

# SEPTEMBER

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**YEAR C  
WEEKDAYS I**

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2019**

(Lec. 126)

- 1) Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29
- 2) Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a
- 3) Luke 14:1, 7-14

Gospel related: **CCC** 575, 588 **CSDC** 261

**TWENTY-SECOND  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: True humility is knowing our need for God.

We are all familiar with that moment when we walk into a wedding reception wondering where we will be seated. Unless we are part of the actual wedding party, most of us would never dream of sitting at the main table, instead we tend to stay close to the door, looking for the table map or hoping that someone will call out “over here, you’re at this table.” Today’s Gospel makes use of this familiar scene, allowing Jesus to teach us about humility and its role in the kingdom.

From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus made it clear that the kingdom of God is pure gift, never earned or achieved by what we do. There is no special status or honor for those who come first, or those born into any particular race or family. Simply to be at the banquet is honor enough. And where we sit at this great feast is not for us to decide, but for the one who has invited us.

It is clear that the Pharisees have invited Jesus not to engage him in dialogue, but to observe him carefully and perhaps even to catch him out. Here Luke uses the Greek verb *paratereo* (to watch insidiously) to suggest this hostile intent, a verb he will use again when they try to test him on the issue of taxes to Caesar (20:20). Clearly, this was never meant to be a relaxed encounter. But as usual, it is Jesus who gets the upper hand, teaching them a lesson in humility.

Observing how they chose the best seats for themselves, Jesus was able to perceive their priorities – to be seen, to be honored, to be important! But these are not the priorities of the kingdom, nor are they the criteria for deciding who will be invited to its banquet.

In words that are radical and countercultural, even today, Jesus explains that the kingdom is for those who truly know their need of God and who live in the knowledge of their inability to repay him.

Of course, in moments of difficulty knowing that need is a little easier, so the real test comes in the ordinary events of daily life. Humility comes in ordering our priorities, and how our faith informs our lives as married people, parents, single people, teenagers and children.

Through baptism, we have been given a role in the building of the kingdom. As we gather today, there is no place of honor, except for the Lord who is our host. Today we come as we are: a people in need of God’s mercy – a people who need to experience his love and joy. We come not because it is a reward for what we have done, but in order to be changed. Christ is the one who invites us to share in God’s mercy and love. It is in his power that we are sent out to live what we have celebrated, and to invite others to share with us in the kingdom.

Monday, September 2, 2019

(Lec. 431)

1) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

2) Luke 4:16-30

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

MONDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are people of hope, and console one another with our faith.

In today's Gospel, Luke gives us his account of the first words of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus is at the synagogue in his hometown and he reads aloud to the congregation, from Isaiah. Then he declares that Isaiah's prophecy is now fulfilled. People listening were amazed, but skeptical. They ask: Isn't this Joseph's son? How can he make such a claim? How can we believe him?

Paul also encounters skeptics and worriers in his ministry. There are some in Thessalonica who doubt aspects of the Good News preached by Paul. They wonder about *those who have fallen asleep* (died) before Christ's impending return. What will become of them? How can they continue to have hope? But Paul reassures them that *the dead in Christ will rise first* and that *we shall [all] always be with the Lord*.

As in the time of Jesus and Saint Paul, there are those who doubt religious claims, and their skepticism is affirmed by our increasingly secular culture. They may question our faith and our reason for continuing to believe. We, too, may be skeptical at times, and experience doubts about our beliefs.

So it helps to be reminded why it is we believe and why we continue to practice our faith. It is not just habit or routine, family custom or social obligation. It is more than that. We believe because the *Spirit of the Lord, is upon [us]*, as Jesus quoted from Isaiah. We have been anointed by Christ's Holy Spirit through his sacraments. Inspired by his Spirit, we participate in his works of mercy – in service to the poor, the oppressed and others in need.

Through this service we grow close to Christ, meeting him in our neighbor and seeing his word fulfilled through the Spirit at work in our world. United with him and all his Church, we trust that we shall always be together with him, in this life and after death. Thus we are people of hope, and console one another with our faith, as did Paul and the earliest members of the Church.

This is why we believe. We can tell this to those who question our faith, but belief can be difficult to explain. It is better to be experienced, as it is a gift of Christ's Spirit. Let us invite those who want to understand our faith to participate with us in the liturgy and life of the Church, so that they, too, can come to know and trust in Christ. If they decline our invitation, perhaps by our witness of hope and love – sustained by our continued participation in the Eucharist – they will eventually become interested. Until then, we keep them in our prayers, and trust the Spirit of the Lord to do the rest.

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Tuesday, September 3, 2019

(Lec. 432)

1) 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6, 9-11

2) Luke 4:31-37

TUESDAY OF

22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

Saint Gregory the Great,

Pope and Doctor of the Church)

FOCUS: Jesus saves – yesterday, today and forever.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as the one whom the Hebrew prophets foretold, the one who will liberate the oppressed. We see an example of this in today's Gospel reading, when Jesus frees a man from an unclean spirit. We know that Jesus is the Son of God, and we are accustomed to hearing about Jesus' mighty deeds. Those who witnessed this exorcism, on the other hand, were amazed, and they wondered at the power of Jesus' word. Little did they know that these acts of mercy were only a taste of what was to come, of the ultimate act of healing.

This ultimate act is what Saint Paul talks about in his letter to the Church at Thessalonica. Paul writes: *God did not destine us for wrath, but to gain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live together with him.* Anticipating Christ's imminent return, this newly converted community of Christians is concerned that some of their members are dying before Christ's second coming. Paul reassures them that Christ's saving power reaches beyond the grave. The dead, too, will rise to new life.

Paul also says this with regard to Jesus' second coming: First, it will be like a thief coming at night. There is an element of the unexpected in this, and therefore an important need to be prepared at all times. Paul also compares it to labor pains, which are inevitable and life-giving. We know that Jesus is coming, but we do not know when. We may have to endure suffering on the way, but we have hope that it will result in new life with him.

In light of this tension, Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to remain vigilant, which is a message we certainly need to hear today as well. Salvation has been won for all by Christ's death on the cross, but our personal salvation is not guaranteed unless we are in a proper state of grace.

Therefore, we are called to hope. Hope is the virtue to counteract the pitfalls of despair and presumption. We are neither to despair of God's mercy in the face of our own sinfulness, nor to presume our salvation despite our many sins. Rather, we are called, like the Thessalonians, to stay alert and sober, to encourage one another and build one another up. To repent, forgive and be converted of heart when necessary. For we have been saved, we are being saved and we will be saved, if we remain in the body of Christ.

Wednesday, September 4, 2019

(Lec. 433)

1) Colossians 1:1-8

2) Luke 4:38-44

WEDNESDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Evil divides, Christ reconciles.

Today's Gospel comes from the fourth chapter of Luke. And once again, Luke is highlighting the miracles, signs and wonders of Jesus over and against the presence of evil. As he did previously while facing the devil and his temptations in the desert, Jesus rebukes this evil: both the fever in Simon's mother and all the demons present in the many who come to him. And in a show of power and mercy, he fills the spaces created by the departing malicious spirits with goodness and healing. What evil harms, Christ mends. What evil divides, Christ reconciles. He comes, as the prophets promised, to liberate us from physical and spiritual sickness – from sin and death.

*I must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God, Jesus says, because for this purpose I have been sent.* And for we who believe, for we who have faith, Christ is the one who gives us hope in the face of whatever trials we may face. The paschal mystery is the promise that evil will not have the final word.

Saint Paul reassures the Colossians of this hope and promise as he and Timothy write to them, blessing and giving thanks for their faith, and encouraging them in their growth in the Gospel. Like the Colossians, we, too, have already been given the gift of faith and salvation through Jesus. We, too, have the opportunity and encouragement to grow in this faith – to live in this faith and bear Gospel fruit for the salvation of the world.

