick, clear and certain.

For those of us who are already baptized, the Church teaches that our conversion has taken place sacramentally – at our baptism, our coming to faith also was quick, clear and certain. And yet our journey to live fully into our faith continues throughout our lives. In that journey, we may often find ourselves like the crowd to whom Jesus preaches in today's Gospel. These crowds have followed Jesus, but still have questions about who he is and what it means to follow him. If these crowds are asked, "What is to prevent us from totally following Jesus?" myriad concerns could likely arise. Many want to follow him, but they still have questions and hesitations.

Jesus responds to these questions not only by teaching the crowds, but also by promising to offer them his very self. Jesus – the living bread come down from heaven – will give himself for the life of the world. He offers them the life that they are desiring even as they question him; he offers us the life that we long for even as we fall into doubt, distraction or weakness.

The Lord is giving himself to us always, and in a special way he gives himself in the Eucharist we are about to celebrate. As he comes to us in this Mass, we can indeed ask, "What is there to prevent us from coming to deeper faith?" What is there to prevent us from giving our whole selves to him as he gives himself to us? As the eunuch boldly asked for baptism, we too can ask the Lord to remove any obstacles or fears that stand in our way. With those removed, we come to him, our Lord who has been working from the start to bring us back to where he has always wanted us to be: close to his heart.

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Friday, May 10, 2019

FRIDAY OF

(Lec.

277) THIRD WEEK

1) Acts 9:1-20

2) John 6:52-59

OF EASTER

(Opt. Mem.

USA: Saint Damien de Veuster,

Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 787, 994, 1001, 1384, 1391, 1406, 1509, 1524, 2835, 2837

FOCUS: God nourishes us and gives us strength.

Food is central to our lives each and every day. One need only skip a meal once in a while to realize how quickly our bodies crave the nourishment. Without the proper nourishment, we get headaches, feel woozy, or worse. The readings today show the centrality of food as a nourishment for our bodies and for our soul.

In the account of Saul's conversion in the first reading, we see a man frantic in his anger with the early Christians. The text says he was *breathing murderous threats* against them. The story goes, of course, that Christ intervenes in the life of Saul (his Hebrew name), and he becomes known more by his Greek name, Paul. He is a man central to the spread of the Gospel and a martyred saint. In those intervening days, between his encounter with the risen Christ and his baptism, he doesn't eat or drink anything. Three days pass in darkness and without nourishment. When finally the disciple Ananias arrives, imagine how deeply Saul's body must have been calling out for nourishment, for food that heals.

The first reading ends with Saul's baptism. The text says, *and when he had eaten, he recovered his strength*. In this scene, Saul is healed and fed, baptized and nourished. God gives new life to Saul through the ministry of Ananias, and through food. There are, of course, echoes of this same scenario in today's Gospel. Jesus Christ declares *my Flesh is true food and my Blood is true drink*. The risen Christ who Saul encountered promises to give himself to his followers as food.

Our spiritual nourishment as Catholics is centered rightly around the Mass. In the Mass, we encounter the God who heals through the word in the Scripture and in the Eucharistic meal. Through the celebration of the Eucharist, we are fed. Our bodies are quite literally nourished through food. The tremendous news, however, is that that food is *the Flesh of the Son of Man*. The extraordinary meaning of partaking in this meal is that communion takes place between ourselves and our God as Christ promises that *whoever eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood remains in me, and I in him*.

We will encounter the risen Christ today, right here. Saul's body grew weak without food, but his strength returned with food. Our bodies call out also for food – real food and real drink. Our souls, too, cry out for nourishment from the risen Christ. We turn our attention now to prepare the table where God's power is made manifest in the Blessed Sacrament, the food that nourishes both our body and soul.

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Saturday, May 11, 2019

(Lec. 278)

1) Acts 9:31-42

2) John 6:60-69

Gospel related: **CCC** 438, 440, 473, 728, 1336, 2766

SATURDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: In good times and in challenging ones, Jesus has the words we need to hear.

Saint Peter asked the question for all of us: *To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.* There is no one else who brings us salvation; no one else who can bring lasting peace to our souls. At times, it seems God asks a lot of us, but there is still no one else we can go to who will serve our needs better than Jesus. He is the way, the truth and the life, and he will guide us if we ask him.

And while we may believe this in our hearts, it is easy to forget it in our day-to-day activities, often depending on our own thoughts and feelings to guide us. Being self-sufficient or asking others for advice is good and appropriate, but in the end, no one, including ourselves, will lead us to the answers of life's challenges as well as Jesus will. Sickness, lack of employment, division in families, raising children, caring for those in need – all these challenges and more can be laid before Jesus. He will help us find the best solutions. Who better to turn to than the one who has *the words of everlasting life?*

But what does everlasting life have to do with these everyday practical matters? A lot! If we can hold onto the vision of everlasting life, our perspective on many of our troubles can change. We can get a longer view, where the problems of today fall into the larger plan God has for our lives. As we listen to Jesus teaching his early disciples, we, too, can learn that his words are *Spirit and life.*

Our goal should be growing closer to God, and ultimately being with him for all eternity. When we seek God's help with our problems or concerns, when we *go to Jesus* and follow his teachings, we can have confidence in the steps we take as we meet each new day with its ups and downs. The perspective of everlasting life can positively color our interactions with others, and give us hope that Jesus is beside us and with us in the difficult times, as well as in the good times.

As we continue our Eucharistic celebration, let us meditate on what it means in our personal lives to turn to Jesus. Let us accept him as our guide in our life decisions. Let us trust him to show us the way, the truth and the life in our darkest times and in our times of rejoicing.

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SUNDAY, MAY 12, 2019

(Lec. 51)

1) Acts 13:14, 43-52

2) Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

3) John 10:27-30

Gospel related: **CCC 590**

**FOURTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

FOCUS: Jesus the Good Shepherd grasps our hand and continues to offer us eternal life.

Most folks are aware by now that sheep are not the brightest of God's four legged creatures. When left to their own devices, they wander off and risk being lost or injured. But we must not resent Jesus for referring to us as sheep! Let's face it, when left to our own devices we, too, can wander off and risk becoming lost. We need Jesus, the Good Shepherd, in our lives.

