

# APRIL

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## WEDDING HOMILY

- 1) Genesis 2:18-24
- 2) Philippians 4:4-9
- 3) Matthew 7:21, 24-29

FOCUS: God is an integral part of a strong marriage.

Congratulations! What a wonderful day this is, as these two people come before the Lord to profess their love and commitment to one another. We are happy for you, and by your participation in the sacrament of marriage today, you are acknowledging that God is an integral part of your union.

As we witness your exchange of vows, we become partners in helping you make this marriage the best it can be. You can call on us to help you live out your vows; to help strengthen you in the difficult times; and rejoice with you in the good times.

Today's readings also provide food for thought as you begin this new and exciting phase of your life together. The Genesis reading reminds us that God created us to share our lives in marriage with a complementarity and intimacy that is physical and spiritual. It is one that builds upon the union we have with God, and makes him an integral part of that marital relationship such that there are no longer two, but one in God's sight.

Today's Gospel speaks of building on a solid foundation. You are doing that already by being here today, establishing your marriage on the rock that is the Church, and by inviting your families, friends, and associates who have your best interests at heart. Hold onto that foundation as your marriage matures, and you will be able to withstand the storms that are sure to come along.

The middle reading is full of practical suggestions for newlyweds, and actually for all of us as we interact each day. Saint Paul wrote the Letter to the Philippians centuries ago, but this inspired writing never gets old. He advises his hearers to *rejoice in the Lord always*. To rejoice is to have an attitude of happiness and positivity. Keeping such an attitude often prevents problems and can transform a challenging situation into one that is joyful.

Paul says, *Your kindness should be known to all*. In other words, be obvious in your kindness to your spouse. As you show kindness to one another it tends to lead to more kindness, both inside your home and among others who witness it.

Paul notes that *The Lord is near*. When we recognize how near God is to us, we naturally keep him as a conscious part of our relationships. We can have the confidence that he will be there to help us in the good times and the tough times.

Saint Paul writes to always notice what is true, what is honorable, what is just, what is pure, what is lovely, what is gracious, and what is worthy of praise. If you can look for these things in your spouse and in your lives together, you will have a peaceful and beautiful marriage. And this is what every person here wishes for you today and for many years to come.

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## FUNERAL HOMILY

- 1) Revelation 21:1-5a, 6b-7
- 2) John 11:17-27 (short form, 11:21-27)

FOCUS: Our faith in the risen Jesus gives us hope for eternal life.

*I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live.* These words have a special significance for all of us today as we honor the life of faith of N., and commend him/her to God. But they are also challenging words – for even hope for the future does not erase the possibility of grief and pain in the present. When we lose a loved one, grief can make it hard to embrace a vision of God who promises to wipe away every tear.

Yet, we know through our faith that there is something more. In this Mass, we are drawn into a community of believers who profess the Resurrection; this community serves as a visible image of God.

And, in spite of our darkness and our grief, this funeral liturgy unites us to one another in our baptismal journey, and to Christ in his suffering. Standing beside one another here, in the same light of faith in which N lived his/her life, we tell death to stand down, for *Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their God].*

Death has been defeated, despite what we see and experience here. Our mortal flesh succumbs to biological nature, of course – and we experience the rupture of relationship and the pain of separation. But as our readings proclaimed, and the Eucharist we share affirms: We are not alone. God has drawn us to himself forever through the sacrifice of his Son. Sin and death are crushed by the cross.

As Jesus was raised from the dead, so, too, will those be who were baptized into his life and death, and who are heirs to God's covenantal promise. As N. was. And it is our belief that we will be united with him/her again. We believe in the Resurrection, and that Christ has indeed made all things new.

One day when our lives on earth end, N. will greet us at the gates of the Kingdom. Until that day, let us continue to pray for N., and for all who have died, that at the end of their journey they will see God face-to-face.

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**YEAR A  
WEEKDAYS II**

Wednesday, April 1, 2020

(Lec. 253)

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

2) John 8:31-42

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

WEDNESDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: *The truth will set you free.*

In our readings today, we hear two stories about the freedom that God desires for us. In the first reading, we hear of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who will be burned alive if they do not bow to the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has made. In this story, when God saves these three faithful followers, he frees them from their danger.

In our Gospel story, Jesus speaks about what people need to be free. To those who believe in him, he tells them to be his disciples, so they can know the truth and be free. But some, rather than remaining in Jesus' word, challenge it, misinterpreting point after point that Jesus makes. By the end of the conversation, Jesus has told them what they need to be free, but it is clear they have not listened and will not follow Jesus.

These are two stories about freedom, and a closer look reveals something about the kind of freedom that God desires for his people. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not free in the beginning of the story insofar as they were in the king's custody, yet they were still able to be faithful. The Jews with whom Jesus spoke appeared to be free insofar as they did not have anyone controlling their actions, but they could not hear and follow Jesus. Who was truly free?

Jesus said, *If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* Jesus desires a freedom for us that is rooted in truth and relationship with him. He longs to free us from sin and death so as to live in love and union with him – with God. In light of this, we see that external circumstances have less to do with freedom than the choices we make to listen to and follow God: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were free the moment they chose to worship only God; Jesus' conversation partners were enslaved the more they refused to listen to him.

In this Lenten season, we, too, are journeying toward greater freedom as we seek to turn from sin and remain in Christ's word as his disciples. With each act of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, may the Lord's grace free us to more truly remain in him – the loving God who desires our freedom in union with him.

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Thursday, April 2, 2020  
(Lec. 254)  
1) Genesis 17:3-9  
2) John 8:51-59

THURSDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK  
OF LENT  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Francis of Paola,  
Hermit)

Gospel related: CCC 473, 574, 590

FOCUS: True freedom is found in Christ.

God promised Abraham that his descendants would be *as numerous as the stars in the sky* (Genesis 26:4). And in our reading today, God promises to make Abraham *the father of a host of nations*.

God's promise is part of his covenant with Abraham. God will give Abraham an heir and descendants; in turn, they must follow God's word and maintain the covenant. Abraham – as he has done many times before – puts his faith in God and trusts that what is promised will be. Indeed, in a year's time, Isaac is born. Abraham has the heir he longed for, and his descendants extend from Isaac through King David, down to Joseph, husband of Mary, mother of Jesus.

This is the salvation history of which Jesus reminds his listeners in today's Gospel. This is their story, their legacy, their humble beginnings. God provided a son to an old man and woman, creating a prolific covenant of love out of what had previously been a barren relationship. In speaking to his audience, Jesus affirms Abraham's legacy of fatherhood in faith and denounces those who claim Abraham as their father while failing to have his faith.

For how could the nation, the covenant, have survived if it did not involve a response by the Israelite people? How could God's promise be fulfilled if there were no one to receive it? That is what faith is: Responding to God's invitation to relationship and love, with a heart of love. It is believing in his promises and loving him in return. It is both a gratuitous gift from God, and an assent of our will to *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen* (CCC 146).

The people to whom Jesus spoke thought only their genealogy mattered. And this blinded them to the son, not just of Abraham, but of God, standing before them. We ask for God's grace to not be so stubborn. We pray for continued growth in the virtue of faith, and in the works of mercy that arise from our belief.

We attend to God's word and partake of the Eucharist, the sacrifice of love in which God's covenant is brought to eternal completion through his Son, Jesus. And we hear Jesus' words that should be our guiding light: *Whoever keeps my word will never see death*.

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Friday, April 3, 2020

(Lec. 255)

1) Jeremiah 20:10-13

2) John 10:31-42

Gospel related: CCC 437, 444, 548, 274, 582, 589, 591, 594, 1562

FRIDAY OF  
FIFTH WEEK  
OF LENT

FOCUS: We know who Jesus is; let us trust him.

We are in the final days before Holy Week. This weekend, we will commemorate Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. One week from today we will remember his passion and death.

Today's Gospel tells us that many Jews came to believe Jesus to be the Messiah because of his signs and fulfillment of prophecies. Many more, we know, came to believe in him following his resurrection from the dead.