United in Christ, and by our baptismal vows, we reject Satan and all his works. We bring our needs before the Lord, knowing he will attend to them, free us from sin and death, and protect us from the evil of the world. Evil divides. Christ unites and reconciles. May we have the grace to trust in the Lord, and allow him to do that for which he has been sent.

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Thursday, September 5, 2019

(Lec. 434)

1) Colossians 1:9-14

2) Luke 5:1-11

Gospel related: **CCC** 208

THURSDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Trust in God.

It is striking to think of today's Gospel through the perspective of Simon Peter. He is not actively seeking Jesus, rather he is going about his day-to-day business of fishing when he is approached by Jesus, who asks to use his boat. Jesus needs it so he can teach to the large crowd that has gathered to listen to him. Simon Peter obliges.

Interestingly, we never hear the specifics of what Jesus is teaching to the crowd. We just know that when he finished, he amazed Peter. Jesus asked Simon Peter to lower his nets into deep water and his catch was so bountiful, he had to call in his partners for reinforcement. Simon Peter went from a night's hard work of nothing caught, to the boat on the verge of sinking because of the number of fish.

Simon Peter was struggling when he encountered Jesus. The vulnerability of his livelihood was apparent when he shared that he had not caught a thing the night before. Jesus calls to him in that vulnerability, directing him to leave everything behind, including his fear. He is inviting Simon Peter to trust him on his journey of discipleship.

As Saint Paul writes to the Colossians, the journey of faith requires *endurance and patience*, but through Christ we are made *fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones*. That is, with growth *in the knowledge of God*, and *in accord with his glorious might*, we are delivered *from the power of darkness*. God has reached out to humanity in its vulnerability and death, and through the sacrifice of his Son he has invited us to trust him. With grace, we have the faith and ability to respond.

And just like Simon Peter, our own story of call and response may involve letting go of something in order to follow God. And we are reminded through the Eucharist, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, that we are not alone. That will never change. In that, we can trust.

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Friday, September 6, 2019

(Lec. 435)

1) Colossians 1:15-20

2) Luke 5:33-39

FRIDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The old way of the scribes and Pharisees has been replaced by the new way of Jesus.

As we have seen time and again, the Pharisees seek out opportunities to accuse Jesus of wrongdoing, or to discredit him in his ministry. In today's Gospel, they try to trap Jesus by critiquing his dining habits – in particular his willingness to feast with his disciples in spite of the traditional fasting practice of the Jews. They gripe: *The disciples of John the Baptist fast often and offer prayers, and the disciples of the Pharisees do the same; but yours eat and drink.*

John the Baptist and his disciples certainly were not wrong to fast, and fasting remains an important part of our Catholic spiritual discipline. However, Jesus' response is to turn the question around on them: *Can you make the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?* He is reiterating for this audience, though not in the exact words, what he just recently pronounced in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30): He, Jesus, is the anointed one of God. He himself is the bridegroom, come to gather his bride, the Church, to his side. And as such, this is a time of celebration and blessing. And in times of celebration, the people feast, not fast.

Hence the parable of new cloth and new wineskins. Jesus is pointing out to the Pharisees that the old ways are no longer the right ways. God's people were floundering in old cloaks and worn-out wineskins. They could no longer be fixed; their relationship with God could no longer be maintained. So God sent his Son to reconcile us to him. The new cloth for a cloak and the new wineskins for fresh wine in today's parable are God's grace. God's grace in the form of Jesus, the Son of God incarnate. Jesus the Christ, who does not abolish the law but fulfills it, and whose prescriptions for the kingdom of God cannot be mixed with the legalism and self-righteousness that had come to define the scribes and Pharisees.

Luke does not tell us how the Pharisees reacted. But given that the next passage in this Gospel (come back tomorrow!) involves them berating Jesus for *doing what is unlawful on the sabbath* (Luke 6:2), it is safe to say they missed the point.

It is a point we today would be hard-pressed to miss. We who have been baptized into Christ already know this of God's grace. We know that Jesus initiates the New Covenant, and that through him, and him alone, we are saved. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit to remain with us and help us live a life in right relationship with God. And while there are certainly proper liturgical seasons and times where fasting is appropriate, we do so not out of law, but love and the desire for spiritual preparation. For we know that when the fast ends, we have Jesus' presence in the Eucharist which we celebrate and on which we feast.

So let us come to the altar of the Lord, rejoicing in him who made *peace by the Blood of his cross*.

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Saturday, September 7, 2019

(Lec. 436)

1) Colossians 1:21-23

2) Luke 6:1-5

SATURDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Saturday in honor  
of BVM)

FOCUS: In faith, we know who Jesus is.

One morning a mother went to wake up her sleeping son. "Wake up," she said, "it's time to go to school." The son replied, "No, I don't want to! All the children hate me, and all the teachers hate me." When the mother insisted, the son said, "Give me two good reasons why I should go to school." "One," replied the mother, "you are fifty-two years old. Two, you are the principal of the school!"

Knowing who we are talking to is essential for understanding a person's actions; what is typical behavior for a cranky school child is comically inappropriate for a school principal. In today's Gospel, the Pharisees who approach Jesus clearly do not know who they are talking to. In the stories leading up to this encounter, Jesus' actions leave the Pharisees surprised and scandalized: they have seen Jesus forgive and heal a paralyzed man, call a known sinner to be his disciple, and allow his disciples to eat and drink instead of fasting. None of these behaviors fit the Pharisees' expectations of a Jewish religious leader, which is who they assume Jesus to be.

Today, the Pharisees are scandalized again when Jesus' followers pick and eat grain on the Sabbath. The Pharisees question this behavior, thus implicitly questioning the Jewish leader who allows this clear violation of the law. The Pharisees' misunderstanding stems from not knowing who they are talking to: they see Jesus as only a Jewish leader, when in reality Jesus is the Son of Man and Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus' behavior fits perfectly with who he truly is. He is the Son of Man, and the Son of God who gave the law. Jesus sees things that others cannot see: he sees the Pharisees' disordered attachments to the law, and he can see the secret thoughts of our hearts. Jesus also can do things others cannot do. He can set us free from everything that we think can save us. He can put us in right relationship with the Sabbath, and with the law, and with our God, who loves us.

In faith, we know who we are talking to, and we can receive his saving actions. We gather at this Mass to respond to the One who has called us by name and who calls us still into deeper freedom. Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and Lord of the Sabbath, calls us to his table. As we receive him today, may we know him more deeply and follow him more closely.

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**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2019**

(Lec. 129)

1) Wisdom 9:13-18b

2) Philemon 9-10, 12-17

3) Luke 14:25-33

Gospel related: CCC 1618, 2544

**TWENTY-THIRD  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Discipleship is *why* we do what we do.

Each of us has a list of responsibilities that are important. We have work and families, organizations we support and people who depend on us. We try to fulfill all our duties properly. This is part of living a good, Christian life.

Undoubtedly there are times when we could give more, and maybe even sometimes when it would be best to give a little less. But we feel committed to doing what's asked of us, and when we do these things, we feel we've done what we should – what God asks of us.

And yet, in today's Gospel Jesus tells us that this is not enough. Simply fulfilling what is required as a parent, child, employee, committee chairperson or neighbor is not the essence of discipleship.

Listen again to what Jesus says: *If any one comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*

The force of a text like this reframes the ordinary world we know. Jesus' words should shake us up. So let's let them. According to Jesus, what is discipleship?

Discipleship is not just one more hobby or extracurricular activity. Discipleship is *why* we do what we do, mindful of the costs it brings.

What Jesus commands is prioritizing him as the source of our life, and as its ultimate end. It is making our love for him the ordering principle of everything else we do. For without him, nothing else matters.