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is often referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday. No matter which liturgical cycle we are in, the Gospel will always be about Jesus, the Good Shepherd. So great is our Good Shepherd that he knows each of us by name and gives us eternal life.

Jesus states that no one can take a sheep from his hand or from the Father's hand because he and the Father are one. Some choose to interpret this as a "get out of jail free" card. In other words, we can choose to do what we want and it's okay because we are, after all, in Jesus' hand.

The truth is that no external force, no other person or entity, can take us out of Jesus' hand or the Father's hand. But we are certainly capable of letting go of Jesus' hand, the Father's hand. As tightly as Jesus grasps our hand out of love, we can break the grasp and choose to run away – risking the very real chance that we can become lost.

By the grace of God, however, we have Jesus the Good Shepherd grasping our hand, bringing us back time and time again – forgiving us, making us new and re-gifting us with salvation. Wander as we do, as lost as we might become, Jesus has promised us he will leave the ninety-nine and come and find us.

The reality of our faith and our free will is such that we must allow ourselves to be found. God will never force himself upon us any more than the evil one can force himself upon us. It is always up to us to choose good over evil, light over darkness, and life over death.

We may not be smart sheep, but we are wise disciples. Wise enough to know that embracing Jesus and his ways and his truth bring us to the eternal life we strive for.

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Monday, May 13, 2019
(Lec. 279)

- 1) Acts 11:1-18
- 2) John 10:1-10

MONDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Our Lady of Fatima)

Gospel related: **CCC** 754, 764, 2158 **CSDC** 1

FOCUS: Jesus, the Word Incarnate, offers the gift of life to all who believe.

Today we see the Good News being spread beyond the original people of the covenant, the Jewish people, to the Gentile community. In the first reading, Peter recounts to the other disciples a vision of the sky, with a large sheet appearing with animals of all sorts. He is told to slaughter and eat, but Peter, a Jewish man who still abides by Judaism's purity laws, refuses to eat the flesh of some of those animals.

A voice calls out to him: *What God has made clean, you are not to call profane.* After having this vision, Peter encounters several Gentiles, and as they engage with one another, the Holy Spirit descends upon them. These events helped shape the fledgling Christian community. Remember that for the most part, the first Christians were also Jewish, and that they followed strict laws as to with whom they could interact. But, God is the Creator of all people, and no one ought to be forbidden from being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit. God's grace can be received by all people.

What helps Peter to advocate for the Gentiles is his reliance upon the word of the Lord. Peter remembers Jesus saying that, *John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.* If God sends the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles, then far be it for Peter or any other person to prevent anyone from coming to God. In the Gospel, Jesus says that his sheep know his voice. Those who long for Jesus know how he reveals himself to them. He calls to them, and they follow. The word of the Lord goes to his sheep, to give them life, in abundance.

The life that comes from Jesus offers the solace of forgiveness. As the early Christians begin to understand why the Holy Spirit can come to the Gentiles, they recognize that God's life-giving repentance is a gift freely given to all people. That gift is also handed on to us, hundreds and thousands of years later. May we use this gift for our good and the good of all the world.

[OPTIONAL: Today, we remember Our Lady of Fatima. More than one hundred years ago, she appeared to several children in Portugal, urging them to pray for peace, in the midst of World War I, the Great War that took life away from so many people. Let us pray for peace, which allows all people to have life and to have it abundantly.]

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Tuesday, May 14, 2019

(Lec. 564)

1) Acts 1:15-17, 20-26

2) John 15:9-17

Gospel related: **CCC** 363, 434, 459, 609, 614, 737, 1108, 1823, 1824, 1970, 1972, 2074, 2347, 2615, 2745 **CSDC** 13, 29, 39, 580

**SAINT MATTHIAS,
APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: *It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you ... to go and bear fruit.*

Our first reading from the Book of Acts highlights a moment of crisis in the early Apostolic Church. The disciples had to decide how to replace Judas. Relying on the Scriptures with which they were intimately familiar, the death of Judas is read in light of the Spirit-spoken text of Scripture, a text from the psalms, *May another take his office*. In this, they affirm that the psalms are, “spoken by the Holy Spirit.” This is what we mean by the word “inspired.”

The disciples look to Scripture for guidance and discernment on how to understand what is going on in their present moment. This amounts to a first rule for discernment in the early Church, and in our world today. The north star of the Christian life is to live our lives “under the gaze of the Bible.”

Let’s look further at the criteria used by this early Christian community to discern a replacement for Judas. First of all, they want someone who was (and is) habitually in the company of Jesus and the apostolic community. One who, *accompanied us the whole time*. Second, this person was a *witness to his resurrection*, and had experienced the risen Jesus. Third, the Church proposes the candidates. Discernment belongs to the Church as a whole, and not to the one being called. Fourth, the Spirit chooses, in the case of Matthias, by lots. To *let go and let God* is a key moment in our lives with the Lord.

Our Gospel also contains a number of key criteria for discernment. Jesus says, *I no longer call you slaves... I have called you friends*. Friendship with Jesus, intimacy with Christ, is at the heart of all discernment and decision-making. It really is what the Christian life is all about. Intimacy with Christ is always a matter of response to God’s prior initiative: *It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you*. The whole life of faith is a response to God. What does it mean to experience ourselves as chosen? We are chosen for friendship with Jesus, to go and bear fruit, with the primal fruit being to *love one another as I love you*. This universal call to service is not a burdensome thing, a heavyweight, like the work of a slave, but is rooted in friendship with the Lord and, as such, is the source of immense joy.

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Wednesday, May 15, 2019
(Lec. 281)

- 1) Acts 12:24–13:5a
- 2) John 12:44-50

WEDNESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
USA: Saint Isidore)

Gospel related: **CCC** 679, 1039, 2466

FOCUS: All Christians are called to participate in the one mission of Christ, to proclaim the good news of salvation to all.