And if we believe these things as well – that Jesus is God and that he rose from the dead – then what? How will this knowledge change our lives? As we enter into Holy Week and enter into the paschal mystery of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, we can confidently look beyond the cross to see the risen Christ. So, too, can we confidently look beyond our own Calvary to see the hope of Christ.

Jeremiah didn't know about Jesus, as he lived about 650 years before Christ. He didn't know about the Son of God who would work great signs, be killed by the Romans, and rise again. But he knew God, and he trusted God. Therefore, even while he was being persecuted, Jeremiah could sing praise to God, whom he said was with him *like a mighty champion*.

If Jeremiah could proclaim this great trust in God's power and deliverance, how much more should we be able to rely on him? We each will face our own Calvary, perhaps several of them, but we know who Jesus is: The Son of God. Throughout any and all hardships we may face in our lives, we know that we can rely on God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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Saturday, April 4, 2020

(Lec. 256)

1) Ezekiel 37:21-28

2) John 11:45-56

SATURDAY OF

FIFTH WEEK

OF LENT

(Opt. Mem

Saint Isidore,

Bishop and Doctor

of the Church)

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

**FOCUS:** God's covenant with the Israelites is fulfilled in Jesus, who reconciles us to God through his death and resurrection.

*I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* These words, spoken on behalf of the Lord by the prophet Ezekiel, comprise a key part of the covenant that God made with the nation of Israel. It is a covenant both vast and bold. Of all the possible nations in the ancient world, God chose the small, often sinful, and easily subjugated people of Israel to be *my people* – God's chosen ones.

Moreover, God longed for Israel to be unified, promising to gather the dispersed Israelites from every quarter, making them one nation under one shepherd. The Lord also says, *I will deliver [the Israelites] from all their sins of apostasy.* Each promise from God is audacious, revealing God's overwhelming love for the Israelites and his commitment to see them through their struggles.

The most grandiose of all these promises, however, was God's promise to come. The Lord says: *I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling shall be with them.* This dwelling place would arise in a literal, physical way, through the incarnation of his Son, Jesus; *Emmanu-el*: God with us.

Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of God's covenant expressed in Ezekiel. Through the Incarnation of Jesus, God literally takes on human flesh. God "makes a tabernacle" – sets up his tent or sanctuary – amongst God's creation through the person of Jesus Christ.

Herein resides the ultimate fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy: Jesus' death cleanses and gathers together not just the Israelites, but all the children of God. This covenant is not mere platitudes; it is the bedrock of who we are as Christians, as the heirs of God's promise first foretold to the Israelites.

Each Lent we recall the death of Jesus with humble gratitude, trusting that it is part of God's beautiful plan, despite its scandalous nature. The scandal of the cross and the gift of the Eucharist are manifestations of God's promises: That his sacrificial love has no limits, and that all of us are called to his heavenly banquet. May his grace be ever present to us that we might respond with the fullness of faith.

**Saint Isidore of Seville (560–636)** – Isidore was the Archbishop of Seville, Spain, for 32 years. He was a scholar and writer, whose encyclopedia, *The Etymologies*, was used for more than 900 years. This was the first summation of universal knowledge ("summa") in the Christian world. Isidore taught that learning was a means of coming closer to God, and that education without faith was incomplete. He was instrumental in the conversion of the Visigoths to Christianity, and subsequently the reunification of Spain.

## SUNDAY, APRIL 5, 2020

(Lec. 37)

Procession with the Palms

1) Matthew 21:1-11

(Lec. 38)

Mass Readings

1) Isaiah 50:4-7

2) Philippians 2:6-11

3) Matthew 26:14–27:66  
or 27:11-54

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 363, 439, 441, 443, 500, 515, 536, 545, 559, 585, 586, 591, 596, 597, 600, 609, 610, 612, 613, 633, 764, 1328, 1329, 1339, 1365, 1403, 1846, 2262, 2719, 2733, 2839, 2846, 2849 **CSDC** 454

## PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

**FOCUS:** Christ became obedient unto death that we might have life.

Today is one of those unique days in the Church calendar when we hear two Gospel passages very different in tone and sentiment, and certainly in content. We begin the liturgy with a presentation of an enthusiastic and exuberant crowd as Jesus enters Jerusalem, the capital of David's kingdom. Along the way he is regaled and hailed as *Son of David*; the *prophet, from Nazareth*; and the one *who comes in the name of the Lord*. He gets the red-carpet treatment: cloaks and *cut branches from the trees* strewn on the dusty road; cries of Hosanna piercing the air; the crowd swelling, their voices crying out in a mixture of scriptural quotations and messianic aspirations.

Then, as the Mass progresses – and somewhat all of a sudden – the mood changes: Our Gospel announces that the king has been degraded to the level of a common criminal. The victory confetti is replaced by whips, spitting, and choking dust. Jesus the prophet and Davidic Savior is now Jesus the criminal, the blasphemer, the rebel. The donkey that once carried him in triumph has disappeared, and on his own back he now carries the heavy and awkward cross. Cries of celebration have turned to calls for death; shouts of joy have given way to the sound of the lash; the parade has become an execution march.

It is enough to make our spiritual head spin. For in this yearly remembrance of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we are well-reminded of the nature of our own temptations and sins. We can often find ourselves with Jesus for the easy part of the journey, but then vanish like the wind when the pressure rises and the threats of death fill the air. We examine how deep is our own loyalty to Christ in a world where faith is so easily mocked and the name of Christ so easily denigrated. We think about the times when we want to skip ahead to the empty tomb without first walking to Golgotha. As Jesus tells us, the human spirit can be very willing, but the flesh very weak. But there can be no resurrection without the cross; there can be no new life without first dying to oneself. There is no Easter without Good Friday.

Let us not be like the crowd: Fickle, inconsistent, swaying with the latest wind of popularity and fame, afraid to stand up for justice and truth – for the innocent one. But as we journey this Holy Week, let us keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus. Let us take note of his patience, his total and unyielding dedication to doing the will of the Father fully and completely. Then let us take up our cross and follow him, so that having shared in his cross, we might share in his resurrection.

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Monday, April 6, 2020  
(Lec. 257)

1) Isaiah 42:1-7

2) John 12:1-11

Gospel related: CCC 2449 CSDC 183

MONDAY OF  
HOLY WEEK

FOCUS: Pray for the grace to be *a light for the nations*.

Yesterday, Palm Sunday, saw Jesus entering into Jerusalem as a king. Soon, we know, we will bear witness to his passion and death. But not all things are as they seem. Jesus is not the king he appeared to be. Indeed, as the oracle of the prophet Isaiah proclaims, *he shall bring forth justice*, but it will not be done by crying out, by making his voice known in the streets, but instead by humility, service, and a radical self-giving love. The passion and death of Jesus, too, are not what they appear to be: They are not the humiliation and defeat of a man betrayed and abandoned, but the paradoxical victory of a God who remained faithful and loved us to the end.

Often, in the world, we struggle to see clearly – to see rightly. The reality of sin can make itself known as a sort of fog, a distortion, a separation from truth. And so appearances can be deceiving. How often do we see the stress, the toil, the pain, the confusion – but fail to see the victory?

In today's Gospel, Mary breaks through the fog. She recognizes the truth of the situation, and the truth about Jesus. In her anointing she not only foreshadows the burial to come, but the crowning as well. Meanwhile, Judas' judgment remains clouded by sin and greed – and we know where that will lead.

The oracle in the prophet Isaiah tells us that the Lord has called us, grasped us, and formed us to be a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, and to bring out from the dungeon those who live in darkness. Let us this week pray for the grace to step into this light ourselves, and see clearly not only the cross, but also the victory that Christ wins for us. When we do, we, like Martha, must then be prepared to act. This light is not to be kept to ourselves! We are called to a victory of justice, to be a people of hope constantly proclaiming the good news that the sin and pain of this world will not have the final say – that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

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Tuesday, April 7, 2020

(Lec. 258)

1) Isaiah 49:1-6

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

TUESDAY OF

HOLY WEEK

FOCUS: Jesus enters into human struggle to save us and bring perfect goodness into our brokenness.

