

AUGUST

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**YEAR A
WEEKDAYS II**

Saturday, August 1, 2020
(Lec. 406)

- 1) Jeremiah 26:11-16, 24
- 2) Matthew 14:1-12

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

FOCUS: God's will for us is nothing but goodness and joy as found in him.

Clearly, prophecy is a dangerous business. In our first reading, Jeremiah risks his life for saying *reform your ways and your deeds*. In the Gospel, John the Baptist gives his life for standing up to Herod. These prophetic messages can be hard to hear: that being in relationship with God means following his commandments; that our lives need to be more in line with God's will; and that we need to let go of the sins we've been clinging to. But accepting this message is our only path to true peace and freedom.

Some days it may be our task to call others to repentance, like John and Jeremiah. If this is the case, love must be the heart of our message, for Jeremiah offers some of the most profound declarations of God's love in the Old Testament, and John's prophecy is all about the unimaginable gift of the Messiah. But they know that love without truth is powerless, and so they never shy away from the full truth.

Other days, we may be the ones being called out, like the princes and the people of Israel Jeremiah speaks to. *Listen to the voice of the Lord your God*, Jeremiah urges us. God's voice may not come in the way we expect, though. It may reach us through the human voice of someone we'd rather not listen to, someone who lets us know – hopefully with kindness – how we may need to change our habits or something in our life to better receive God's immense, transformative love.

Today, the Church celebrates such a voice, in the life of Saint Alphonsus Liguori. Founder of the Redemptorist congregation and patron saint of moral theologians, Alphonsus Liguori was a pastor, scholar of moral and dogmatic theology, and bishop. He spent his life dedicated to helping others live the Christian vocation in a faithful way, focusing on the concrete actions necessary for living out our universal call to holiness. This meant speaking the truth to those in need of healing from sin, and teaching them of the redemptive grace and mercy of God.

Only by God's grace can we respond in humility to God's word, and to those who voice it, such as Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Alphonsus Liguori. When we encounter God's presence in prayer and the intimacy of the Eucharist, we're reminded that we didn't create ourselves and aren't in charge of our world. When we submit to this reality instead of feeling threatened by it, we discover the deepest truth of all: God's will for us is nothing but goodness and joy as found in him. We can, in fact, entrust our entire lives to him without fear. As we draw near to God today, may this confidence make truer penitents and more courageous prophets of us all.

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 2020

(Lec. 112)

1) Isaiah 55:1-3

2) Romans 8:35, 37-39

3) Matthew 14:13-21

Gospel related: CCC 1329, 1335

**18TH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TME**

FOCUS: Let us confidently seek the renewal Christ wants to offer us.

Many of us struggle to balance the demands in our life. How often do our conversations center on how busy we are and how much we have to do? Today's readings speak into that pressure, into that rush, into our often overextended lives.

Paul asks the Romans, *What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress ... or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us.* Isaiah offers us a similar comfort: *All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk!*

What are we hungry for? What do we thirst for? What are our deepest needs? The Lord tells us, come to the water! Drink and eat without cost. Receive Christ, whose love for you is stronger than death – stronger than present or future things, stronger than powers or any other creature.

If God is truly calling us to care for others, to participate in the work God is doing in the world, then he also desires to give us everything we need to do so. This means we must try to reject the urge to be constantly "doing," and instead root all our efforts in the truth that we are, first and foremost, infinitely loved.

We do not have to earn this love by doing more or better. We do not have to spend *[our] money for what is not bread; [our] wages for what fails to satisfy.* We need only to rely on the Lord; listen to him; heed his voice that we *may have life* and be renewed with the *everlasting covenant.*

As we approach the Eucharist today, the fulfillment of the covenant, let us bring our needs and our hunger to Christ. Let us confidently seek the renewal Christ wants to offer us. Let us open our hearts to be nourished by his love so that we can feed those he calls us to serve.

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Monday, August 3, 2020

(Lec. 407)

1) Jeremiah 28:1-17

(Lec. 408)

2) Matthew 14:22-36

Gospel related: CCC 448 CSDC 453

MONDAY OF
18TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Rely on the strength of Christ.

As often as Peter appears to get it right – naming Jesus as the Messiah and being the rock on whom Jesus will build his Church – Peter just as quickly falls flat on his face. Today's Gospel is a case in point. Peter's initial enthusiasm is praiseworthy: He sees Jesus walking toward him on the water, and he immediately wants in on it.