As we reflect on the sending of Barnabas and Saul described in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we can see that their mission is driven by the Holy Spirit. The immediate response of those gathered was to fast, pray and send them off after laying their hands on them. These actions are just as fitting for us today whenever we attempt to follow God's will in our own lives. Fasting brings about a kind of emptiness that puts us in a proper state where we are open to submit to God; praying helps us discern what it is we are being called to do and provides the necessary unity with God to accomplish it.

The laying on of hands is a very old practice that signifies the power of God being given to those being sent. It is a practice that continues today in the sacraments of the Church. In today's reading from the Gospel of John, Jesus refers to the power of God that has entered the world through him. It is to be passed on, drawing all to the gift of salvation. Believers who accept his word and receive him, receive the Father as well, and are sent out. How else would unbelievers come to believe if they do not encounter Christ's disciples?

Jesus is doing the work of the Father, and as Christians, we are doing the work of Christ (which is one and the same) –when we participate in the mission. He has given the Church a great command to “go and make disciples.” It is every Christian's work, or apostolate, to do this. How we carry it out using our unique gifts will vary, but that is where the fasting and prayer can help. We may not all be called to be theologians or Bible scholars, and some of us may forever struggle with the art of praying (many of our saints did, too.) But, like Barnabas and Saul, what is important is our willingness to be faithful to the Gospel, and go where we are sent. Sometimes that is to our own family, or our own community.

Often, the sincere Christian assumes that to be sent means to leave their home and family. This is not the case for most of us. The mission field can be where we live and work within our community. Today's reading can be an invitation for us to reflect more deeply on how we, too, can participate in the mission of the Church.

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Thursday, May 16, 2019
(Lec. 282)

- 1) Acts 13:13-25
- 2) John 13:16-20

Gospel related: **CCC** 858, 1337, 1694

THURSDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus invites us to open our hearts and minds to him with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Our readings today invite us to receive Jesus, telling us that, as we enter more fully into relationship with the Son of God, we are drawn near to God's saving power that has been at work throughout history. In the resurrected Christ, the power that saved the Israelites from slavery is present in our lives. In the resurrected Christ, the wisdom that guided the Israelites through the desert and the mercy that was faithful through their rebellion is present in our lives. In the resurrected Christ, the goodness that prepared the Promised Land for God's people and the patience that prepared them for the Messiah is present in our lives.

The goodness of which the psalmist sings – *For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord* – continues to live and love and act here in our midst. God's salvation is not in the past – something to study from a history book or a story to memorize from the Bible. The stories Paul alludes to in the first reading are our stories.

When we are enslaved by our habits, our addictions or our attitudes, our God draws near to free us. When we lose our way in the deserts of careerism, consumerism or materialism, our God draws near to guide us to fullness of life. When we lose sight of Christ our King, grasping for control in our lives, God draws near, gently washing our feet, offering us refreshment and healing.

We have only to receive the living Christ to receive this salvation that frees, guides, loves and heals. What does receiving the living Christ mean for you, for me, for each of us as we gather here? Notice the intimacy of this moment we read about in today's Gospel. Jesus washes his disciples' feet – and we are asked to open our hearts to this kind of intimacy. Let us share our brokenness and vulnerability with him today. Let us offer him our joys, our needs, the ordinary stuff of our lives with the gifts which are soon to be brought to the table of the altar. Jesus is already here, reaching out to help us to do so through the Holy Spirit.

That is the invitation of our Mass today. Jesus who saves is offering himself to us in intimacy right now, speaking his love in the proclamation of God's word, giving himself at the table of the Eucharist. We are each being invited to open our hearts and minds to him with the help of the Holy Spirit, and to receive his intimate love. In so doing, may we be strengthened to receive this gift more fully as we continue through our week.

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Friday, May 17, 2019
(Lec. 283)

- 1) Acts 13:26-33
- 2) John 14:1-6

Gospel related: **CCC** 74, 151, 459, 661, 1025, 1698, 2466, 2614, 2795 **CSDC** 1, 555

FRIDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: There is no need for a heavenly road map to salvation because Jesus himself is the way to the Father's house.

Paper road maps and atlases are less frequently used as a primary means of planning a trip and determining what specific streets are needed to reach a new destination. Until relatively recently, these maps were often the only way to be guided to a glorious vacation destination, and they also contained a fountain of additional information to enlighten the reader. Not to mention, trying to successfully refold the map after using it, or trying to read its incredibly small print were occasions for prayer ... and maybe the need for confession!

The term "road map" can also be defined more broadly as a detailed plan to guide progress toward a goal. For the children of Abraham, the road map to the goal of right relationship with God was the Hebrew Scriptures, which directed their way of living. These laws and commandments contained all that was needed to not only live justly and walk humbly with the Lord, but to recognize the son of God when he appeared, especially through the proclamations of the prophets.

The words of these prophets, however, were often extremely difficult to listen to for the Israelites. There were a variety of reasons for this, but they all stemmed from their own sinfulness. In shutting their ears to these messages, they fulfilled the oracles of the prophets in condemning the one who was sent to save them. They ignored the road map to salvation.

But God did not ignore them. God still fulfilled the promise made to their forebearers in faith and raised up his only begotten son, Jesus the Christ. And because of that, the world has something more effective than a road map, it has a GPS, as it were, a single voice showing the way. This GPS pinpoints the direction in which we need to point ourselves: a place prepared for each and every one of us by Jesus in his Father's house.

It took patience and a bit of luck to be able to fold an old paper map. For this new road map, we simply need faith. As Jesus says, *You have faith in God; have faith also in me. For I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* This is not a heavenly road map impossible to read, but the Incarnation of God himself, leading and pointing the way. It is Jesus, who is the only meaningful source of life and truth.

So let us tune the ear of our heart to the guiding voice of the only begotten Son. Let us allow his grace, through participation in the sacraments, to metaphorically recalculate our GPS when needed. And let us have faith in the only directions we will ever need.

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Saturday, May 18, 2019
(Lec. 284)

- 1) Acts 13:44-52
- 2) John 14:7-14

SATURDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint John I,
Pope and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 470, 516, 2614, 2633, 2815 **CSDC** 28

FOCUS: The promises of God are available for all who believe.