God wants to remind us of the truth that Isaiah sees so clearly: God is here with us in our struggles. God is here, he cares, he is helping us, strengthening us, giving us all we need to be a part of his work of bringing goodness into the world. This testimony has been passed down through generations who have experienced their truth and found consolation in their promises.

But in case we find Isaiah's prophesy unconvincing, if we are not moved by the witness of so many in Scripture who tell of God's care in their struggles, we are also given this Gospel reading, and the Eucharist.

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, is *reclining at table with his disciples*. He has been teaching them, guiding them, pouring his love into them in countless ways. All of his life has been leading to this moment where he will give of himself completely. Yet the first words from Jesus today are, *Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me*.

What a contrast, no? In his moment of pure selflessness, he is faced with another's selfish, prideful sin. And yet, Jesus does not shy away from the heartbreak this surely caused them all to feel. He enters in, just as he enters even into death to complete his work of salvation: To bring perfect love and goodness into all of our brokenness. To bring salvation to the world, and reunite us in fullness with our Creator.

And in this Gospel today, Jesus still continues to teach, to affirm, and to love. He does not *leave* those who need him most. He is *taken* from them. But we have the benefit of knowing that he returns.

We know that Jesus is here with us now. He enters into our struggles and carries us in them. He gives us his strength and all we need to do God's will. He will never leave *us*, though our own pride and sinfulness may move us away from *him*. Through the grace of the Eucharist we have his help and his goodness to transform us. May we always have the faith to live it.

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Wednesday, April 8, 2020  
(Lec. 259)

WEDNESDAY OF  
HOLY WEEK

- 1) Isaiah 50:4-9a
  - 2) Matthew 26:14-25
- Gospel related: CCC 610, 1339

FOCUS: We have been given the keys to the Kingdom.

Ash Wednesday called us to “turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel.” Today is Wednesday of Holy Week, marking the end of Lent. We now prepare for the passion of Christ. During the next three days, the *Triduum*, we reflect on the events leading to the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord. There is a profound sense of sadness as we remember the betrayal, the suffering, the death, the mourning, and the loss that all followers of Jesus experience in recalling these events. We must live Good Friday before we can truly celebrate the joy and promise of Easter.

Today’s Gospel sets the stage for Judas’ betrayal of Jesus. For 30 pieces of silver, he promises to turn him over to the chief priests. At the Passover supper, Jesus makes it known that Judas would betray him, and thus Judas became one of the most notorious traitors in history.

In many ways, it is easy to condemn Judas for his actions and dismiss our own role in this. The truth, however, is that we, in our sinfulness, share in this betrayal. Our sins added nails to the cross as well. Jesus died for all of us. He took on the weight of our transgressions, and suffered the pain of our sins. Our salvation comes at the cost of our Savior’s sacrifice. This week, especially, we remember how he humbly accepted his role, suffering and dying to free us from the burden of our sins. Because of this, eternity with God becomes a possibility for us. Heaven’s doors are open.

Salvation is a pure gift from God – we have done nothing to earn it. However, we ought to celebrate this gift in the way we live – as if we have been given the keys to the Kingdom. Because we have! So as we partake of the Eucharist, may the body and blood of Christ that nourishes our souls help us to cooperate with the grace the Lord gives us to live as his disciples.

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Thursday, April 9, 2020

(Lec. 39)

1) Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

2) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

3) John 13:1-15

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

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

FOCUS: In the Eucharist, we are transformed to be instruments of God's grace to those around us.

Tonight we begin our *Triduum*, the three holiest days of the Church calendar. The readings we have just heard are worthy of the solemnity of this occasion, as we hear about the first Passover, and the Passover before Jesus had his Last Supper with his disciples.

Passover refers to the instructions given to Moses and Aaron by God, in the book of Exodus. These instructions set out the rules and rituals they were to follow so that as the Lord went *through Egypt, striking down every firstborn of the land, both man and beast, and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt*, the community of Israel would be spared. Central to this event was the slaughter of a lamb: *A year-old male and without blemish*. The eating of its flesh and the application of its blood *to the two doorposts and the lintel of every house* signified their adherence to God's command, and their salvation from ruin.

In the same way, we remember God's salvific promise and participate in Christ's sacrifice in every Mass throughout time and across the globe. We who participate in the Eucharist are called, in turn, to be the body and blood of Jesus to all the people we meet, to bring Jesus' love tangibly to the world.

In the Gospel, Jesus demonstrates a tangible way that we as Christians are to be his body and blood – through humble service to one another and to the world around us. Jesus, the Teacher and Master, offered a humble service to his disciples: He washed their feet. His example is one that should guide our own lives: Servant leadership and humility.

But what do these ancient ritual actions and symbols mean to us here and now, in our daily lives in the 21st century? We, like the Israelites, can celebrate God's merciful action in saving us from slavery – not the slavery of the Israelite people to the Egyptians, but our personal slavery to sin. Through baptism, we are freed from the effects of original sin and welcomed into a life of grace – freed to live the life that God called us to. And every time we receive Jesus' body and blood, we are transformed to be instruments of his grace to those around us, serving others humbly as Jesus did at the Last Supper.

So let us give thanks for all that we have received through the saving power of God; and let us pray for continued growth in faith, hope, and love – that we might be servant leaders in a world in need of salvation and hope.

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Friday, April 10, 2020  
(Lec. 40)

- 1) Isaiah 52:13–53:12
- 2) Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9
- 3) John 18:1–19:42

Gospel related: CCC 217, 440, 478, 495, 501, 544, 549, 559, 575, 586, 595, 596, 600, 607, 608, 609, 624, 641, 694, 726, 730, 964, 1225, 1432, 2471, 2561, 2605, 2618 2677, 2679 CSDC 22, 52, 181, 209, 210, 217, 219

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

FOCUS: Through his cross and resurrection, Jesus breaks the chains of sin and death.

Each Good Friday, the recitation of the passion narrative is taken from the Gospel of John. Where Matthew, Mark, and Luke show Jesus' great suffering, John emphasizes divine power shining through human weakness. Jesus, fully human and fully divine, knows what is about to happen to him, but he shows no fear, only faith and determination in the face of torture and execution.

John's account is a very detailed firsthand retelling of Jesus' last hours. He was the only Apostle not to abandon Jesus at Calvary, which perhaps explains this sense of it being from an eyewitness point of view. And do we truly hear his account? Perhaps we have heard these words so many times now that we have become immune to the diabolical nature of what is actually happening in it. Perhaps we're even desensitized to the fact that this "story" is not fiction, but a descriptive rendition of an historical event.

An innocent man is betrayed for money by his friend; he is taken before the elders of his own community who strike him and disregard him for answering their questions politely and truthfully; he is framed before a government official who is overly concerned about the political fallout of what is happening, but who doesn't hesitate to beat Jesus within an inch of his life in the hopes of appeasing somebody. His Jewish countrymen, oppressed and ruled by a foreign power, give him over to that foreign power to kill him. And so Jesus is unjustly, brutally, tortuously executed in an excruciating, humiliating, and public manner.

Let's look around us, at each other. If this were today someone sitting beside us – our brother, our son, our sister, our daughter, our parent, or any other loved one who was not only innocent of any and all charges, but was the perfect, most loving, sinless person ever – would we not be absolutely outraged? Would we not be heartbroken? Would we not be dedicating every moment of our life to making sure that happened to no one else, or – at the very least – creating meaning from its occurrence?

That visceral feeling we now feel in answering yes? That's the intensity of the Gospel. That is the urgency of the Good News. Not in terms of revenge, or payback, or political protest, but in the power of the Holy Spirit moving in us to declare to the world what has happened. To declare how God took death and turned it into life. How he overcame sin through the outpouring of love.