Peter's passion and love for Jesus are strong, impelling him to throw reason aside and walk on water himself toward Jesus. We know how the story goes from here. The wind picks up, causing Peter to doubt, and, as fast as he got out of the boat, Peter begins to sink.

There are few stories in Scripture that capture our lives as followers of Jesus as definitively as this encounter between Peter and Jesus on the water. How often we, too, with a heart full of love for the Lord, desire to walk with Jesus. Perhaps we even are willing to leave the boat, exiting our comfort zone in pursuit of the Lord. But the winds around us are strong – the things that cause us to doubt.

One can imagine Peter, in this instant, diverting his eyes from Jesus to the waves around him, to his own feet atop the thrashing water. We, too, often take our eyes off Jesus, focusing instead on the challenges around us or on our own abilities that seem to be lacking.

Yet Peter never walked on water on his own. It was God working within him that gave him courage. It is fitting, therefore, that Jesus, although he allows Peter to momentarily stumble, does not permit Peter to sink. Instead, Jesus responds swiftly to Peter's cry for help, reaching out to him amidst his weakness.

The lesson for us is clear: If the Lord calls us somewhere, he will offer the grace for us to see it through. As with Peter, we need only to ask for and willingly receive it. This is not to say that we will not encounter challenges – the winds that lead us to divert our eyes from Jesus. In fact, it is precisely in these moments of weakness, when we try to depend upon our own talents and abilities, that God's grace will become ever more apparent to us. May we, like Peter, cry out to Jesus, trusting that we walk not on our own strength but with the strength of Christ.

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Tuesday, August 4, 2020
(Lec. 408)

- 1) Jeremiah 30:1-2,
12-15, 18-22
- 2) Matthew 14:22-36
or Matthew 15:1-2, 10-14

Gospel related: CCC 448 CSDC 453

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

FOCUS: Amid the ups and downs of our lives, the Lord invites us to abide in his constant fidelity.

One common dinner-table practice is for families to share “highs and lows,” with each person sharing a high and low point of the day. In our readings today, we hear a series of “highs and lows” in quick succession. In Jeremiah, the Lord speaks of his people’s “incurable wound” after their loved ones have abandoned them. Just a few verses later, however, the Lord promises to take pity on his people and restore them.

In the Gospel, Jesus’ disciples likewise swing from distress to consolation. First, the disciples get caught in the storm at sea, which is calmed when Jesus comes in the boat. During that episode, a faith-filled Peter steps onto the water and miraculously walks on top of it, only to begin to sink a few moments later and need to be saved.

The people of God experience lots of change in these readings, yet we hear about something, or someone, who does not change. At the end of Jeremiah’s prophecy, the Lord says, *You shall be my people, and I will be your God*, recalling the covenant the Lord first made with their ancestors. In the Gospel, as the disciples go through their ups and downs, the faithful Lord comes to them. Peter may stumble in his faith, but Jesus upholds him.

Amid the highs and lows in our lives, the Lord invites us to abide in his constancy and fidelity. This is a secret of the saints who trust in the Lord more than in their circumstances. Saint John Vianney, who the Church celebrates today, was assigned to a parish in France in the early 19th century where many had grown cold in their faith. Abandoning himself to the Lord, Saint John Vianney prayed for his parishioners and heard confessions for more than 10 hours a day. He helped bring about an amazing spiritual renewal in his parish and in the surrounding countryside – all through keeping his eyes fixed on the Lord and trusting in God’s faithfulness.

As humans, we all experience highs and lows, and yet we can trust in the Lord, our Rock, who is always present to his people. He is present within and among us right here, speaking his Word and offering his body and blood. Let us come to him.

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Wednesday, August 5, 2020
(Lec. 409)

- 1) Jeremiah 31:1-7
- 2) Matthew 15:21-28

WEDNESDAY OF
18TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
The Dedication of the
Basilica of Saint Mary Major)

Gospel related: CCC 439, 448, 2610

FOCUS: Persevere in prayer even when it seems God is silent.

We have all been the Canaanite woman.

First, she cries out to Jesus. But he is silent. Does he hear her? She perseveres. His disciples think she is a bother and suggest she be sent away.

I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Jesus says. That may seem like he was saying “no.” The woman approaches him and, after paying him homage like one would a ruler, she begs him directly: *Lord, help me.*

Once again, Jesus seems to tell her no. Once again, she does not relent. This time, Jesus commends her for her faith and heals her daughter.