As we conclude the fourth week of Easter, our readings focus on the Gospel moving beyond the Jewish Christians and into the Gentile communities.

Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch, an ancient city which is now part of Turkey, to preach the Gospel. News was spreading that they had a mighty message from God for all. We are told that almost the whole city, including Gentiles, came to hear them speak. Remember that the Jews believed Gentiles to be outside of their religious enlightenment, scorning them because they were not Jews.

They were horrified to see that Paul and Barnabas were preaching to the Gentiles, and even more alarmed to see the Gentiles responding to our Lord's call for them to turn to him.

When Paul started to castigate the Jews for not believing, he made it very clear that because they had rejected the word of God, it was being preached to the Gentiles who joyfully embraced being part of God's family. Ultimately, the Jews in Antioch stirred up anger within their community and started to persecute Paul and Barnabas. They left Antioch and continued on to another city.

Paul and Barnabas were fearlessly preaching the good news of God's salvation for the world to all people, Jews and Gentiles, because God intended redemption for all of Creation.

What does this mean for us today? We are called to share the Gospel with others, and to accept and encourage all who believe in it. The Gospel is not easy for many to hear and accept. It isn't just about preaching words, it is about living our lives as a testimony of his love. Today, let us resolve that we, too, can help others to know Jesus' love.

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SUNDAY, MAY 19, 2019

(Lec. 54)

1) Acts 14:21-27

2) Revelation 21:1-5a

3) John 13:31-33a, 34-35

Gospel related: **CCC** 782, 1823, 1970, 2195, 2822, 2842 **CSDC** 32, 196, 580

**FIFTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

FOCUS: A Christ-like love is the hallmark of the true Christian.

Everyone, believers and non-believers alike, is familiar with the Golden Rule: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*. In other words, treat others as you would expect to be treated. We can all agree that it is very reasonable and practical, and makes good sense. Even Jesus seems to endorse it! But as we hear today, Jesus is never one simply for minimums or convenient half-measures. He always calls us to a higher standard or way of thinking – one that is not just in keeping with human expectations, reason and demands, but one that aligns with God's ways.

In today's Gospel passage from John, Jesus gives us a new commandment, one that will take commitment, perseverance and self-giving on our part even when it might not seem practical or even sensible. We are told today that we are to love as he loves.

Note that Jesus calls it a commandment, not an option but a mandate for every Christian: *As I have loved, so you also should love one another*. Measure for measure, our behavior in all aspects of our life must strive to be Christ-like, not merely reasonable or convenient but modeled on Christ. Now that is quite a demand!

So how can we describe this Christ-like love? One key word that the ancient Greeks used was *agape* – selfless, unconditional and self-giving love. We have only to look upon the cross to see that love poured out for each one of us in the outstretched arms of the crucified Christ. Right through the Gospels, we see this love exemplified in Jesus' words and actions in the way he encounters sinners, heals and liberates the sick, faithfully preaches the word and is faithful to the Father in all things.

Based simply on reason, it might seem like the life and mission of Jesus ended in failure and death. But God's ways are so different from ours; Christ's love is so much richer and fuller than mere human love. And it is this love that we are called to imitate in all its fullness, its faithfulness and, even at times, its impracticality.

Here today, Jesus sets a new command for his disciples. But he also give us the means to fulfill it: through his example (as he says in the passage), and in the sending of the Holy Spirit later to help us. We are not set up for failure, for the very credibility of the Christian message depends on our witness and how we live out that commandment of love.

Today, as we ponder his command, we might ask ourselves whether love is at the heart of our lives. And keeping in mind that we can do all things with God's help, let us commit to love of God and love of neighbor. To serving others lovingly, speaking lovingly and forgiving abundantly. For a Christ-like love is the hallmark of the true Christian.

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Monday, May 20, 2019
(Lec. 285)
1) Acts 14:5-18
2) John 14:21-26

MONDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Bernardine of Siena,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 243, 244, 260, 263, 647, 692, 729, 1099, 2466, 2615, 2623 **CSDC** 70, 104

FOCUS: Jesus promises that those who observe his commands will have the gift of his presence within.

How do we show our love for Jesus? In today's Gospel, Jesus is very clear: the one who loves him observes his commandments. And what are his commandments? This exchange takes place during the Last Supper at which Jesus washed his disciples' feet, showing them how they (and we) are to treat one another before giving us a new command: to love one another as he has loved us. So we show our love for Jesus when we literally and figuratively "wash" one another's feet – when we serve and care for all who are before us, whether they love us or betray us. We show our love for Jesus when we make sacrifices for the benefit and good of others, whether or not they deserve it.

This is a lot to ask. It is one thing to serve and care for those who reciprocate, or at a minimum won't intentionally stab us in the back or undermine us. But to also be giving and loving toward people who are ungrateful, hurtful or always looking for ways to belittle us, can seem an unreasonable expectation.

So why do it? Why should we show our love for Jesus even in those situations when observing his commands seems too much to ask? Because of Jesus' promise that he and the Father will dwell within the one who does so.

And yes, absolutely, the presence of the Lord makes a difference and changes us and makes it actually easier to observe the commands of the Lord. That presence, and the grace it fills us with, is ultimately what we most long for and need. Yes, it takes some sacrifice and service, but these are the tools that make it possible for the Lord to come within for they teach us humility and help us make room within our hearts for the Lord.

As we come to the table to receive the presence of the Lord in the Eucharist, let us pray that this gift strengthens us to better observe Jesus' commands that we may always enjoy the transforming fruits of this sacrament.

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Tuesday, May 21, 2019
(Lec. 286)
1) Acts 14:19-28
2) John 14:27-31a

TUESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Christopher Magallanes,
Priest,
and Companions,
Martyrs)

Gospel related: **CCC** 606, 1851, 2853 **CSDC** 491, 516

FOCUS: The peace of Christ is a wholeness and holiness that reaches the deepest part of our being.

The term peace has many meanings in the English language. Many a parent has exclaimed at the end of a busy day with the kids, “I just want a little peace and quiet.” This equates peace with an absence of noise. When we talk about world peace, we mean a world without war. Each of these definitions is valid, but each falls well short of the peace Jesus speaks of in today’s Gospel.