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Monday, September 9, 2019

(Lec. 437)

1) Colossians 1:24–2:3

2) Luke 6:6-11

MONDAY OF

23<sup>RD</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

USA: Saint Peter Claver, Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC 581 CSDC 261**

FOCUS: Jesus reminds us that when we have the opportunity to help another, we ought to.

How often do we participate in unjust criticism or judgment? How many of us have watched another person with an eye to accuse, whether it was at work, or school or home? We think, “What are they going to do wrong this time?” and we wait for it to happen.

At the same time, many of us *feel* this judgment from others; we feel eyes on us, watching, waiting to criticize. How well do we handle this criticism? Oftentimes, we may *avoid* acting at all, for fear of being judged.

Today’s Gospel recalls an event in Jesus’ life involving such judgment. After Jesus enters a synagogue and begins to teach, the scribes and the Pharisees – normally adversaries but now allies with each other – watch him *closely ... so that they might discover a reason to accuse him*.

During this encounter, Jesus turns the critique back to his accusers. Although the Pharisees and scribes are looking to judge *him*, he takes the initiative and says, *I ask you, is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath rather than to do evil, to save a life rather than to destroy it?*

Saint Peter Claver, whose feast we celebrate today, provides an extraordinary example of one who focused on what was important: doing good. Faced with the slave trade, an appalling practice that brought profit to those who oppressed others, he dedicated himself to caring for those who suffered because of it. Those who were captured as slaves were rounded onto ships and brought to the Americas under such inhumane conditions that many, possibly up to one-third of them, died on the ship. Once they arrived, the mistreatment continued.

Peter Claver could have remained neutral. He could have avoided all criticism and judgment. Instead, he chose to do good, to save lives. He entered into the life and living conditions of the slaves, providing food and medicine; he ministered to them and assured them of their dignity. When he traveled as a missionary, he would often stay overnight, not with the landowners but in the quarters of the slaves. He even called himself the “slave of the slaves forever.”

Because of his actions, Peter Claver faced criticism from city officials and, most likely, townspeople. We can imagine this judgment. We can even imagine those who may have disagreed with the slave trade, but who still turned their eyes to avoid the suffering, those who tried to remain neutral rather than act for good. Yet Jesus reminds us that when we have the opportunity to help another, we ought to.

As we prepare ourselves to celebrate the Eucharist, let us pray that we may be strengthened by this divine nourishment, so that when presented with the opportunity to help others, we may, like Saint Peter Claver, be willing to face criticism in order to act for good.

Tuesday, September 10, 2019

(Lec. 438)

1) Colossians 2:6-15

2) Luke 6:12-19

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

TUESDAY OF  
23<sup>RD</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Follow Jesus, who heals us from all infirmities.

Imagine being one of the Twelve Apostles, called by name to follow Jesus in a special way. These men bore witness to innumerable miracles, like the ones in today's Gospel, in which Jesus heals many diseases and casts out unclean spirits. Luke tells us that *power came forth from [Jesus] and healed them all*.

We must avoid the trap of thinking that these signs of God's providence are confined to the Gospels. The same Jesus who healed the masses two thousand years ago continues to work on our hearts and in our lives. Sometimes he works through others. For example, healing of diseases may come through doctors and researchers whom God has gifted with the necessary skills. Spiritual healing may come through counselors, the confessional or good friends. All are good and come from God, but there is one kind of healing that can come only through Jesus Christ – healing the relationship between our fallen humanity and God.

Saint Paul emphasizes this in today's first reading. By his death and resurrection, Jesus reconciled us to the Father, paying the incalculable debt for our sins and opening the gates of heaven. Because of this, we can have confidence that since we have been *buried with [Christ] in baptism*, so, too, we have faith that we will also rise with him.

Since Christ alone healed that great divide, we should take Saint Paul's advice of living in thanksgiving and relying on Christ alone, for in Christ we enjoy a relationship with God. Having a personal relationship with Jesus is also not something confined to the Gospels; we can encounter him every time we receive the Eucharist or pray before the Blessed Sacrament. Saint Paul tells us that *in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily*. When we receive the Eucharist, we receive God. The same Jesus who called the Twelve Apostles by name calls each of us by name and bids us to follow him. The same Jesus who healed the masses offers himself bodily to us at Mass.

As we prepare to receive him in the Eucharist, let us ask Jesus to help us realize that he wants to continue to heal us so that we can have eternal life with him. We pray that he will strengthen our resolve to follow him in all things and most of all, let us thank him for his great sacrifice on the cross. May we always trust that the *power came forth from (Jesus) and healed them all* in the Gospel is just as strong today, and that Jesus is just as eager to heal those who follow him.

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Wednesday, September 11, 2019

(Lec. 439)

1) Colossians 3:1-11

2) Luke 6:20-26

Gospel related: **CCC** 244, 2546, 2547 **CSDC** 325

WEDNESDAY OF  
23<sup>RD</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Let us live our life in Christ.

Today Paul asks the Colossians (and us) to do something great. We are right in asking ourselves, "How can I do this?" The answer, of course, is, with the help of God. As Paul says: because we have died in Christ our *life is [now] hidden with Christ in God*. It is in a *life ... hidden with Christ in God* that we can *think of what is above, not of what is on earth*. It is only with this kind of life that this is possible, because in our humanity, we are naturally focused on what is before us. We should not be mistaken, though, to think that Paul is asking us to live with our heads in the clouds and ignore our responsibilities here on earth.

No. Instead, Paul is saying that because of the knowledge of the heavenly kingdom where we will one day stand before God, we should put aside behaviors that will work against our goal of eternal life. Behaviors such as *immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and the greed that is idolatry*. We are to put away *anger, fury, malice, slander, and obscene language*. He gives these exhortations because those who follow Christ are to shake off their old selves and the practices that go along with them, and *put on the new self, which is being renewed*. We are, as Paul tells us, *in the image of [our] creator*.

Therefore we infuse this life of Christ into everything we do. We strive to be holy people. We strive to take a healthy assessment of our life and our behavior and re-shape it so that it is in the form of Christ. It means, as Jesus himself says, we are blessed to be poor, hungry, weeping and renounced for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. And it means reaping God's displeasure when we prefer things of this world – riches, consolations, satiety – the false prophets of this world, above our fellow Christians: those in whom *Christ is all in all*.

For when we are in Christ, we are all free; we are all one. We shall no longer be disobedient, but *put to death* those parts of us that are harmful to our renewed life in Christ. This is an amazing thing Paul is asking the Colossians (and us) to do, and it can only be done with the help of Christ, whom we now approach with grateful hearts, ready to receive him and go forth proclaiming his Good News.

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Thursday, September 12, 2019

(Lec. 440)

1) Colossians 3:12-17

2) Luke 6:27-38

THURSDAY OF

23<sup>rd</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

The Most Holy Name of Mary)

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

FOCUS: Love even our enemies and forgive always.

In the Gospel today, Jesus offers a brief capsule of advice on how to live: love everyone, including your enemies, and forgive always, being merciful as God is merciful. Saint Paul gives the Colossians a very similar outline of what it means to be one of God's chosen ones: forgive one another, even as the Lord has forgiven you, covering everything you do with love, which is the bond of perfection.

Deceivingly simple advice, almost impossible to put into practice. Do Jesus and Saint Paul really want us to love and forgive the person at work who humiliates us? The person who was a friend who rejects us? The person at our own dinner table who betrays us? Yes, yes and yes. Because Jesus and Saint Paul give us the tools to do just that, laid on the table of the word and the table of the Eucharist every time we celebrate the liturgy. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*, Paul tells us. Let us sing *psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and let the peace of Christ control [y]our hearts*.