We can't get to the Resurrection without Good Friday, though. This event was not just some prophet who fell asleep into death and then came back on his own. The reason this harrowing, descriptive story is so important is because it shows that all the powers of the earthly world conspired to put Jesus to death. And God raised him back up.

The sky was darkened. The earth shook. The curtain of the Temple was torn. Time stopped. As Christians everywhere this day flock to darkened churches to venerate the wood of the cross, we fast and pray, mindful of the depth of God's love for us, even to the death of his Son on a cross. A death that gives birth to our salvation.

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Saturday, April 11, 2020  
(Lec. 41)

**HOLY SATURDAY  
EASTER VIGIL**

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

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

**New Testament Readings**

- 8) Romans 6:3-11
  - 9) Matthew 28:1-10
- Gospel related: CCC 500, 641, 645, 652, 654, 2174

**FOCUS:** We can be witnesses to the Resurrection by our words and by our lives.

We've processed into a dark church with lit candles and spread that light to one another. We've heard the glorious *Exultet*, proclaiming that this is the "night of all nights," followed by a series of readings that proclaim the goodness, mercy, and unbelievable love of God.

It seems that all of these elements of rejoicing and the great news in our many readings should come to a climax with the Gospel just proclaimed – the story of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. With all the build-up from our rituals and our readings, we could rightly expect exultant cheers and rejoicing from Mary Magdalene and the other Mary when they hear about the resurrection of their beloved Master.

The women have gone to the tomb and witnessed extraordinary and frightening events – an earthquake; an angel appearing *like lightning*; the guards, *shaken with fear who became like dead men*; and the body of Jesus missing. The angel tells them, *Do not be afraid! ... for [Jesus] has been raised just as he said*. The angel then directs them to go quickly to tell Jesus' disciples. The women run off, both *fearful* and *overjoyed*.

We have all, perhaps, experienced similar feelings – we want to believe good news that we hear, but it's too good to be true! In a world full of problems, crises, suffering, and sorrow, we can be so used to hearing bad news that good news can be hard to believe. We can be like the women – hopeful, yet afraid to believe the good news.

But, whatever doubt Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had after encountering the angel, it is erased when they encounter Christ himself. He is not a ghost or a memory – indeed, they touch his feet and hear his voice. They worship him, and are reassured by his words, *Do not be afraid*. Jesus himself directs the women to announce his resurrection to the Apostles and instructs them to meet him in Galilee. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go, emboldened by their direct encounter with Jesus, and later Matthew will tell us: *The eleven\* disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them* (v. 16).

In the next 50 days, we will see how the Apostles have their own encounters with the risen Jesus, and how they receive power from the Holy Spirit to be witnesses themselves. The men who

deserted Jesus at his hour of need will now have the courage and zeal to be witnesses to Jesus' life, message, death, and resurrection.

And how about us? The Resurrection is 2,000 years removed from our own experiences, yet we've had the advantage of the witness of the Apostles, Scripture, our teachers, parents, and other people whose influence in our lives helped us to believe in Jesus and his resurrection. Hopefully, in the past 40 days of Lent, we've also had our own personal encounters with Jesus through prayer, the sacraments, and Jesus' message spoken to us through other people in our lives.

Now, as people who have encountered Jesus, it's our turn to be witnesses to the Resurrection – witnesses of hope in a world in need of hope. Let us claim our legacy as Christians – the deep joy of the Resurrection and the call to pass on the word. Jesus is risen – alleluia!

\* \* \*

## SUNDAY, APRIL 12, 2020

(Lec. 42)

- 1) Acts 10:34a, 37-43
- 2) Colossians 3:1-4 or  
1 Corinthians 5:6b-8
- 3) John 20:1-9 or  
Matthew 28:1-10 (Lec. 41)

Gospel related: CCC Lec. 42: 515, 640, 2174; Lec. 41: 500, 641, 645, 652, 654, 2174 CSDC 454

## EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD - SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: All praise to Christ our *victor King*.

“Who is my opponent? I,” he says, “am the Christ. I am the one who destroyed death, and triumphed over the enemy, and trampled Hades under foot, and bound the strong one, and carried off man to the heights of heaven, I,” he says, “am the Christ.”

These words in an early second-century homily from Melito of Sardis, Bishop of Sardis, serve to help our understanding and appreciation of just what we are celebrating today. Especially, in fact, if we can imagine the bishop delivering these words in the same way that has occurred in movies: When King Leonidas of Sparta says “this is Sparta,” in *300*; or William Wallace yells “freedom!” in *Braveheart*.

It is not an entirely bad image, for Jesus Christ is indeed our warrior King, although not in the temporal, political sense. We are not called to arms against earthly enemies. In fact, we are not called to arms at all because – victory has been won! His resurrection is our resurrection (Cf. Romans 6:5); his life is our life; his kingdom is our kingdom.

And while in the Gospel today Mary of Magadala, Simon Peter, and the other disciple *did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead*, we are privy to the full story and the history of the Church which commissions us as witnesses. *We testify that [Jesus] is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead ... [and] that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name.*

These are not just nice words we heard in the reading from Acts. These are not “just claims” that perhaps we have heard so many times that we sort of gloss over them. This is victory over sin and death! A gift given to us in the most merciful and generous way possible. This is not an end – as many who surrounded Jesus may have thought – but a beginning. We celebrate the Resurrection as the day, as our psalm says, when *The right hand of the LORD has struck with power.*

“Therefore,” Melito continues his homily, “come, all families of men, you who have been befouled with sins, and receive forgiveness for your sins. [Christ is] your forgiveness, [Christ is] the passover of your salvation, [Christ is] the lamb which was sacrificed for you, [Christ is] your ransom ... your light ... your savior ... your king.”

On this most solemn and yet triumphant day of all days, may we vow to carry this joyful, regal message of salvation to others, for we are compelled by virtue of our baptism to share that Good News with the world. “For who is [Christ’s] opponent? After all, he is the Christ. [He is] the one who destroyed death, and triumphed over the enemy, and trampled Hades under foot.”

All praise to Christ our *victor King, ever reigning.*



Monday, April 13, 2020

(Lec. 261)

1) Acts 2:14, 22-33

2) Matthew 28:8-15

Gospel related: CCC 640, 641, 645, 654

MONDAY  
WITHIN THE OCTAVE  
OF EASTER

FOCUS: We are witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus.

When we hear the word “witness,” one of the first things to come to mind are people called to give testimony in a trial in a courtroom. Today’s readings use the word *witness* in a related way. While the people mentioned in the readings are not in a court of law, they do give testimony to an event that they and others were trying to grasp. In a courtroom, a jury listens to witnesses to learn the details of a crime. In these readings, the witnesses give testimony to the mystery of an empty tomb.

Chronologically, our two readings today are reversed, for the events in the Gospel took place first. Two women, both named Mary, are running away from the empty tomb. They have learned the strange news that their friend, Jesus, rose from the dead. They hurry while *fearful and overjoyed*. The women witness the empty tomb and encounter the risen Christ on their way to tell the story. He tells them not to be afraid, and their fear became faith, and their joy expanded.

Another group of witnesses in the Gospel are the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb of Jesus. They, too, must have witnessed the empty tomb. But they are bribed to manipulate the truth – not the first time Christ is betrayed for money. The soldiers follow instructions and give false testimony that Christ’s body was stolen in the night.

For another group of witnesses, we turn back to the first reading. It is Pentecost, and Peter is with the disciples, preaching to the Jews and *all [who are staying] in Jerusalem*. They are exhorting those who hear to have an understanding of the great import of the events that had taken place. Jesus was lawlessly killed, *But God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death*. Peter raises his voice to proclaim his testimony about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The final group, unmentioned in the readings but important nonetheless, is all of us gathered here. *We are witnesses* to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have heard the testimony of the witnesses in the Scriptures and believe their words. We have seen and heard the great works of God and know the great promise that arose from that now-empty tomb. So along with Peter and the two Marys, we offer our testimony of truth – *the tomb is empty*, of this great mystery we are witnesses. Jesus Christ is risen, alleluia.