The Hebrew word for peace Jesus uses is *shalom*, which has a broader and deeper meaning. “Shalom” extends a wish for a deep sense of wholeness – a peace that cuts to the innermost reaches of our heart. In today’s Gospel from John, Jesus is speaking to his Apostles in one of his Last Supper discourses. He tells them the peace he is extending is different than anything they have ever experienced, saying, *not as the world gives do I give it to you*.

The Church says the concept of peace starts in the Old Testament but “finds its fulfillment in the very person of Jesus” (*CSDC* 491). In biblical terms, Jesus’ “shalom” is a “gift of salvation, connoting the bounty of messianic blessing” (*NABRE* John 14:27). In other words, when Jesus says *my peace I give to you*, he is giving the Apostles a blessing from heaven. This is a peace available to all of us through prayer – through a personal relationship with the Lord.

We live in a very hectic society. Technology has accelerated the pace of living. Everything needs to happen “right now.” When we don’t consciously take a step back and slow down, we run the risk of being absorbed into a world of shortsighted goals – goals that tend to be materialistic, even selfish. Following Jesus requires a farsighted plan. It calls for short-term pain for long-term gain – heaven. We heard this in our first reading from Acts today, which says we must *undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God*.

So let’s find some time this week to hit the pause button on a chaotic part of our lives. Let’s find some peace and quiet first, then pray for that peace that can only come from Jesus – that deeper inner peace of wholeness. Shalom, my friends, shalom.

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Wednesday, May 22, 2019
(Lec. 287)
1) Acts 15:1-6
2) John 15:1-8

WEDNESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Rita of Cascia,
Religious)

Gospel related: **CCC** 308, 517, 737, 755, 787, 859, 864, 1108, 1694, 1988, 2074, 2615, 2732
CSDC 39

FOCUS: As Jesus, the vine, sustains us, we are called to bear much fruit and feed others with God's love.

Today's Gospel takes place near the end of Jesus' ministry on earth. He has told his Apostles that his time with them is almost over. He spends these precious moments with them still teaching. He wants them, and us, to know that he will give us what we need for all time. Jesus reminds us that we need to maintain our relationship with him at our center.

Jesus teaches, *I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.* Just as branches need their connection to the vine to live and flourish, so we need Jesus to sustain us and help us grow. Jesus, the vine, is our source of life. Cut off from him, our relationship will wither and die.

God is our base, and as branches we spread his word. As we "bear fruit," we provide sustenance and comfort to others with his teachings. This, in essence, is the other side of the relationship. Jesus provides the nourishment, the message, the truth and grace we need to live as his followers. We, in turn, feed others with the fruit of our branches.

So, we have to ask ourselves: How do we share this fruit with the world? We are tasked with making sure God's message and truth reach beyond ourselves. Maybe we do this by the kind of life we lead. Loving others, treating them with kindness and compassion, giving to those in need, speaking words of encouragement to the downtrodden, placing value on goodness and living a moral life are all ways of sharing the fruit of the vine.

However we do it, and no matter where each of us is on our faith journey, Jesus remains steadfast in his promise to sustain us, feed us and love us eternally. That promise is found here in the Eucharist, given to us in love so we may then share his love with others.

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Thursday, May 23, 2019
(Lec. 288)

- 1) Acts 15:7-21
- 2) John 15:9-11

Gospel related: **CCC** 1108, 1823, 1824 **CSDC** 39

THURSDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: *Remain in my love.*

Our fifty days of Easter is a time to immerse ourselves in the paschal mystery: Christ's work of redemption "accomplished principally by ... his blessed Passion, Resurrection from the dead, and glorious Ascension" (CCC 1067). Indeed, reflecting on this mystery is not an attempt to solve some sort of riddle, but a way of asking God to open our minds and our hearts so that we might grow in our understanding of it. For at the core of the paschal mystery is God's love.

God's love is inexhaustible to our understanding, and yet, the more we prayerfully reflect on it, the closer we grow in our relationship to God. God's abundant grace is always drawing us closer to him. Yet, we can sometimes struggle with how best to be receptive and answer his call.

As we saw in our first reading, even the early Church wrestled with what was required for joining the community. The leadership debated at length about what to do with Gentile converts. Should they observe all the religious practices that Jewish converts observe? As they consider this substantial question, Peter stands up and reminds all of the leaders gathered about God's incredible presence among the Gentiles. He reminds them of the power of God, *who knows the heart*. Then *Paul and Barnabas described the signs and wonders God had worked among the Gentiles through them*. God's saving grace unites all, regardless of background. The spirit of the law is to grow, united in God's love.

Our Gospel calls us to further reflection on God's love and our response to it. Jesus, speaking to his followers, tells them to remain in his love. What could this mean? Jesus elaborates that to keep his commandments is to remain in his love. To follow Jesus' commandments, then, is not to mindlessly follow arbitrary rules, but to enter into and reflect God's love, which is at the core of each of them.

Jesus shows us the way. And in a concerted way during this Easter season, we remember and celebrate that Jesus' love is revealed in the paschal mystery of his life, death and Resurrection. The same mystery and love into which we are baptized. For when we live in him, and die in him, we will receive the promise he gave to his disciples: *Remain in my love ... and remain in [the Father's] love ... so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete.*

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Friday, May 24, 2019
(Lec. 289)

- 1) Acts 15:22-31
- 2) John 15:12-17

FRIDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER

Gospel related: **CCC** 363, 434, 459, 609, 614, 737, 1108, 1823, 1970, 1972, 2074, 2347, 2615, 2745, 2815 **CSDC** 13, 29, 39, 580

FOCUS: God has chosen us, set us apart, to carry his love to others.

As we continue to celebrate the triumph of the Resurrection this Easter season, today's readings invite us to dive deeper into the real-life implications of God's love. To contemplate what a love that transcends death looks like. To think about how such a love affects us.