Then let us take in ourselves, into our own bodies, the body and blood of the risen Christ, given to us when Jesus himself did what he asks of us: love even your enemies and give all that you have, even to your very last breath. And as often as we do that, we come closer to doing everything we do in our lives in the name of the Lord Jesus. We grow more thankful for all the gifts our loving God has already poured out onto our laps, even as we struggle to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us.

For by our participation in the Eucharist, we are continually transformed and more perfectly conformed to the mind and heart of Christ. A heart that echoes, in all we do, the psalmist of today: *Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!* Praise the Lord for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked, and sometimes that is us.

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Friday, September 13, 2019  
(Lec. 441)  
1) 1 Timothy 1:1-2, 12-14  
2) Luke 6:39-42

FRIDAY OF  
23<sup>RD</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint John Chrysostom,  
Bishop and Doctor  
of the Church)

FOCUS: Humility before God brings abundant grace.

Here is some shocking news: none of us is perfect. We sin. We are good people, but we fall short in the ways of the Lord. We guide others – sometimes astray – when we ourselves do not even know, or do not go, the right way. We criticize others' wrongdoing, without noticing our own. We ignore the beam in our own eye while focusing on the splinter in someone else's.

So, how do we counter this weakness? This fallen aspect of our nature? Today's Gospel tells us: by admitting our own shortcomings. A dose of humility is very powerful in helping us see our failings – to see that we are not better than others. Paul's words in today's first reading also can help, for he is an example of someone who struggled to come to terms with his own shortcomings.

Saint Paul admits to Timothy, and to all of us, that he is a sinner. He has been an arrogant man, he acknowledges. And arrogance, along with pride, is at the heart of many of our sins. Arrogance that we are our own god; our own arbiter of right and wrong; our own master and commander, whose destiny and prosperity come about through actions that we, and we alone, take.

Pride, like arrogance, keeps us from being humble before the Lord and his mercy. Paul came upon this knowledge honestly, and then learned of the humility Jesus modeled and tried throughout the rest of his life to follow in those humble footsteps.

It is God's grace that helps us see where we need to improve our lives, and how to avoid criticizing and leading others astray. Anyone who looks into his or her own heart and recognizes sin can do as Paul did and pray for God's help in overcoming it. And with this help we, like Paul, can say, *Indeed, the grace of our Lord has been abundant, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

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Saturday, September 14, 2019  
(Lec. 638)

**THE EXALTATION  
OF THE HOLY CROSS  
- FEAST**

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

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

FOCUS: The Cross is the Tree of Life that offers eternal life to all who believe in Jesus.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Today's readings may seem a bit stark in their message that all of us live, and all of us will die. These are realities that define our earthly life, but as those who believe in the paschal mystery, we look to the Cross, the Tree of Life, to offer us eternal life, through Jesus who was raised up on it.

We remember that the Tree of Life has its roots in the history of God's chosen people, brought out of slavery from Egypt. In our first reading, we listened to the people who have forgotten that God has chosen them to be set apart from all other peoples. They grumble about why they were freed from slavery only to die in the desert. Some would say that this is a God who is vindictive, even sending serpents to punish the people. But this is not a God of anger, but one of love. Through God's mercy, Moses raises up a source of healing, so that those who have been punished might live. The Lord is a God of mercy, of healing, of forgiveness and of life.

The life given to the wandering Israelites is nothing compared to the life that Jesus claims for all of us. Through his death on the Cross, we are glorified. Just as Moses raised up his staff to heal the Israelites, Jesus is raised up on the Tree of Life so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. It is on that Tree of Life that true life is offered to us. It is on that Tree of Life that the ultimate sacrifice was made for us, through Jesus' unconditional love for us.

On this day when we exalt the Holy Cross, we remember that Jesus suffered on the Tree of Life for our sake. The Tree of Life continues to give life when we allow ourselves to be raised up on it, when we give our lives for the sake of others. The Christian life asks us to love God with all our being, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. By stretching ourselves to offer God's mercy to our neighbors, we allow the Tree of Life to bloom.

As Pope Francis has reflected, "Christian life has to be a life that must blossom in works of charity, in doing what is good. But if you do not have ... Jesus ... and if you do not water your life with prayer and the sacraments," you will not bear flowers (General Audience, 3/21/18). As we come forward to the altar, let us be grateful for being included as a part of God's chosen people, for being raised up on the Tree of Life so we might bear life for others, and for Jesus who sacrificed himself as he was raised up on the Cross so that we might have eternal life.

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**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2019**

(Lec. 132)

1) Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14

2) 1 Timothy 1:12-17

3) Luke 15:1-32 or 15:1-10

Gospel related: CCC 545, 589, 1423, 1439, 1468, 1700, 2795, 2839

**TWENTY-FOURTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: God, who is merciful, seeks out and welcomes the lost.

Today's Gospel, and particularly the parable of the prodigal son, reminds us of the merciful love that God the Father has for all of us, his children. Jesus depicts so poignantly the love found in the character of the father who runs out to greet his wayward son before he is even home – and who celebrates his son's safe return with the feast of a fatted calf.

We might wonder how a father can be so quickly and completely forgiving of a son who prematurely took a share of the father's wealth (to which he was not even entitled, because he was not the older son and heir), abandoned the family, and wasted the hard-earned money on immoral and reckless acts. But Jesus reminds us, as he did the Pharisees and scribes at the beginning of the Gospel, that God the Father himself is merciful, for Jesus was sent to encourage sinners to turn away from their sins and toward God.

These readings challenge us on many levels. If we are like the younger, prodigal son, it might be hard to imagine that God could forgive us for the wrongs we might have done, for the times that we turned away from God. But in the second reading, Paul reminds Timothy that God not only forgave him for his persecution of the Church, he called Paul to great glory as an Apostle. Paul describes himself as the foremost of sinners, who *was mercifully treated, so that in me, as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display all his patience as an example for those who would come to believe in him for everlasting life.* Through his mercy for this most zealous persecutor of the early Christians, Jesus gave Paul the grace to become one of his greatest advocates and one of the shining stars of the Church. If any of us feel that we have committed some wrong that can't be forgiven – or have strayed so long that we can't be welcomed back – we can take courage and comfort from these readings.

But, just as the readings encourage us to accept the mercy of God, they also challenge us to extend God's mercy to others. For we also know that the measure we give to others is what we shall receive. We are forgiven, as we forgive. And we have this good news to share with anyone who needs to hear it: come home! So let us then accept God's mercy, extend it to others and rejoice, as the Father commands us, when those who are lost return home.



Monday, September 16, 2019

(Lec. 443)

1) 1 Timothy 2:1-8

2) Luke 7:1-10

MONDAY OF  
24<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saints Cornelius, Pope,  
and Cyprian, Bishop,  
Martyrs)

FOCUS: We are invited to pray for all people, for God wills the salvation of all.

Today's readings draw our attention to prayer. What is prayer? Who do we pray for? Who *should* we pray for? What should we pray? Why should we pray?

Prayer is the way we connect with God. It "is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God" (CCC 2559). And there are many ways to do that – we can pray with words or without them, we can pray in church, at home, alone or with others; we can pray with images and sacramentals and, of course, we can pray with Scripture. We probably all have our go-to way to pray and our favorite places to pray. And, if we've been at it long enough, we probably have struggled with prayer at some point in our lives.

And why pray? If prayer is a lifting up of our minds and hearts to God, then hopefully, our primary reason to pray is a response to God's love for us, a longing to grow closer to the God who sent his only Son *as ransom for all*. And, as we grow closer to God, as our love for God deepens, hopefully it radiates outward, prompting us to pray for others.

Today's Gospel story of the centurion asking Jesus to heal his slave can serve as an example of such prayers of intercession. The centurion's slave was very sick, and the centurion prays for his healing by sending intercessors on his behalf to bring his petition before the Lord, much as we might ask the saints to intercede on behalf of a loved one in need of healing.