\* \* \*

Tuesday, April 14, 2020  
(Lec. 262)

1) Acts 2:36-41

2) John 20:11-18

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

TUESDAY  
WITHIN THE OCTAVE  
OF EASTER

FOCUS: How blessed we are to be called sons and daughters of God.

In today's Gospel, taking place after Jesus' death, John recounts that when *Mary Magdalene* and Jesus see each other, he speaks to her as his beloved sister, *I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*

For the first time in this Gospel, Jesus speaks not solely of his Father, but "their Father." This language is John's way of signifying the transition taking place. *The disciples are yet to experience the fruits of Jesus' glorification, but the days of being associated with the historical Jesus are over. An entirely new situation is being established (Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John).* His time of returning to the Father has not yet come, but the hour is at hand.

What an absolutely mind-blowing moment this is. For not only has a man been claiming that he is the Son of God, he now claims his followers as sons and daughters of that same God!

In ancient times, to believe that a god, any god, would deign to take on human form was one thing. And of course, it was something only the One, Triune God did do. But for that same God to welcome as children those who are not divine, but only human ... well, that was revolutionary. It was revelatory.

Yet, by the power of his cross, death, and resurrection, Jesus was reuniting us to and reconciling us with the Father. No longer were we enslaved to sin and death, for our Father – not just Jesus' Father – had sent his Son, our brother, to redeem us.

It may be hard for us to understand how radical this language was. Especially when we are so accustomed to praying, *Our Father* ... But we ought to remind ourselves of how radical the entire enterprise of Christianity was, and still is. And how blessed we are to be called sons and daughters of God.

Perhaps this Eucharist today will help us understand in a deeper way the love that God has for us. And as brothers and sisters in Christ, and children of the one Father, may the graces we obtain today make us ever more worthy for that day when we will see our Father face to face.

\* \* \*

Wednesday, April 15, 2020  
(Lec. 263)

WEDNESDAY  
WITHIN THE OCTAVE  
OF EASTER

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

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

FOCUS: Behold, Christ makes all things new.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead makes all things new.

When Peter and John encounter a man begging for alms outside the Temple, they do not just give him money and go on their way. They look *intently at him* and ask him to pause and pay attention to them in return. Then, instead of giving alms, they heal him. Rather than a temporary fix, they offer a permanent solution. Peter takes his hand and raises him up.

This man now bears witness to the resurrection in his own body. Those who have seen him begging outside the Temple every day now see him healed and worshipping inside the Temple, and are amazed. Things of this world – those which are temporary – are now replaced with the eternal.

When the two disciples in today's Gospel meet Jesus on the road, they do not recognize him. It is only after they have invited him to supper and seen him bless and break the bread that their eyes are opened. Once they know his identity, they can look back on their encounter on the road and acknowledge the burning they felt in their hearts while he explained the Scriptures to them.

Both the man begging outside the Temple and the disciples on the road to Emmaus bore witness to their encounter with the risen Lord. The man who was healed would stay with Peter and John even after they were later apprehended by the Temple authorities for preaching in Jesus' name. The disciples returned to Jerusalem to share with the Apostles what had happened to them.

God's saving actions change people. It changed the world, and changed our destiny. May our encounter with the risen Lord in the Eucharist embolden *us* to proclaim this good news with joy throughout this Easter season.

\* \* \*

Thursday, April 16, 2020  
(Lec. 264)

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

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

THURSDAY  
WITHIN THE OCTAVE  
OF EASTER

FOCUS: In the Eucharist, we are transformed in God's love for going forth into the world.

In our baptism, we are grafted onto the life of Jesus Christ. We are chosen by him and marked as his own. But the journey on the path of discipleship can feel challenging and uncertain. Today's readings show us how some of the early believers also experienced this uncertainty, and how Jesus responded.

In the first reading, Peter and John had just cured a crippled man on the Temple grounds. The crowd around them reacted with astonishment, which seemed to surprise and perhaps even annoy Peter. He may have wondered why they had not yet heard of the truth about Jesus. Preaching to this Jewish audience, Peter calls them to repent from their unbelief and turn to Jesus in faith.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples in his resurrected body, they felt scared and uncertain. Jesus questioned why they felt this way, but he invited the disciples to look at and even touch his hands and feet.

We also may feel scared and uncertain at times; we may occasionally fail to see the truth of Jesus in our midst. But like the disciples, and the crowd around Peter and John, we also have the opportunity to draw closer to Jesus. We do this through prayer and sacrament, of course, and specifically every time we come to Mass. Jesus becomes present to us in body and blood, soul and divinity, in the Eucharist. Here we can experience his healing and his touch. And by receiving the sacrament and devoting ourselves to listening to God's word, we are being formed in the light of Christ, and transformed in God's love for going forth into the world.

\* \* \*

Friday, April 17, 2020  
(Lec. 265)

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

Gospel related: CCC 448, 645, 659, 1166

FRIDAY  
WITHIN THE OCTAVE  
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The stone that the builders rejected *has become the cornerstone*.

In times of life's inevitable transitions, we might find ourselves a bit lost. Graduations, moves, or other transitional life experiences can leave us with feelings of grief for what is changing or what will be lost.

Imagine the intense sadness Peter and the disciples must have felt in the wake of Jesus' death and resurrection. In today's Gospel, Peter and the disciples decide to go fishing, hearkening back to their livelihood before they first encountered Jesus. This may have provided some kind of solace to go back to the familiar in such confusing times.

Jesus meets them where they are, and it takes some signs for them to recognize that it is, indeed, Jesus. They have not caught anything yet, and Jesus tells them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. They catch an incredible amount of fish, and *the disciple whom Jesus loved* recognizes Jesus in the multitude of the catch. Peter only realizes it is Jesus when his fellow disciple tells him.

Compare that Peter to the one we encounter today in the Acts of the Apostles. While he was uncertain in the Gospel, Peter of the first reading is courageous and proclaims boldly the message of Jesus. He has healed a crippled man in the name of Jesus, and he has taught a multitude of people. He is not afraid to stand up to the religious leaders of the time and to correct them in their ways.

When the leaders question him about what power or by what name he has cured the crippled man, Peter states it was *in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean*. He goes on to clearly and concisely describe how Jesus was raised from the dead and has brought us salvation. He is the rejected stone that has indeed become the cornerstone. Peter knows this intimately in his heart. How? Through the gift of faith, and his personal witness of the risen Christ.

This is the same faith which has been given to us, and we are witnesses to the same risen Christ in the Eucharist. In this Octave of Easter, may we give thanks for this gift of faith and salvation. And may we have the courage and fortitude of Peter to proclaim the Good News. For indeed, the stone that the builders rejected *has become the cornerstone* of the Church and the kingdom of God.

\* \* \*

Saturday, April 18, 2020  
(Lec. 266)

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

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

SATURDAY  
WITHIN THE OCTAVE  
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The risen Christ sends out his disciples to announce the Good News to the world.

Jesus says, *Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.* His Apostles and disciples follow his command, and – as we heard in our first reading – meet resistance for it.

The religious leadership in Jerusalem is *amazed* at the *boldness of Peter and John*, because they – still! – do not understand who Jesus was, or the Good News he brought. Instead, they judge by appearances: Peter and John appear to them to be *uneducated, ordinary men*. That is, they were not devout, religiously trained scholars such as themselves.

These members of the Sanhedrin are at a loss as to what they should do. Conferring amongst themselves, they acknowledge they cannot deny the healing that took place, but at the same time they must silence these men.

By commanding them *not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus*, they hope to stop the spread of the Gospel. But the Apostles reply: *It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard.* There is no silencing the word of God. And while the Sanhedrin are frustrated, the people *were all praising God for what had happened.*

The people praised God, and Peter and John refused to be silenced because God is not bound by human limitations and prohibitions. What was not clear to the “elite” scribes, elders, and leaders was abundantly clear to and accepted in faith by the “ordinary people” – by the *hoi polloi* (literally, “the common people”). God chooses to work in and through whomever he pleases, and these “common people” were empowered and gifted by the Holy Spirit.