Jesus tells us that, first and foremost, this kind of love makes us friends and no longer slaves. Saint Basil the Great, reflecting on this dynamic, says, "If we turn away from evil out of fear of punishment, we are in the position of slaves. If we pursue the enticement of wages ... we resemble mercenaries. Finally, if we obey for the sake of the good itself and out of love for him who commands ... we are in the position of children" (CCC 1828).

Neither the fear of punishment nor the promise of a future reward is as powerful as the love Jesus offers his disciples each day. This love, by which he calls us friends, changes everything. This love conquers death and invites us to a new and transformative relationship with God.

This is the love highlighted in our first reading as well: the love that identifies us and sets us apart. In response to a debate over how the Jewish law should govern Gentile converts, the Apostles affirm that it is the relationship with Jesus, this friendship to which the converts are called, that sets them apart as Christians, not circumcision.

As we go through our day, God will call us. He will call us to be his children – to love ourselves with the dignity we have been given by this relationship. God will call us to love a co-worker, a neighbor, a family member. He will call us to enter into this friendship with him through prayer. He will call us throughout this day, and will love us in such a way as to empower our response.

Jesus has chosen us, and set us apart, to go out and bear the fruit of this transformative love; to partake in this friendship, and the Eucharist, that changes everything. In so doing we are formed, and transformed, to share with the world this love that transcends death.

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Saturday, May 25, 2019
(Lec. 290)

- 1) Acts 16:1-10
- 2) John 15:18-21

SATURDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.

Saint Bede the Venerable,
Priest and Doctor of the Church;
Saint Gregory VII,
Pope;
Saint Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi,
Virgin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 530, 675, 765 **CSDC** 39

FOCUS: Those who belong to Christ will encounter hardship on account of his name.

Today, Jesus warns Christians that if we are truly living and sharing the Gospel, we are likely to be persecuted by the world. The “world” can mean those who do not believe; who scoff at the idea of a savior; or those who give in to the dark forces of greed, power and other vices.

Jesus says that those who will persecute Christians will do so *because they do not know the one who sent me* – that is, they do not know God, our Father. Here, Jesus is not referring to only atheists and agnostics who do not know God. On the contrary, it may be possible for even Christians to so misunderstand the Gospel that their understanding of God is warped – and in effect they do not really know God. After all, many of the religious leadership of Jesus’ day were ready to crucify our Savior.

The world’s hate can take many forms, and we must take caution not to participate in it. Sometimes egregious forms of hate can wreak havoc because good people close their eyes and allow it to happen unchecked. Pontius Pilate, for example, seemed to believe that Jesus was both innocent and relatively harmless, and yet he still washed his hands and allowed Jesus to be crucified. Closing our eyes can be a quite easy and natural thing to do in the face of ugliness – ugliness that can give rise to the dehumanization of others.

Our baptism calls us to resist any silent complicity, however. Anointed as priest, prophet and king for the world, each one of us has a role in spreading the Gospel. And while at times the injustice may seem greater than our reach, in these moments we must resolve to stay focused on Jesus and sharing God’s love. After all, God’s love can and will conquer all.

Let us go forth to the Eucharistic table, the visible evidence of God’s love conquering all, to unite ourselves to God and one another. There we will find the strength to stand solidly on the side of God’s kingdom and withstand any wave of hatred that may come to knock us down.

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SUNDAY, MAY 26, 2019

(Lec. 57)

- 1) Acts 15:1-2, 22-29
- 2) Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23
- 3) John 14:23-29

Gospel related: **CCC** 243, 244, 260, 263, 692, 729, 1099, 2466, 2615, 2623 **CSDC** 70, 491, 516

**SIXTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

FOCUS: *Do not let your hearts be troubled.* We are not alone in our mission to the world.

How many of us have ever wished, in moments of indecision, that God would send us a clear sign about what we are called to do at that moment – perhaps an angel to tell us exactly what God wants? At times like these, when we're surrounded by turmoil and violence, it can be easy to feel that God has left us alone to fend for ourselves – that we're left on our own with no clear direction.

But the readings today, as we come ever nearer to the great Feast of Pentecost, are reassuring. We are not alone, but have God, the Church, and the people around us to give us guidance and support when we need it – as long as we're open to the different ways the Holy Spirit operates in our daily lives.

In the first reading, we see the Church, our brothers and sisters in the faith, as a support system to help us understand what is required of us. The earliest Gentile disciples in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia were misled into believing they had to follow the ancient Mosaic law if they were to be saved – if they were to be Christians. But the Apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit in their discussions, realized that Gentile believers were not called to the same strict code of law that the Jewish people had been, and they sent emissaries to encourage the Gentiles, to lighten their load. Sometimes, in this case, the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the word of those around us, the faithful people who listen to the voice of the Spirit and help us to understand.

Jesus assures us in the Gospel that the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, will be with us if we stay close to God, if we listen to God's word and allow God to make his dwelling in us. Even though Jesus is not physically with us any more (in his human form), his Spirit is with us to guide us to the truth – to remind us of the words that Jesus spoke to the Apostles and continues to speak to us through Scripture. The Holy Spirit who dwells in us speaks to us in our heart, during our prayer and when we are open to receiving his message.

How do we know that the Holy Spirit is speaking to us? One way is to stay close to God through daily prayer, Scripture reading and the sacraments. One special type of prayer is the nightly *Examen*, in which we review the day past and see how God has been working in that day – where we received special blessings, where we were effective in our discipleship and where we might have failed. Through the daily practice of examining our lives, we can more easily see how God has spoken to us that day – through prayer, for example, or through the words or action of a family member or colleague.

As we prepare to celebrate Pentecost, let us always remember that the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, longs to speak God's word to us and guide us – if we're open.

* * *

Monday, May 27, 2019

(Lec. 291)

1) Acts 16:11-15

2) John 15:26–16:4a

MONDAY OF

SIXTH WEEK

OF EASTER

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Augustine of Canterbury,

Bishop)

Gospel related: **CCC** 244, 248, 263, 692, 719, 729, 1433, 2671 **CSDC** 39

FOCUS: We are called to welcome Christ and to enable the preaching of the Gospel.