We have all been the Canaanite woman – crying out to God, who can seem to be silent or telling us no. It can be distressing and disheartening, and can even try our faith. Do we persevere? In today’s Gospel, it appears that Jesus answers the Canaanite woman’s prayer because of the faith with which she approaches him. She is bold and confident in Jesus’ power and goodness, even as she acknowledges that she is not part of God’s chosen people, the Jews. Maybe we don’t feel like we deserve God’s time, goodness, or power, but that doesn’t mean that God doesn’t want to help us as a Father helps his children.

As we prepare our hearts to receive Christ, we can take heart from this Gospel’s message: If it seems that God is silent in the face of our prayers – or that his answer is no – let us be unrelenting in our prayers!

Yes, we have all been the Canaanite woman. May the Holy Spirit give us the fortitude to persevere, like her, in unwavering confidence and faith.

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Thursday, August 6, 2020
(Lec. 614)

- 1) Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14
 - 2) 2 Peter 1:16-19
 - 3) Matthew 17:1-9
- Gospel related: CCC 444, 554

**THE TRANSFIGURATION
OF THE LORD
- FEAST**

FOCUS: When we are present to the Lord, we can truly be open to his Word and to the gift of Christ's glory.

In the modern world, every invention and technological advance seems to be accompanied by either an increase in noise or level of distraction. The volume of sound and number of screens that surround us can make it difficult to hear and see what God is showing us – what God is doing for us in our lives.

Today's feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord is a good counter to that. Matthew's account is similar in many ways to the other Gospels. Jesus leads three of his disciples up the mountain. Suddenly they witness a new and challenging view of him, as God's glory shines through his humanity.

In the presence of the transfigured Jesus, Peter, always ready to speak up, seems to panic. As so often happens when he is faced with what is challenging and unsettling, he falls back onto what is familiar and less threatening. His suggestion to make three tents, and thereby capture this moment forever, shows how little he understands Jesus. He has yet to grasp that Jesus is the very presence of God in the world – an understanding that will come after the Resurrection, as Peter recounts in his letter, our second reading.

But from the cloud comes the voice of the Father: *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.* Here is the true meaning of this event: Jesus is revealed as not just a great teacher and prophet, but the anointed of God – his beloved Son. Every generation, every assembly that hears this Gospel, must listen anew to the words of the Father and the life-changing truth that, in Christ, we, too, are transformed. In his transfigured glory, we get a glimpse of our own heavenly future after a life of faith.

In the darkness of our noisy world, we need to hear this anew. We must be willing to climb the mountain and see once more the glory of God as revealed to our world in Jesus. We need to seek that peace to hear the Father's voice. Today's feast ought to signal and foretell a transformation of our own hearts and communities. As Peter said, *it is good that we are here*, for only when we are present to the Lord can we truly be open to his Word and to the gift of Christ's glory.

Friday, August 7, 2020
(Lec. 411)

- 1) Nahum 2:1, 3;
3:1-3, 6-7
- 2) Matthew 16:24-28

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

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

FOCUS: Jesus promises, *whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

In today's Gospel, Jesus explains to his disciples the meaning of discipleship and the challenges they will face. Earlier, they had left everything to follow him. Now Jesus wants them to more fully understand what their decision entails: *Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.*

The self-denial Jesus speaks about is more than just our Lenten practices or penitential responses to sin in our lives. It is a freedom and a challenge to say no to ego and self-interest and say "yes" to God, who wishes to fulfill us beyond our understanding.

However, Jesus also makes it clear that following in his footsteps will require more than self-denial. It will require sacrifice: Sacrifice that may mean surrendering personal ambitions, comforts, relationships – and for many of the original disciples, even their own lives – for the plans God has for us.

The important part of saying "yes" to God is our willingness to accept whatever crosses come along in life, and in trusting that he is with us to help us bear them. This is challenging, but Jesus shows us the way. His complete surrender to God's will led to his death – but also to his resurrection and glory.

He promises in today's reading that *whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* We gather at this table today because we believe this, and we believe that the life we find is fuller than we could ever imagine on our own. It is a life that leads to complete communion with Christ, in the kingdom of heaven.

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Saturday, August 8, 2020

(Lec. 412)

1) Habakkuk 1:12–2:4

2) Matthew 17:14-20

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

FOCUS: All we need to evangelize is an authentic experience of God's saving love.

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*, Pope Francis writes, "Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love" (120).