There is a message in all of this for us. We, too, are commanded to announce the Gospel to the world – and God is ready to work through us. We don’t need to be something other than we are, in order to begin. We are the “common people”: The beggar in need of healing, the ordinary person in the crowd. God is not bound by our limitations. In fact, where we are weak, God is strong (Cf. 2 Corinthians 12:9).

As we go forth from here today, may the grace of our unbounded and unlimited God give us the boldness of Peter and John, that we might announce the Good News in accordance with our gifts. And may the Holy Spirit empower us to find it *impossible ... not to speak about what we have seen and heard.*

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**SUNDAY, APRIL 19, 2020**

(Lec. 43)

1) Acts 2:42-47

2) 1 Peter 1:3-9

3) John 20:19-31

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

**SECOND SUNDAY  
OF EASTER  
or DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY**

FOCUS Jesus is the font of God's Divine Mercy.

Today the Church celebrates Divine Mercy Sunday. The central focus is our celebration of the resurrection of Christ and the floodgates of God's mercy being opened upon us, and is based both on Scripture and the revelations of Saint Faustina Kowalska.

Peter says in today's second reading, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.*

Saint John Paul II, in his canonization of Sister Mary Faustina Kowalska, instituted this day into the Church calendar. In his homily, he said:

"It is important then that we accept the whole message that comes to us from the word of God on this Second Sunday of Easter, which from now on throughout the Church will be called 'Divine Mercy Sunday.' In the various readings, the liturgy seems to indicate the path of mercy which, while re-establishing the relationship of each person with God, also creates new relations of fraternal solidarity among human beings. Christ has taught us that "man not only receives and experiences the mercy of God, but is also called 'to practise mercy' towards others: *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy* (Mt 5:7)" (*Dives in misericordia*, n. 14).

That mercy is easily seen in the many healing miracles recalled in the Gospels. In each one, whether physical or spiritual, the power of Christ to renew, forgive, and heal bursts into the life of someone and, at times, even turns upside down the very laws of nature.

In today's Gospel, that specific ministry of forgiveness and mercy is passed to the disciples, when Jesus says, *Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them.* This is Divine Mercy.

When Thomas, broken and distraught at the death of Jesus cannot, or will not, bring himself to accept the Resurrection, Jesus gently takes him from obstinate refusal to a moment of faith. He coaxes from Thomas one of the great confessions of faith: *My Lord and my God!* In that moment, Thomas is healed and changed – healed of his grief and pain, changed from doubt to belief. This is Divine Mercy.

Having experienced that same forgiveness and healing in their own lives, the disciples now become carriers of these gifts for all who will hear and respond to their preaching. For what they say about the risen Christ is no mere fantasy. They witnessed his death on the cross, and now they witness with their very eyes and with the touch of their hands that he is fully alive. Divine Mercy.

The need for those gifts of mercy and healing is as great today as it was in apostolic times, as Saint John Paul II noted. Without it, we are lost – still in our sins, unable to be reconciled with God. So as we continue to celebrate the Resurrection, let us each open our hearts to those gifts and then commit ourselves to be conduits of them to others. Divine Mercy.

Monday, April 20, 2020  
(Lec. 267)

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

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

MONDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Give the Holy Spirit room to work.

Imagine a beautiful, small room. It has a great deal of potential, but right now it needs a little – or a lot of – work. Maybe the windows are broken, the floor needs repairs, and a coat of dust, grime, and cobwebs covers everything. The fireplace is cold and barren. It's dark.

But it could be so beautiful! It would be wise to first call a professional to repair the windows and floor. The homeowner, too, will need to put in countless hours of elbow grease to clean the room. In time, the room becomes the beautiful space it was always meant to be. At long last, a fire can crackle in the hearth and the room can be used to its full potential.

Now imagine this room is our soul. It has great potential, but it may be obscured by sin, by doubts, by fears. Where do we begin? First, call on the Holy Spirit. Pray for the graces needed to overcome sin, to “clean out the soul” and repair its brokenness. Sometimes, this requires giving up some control. That doesn't mean we can simply wait for the Holy Spirit to change us. Rather, it is our job to cooperate with the graces he gives us. It's up to us to put in the elbow grease to clean the room of our souls. Empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit, we can trust that the cold, barren places in our hearts will be aflame with the love of God.

Today's first reading tells of early Christians praying for graces to boldly proclaim the Gospel, and being *filled with the Holy Spirit*. When we ask for help in becoming holy and spreading the Good News, our prayer will be answered.

In baptism, we were given the gift of the Holy Spirit in a special way. The *Catechism* teaches us that baptism purifies us from sin and makes us a new creature: “an adopted son [or daughter] of God ... a partaker of the divine nature, member of Christ ... and a temple of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1265). This is what Christ was alluding to when he spoke to Nicodemus of being born of water and Spirit.

Today, let us invite the Holy Spirit into our hearts in a radical way. Though he is with us from the moment of our baptism, let us pray that he may help us make our hearts a truly beautiful dwelling place for God.

“Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth.”

\* \* \*



Tuesday, April 21, 2020  
(Lec. 268)  
1) Acts 4:32-37  
2) John 3:7b-15

TUESDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
OF EASTER  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Anselm,  
Bishop and Doctor  
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 423, 440, 505, 526, 591, 661, 2130 CSDC 50

**FOCUS:** *The Son of Man [will] be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.*

In today's Gospel, Jesus engages a Jewish leader named Nicodemus in what appears to most of us as a cryptic, and somewhat confusing, conversation. Jesus talks about being *born from above*, about the wind, and about being *born of the Spirit*.

When Nicodemus expresses puzzlement at Jesus' words, Jesus queries him in return: *You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand this? ... If I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?*

One way of looking at this exchange is to see it as a way of pointing out the limitations of human wisdom, and therefore our need for reliance on the Wisdom of God. For as the Proverb says, *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, on your own intelligence do not rely; in all your ways be mindful of him, and he will make straight your paths* (Proverbs 3:5-6). Anyone can tell us about things of this earth, but only the *Son of Man ... has gone up to heaven* and can tell [us] about heavenly things.

It will surprise no one here that reliance on human wisdom is not a fail-safe endeavor. After all, Jesus' entry into human history was in direct response to human wisdom failing time and again. Despite God's continual efforts to move his people out of bondage and sin, their own weaknesses and failure won out. They relied on themselves, rather than God. So God became one of them – one of us – so that we might become wise.

It's unclear how much "wiser" we as a human race have become. What is clear is the way to salvation: Jesus Christ, Wisdom personified; *the Son of Man [who will] be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.*

May Wisdom be our guide, and the Spirit be our strength.

**Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)** – Anselm, a Benedictine monk of the 11th and 12th centuries, is a Doctor of the Church and is called the "Father of Scholasticism" for his work to understand the truth of faith through reason. He is best known for his book *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God Became Man). Considered the brightest Catholic intellect between Saint Augustine in the fifth century and Saint Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century, Anselm was also committed to caring for the poor and abolishing slavery.

\* \* \*

Wednesday, April 22, 2020  
(Lec. 269)

1) Acts 5:17-26

2) John 3:16-21

Gospel related: CCC 219, 444, 454, 458, 618, 679, 706 CSDC 3, 64

WEDNESDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
OF EASTER

FOCUS: God sent his Son to save us; we need only accept his grace.

The first verse of today's Gospel should be familiar to all of us from billboards along the highway and posters held up at sporting events. There is a reason John 3:16 is so popular. It basically sums up the core belief of Christianity: That God is a loving Father, who sent his only Son into the world to defeat death and offer life to those who believe in him.

This is a message of hope that the world sorely needs to hear. God sent the Son not to condemn the world, but to save it. God offers salvation in Christ to everyone, but he loves us so much that he grants us the freedom to believe or not: *Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned.* Like any gift, salvation can be rejected.