In the first reading, a woman named Lydia, who was a successful cloth merchant, listens to Saint Paul, and afterward she and her household were baptized. Luke tells us that she opened her heart to God and then she says something quite interesting: *If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my home.*

If you consider me a believer. What an odd thing to say to the one who had, presumably, examined her faith and baptized her household. How could she have undergone baptism if she were not a believer? But perhaps that is emphasizing the wrong part of Lydia's statement, for the second half is just as striking: *come and stay at my home.* This is not a request, but a directive – and it is being given by a woman. A woman who may or may not be married, but clearly has property and economic means in her own right, for we are told about *her* household.

It's a classic if/then, cause and effect relationship she puts before Paul and his friends. If they consider her to be a believer [which they clearly do], then they [must] accept her hospitality. Which they do. In the lands of the Middle East, hospitality is an important virtue and social construct. For Christians, it is a key component of discipleship. Because Paul and his friends stayed at her home for an extended time, they could continue to preach in Philippi. They could minister to those who were seeking God. And their needs for shelter and food were met.

In today's Gospel, Jesus warns of situations that will *not* look like the one with Lydia. He tells them they will be expelled from synagogues, and killed. He says that those who kill them will do so in the thought that they are worshiping God – because they do not know the Father, or him. But the Holy Spirit will be there as their Advocate, Jesus assures them. The *Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will testify to me*, and the disciples themselves will testify. And we know that this is true, because we here today saw it take place in the first reading. The Spirit moved Lydia and her family, and as one who came to know and believe in the Father, and the Son, she in turn testified to this belief by offering hospitality to the disciples. She heard the Good News, she believed the Good News, and she practiced the Good News.

We, too, have heard the Good News, we believe it, and we [hopefully!] all try our best to share and practice it. Now it is our turn to open our homes – our bodies – to Christ. In the Eucharist, and in our daily interactions with others, we are called to welcome Christ and to enable the preaching of the Gospel. May we have the strength and grace of Lydia as we answer that call.

* * *

Tuesday, May 28, 2019

(Lec. 292)

1) Acts 16:22-34

2) John 16:5-11

Gospel related: **CSDC 39**

TUESDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Belief in Jesus is what saves us.

The story we hear in the first reading could be a scene from an action movie. First, our heroes are badly beaten and placed in a high-security prison. When all hope seems lost, they are found singing hymns of praise to God. Suddenly, a violent earthquake bursts open the doors, freeing not only our heroes but all of the prisoners. In another plot twist, they choose not to escape. Remaining in their cell, they save the jailer from death by his own sword. The jailer then asks what he must do to be saved. Their response sounds simple enough: *Believe in the Lord Jesus and you and your household will be saved.*

What does Paul mean, when he tells the jailer to believe in Jesus? It is clearly not a command to accept an abstract concept, to acknowledge that Jesus existed. Rather, it is the conviction that Jesus is who he says he is. It is the belief that Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead, and that by this dying and rising he conquered sin and death, opening the way to eternal life.

Furthermore, belief in Jesus is an action. After Paul has told him that belief in Jesus will save him, the jailer immediately invites Paul and Silas into his home and cares for their wounds. Then, he and all his family members are baptized at once, and they host a meal in celebration of their new faith. All of this happens overnight. The verse that follows this passage begins, *But when it was day....* The jailer acts with a sense of urgency that we who have inherited this two-thousand-year-old tradition rarely display. He responds to the preaching and actions of Paul and Silas the way we might respond to someone throwing us a flotation device or directing us toward the emergency exits. After they save him from immediate danger, he turns to them for something more – for the salvation of his soul.

By being baptized, the jailer and his family participate in Christ's death and resurrection and take on a new name – Christian. To believe that Jesus is who he says he is means identifying ourselves with his very person. Incorporated as members of his body, we are freed from sin to participate in Christ's saving work. Hospitality. Mercy. Joy. These are just some of the marks of a believer that the jailer and his family exhibit. May we who hear the word today recognize the saving power of the risen Lord in our lives and respond accordingly.

* * *

Wednesday, May 29, 2019
(Lec. 293)

- 1) Acts 17:15, 22–18:1
- 2) John 16:12-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 91, 243, 244, 485, 687, 690, 692, 729, 1117, 1287, 2466, 2615, 2671
CSDC 29, 39, 104

WEDNESDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: We were created to be fully alive in and with God.

In the first reading, Paul preaches to the Athenians in a way that would have appealed to a Greek/Gentile audience. He emphasized God as Creator, and describes the human impulse to seek for a higher being. He introduces them to Jesus, though not by name, by telling them that God has established *justice through a man he has appointed, and he has provided confirmation for all by raising him from the dead*. Emphasizing God as Creator was a relevant and powerful rhetorical tool for Paul to use while talking to a Greek audience. They were not as keen on thinking about the Resurrection, but they were interested in the message. Why? Because they understood the concept of searching for “more.”

Walking down the self-help aisle of any bookstore reveals the same, contemporary human longing for happiness and well-being. The number of fad diets and fitness programs reveals the human desire to be whole. When we consider Paul’s words, we can see how this innate desire for wholeness and happiness comes from God. Paul proclaimed that God *fixed the ordered seasons and boundaries of their regions, so that people might seek God, even perhaps grope for him*. The longing for truth and happiness comes from God so that we might seek him in return.

Saint Augustine captured this sentiment well in *The Confessions* when he wrote, “For you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” Humanity was created to be fully alive in and with God. Jesus came into this world to fully reveal God’s compassion and saving grace. Then, Jesus sent us his Spirit to declare the truth and guide our restless hearts.

This restlessness of heart has characterized humanity for ages. Saint Augustine wrote *The Confessions* in the fifth century, and his words still hold true today. It is normal to ask questions and struggle with questions of faith, life and death. It is exactly this struggle that can help us to seek God. We can bring our struggles, weariness, and questions before him. We can ask the Spirit for guidance. It is in recognizing and bringing this restlessness to God, that God can transform our unsettled souls.

Jesus tells his disciples in today’s Gospel, *when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming. He will glorify me*. We cannot be misled by the Spirit. If we seek to know and love God, and are receptive to what the Spirit speaks to us, our restless hearts will find rest. God has created us able to know and love him. May we seek him in all things.