In today's Gospel passage from Matthew, the disciples are struggling with the task of evangelization. A father had brought his son to be cured, but they were not able to free him from his suffering. So the father humbly approaches Jesus for his help. Jesus is immediately able to cure him, and he admonishes the disciples for their lack of faith. He tells them if they have faith the size of a mustard seed, they will be able to move mountains. Nothing will be impossible for them.

The struggle the disciples faced are struggles we continue to face today. There are so many challenges in the world today that seem insurmountable. Yet all we need to evangelize is an authentic experience of God's saving love. This is the mustard seed of faith that can move mountains.

Saint Dominic, whom the Church celebrates today, faced a large mountain in his mission to counter the Albigensian heresy. But with God's help, he accomplished that and more. For centuries, the Order of Preachers which he founded – the Dominicans – have evangelized through preaching. Today, Dominican religious are found throughout the world, and each of them uses their unique gifts to preach the Gospel to those in their care.

Today, let us remember how we have experienced God's saving love. As we hold on to this memory, let us look with eyes of faith on the world to see how God may be calling us to announce the Gospel. We are nourished by the Eucharist. Our faith is strengthened as Christ shares his body and his blood with us. Let us take it and do the impossible in this world.

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 9, 2020

(Lec. 115)

1) 1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a

2) Romans 9:1-5

3) Matthew 14:22-33

Gospel related: CCC 448

**19TH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Let us pay attention for that *tiny whispering sound*.

How many times in our lives have we sought some sort of sign from God of what direction to take, what decision to make? It is as if we were waiting for our personal lightning bolt to strike, giving us a clear and precise answer. The truth is, there may not be a lightning bolt, but God will always give us an answer.

God may visit us in a tiny whispering sound, as he visited Elijah. If we get distracted or are not paying attention, we can miss God passing by. When an infant smiles at us, someone holds the door for us, or offers a helping hand, there is an opportunity to sense the presence of God. The answer may arrive in the words of a psalm, or in the unassuming example of sacrificial love we witness in another.

We often identify Thomas as “the doubting Apostle,” but in today’s Gospel we see that Peter also doubted. That image of Peter sinking in the water can be very real for us. We’ve likely had that same sinking sensation when adversity enters our own lives. Like Peter, we can cry out, “Lord save me!” We know what it’s like to make that cry; we should also know what it means to respond to another’s cry of the same.

There is a story told about a school principal who was cleaning out the storage area of the parish school. She came across an old crucifix that was about four feet tall. Unfortunately, the hands and feet had broken off the corpus. She was planning to have it buried in the parish cemetery when she got an idea.

Instead of disposing of the crucifix because of the damage, she asked the maintenance department to give it a good cleaning. She then had it hung in the main entrance area where all the students, staff, and parents would see it. Underneath the cross she installed a sign that read: “Will you be my hands and feet today?”

This might be a good prayer for all of us to bring to the Lord before we leave today: “Help me to be your hands and feet today. Give me the grace to help another to hear your quiet whisper. Allow me to be there for someone, keeping them from sinking into the waters of doubt or despair.” And then, let us pay attention for that tiny whispering sound.

Monday, August 10, 2020
(Lec. 618)

1) 2 Corinthians 9:6-10

2) John 12:24-26

Gospel related: CCC 2731 CSDC 570

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

FOCUS: Saint Lawrence became the grain of wheat described by Jesus in the Gospel.

Saint Lawrence the deacon lived well the scriptural teachings laid out in today's readings. Saint Paul extols the virtues of a cheerful giver, one who gives to the poor and from whom God increases the harvest of righteousness. In the middle of the third century, Lawrence was the cheerful giver of the Church of the Catacombs in Rome. He distributed the Church's alms to the poor, the widowed, and the orphan. They were all suffering greatly at the hands of the Roman Empire during one of the bloodiest periods of persecution of the early Christian community.

Lawrence was the right-hand-man of Pope Sixtus II. Prior to his own martyrdom on August 6, 258 A.D., the pope prophesied that his young friend would experience even greater tortures. The Roman prefect who put the pope to death believed that Lawrence was hiding the Church's great wealth, and demanded that the deacon present it to him for his inspection.