And reject it we may do. Like the high priest and his companions who don't believe that Jesus was who he said he was. Even after the Apostles are mysteriously released from prison, it does not change their minds about who God is and how he acts. The heart of their objections are jealousy, pride, and fear. Perhaps our fear, or an actual stubborn refusal to accept the grace Jesus offers us, can hold us back from accepting Jesus in our own lives.

The Apostles taught and healed in Jesus' name, bringing his sacred presence to the nations. We can encounter this presence today in the sacraments. Jesus' forgiveness is available to us in the sacrament of reconciliation. Jesus offers us his own body in the Eucharist as food for the journey. We can be healed by Jesus through the anointing of the sick. How often have we let our pride, shame, or fear keep us from the sacraments, preferring our own darkness to the light? When we cut ourselves off from these sources of grace, we condemn ourselves. God the Father sent his Son into the world to save the world. It is up to us to accept the abundance of grace we are offered in his name.

\* \* \*

Thursday, April 23, 2020  
(Lec. 270)

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

THURSDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
OF EASTER  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint George,  
Martyr;  
Saint Adalbert,  
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 161, 504, 690, 1286

**FOCUS:** *God does not ration his gift of the Spirit.*

Alleluia! The joy, the hope, and the promise of the Resurrection are alive and well as this Easter season continues. This is the good news that Peter and the Apostles shared with the world in the early days after Jesus returned to the Father. Filled with the Spirit, they ignored the demands of the Sanhedrin, who put them in prison and threatened death if they did not stop preaching about the resurrection of Jesus.

*We must obey God rather than men, Peter and the Apostles said. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus ... [and] we are witnesses of these things, as is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.*

And we know from John's words today that *God does not ration his gift of the Spirit.*

This seems like even more good news! For it means that there is no limit to the help we can receive from the Spirit in our lives; no limit to the forgiveness of sins – if we only ask. The Spirit is the source of all holiness, awakening faith in us and teaching us how to pray. It kindles in us the fire of God's love and unites us in faith. Therefore, it is what allows us, empowers us, enables us, to believe in the Son so as to have eternal life.

And what does that mean for us? At the very least, we are called to a life that strives to “turn away from sin, and be faithful to the Gospel,” as we were reminded at the beginning of Lent.

Peter and the Apostles were witnesses. We, too, are witnesses, and we have Good News to share. May the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit be our strength in our daily efforts of discipleship, and the grace of the Eucharist be that which nourishes us in the same.

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Friday, April 24, 2020  
(Lec. 271)  
1) Acts 5:34-42  
2) John 6:1-15

FRIDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
OF EASTER  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Fidelis of Sigmaringen,  
Priest and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 439, 549, 559, 1338

FOCUS: We who partake of the bread of life shall have our fill.

Jesus' feeding of the multitude appears in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Here in John, however, are two narrative aspects that are worth mentioning. The first is that, unlike in the other three Gospels, Jesus initiates the discussion of the issue at hand: How to feed all of these hungry people as Passover approached. He asks Philip, *Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?* We are made aware that this is a test, perhaps to see if Philip – who has been present from the beginning of Jesus ministry – has grown in his understanding of Jesus and his mission.

That Philip sees no attainable solution to the problem at hand seems to indicate that he has yet to grasp all that he needs to about Jesus.

The second aspect is that John indicates that *there was a great deal of grass in that place [and] so the men reclined*. Anyone in John's Christian community, sometime between 90 and 110 AD, would have likely associated this scenic description with Psalm 23: *Where with the Lord as our shepherd, we shall not want (we shall be fed), and in green pastures he makes me lie down*.

As a prefiguration of the Eucharist, the feeding of the multitude gathers together many of the images in Scripture, and ostensibly fulfills some of the promises (as with Psalm 23). It is a clear miracle that takes place through the words and actions of Jesus, and evokes a strong reaction from the people. It is a strong but incorrect reaction, as they recognize him as a prophet, but believe him to be one who would serve as an earthly king. And so Jesus must withdraw from them.

There is much to consider in the recounting of this miracle. But at the heart of it is that the bread Jesus offers here is symbolic of the bread of life that he offers in himself. As in this passage the people *had had their fill* – that is, they were satisfied; satiated. So, too, we who partake of the bread of life shall have our fill. That is, we shall need nothing else.

So come, let us partake of this bread of life, found in his body and blood, broken and shared for us. May it give us strength, and nourish us for the sake of proclaiming the Good News.

Saturday, April 25, 2020  
(Lec. 555)

- 1) 1 Peter 5:5b-14
- 2) Mark 16:15-20

Gospel related: CCC 2, 156, 161, 183, 434, 659, 670, 699, 888, 977, 1223, 1256, 1257, 1507, 1673

**SAINT MARK,  
EVANGELIST  
- FEAST**

FOCUS: May we, like Mark, be joyful evangelists for the Lord.

Today the Church celebrates the feast of Saint Mark, the Evangelist. Though authorship of the oldest (that is, earliest written), and shortest Gospel is often ascribed to him, scholars differ on their certitude of that. We *do* know that Mark traveled with Paul and Barnabas on their missionary trip to Antioch, and was seen alongside Paul and Peter in Rome. It is fitting, then, that the first reading today is a letter from Peter which mentions Mark.

What a fantastic letter it is, too. Clear, concise, direct, and encouraging. Peter, with *Mark, [his] son*, sends greetings from Babylon to the Christian communities throughout Asia Minor. Of interest – “Babylon” here and in the Book of Revelation is code name for Rome, i.e., the corrupt Roman Empire. It was used by the early Christians to hide their criticisms of the Roman Empire, and the persecutions being waged against them by its emperor. In this short letter, he presents a series of “do this, because that” items, focusing on these communities’ steadfastness in faith despite suffering.

Who are these communities? They are the earliest Christians who are both the practitioners and recipients of Jesus’ command in today’s Gospel from Mark. He says, *Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned.* These committed disciples, approximately 30 years after Jesus’ death, are teaching, healing, and baptizing; others are those who have repented and believed, been baptized and now participate in the life of the Church where they are. This is an active, vibrant young Church that is spreading and growing even in the face of vicious and diabolical persecution. And Peter, perhaps sensing his own death may be approaching, wants to reassure them.

He ends the list in his letter with this promise: *The God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory through Christ Jesus will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you after you have suffered a little.* And therein is a core truth of the Gospel: Christ has come, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again. This in-between time, this period of the Kingdom already established but not yet fully realized, will include suffering. But for believers, those who follow Christ in faith, there will be an end to all mourning and tears. Death and sin have been defeated and we will one day be reunited with Christ for eternity.

We celebrate the feast of Saint Mark today because he did what was he was called to do: He joyfully and diligently spread the Gospel. He was a visible person in the early Church who had a role in its growth and perhaps its recorded history. So as we continue in this liturgy, may the graces we receive here on his feast day help us to do as Mark did, and be a joyful evangelist for the Lord.

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**SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2020**

(Lec. 46)

1) Acts 2:14, 22-33

2) 1 Peter 1:17-21

3) Luke 24:13-35

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

**THIRD SUNDAY  
OF EASTER**

**FOCUS:** We need God, and the Mass gives us what we need.

The Gospel tells us today, *While he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him.* Immediately, the despair of the two disciples turned to joy; their despondency turned to elation and they rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples of their encounter with the risen Lord.

It is likely we can identify with these two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus. We have all experienced times of despair and disappointment. We've had dreams dashed and felt overwhelming losses. Perhaps these times have weakened our faith or left us questioning God's plan for us.

Just like the two we hear about today, we need something to bring us out of our gloom at times. We need our outlook lifted and our faith reignited. We need God.

This is what brings us here. We need God, and the Mass gives us what we need. It is not unlike our own "Road to Emmaus." We enter the doors needing to be fed. In the Liturgy of the Word, God speaks to us. The Scriptures feed us, teaching us God's ways and his plan for us. We are nourished again in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Today's Gospel tells us, *He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.* This is repeated at every Mass. It is the perfect sacrifice, the perfect meal, the perfect nourishment for our souls. If we open ourselves to all that it offers, we, too, can feel the complete joy that energized Christ's disciples to rush out and share the Good News with others.