* * *

NOTE: Regarding the Ascension of the Lord, the ecclesiastical provinces of Boston, Hartford, New York, Newark, Omaha, and Philadelphia have retained its celebration on the proper Thursday, while all other provinces have transferred this Solemnity to the Seventh Sunday of Easter, June 2. If transferred, Thursday, May 30, is observed as an Easter Weekday or as the following Optional Memorials: Saint Damien de Veuster, Priest. The following readings are used: Acts 18:1-8/John 16:16-20(294).

Thursday, May 30, 2019

(Lec. 58)

- 1) Acts 1:1-11
- 2) Ephesians 1:17-23 or
Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:19-23
- 3) Luke 24:46-53

Gospel related: **CCC** 112, 627, 652, 659, 730, 981, 1120, 1122, 1304 **CSDC** 52

**THE ASCENSION
OF THE LORD
- SOLEMNITY**
(Holy Day of Obligation)

FOCUS: Jesus has prepared the way for us, and sent the Holy Spirit to guide us.

Today's celebration of the Ascension of the Lord can get lost. It comes between two other significant moments in the life of a young Church. A few weeks ago, we celebrated the greatest day on the liturgical calendar, the Resurrection of the Lord. In a few days, we will celebrate another important event for a fledgling Church, the Descent of the Holy Spirit.

Today, the Apostles are less afraid than they were when Jesus came to them on that first Easter, but losing him today for a second time could not have been easy. In our first reading, they are left staring up at heaven. In the Gospel, they leave rejoicing filled with great joy. So which is it? Are they bewildered or joy-filled? Actually they are both.

The Apostles have journeyed with Jesus for three years. They have witnessed the miracles and the parables. They have also witnessed the resentments and the ridicule. They have just witnessed his torturous death and his glorious Resurrection. It has truly been a rollercoaster ride of giant proportions.

Such is the life of discipleship we live even today as we gather to celebrate the moment between Easter and Pentecost. We are a people living in a kingdom established here on earth, but not yet part of its fullness found in the next life. It is an in-between moment for the Church, and in our own lives. How we choose to face such moments tells us how resilient our faith is, or whether there is work to be done to strengthen our reliance on Jesus and on his promises.

It is always going to be easier to have faith when things are going well. It is in those in-between moments that we learn a great deal about ourselves. It is okay to stop and stare at what is unclear or confusing – as long as we find joy in the journey, as the disciples in both readings eventually did [even though we don't hear about it in the first reading]. It is here we discover the need to go deeper in our trust in Jesus' promise not to ever leave us orphaned.

It is in these in-between moments we also realize we are never alone in facing any challenge that is before us. For though Jesus' human form ascended into heaven, he is here present in word and sacrament. The Holy Spirit dwells within and among us. By God's grace, may we have all that Saint Paul prayed for, for those who lived in Ephesus: *May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe.*

OPTIONAL HOMILY FOR MAY 30

Thursday, May 30, 2019

(Lec. 294)

1) Acts 18:1-8

2) John 16:16-20

Gospel related: **CSDC 39**

THURSDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Though we may lose sight of him sometimes, Jesus waits for us to return to him so he can turn our grief to everlasting joy.

Today's Gospel is part of Jesus' Last Supper discourse – the things he wanted to share with his disciples before his Passion began. His words sound almost cryptic: *A little while and you will no longer see me, and again a little while later and you will see me*. His disciples must have been confused as well, since they discussed the meaning of these words.

Today, knowing what comes next in Jesus' story, we have an idea of what he meant: he would suffer and die, and the disciples would not see him and they would grieve; and then he would rise again and the disciples' grief would become joy.

There is a lesson in this for each of us. Throughout our lives, we all have times we don't see Jesus. Maybe it's during a time of personal tragedy, struggles with sin or even just feeling too busy to take time for God.

However, with the grace of God, we can reorient ourselves to God. We can open our eyes to once again see Jesus, and seeing him will bring us true joy, just as seeing Jesus in person brought joy to the disciples.

Though the human form of Jesus is hidden from our eyes, we as Catholics believe that we can see him every day under the appearance of bread and wine. When we come to Mass, we can bring everything to Jesus: our joys and sorrows, concerns and praises. Though we may lose sight of him sometimes, Jesus is always here waiting for us to see his face gazing lovingly back at each of us. Though we know our lives in this fallen world will sometimes cause us to grieve, we can trust that Jesus who conquered the grave will also conquer all sorrow, and one day bring our souls the everlasting joy that comes when we unite ourselves fully to him.

* * *

Friday, May 31, 2019

(Lec. 572)

1) Zephaniah 3:14-18a
or Romans 12:9-16

2) 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, 259

**THE VISITATION
OF THE
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Mary's witness teaches us how to be authentic disciples of Jesus.

On this Marian feast day, the Visitation, the readings provide additional insights into the identity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Through the Annunciation, we know Mary as a young contemplative woman who said yes to God and changed the world. And today Mary, through her visit to Elizabeth, illustrates how authentic prayer should always lead to action.

We do not know the full details of her visit, but we do know her appearance moved both Elizabeth and the child in her womb to proclaim who Mary is for us: *Blessed are you among women*. Elizabeth's greeting is more than just a recognition of Mary's blessedness. By using this line of praise taken from the Book of Judith, she is defining Mary through the exploits of Judith, a great heroine in the Hebrew tradition.

When Mary responds to this greeting, by declaring, *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord*, she is drawing on the words of another woman, Hannah, who praised God for allowing her to conceive a child despite her barrenness. (cf., 1 Samuel 2:1-10). By Mary drawing on Hannah's words, she, too, is expressing her praise of God who chose her, despite her lowliness and virginity, to conceive a child, who will be called the Son of God.

Two thousand years later, each time we pray the Hail Mary, we testify, as Elizabeth did, to Mary's blessedness and her role in our salvation history. We recognize how trusting in God can produce fruit that will change the world. And, through the witness of Mary, we know that through prayer we encounter the saving power of God, moving us to go out and help those who are in need, lifting up the lowly, feeding the hungry and making known God's mercy to the small and weak of the world.

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