But Paul reminds us that it is not enough to pray for our loved ones and those who are dear to us. Christ died for all people and God wills the salvation of all people. If our prayer is addressed to this God, then our own good will, our own prayers and petitions need to extend beyond the circle of our own tribe, our own community. Paul specifically mentions praying for those with civil authority. Whether we like them or not, voted for them or not, we are called to pray for them. But not only them.

Today we memorialize Saint Cornelius, Pope and Martyr, and Saint Cyprian, Bishop and Martyr. These two were contemporaries and friends who understood that God desired all to be united with him. They argued, against strong prevailing views, that the Church must welcome back apostates and those who had strayed, and that this return must include adequate penance. And, of course, those returning would be prayed for by the community.

Let this message challenge all of us to think about someone, or a group of people, we don't typically pray for or think about, and pray for them this day. Pray for their good, intercede for their needs, give thanks for them and most importantly, pray for their salvation, which is God's will for all of us and what we celebrate every time we gather at the table of the Lord.

Tuesday, September 17, 2019

(Lec. 444)

1) 1 Timothy 3:1-13

2) Luke 7:11-17

TUESDAY OF

24<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Robert Bellarmine,

Bishop and Doctor

of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 995, 1503

FOCUS: Let us love one another and reach out in compassion to those in need.

*Young man, I tell you, arise.* With these words in today's Gospel from Luke, Jesus brings back to life the only son of a widow. He, in essence, saves the widow's life as well, because she was on the verge of being a castaway. With no husband and no son, she would have had no standing in society, no source of income. So by bringing her son back to life, Jesus gave her not only a source of livelihood, but a source of hope as well.

Many of Jesus' miracles are tied to the faith of those who are healed. In the miracle immediately preceding today's reading from Luke, Jesus healed the sick slave of a centurion – and lauded the centurion, a Gentile, for his faith. But in today's Gospel, Jesus initiates the action. He is filled with compassion. He isn't asked to help. His pity moves him to raise this young man.

Jesus models behavior for us today that we can use in our lives. That is, being aware of what is happening around us, and having compassion for those in need. Jesus tells us throughout the Gospels that we need to take care of our fellow human beings. We are to love one another. We also know that love is not a feeling, but an action. Sometimes it is tender love, sometimes it is tough love, often it is somewhere in the vast in-between. But as long as it arises from our own faith, and our own desire to love as Christ loves, then we truly do "suffer with" the other, which is what "compassion" means.

Christ raised the young man, and gave both him and his mother "new life" in that moment. We, too, are given new life in this moment, and every moment, when we profess our faith in him. And here and now, we, too, have the opportunity for Christ to be among us and heal us – for him to transform us for the good of the world. Let us prepare ourselves to receive him, and to glorify God as the people of Nain did: *God has visited his people.*

**Saint Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621)** A key leader of the Counter-Reformation, Robert Bellarmine was a man of giant intellect and influence. The Jesuit professor of theology was a gifted preacher and teacher whose sermons attracted crowds and converted many. His publication, *Disputations*, is a comprehensive defense of Catholicism and papal authority. Robert wrote several works on spirituality for the laity as well. He is the patron saint of catechists, catechumens and canon lawyers.

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Wednesday, September 18, 2019

(Lec. 445)

1) 1 Timothy 3:14-16

2) Luke 7:31-35

WEDNESDAY OF  
24<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God's love is unwavering for his children, even when they are difficult to please.

At this time of year, well into the month of September, we know that a new season looms ahead as we enter into autumn. For many, it is their favorite season. They love the cool, crisp air after the heat of the summer. They marvel at the beauty of the colors of fall and find comfort in the idea that nature is preparing for a rest. Others look to the season with a sense of loss. The rebirth of the earth that began in the spring and thrived through the summer goes through a kind of death in the fall and winter. The trees lose their leaves. The grass turns brown. Birds fly south, and many animals prepare to hibernate during the coming months. Clearly, what is good news for some is disappointing for others. Some people are difficult to please and seem to bask in negativity, choosing to close themselves off from the benefits of each situation.

In today's Gospel, Jesus seems to admonish the crowd as he finds them difficult to please. He says they are like children who do not understand or agree on what they want. He addresses the Pharisees who criticized John the Baptist for fasting in the desert instead of dining with the people. And then when Jesus ate and drank with the masses, they found fault with him as well. They grumbled about his choice of companions, closed their hearts to him and stood in judgment. They looked for excuses to dismiss him rather than embrace his message.

Perhaps we can see some of ourselves in these words. The times when we, like children, are dissatisfied when people don't respond in the way we expect. The times when we are quick to find fault instead of trying to work it out. When we give excuses, or are critical of those with whom we disagree, or complain about someone for not doing enough rather than exert the effort needed to change a situation around. Are we like the Pharisees, blind to God's truth?

God's plan is hard to live out sometimes. The Good News involves hard truths. We might think it would be easier to turn away, and to say that he asks too much. We may want to blame others when it is hard. But we know that true joy lies in a life with God. The promise of eternal life is a powerful gift. How blessed are we that God is our Father, and like a father, he grants mercy and forgiveness to his children.

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Thursday, September 19, 2019  
(Lec. 446)

- 1) 1 Timothy 4:12-16
- 2) Luke 7:36-50

THURSDAY OF  
24<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Januarius,  
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 575, 588, 2616, 2712

FOCUS: Spiritual pride can prevent us from walking closely with God.

Today's Gospel from Saint Luke presents us with a somewhat interesting event. Jesus was invited to a banquet at a Pharisee's house. We aren't told why this man invited Jesus, but culturally it makes sense. The Pharisees were part of the religious leadership, and they would necessarily vet anyone claiming to have knowledge of God, and who went around preaching and teaching.

During this dinner, a sinful woman from the city came to Jesus, *bringing an alabaster flask of ointment*. She was weeping, and she *bath[e]d his feet with her tears* and dried them with her hair before she *anointed them with the ointment*. These actions attest to her faith in God, and her recognition of her need for forgiveness.

The Pharisee who was hosting thought to himself that if Jesus were really a prophet, he would not be allowing this to happen, for Jewish holy men were not supposed to have a sinful woman touch them. The behavior of the Pharisees is almost to the point of ridiculousness: even after all Jesus has done up to this point in his ministry, after the many signs the Pharisees have seen and the conversations they have had with Jesus, this Pharisee still did not see what was right in front of him. He was still thinking, "if."

Now, when he heard the parable of the two men who were in debt to a creditor, the Pharisee understood *that* story – after all, rules, laws and the pride that goes with wealth were the waters in which he swam. But he still completely missed the *point* of the story, even after Jesus explained: that the Pharisee and the woman who anointed Jesus were both sinners in need of forgiveness. And when Jesus said to the woman, *your sins are forgiven*, the Pharisee and the others at table continued to be blind to the truth, and wondered to themselves as to who Jesus was.

The Pharisee, and his guests, allowed pride to keep them from recognizing Jesus as Lord. We also can slip into that sin of pride from time to time, as other things take precedence over our relationship with God, or we simply blind ourselves to the reality of our sin. But Jesus is always there. He is always easy to find when we seek him out. And he is ever available to offer forgiveness when we approach him as the woman did: in faith, and with contrition and love.

God has given us the gift of the sacrament of reconciliation, which gives grace and offers freedom. So let us not allow pride to prevent us from walking closely with God. Let us recognize our failings and be reconciled with God. The result of being forgiven brings joy, peace and salvation.