After the pope was martyred, the prefect of Rome, knowing the material goods and money of the Church, demanded that Lawrence bring it all to him. Lawrence showed up with the poor, the sick, and the downtrodden – his fellow Christians – exclaiming “these are the treasures of the Church.” Enraged by this insolence, the prefect had Lawrence thrown into prison, where he converted his jailer and worked many miracles. Seeking an end to this man's influence, the prefect had Lawrence put to death on August 10. As the deacon died, he prayed for the conversion of Rome.

Defying an empire, knowing he was facing certain death, Lawrence became the grain of wheat described by Jesus in the Gospel today: *If it dies, it produces much fruit ... whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.* The deaths of Lawrence and Pope Sixtus, and so many others, did bear great fruit. Within 75 years of their martyrdom, the persecutions ended and the entire empire began a process of “Christianization.”

The first churches in all of Christendom were built, and one of them was erected in honor of Lawrence. In death, he became even more popular than the pope under whom he served. To this day, the Basilica of St. Lawrence outside the Walls stands next to Rome's largest cemetery, the Campo Verano. Millions of pilgrims a year come to pray at the tomb of one of the Church's greatest saintly treasures, who thought himself but a grain of wheat.

Lawrence remains a patron saint of the poor. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.* Through the intercession of Saint Lawrence, deacon and martyr, we pray with the psalmist today: *Blessed the man who is gracious and lends to those in need.*

Saint Lawrence, pray for us.

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Tuesday, August 11, 2020

(Lec. 414)

- 1) Ezekiel 2:8–3:4
- 2) Matthew 18:1-5, 10, 12-14

TUESDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Clare,
Virgin)

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

FOCUS: Jesus calls us to be humble in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

The disciples ask Jesus in today's Gospel, *Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?* It is possible they had been debating this question among themselves and had their own ideas about how Jesus might respond. Regardless of what prompted them, Jesus answers that those who are the most humble and lowly, as children are in their complete dependence upon others, would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

It may sound like an odd question on the part of the disciples, but in many ways it is the right one. How often do we ponder who is the greatest – not in sports or business or media – but in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus challenges us to not only ponder the question, but to live by the answer.

Today we celebrate the memorial of Saint Clare of Assisi, a disciple who asked, and lived, the answer to this question. In 13th-century Italy, she discerned a call to serve the Lord through a life dedicated to prayer and Gospel poverty. Despite numerous attempts to persuade her to abandon or mitigate this life, she and her fellow sisters persevered. Her witness, holiness, and wisdom persuaded others that perhaps such a life was indeed great in the kingdom of heaven.

The answer to this question has not changed. The Lord, in his great mercy, loves all of us – the great saint, the terrible sinner, the lowly, the successful – just as deeply, abundantly, and joyfully. And we can only hear this as the good news that it is with the ears of humility.

As we come to the Lord's table, let us pray for the grace to be humble in our discipleship so that we may be great in the kingdom of heaven.

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Wednesday, August 12, 2020
(Lec. 415)

- 1) Ezekiel 9:1-7; 10:18-22
- 2) Matthew 18:15-20

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

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

FOCUS: We are ministers of Christ's mercy and healing.

In the reading from Ezekiel today, we heard excerpts from his vision in which the Lord calls for the slaughter of idolaters within the city of Jerusalem. Those who lament, or show sorrow for *the abominations that are practiced within [the city]*, shall have a *Thau* – an “X” – marked on their foreheads. Those marked as such shall be spared destruction.

We, too, were marked with a sign on our foreheads – a cross, not an “X” – signifying the indelible seal that identifies us as belonging to Christ. We receive this sign at baptism and again at confirmation. We are marked as children of God, redeemed by Christ for fullness of life in the Kingdom.

That fullness of life is not simply a vertical, one-on-one personal relationship with Christ, however. It is a horizontal, communal relationship with one another: We are baptized into Christ's Church – into his body. And so God gives us graces and ways to build those relationships, and to repair them when they are broken.

In today's Gospel, Jesus provides a guide for restoring relationships between individuals broken by sin, but more importantly, he establishes the means for restoring wholeness to the body of Christ, the Church.

In bestowing the power to bind and loose on the Apostles, Jesus instituted the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. In this sacrament, the priest represents Christ – and the Church. When we are reconciled to God in the sacrament, we are reconciled to the Church. The healing power of the sacrament changes us, restoring our ability to forgive and heal as Christ does. We resume our roles as ministers of Christ's mercy and healing.

Jesus tells us that when two or more agree about anything in prayer, he is with us. As we seek communion with him today, may his love and mercy open our hearts and inspire us to reconcile all that separates us from one another and prevents how we, the Church – united as the body of Christ – transform the world.