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Monday, April 27, 2020

(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: Christ is *the food that endures for eternal life*.

Free – it's a word advertisers use constantly to get our attention. And "free food" is a concept that *really* draws our attention. And so it seems it was in Jesus' time as well.

Today's Gospel takes place the day after Jesus had fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. Jesus is now in Capernaum, and the crowd has followed him there. He is a bit skeptical of those who followed him to Capernaum. He believes they are there just to fill their baser needs, and perhaps have bread given to them again. He says, *you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled*.

In other words, these people – who as recently as 11 verses ago in John's Gospel wanted to *come and carry him off to make him king* (6:15) – no longer even sought any type of miracle or sign. They came because they had been easily satisfied by earthly nourishment, and Jesus wants to disabuse them of this mindset. He exhorts them, *Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life*.

This Gospel reading marks the beginning of John's 50-verse "Bread of Life Discourse" in which Jesus repeatedly emphasizes that he is the "bread of life," and whoever eats this bread will have eternal life. Thus, when he is asked about what can be done to *accomplish the works of God*, he answers simply: *Believe in the one he sent*.

And here is where the good news of salvation becomes really, really good. *It's all free*. Believing in the one God sent is free. Our faith is a free gift. The bread of life we receive is free. Jesus Christ has already paid the price. We can neither add to nor detract from its cost. Everything about God's love for us, the sending of his Son, the gifts of faith, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit – all of that is free to us. Not only is it free of price, it gives us freedom. We need do nothing other than accept it. How could we not?

Granted, our lived experience as a Christian has its costs: We sacrifice and suffer; we gain and we lose things; we falter under the *food that perishes*. But always available to us is *the food that endures for eternal life*. And so with gratitude we approach the altar to receive the Eucharist, thankful for our faith in the one God sent.

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Tuesday, April 28, 2020  
(Lec. 274)  
1) Acts 7:51–8:1a  
2) John 6:30-35

TUESDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
OF EASTER  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Peter Chanel,  
Priest and Martyr;  
Saint Louis Grignon de Montfort,  
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 423, 1094, 1338, 2835

**FOCUS:** I believe, Lord, that you are indeed the bread of life come down from heaven for the salvation of the world.

In today's Gospel reading from John, Jesus is asked to prove himself by would-be disciples so that they will believe in him. But it is important to note that this crowd had followed him from the other side of the lake where Jesus had just multiplied the fish and loaves and fed a mountain-side full of people. Once he escaped to the other side of the lake, the crowd followed him, but essentially said, "Hey, Moses gave us manna – Show us a sign, Jesus! It's been at least a day since you fed the 5,000!"

Of course, Jesus had to correct the people. It had not been Moses who fed them in the desert, but God who gave them bread from heaven. If they cannot understand that sign in their own history, how can they possibly understand the signs that he is performing for them now, and what those signs signify? How can they possibly understand him when he says that the Father now gives them true bread from heaven, and that *he* is that bread?

Well, they don't understand. We know as much from our hearing of these Scriptures over the years, and the fact that they crucified him. In all fairness, Jesus' claims here and throughout this section of John are quite shocking and somewhat odd. It would be a lot to take in.

It still is a lot to take in, and yet here we are – soon to be professing our faith – and preparing to be nourished by the very bread of life the crowd couldn't fathom. And that is because of the gift of faith. Faith that is a response to the invitation of God to join him in friendship; faith *that is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed* (CCC 150). Faith is a grace, a human act, and the beginning of eternal life (CCC 153, 154, 163). It is this faith that says, through God's grace and the constant help of the Holy Spirit, "I believe, Lord, that you are indeed the bread of life come down from heaven for the salvation of the world."

So in faith we prepare ourselves to receive the bread of life in the Eucharist – in the body and blood of our Lord. May it help us to live, grow, and persevere in that faith until that time when we shall enter into eternal life.

**Saint Peter Chanel (1803–1841)** – Peter was born in France and worked as a shepherd when he was a child. He began Catholic education in 1814, and eventually joined the Society of Mary (Marist Fathers). In 1836, he became head of a small missionary group that travelled to the island of Futuna in the Pacific to teach the faith. When many converted, the king became jealous, fearing for his own power, and ordered Peter beaten to death. Most islanders eventually converted to Catholicism.

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Wednesday, April 29, 2020  
(Lec. 275)

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

WEDNESDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
OF EASTER  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Catherine of Siena,  
Virgin and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 161, 606, 989, 994, 1001, 1338, 2824

FOCUS: We belong to Jesus, and our call is to bring others to him as well.

Jesus' words today can give us a sense of security and peace: Jesus, obeying the will of the Father, will not reject any who come to him and will not lose any of the people the Father has sent to him. And knowing that we belong to Jesus and that he won't lose us, we can let go of any fears and follow the example of Jesus' first disciples – preach Jesus with our actions and our lives.

The Apostles remained in Jerusalem – in spite of persecution – and developed the early Church, while those who were scattered brought more and more people to belief in Jesus through their preaching and their great works: Casting out demons and healing the paralyzed and crippled.

“But,” we might say, “I can't do what those disciples did. I've never cast out demons or healed the paralyzed or the crippled.” And maybe most of us can't – not in the same dramatic way. But, as we preach Jesus through our daily lives and through loving service to others, we can help them dispel the demons of fear and hopelessness that have enveloped them. We can help others who are overwhelmed or paralyzed by the sufferings of the world to take action again and to reach out in small ways that bring joy and hope to the lives of people. Since we belong to Jesus, we can stop being afraid for ourselves and open our hearts to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit may surprise us in how we are called to make a difference.

We can see the work of the Spirit in the life of Saint Catherine of Siena (1347-80), a lay Dominican whose memorial the Church celebrates today. The Holy Spirit called her out of her prayerful solitude to reform the Church and the lives of others. In her short life, she visited the sick, wrote spiritual letters to people of all ranks, and drew a following. She was instrumental in the restoration to Rome of the papacy, and was a peacemaker among warring Italian states. So compelling was her faith that she began a monastery for women in 1377, and composed a large corpus of theological works. These works were so influential that she was declared a Doctor of the Church.

The Holy Spirit moved through the daily work of Saint Catherine of Siena, and longs to continue to work through each of us today. Let us be led by the Holy Spirit and bring others to the joy and peace of knowing and serving Jesus and his people.

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Thursday, April 30, 2020  
(Lec. 276)

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

THURSDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
OF EASTER  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Pius V,  
Pope)

Gospel related: CCC 151, 259, 591, 728, 1001, 1335, 1338, 1406, 1428, 2837

FOCUS: Jesus nourishes us, body and soul.

In salvation history, as well as human history, bread holds a place of prominence. In Scripture, bread is often associated with God's generous care for us. He provided manna in the desert when the Jews escaped from Egypt. The manna was *the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die*. There are several other Old Testament stories that include bread as a symbol of how God cares and provides for his people. Then, in each Gospel, there is a passage where Jesus feeds the multitude with just a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. So the idea of bread as food from God is a common theme.

Today's Gospel reading follows closely on the heels of the miracle of the loaves and fish, where so many were given bread for their physical well-being. Building on that, Jesus now presents *himself* as the source of *spiritual* well-being. We should remember that the crowds pursued Jesus after he fed them, and he told them *not to work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you* (John 6:27). If the people were paying attention and thinking from a spiritual perspective, they would have realized that he was the one who had come to give eternal life.

We realize it, or we would have no real purpose for being here. We claim our inheritance to the promises of God who made a covenant with his people and fulfilled that covenant in the sacrifice of his Son. He has given us the Eucharist, bread and wine transformed at every Mass into his body and blood, soul and divinity. True bread from heaven; *food that endures for eternal life*. It nourishes us, body and soul, and sustains us for the building of the Kingdom.

*Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died, Jesus said. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever.*

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