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Friday, September 20, 2019

(Lec. 447)

1) 1 Timothy 6:2c-12

2) Luke 8:1-3

FRIDAY OF

24<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

Saints Andrew Kim Tae-gŏn,

Priest,

and Paul Chŏng Ha-sang,

and Companions,

Martyrs)

FOCUS: *Love of money is the root of all evils.*

As a preacher and writer, Paul had much to say about the many and varied aspects of the human condition. Over and over, he had an uncanny and insightful ability to shine a light on the strengths and weaknesses of humanity, and to offer guidance and direction on how to use those strengths and avoid those weaknesses. For Paul, human flourishing was to be found in embracing and living the Gospel message to its full.

Today's first reading, written to his friend and protégé, Timothy, is one such guiding piece. Having advised him earlier in the letter on his role as bishop – challenging him to perfection in his actions and words – he turns now to the thorny issue of material goods and how they are to be used.

In a saying that is often misquoted, “money is the at the root of all evil,” versus the correct *love of money is the root of all evils*, people home in on the latter part of the saying and ignore that it is the *love of or pursuit of* material wealth that is the real problem. It is in loving money that we get into trouble; we forget what is eternal, what is ultimately good for us and for others.

Like everyone else, Paul is well aware that money is a given part of life, indeed as today's Gospel tells us, Jesus' ministry was aided by those who provided for him out of their resources. Paul, too, knew the financial help of others that allowed him to travel and preach. But he is equally aware that the pursuit of wealth can overwhelm people and distract them from what is eternal and essentially good. In that way, it becomes the source of evil as it separates the individual from God and the offer of eternal life. In words that are sobering, he reminds us that no matter how materially successful we are in this life, we cannot take it with us. We must leave it behind.

Today we celebrate the Korean martyrs – Saints Andrew Kim, Paul Chŏng, and companions – men and women, mostly lay, who paid the ultimate price for their fidelity to Christ and his Church, and were canonized in 1984. They demonstrated total detachment from the things of this world and embraced fully the challenge from Paul to pursue righteousness, devotion, faith love, patience and gentleness. They competed well for the faith and made the noble confession in their sufferings.

May the witness and intercession of these Korean martyrs conform us ever closer to the Gospel, and may the Eucharist remind us what true riches really are.

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Saturday, September 21, 2019

(Lec. 643)

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

2) Matthew 9:9-13

Gospel related: CCC 581, 589, 2100

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

FOCUS: Using our gifts to build up the kingdom of God on earth.

When we look at the Twelve chosen by Jesus to be his Apostles, we might wonder – at least a little bit – about his thought process in choosing the group he chose. One Apostle would turn him in, and another would not admit knowing him when Jesus needed him the most. Two others would be more concerned with their rankings in the group. Another one, Matthew, would be despised by the others because they saw him as a traitor because he was a tax collector for the Romans. What a ragtag bunch of misfits.

Well, before our spiritual egos get too inflated, let us come back down to earth by admitting that this describes us in varying degrees. We have each had our moments of denial or betrayal, of jockeying for position, or being looked down upon for past mistakes. We are not that unlike the original Twelve.

Yet, consider Paul. In our first reading, we find him in prison for preaching the Gospel. And it is from his prison cell, where he could be angry, or turning his back on the Gospel for the sake of self-preservation, that he describes the characteristics of a good and faithful disciple. We are to live *with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

Paul goes on to describe the gifts each receives, through the grace of God, for the purpose of building up the kingdom here on earth. Using God's blessings to instead further our own benefit above others always leads us down a path of self-destruction. Self-destruction is most likely where Matthew was headed before Jesus called him.

Matthew, the tax collector, whose feast we celebrate today, is given credit for writing one of the four Gospels. In today's passage, Jesus chooses him and then wishes to dine with him. Of course, the Pharisees take issue with Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus' response to them is that the Father is more interested in genuine mercy than in self-inflated sacrifices.

Like Matthew and the rest of the Apostles, we are called to set aside our old ways and put on the ways of Christ. Like the Twelve, we, too, are sinners on the road to becoming saints. As we travel down this road, we continually come to forks in the road where, each time they occur, we will be called to choose the road to justice or injustice, the road to sacrifice or self-aggrandizement, the road to helpfulness or selfishness. Let us pray for the grace today to always choose wisely.

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**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2019**

(Lec. 135)

1) Amos 8:4-7

2) 1 Timothy 2:1-8

3) Luke 16:1-13 or 16:10-13

Gospel related: **CCC** 952, 2424 **CSDC** 181, 453

**TWENTY-FIFTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Let us live a life full of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

English explorers Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon surveyed the boundary between Pennsylvania and Maryland in 1767. The border has come to be known as the Mason-Dixon Line. During the American Civil War a century later, it was the dividing line between the Union and the Confederacy. There is a story of a man whose property was right on top of this invisible line separating the states. During the war, he feared both sides would view him as a traitor so he decided to wear a Confederate jacket and Union pants. When the fighting got too close to home, he was in big trouble. The Union muskets were fired at his chest, and the Confederacy shot at his knees, a grim reminder that we cannot serve two masters.

Such is the challenge between the pursuit of holiness versus the pursuit of wealth and power. This was the focus of today's first reading from the Prophet Amos. Sometime around 750 BC, the shepherd Amos was called to leave one flock in service of another. God sent him north into Israel to convict people for their sins against the Covenant – working on the Sabbath and cheating the poor out of their hard-earned money.

Amos knows that the merchants in the Temple are fixing their scales to cheat the pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the feast. These wealthy men became rich and made themselves richer by taking advantage of the less fortunate. *Never will I forget a thing they have done*, the prophet says, speaking for God. It is an announcement of God's judgment on those who are deaf to the cry of the poor. They were in need of forgiveness, but would only receive it if they humbled themselves to ask for it.

In writing to Timothy, Saint Paul affirms God's desire that we all ask for and receive his mercy, and then share it with one another. Paul thought this important especially for kings and all those in authority, that they might *lead a quiet and tranquil life, one without anger or argument*. It is God's great desire that everyone *be saved and ... come to knowledge of the truth*.

Mercy and forgiveness are in the message of the parable of the steward that Jesus tells in today's Gospel. The steward is quite creative in dealing with the loss of his job. The steward was not forgiven his debt, but he *does* forgive the debt of one who owes him a large sum of wheat. Jesus compliments the man for his ability to look beyond earthly wealth to store up for himself treasure in heaven. This appears to be Jesus' way of getting our minds out of our pocketbook and into his holy book. The Lord desires that we all show such industry in our pursuit of eternal life.

Experience tells us that wealth may leave us or be taken away, but God is a firm anchor. The dollar in our pocket is here today and gone tomorrow, but the Lord is always there for us, and all around us. The late Evangelist Billy Graham said the Lord gave us two hands – one to give, one to receive. We need both. Fold those two hands together and we can pray to God who is the source of every blessing. What Amos says is true – that God never forgets a thing we have done – so let us at least live a life worthy of remembering, a life full of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

Monday, September 23, 2019

(Lec. 449)

- 1) Ezra 1:1-6
- 2) Luke 8:16-18

MONDAY OF  
25<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Pius of Pietrelcina,  
Priest)

FOCUS: Share God's truth so that all may see clearly by the light of Christ.

Today's readings remind us that the light of Christ is a gift for all and we must not keep it to ourselves. Imagine being in a power outage at night and you have the only flashlight in the house. It would be ridiculous to hide under the bed with it while everyone else struggles to eat, work and play in the dark! Similarly, sharing with others our Christian identity, and giving witness by our own prayer and service, are acts of light in a darkened world. In fact, the joy with which we do those things, and even talk about these things, helps to shine Christ's light in a way that hopefully inspires and uplifts.

Sharing Christ's light sheds light upon truth: the beautiful and the ugly realities alike. It is easy to shine light on the beautiful and easy things. It can be more difficult when the darkness of sin and suffering surround us. But speaking the truth in love to others who are struggling with the challenges of following God's commandments, and being open to hearing that truth when we ourselves fall short, is what caring for each other in Christian charity means. If we hide the truth, how would it ever be possible to be guided by it?

Perhaps the intensity of Christ's pure light upon the darkness of sin is because of the purity of the light emanating from the hope of the cross. By showing one another the blessings God provides for us that are more worthy, more rewarding, more eternally focused than pleasures and desires of this earth, new visions become possible: visions that are healthy, fully life-giving, creative, and beautiful.

Unlike squirrels with their acorns, hoarding faith for oneself does not increase faith, but rather diminishes it. Conversely, the more we study and share our faith, the richer our lives will be. God is always ready to teach and inspire us. Even if we are reading the same Bible passage for the fifth time, because we are in a new circumstance today than we were in yesterday or yesteryear, we will gain new insights if we are careful in our hearing.

Grateful for the light we have received in the sacraments, let us resolve to make every effort to magnify the light in our hearts for all to see.

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Tuesday, September 24, 2019

(Lec. 450)

1) Ezra 6:7-8, 12b, 14-20

2) Luke 8:19-21

TUESDAY OF  
25<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus extends his family to include everyone who follows God.

What makes family? In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus seemingly brush aside the fact that his mother and brothers (meaning "kinsmen" or "cousins") were waiting to see him. Jesus responds in a way that seems odd, given what he was told: *My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it.*

In Jesus, the ancient covenant that God had made with his people, the Israelites, was superseded by the New Covenant. God's family is no longer limited to only the people of Israel, but includes all who hear God's word and act upon it.

Though that may sound easy, the reality is that sometimes following God's commands can be difficult. However, with God's grace and help, we can do whatever he asks of us, even when it may seem like a daunting and impossible task – a task like rebuilding a temple.

Today's first reading from the Book of Ezra describes the building and completion of the Second Temple in Jerusalem while the region was part of the Persian Empire. The Jews had returned from the Babylonian exile but had not yet been able to rebuild the Temple due to delays. After finding an old memorandum by King Cyrus decreeing that the Temple should be rebuilt, the Persian King Darius issued a similar decree, adding that the Jews should be repaid their expenses. After this edict, the Temple was completed in just five years.

Following the Temple's completion, the Jews were able to follow the commands the God had set for them regarding right worship, including setting up a priesthood, making sacrifices and celebrating the Passover. And now, with Jesus having rebuilt God's Temple once again, we, too, are able to worship rightly, and celebrate the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ who rescues us from death.

Today, let us renew our commitment to hear God's word and act upon it. To do this, we must do three things: quiet our hearts so that we are open to hearing what God wants to say, truly listen to what he tells us, and trust that the Lord will help us to do whatever he asks. In doing this, we can confidently say we are members of Jesus' family.

Receiving Jesus in the Eucharist can strengthen us to do every kind of good. As we prepare to approach the Eucharistic table, let us pray that we may be open to receive the word of God, Jesus Christ, and that we may then carry him out into the world.

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Wednesday, September 25, 2019

(Lec. 451)

1) Ezra 9:5-9

2) Luke 9:1-6

Gospel related: **CCC 551**

WEDNESDAY OF  
25<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Holiness can rise out of sin and find its greatest work on behalf of others.

What is holiness? We need look no further than Ezra in today's first reading for a great example. Ezra was a holy man of God, filled with God's wisdom. After hand-picking heads of family to journey with him to Jerusalem, he was disheartened to learn that they were mixing in and absorbing the ways of the people around them, people whose sinful practices should have been avoided. He takes responsibility for this situation, taking upon himself the sins of those around him. Then, as the time for the evening sacrifice arrives, he faces God.

In his moment with God, Ezra, ashamed and downtrodden, acknowledged the "heaps" of wicked deeds of those around him and placed before God the guilt associated with them. This is holiness. He did not deny the wayward actions of the people, but he brought them before God to seek relief. So often we approach God in distress over our own sins, but do we ever make reparation for the sins of those around us? Do we pray to God and repent for the sins of our world? How do we even do that?

We model the example set by Ezra, and perfected in Jesus Christ. With the prophetic and priestly roles given to us in our baptism, we unite ourselves to Jesus' sacrifice in faith. This is a good practice, if done in a healthy way. To offer spiritual sacrifices and ask God for pardon not only for ourselves, but for the sins of our generation, is a good work, but we must be careful. Careful to not let this work slip into pride or, at its worst, an arrogance that demeans others for the error of their ways. Any spiritual work is done out of love with the intention of bringing before God the wounds that are in need of healing.

Ezra deeply felt the actions of those around him and took it upon himself to make amends to God. Jesus took the sins of the world upon his shoulders and reconciled us to God. Holiness is an awareness of our connectedness to this salvation history, and is expressed through our love in action for our brothers and sisters. We know that when we sin, it hurts others as well. This offering before God is a work that each of us can do for each other.

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Thursday, September 26, 2019  
(Lec. 452)

- 1) Haggai 1:1-8
- 2) Luke 9:7-9

THURSDAY OF  
25<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saints Cosmas and Damian,  
Martyrs)

FOCUS: To see Christ is to know his power to save.

There are many references in Scripture to the desire for a person to see God. The psalms contain several prayers sung in longing to see God's face. There are the poor and suffering in the Gospels who line the streets to catch a glimpse of Jesus Christ as he passes. Our Tradition, too, is filled with references to seeing Christ. Many people in the Middle Ages would wait to view a consecrated host. There's also a lovely quote from the Chilean saint Alberto Hurtado Cruchaga, S.J., "One who has even once looked deeply into the eyes of Jesus, can never forget it."

Then today in the Gospel we hear of Herod's desire to see Jesus. It notes in its last line concerning Herod, *Who then is this about whom I hear such things? And he kept trying to see him.* One gets the impression that rumors abound about this Man of God who has the power to heal and to preach.

What is different about us in the prayers we sing to God of our desires to see God's face and Herod's desire to see Jesus? While Herod sees Jesus as a threat to his power, we know that to see Christ is to know our salvation.

In Herod's worry over the identity of this powerful and mysterious preacher, he grasps at straws: Could the man be Elijah? Or John the Baptist? Jesus Christ preaches with the power of a prophet. Herod worries over his power because the tetrarch will not be able to maintain his tenuous rule if another leader rises. He desires to see Jesus in order to size him up and assess his weakness.

We know, of course, that Christ will not topple the rule of Herod, and that the Roman Empire itself will violently execute Jesus on the cross. Yet here we are, many hundreds of years later, longing for Christ to return, praying to see his face.

The threat that Herod perceived to his power is correct but misguided. Surely this great prophet will challenge his reign not only in his own region, but everywhere. The Christ will challenge the reign of sin. Christ will topple the tyranny of death. The power Herod fears is the power that will save us. To gaze into the eyes of Jesus is to know life everlasting.

While Herod desires to see Jesus out of fear, we desire to see God because we know that God saves. The power of Christ is real, and we know that to see Christ is to know his power to save us.

\* \* \*

Friday, September 27, 2019

(Lec. 453)

1) Haggai 2:1-9

2) Luke 9:18-22

FRIDAY OF  
25<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Vincent de Paul,  
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2600

FOCUS: God's faithfulness is eternal.

God's faithfulness is a common theme of the Hebrew Scriptures. Over and over, we see God make and keep promises to the Israelites. In the New Testament, this becomes even clearer. The prophets had promised a messiah would come, and God sent his only Son into the world to fulfill that promise.

God's working in mysterious ways, and according to his own timing, is evident in today's first reading. The prophet Haggai delivers a message from God to the people of Israel, who have recently returned from exile. Haggai has encouraged them to rebuild the Temple, and they are disappointed that it pales in comparison to the original. God, via Haggai, assures them that the future glory of this Temple will far surpass the former. However, if the Israelites expected an immediate upgrade to the Temple building, then their hopes were misplaced.

For in the writings of the prophets, this theme of a glorious Temple is closely linked to messianic expectations. Jesus would not be born for another five hundred years, and he would not bring glory to the Temple in the way people expected.

In today's Gospel reading, immediately after Peter identifies him as *the Christ of God*, Jesus foretells his suffering, death and resurrection. Jesus did not come to rule the Israelites as an earthly king or high priest. He came to save us all by opening the way to the heavenly kingdom. When he died, the Temple veil was torn. This is not exactly the influx of silver and gold that the Israelites envisioned. But when we think about what this means, how much more glorious is it that God is now present to everyone? No longer is the Holy of Holies restricted to the high priests. Jesus' death on the cross was the final sacrifice that granted us access to God's presence for eternity.

Maybe some of us feel like the Israelites of Haggai's time. Our prayers have been answered, but we are disappointed in the results. We long for the "glory days" – of our Church, our government, or our own bodies. Maybe we had hoped to be further along by now – in our careers, our personal lives, our journeys toward holiness. Will our promised future glory remain always and only in the future?

Let us not be discouraged when we feel our prayers are going unanswered. They are not unanswered – they just may be answered differently than we want. May we trust that God sees the big picture. His plan is at work in the world, and he answers our prayers in due time in likely unexpected ways. In the meantime, may we heed Haggai's message: *Take courage ... and work! For I am with you, says the Lord ... do not fear! ... I will give you peace.*

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Saturday, September 28, 2019

(Lec. 454)

1) Zechariah 2:5-9, 14-15a

2) Luke 9:43b-45

SATURDAY OF

25<sup>TH</sup> WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Wenceslaus,

Martyr;

Saint Lawrence Ruiz and Companions,

Martyrs;

Saturday in honor of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 554

**FOCUS:** Jesus' good news often comes with challenges and hardships for his disciples.

Today's readings can seem very strange to us twenty-first century Christians, but in a sense they bring us the same good news: the end of exile and the beginning of a life of joy and peace in the presence of God.

In the first reading, Zechariah addresses the people of Israel who only recently returned from captivity in Babylon. As they return to Jerusalem, Zechariah promises them that God will dwell in their midst as protection, an *encircling wall of fire*, and that they shall once again be God's people. The God who led them home will be with them and will again be their guardian and companion.

Today's Gospel follows Luke's description of several miracles and signs: from Jesus' calming of the sea and healing of the daughter of Jairus, to his Transfiguration and casting out of a demon. After the Apostles witnessed these Messianic signs, is it any wonder that they are shocked about Jesus' statement of being *handed over to men*? They were expecting imminent glory for Jesus, the Messiah – not suffering and death.

Ultimately, *we know*, Jesus' suffering and death are part of his role as Messiah – leading to his resurrection and to his reigning at the right hand of God. God's methods – humiliation, great suffering, and a terrible death – are not human visions for a Messiah, but they lead to a greater glory than any of us can imagine. From our vantage point, we can rejoice that Jesus endured so much suffering on our behalf and was exonerated and raised to the right hand of God – bringing humanity to God and regaining heaven for us.

In a sense we, like the people of Zechariah's time, are exiles from the home in heaven that God has meant for us to have. In troublesome times, our life on earth can seem to be an exile from God. Yet Jesus reminds us that the good news of the reign of God comes only through suffering. Yes, Jesus has conquered sin and death once for all, but we, as his disciples, still must face our own suffering before we can claim our place in heaven.

Even now in the midst of this suffering, in our exile on earth, we know that joys are also part of life. God is in our midst as an *encircling wall of fire* to protect us, to nurture us, and to be our companion throughout this journey. Today, as we receive Communion, let us pray in trust and with praise, knowing that Jesus is our companion and Messiah in this life and in the next.

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**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2019**

(Lec. 138)

1) Amos 6:1a, 4-7

2) 1 Timothy 6:11-16

3) Luke 16:19-31

Gospel related: CCC 336, 633, 1021, 1859, 2831

**TWENTY-SIXTH  
SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Like the poor man in the parable, we are all people in need.

It is a scene that is repeated far too often in far too many places. Usually it occurs near a major intersection or at the end of a freeway off-ramp: an individual, dressed in worn clothing, holding a sign written on cardboard. Sometimes the signs indicate that the person is out of work. Other times, the signs may indicate that they are homeless. Some of the individuals look like they may be veterans down on their luck, but all of them look like they are in need.

Dozens of vehicles stream by; few, if any of them, stop for a moment, roll down a window, and hand a few bills or some change to the person in need. Unfortunately, many of us may, too often, be one of those drivers who keeps eyes focused straight ahead, doing everything we can to not make eye contact with the person in need. Apparently, we think that if we somehow don't see or notice the individual, we don't have to respond to their need.

Jesus' parable in today's Gospel challenges us in a very fundamental way. The problem with the rich man is not so much that he did something wrong. The problem is that he did nothing at all. One can imagine the rich man walking out his front gate each day, carefully stepping over Lazarus, intently trying not to notice his need, and trying to avoid doing anything to alleviate his suffering. All it would have taken was a little food, a little bit of human kindness, some clean clothing, a decent coat and a warm hat. Very practical things and perhaps things that the rich man had in abundance and could easily have shared with someone in need – but he didn't.

When someone is in need, we may not be able to solve all their problems, but we can often do little things with great care to ease their sadness and suffering. All that is needed is a little food; some clean, used clothes; a bottle of water and a cereal bar; a gift card to a fast-food restaurant; a listening ear and a prayerful heart. The willingness to give these little bits of our selves can ease the burdens of another. It is good to keep this in mind as the weather begins to cool and the nights become longer. We are dependent upon one another, and we are dependent upon God. We are all needy people.

That is what we admit in this Eucharist – we are a people in need. We need God's love. We need God's forgiveness. We need our Savior, who freely offers himself to save us and bring us to eternal life.

In this Eucharist, Jesus reaches out to each of us as we reach out with our hands and with our hearts. Jesus offers us his love and comfort in his body and blood, so that we can share that with those around us.

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Monday, September 30, 2019

(Lec. 455)

1) Zechariah 8:1-8

2) Luke 9:46-50

MONDAY OF  
26<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Jerome,  
Priest and Doctor  
of the Church)

FOCUS: Serve one another with *faithfulness and justice*.

Today's readings offer us a glimpse into the mind and heart of God. The Lord of Hosts is attentive to his chosen people in the Diaspora. They are "scattered" to the east and to the west, living in exile. *I will rescue my people from the land of the rising sun and from the land of the setting sun. I will bring them back to dwell within Jerusalem.* He speaks of more peaceful times – mentioning old men, and children playing in the streets. He renews his covenant with them, reminding the exiles that *they shall be my people and I will be their God, with faithfulness and justice.*

God cares for his people. He desires relationship and union with them, and promises his faithfulness throughout all time. No matter how many times the Israelite people – or we today – fail to keep our part of the covenant, God never falters in *his* resolve.

Jesus Christ is the incarnate, embodied fulfillment of God's faithfulness. And his message of the priorities of the kingdom reflect the importance of our relationship to God, and the priority of our union with him. For the Apostles who are arguing about who would be the greatest and the least, Jesus has some choice words. He takes a little child and reminds them that the least will be the greatest. That is, rivalry among the children of God has no place in the kingdom. Our relationship is with God first, and then – through him – all others. And for those who complain that a stranger is casting out demons in his name, Jesus offers wise counsel: *Do not prevent him, for whoever is not against you is for you.*

God is for us; the kingdom is for us; those who do good in the name of Christ are both for us, and with us. We are God's people, and we are being drawn ever closer to him in this life for the purpose of being forever with him in the next. May we have the grace to serve one another with the same *faithfulness and justice* God bestows upon us.

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