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Thursday, August 13, 2020
(Lec. 416)

- 1) Ezekiel 12:1-12
- 2) Matthew 18:21–19:1

THURSDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saints Pontian,
Pope,
and Hippolytus,
Priest,
Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 982, 2227, 2364, 2843, 2845

FOCUS: God gives us abundant mercy.

Debts are no fun. Nobody wants to have a huge mortgage payment or lots of student loans or massive credit card debt. Wouldn't it be amazing if all of our debts were wiped away in a single act of mercy? What would our reaction be? Shock? Disbelief? Our first thought might be, "This is way too good to be true. What's the catch?"

It may even seem that God's mercy seems too good to be true. The *catechism* puts it plainly in paragraph 982: "There is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive." So long as we seek forgiveness with a contrite heart, there truly is no limit to the mercy of God.

The depth of God's mercy ought to keep no sinner from seeking God's forgiveness. But sometimes we do not recognize our sins. Like the Israelites in our first reading, sometimes we do not want to see ourselves as a *rebellious house*. Recognition of our sins is also a gift from God, who opens our eyes to see when we need to seek his healing mercy.

Once we have recognized our need for God's mercy, we can look to the debtor in our Gospel reading for an example of what to do next. He simply asks for mercy. And the compassionate king gives the debtor more mercy than he even asked for. This is the heart of Jesus. He is our compassionate king – the one who surprises us with the unfathomable depth of his mercy as soon as we ask.

But the mercy of God does not stop with Jesus. When Peter asks Jesus how often he must forgive, Jesus exhorts Peter to give the same astounding amount of mercy as our Lord. We are called to be the mercy of God in the world, to give the compassion of Jesus to the people in our lives.

The truth is that we are all sinners who have no way to cancel our debt on our own. Thanks be to God, we are not without hope. The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus died on the cross to wipe away our debt of sins and reconcile us to God. The whole world ought to know the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. Therefore, as we receive the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist today, let us remember we are receiving an abundance of mercy. Let us receive this abundance joyfully and gratefully, so that it overflows from the Church into the world.

Saints Pontian and Hippolytus (3rd century A.D.) After serving as pope from 230-235, Pontian was arrested during a persecution of the Church and banished to a life of slavery on the island of Sardinia. Hippolytus was a priest – eventual bishop and "anti-Pope" – in Rome in the third century who opposed Pope Callixtus' lenient approach to allowing back into full communion with the Church those who had worshiped false gods. Hippolytus was a great scholar and foremost authority on Church liturgy. He, too, was arrested for his Christian beliefs in 235 and sent to Sardinia, suffering the same fate as Pontian. Hippolytus was reconciled to the Church before being martyred.

Friday, August 14, 2020
(Lec. 417)

- 1) Ezekiel 16:1-15, 60, 63
or 16:59-63
- 2) Matthew 19:3-12

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

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

FOCUS: God's merciful love is given to all who live out his covenant with him.

Both of today's readings speak to the idea of covenant: God's covenant with his people and a married couple's covenant with each other. A covenant is more than an agreement. It is a perpetual promise – one that can't be broken. It is a total commitment that becomes a way of life, visible in the choices we make and the way we live.

Today is the feast day of Saint Maximilian Kolbe. Born in 1894 in Poland, he died at the age of 47 in the German death camp of Auschwitz, located in German-occupied Poland during World War II. He died there because he chose to take the place of another man set to be executed.

When a prisoner escaped, the camp commander retaliated by ordering that 10 men be moved to an underground bunker until they starved to death. When one of those chosen voiced despair about his wife and children, Maximilian stepped forward and asked to take his place. It is said that throughout the ordeal, he led the group in prayer and comforted them in their fear and misery. After two weeks with no food or water, Maximilian was the only man still alive. He was given a lethal injection and died.

Maximilian Kolbe lived and died in a way that made his covenant with God visible and truly life-giving. The man he saved survived the war, and lived to the age of 93, spending his life proclaiming that he would never forget the heroic act of love by the man who died for him.

Saint Maximilian Kolbe gave his life to save another, just as Jesus gave his life to save us. He models for us the unconditional love that God has always freely given to us. God calls us to do the same.

* * *

Saturday, August 15, 2020

(Lec. 622)

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

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

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

[not a holy day
of obligation this year]

FOCUS: Throughout her life and in her glorious death, Mary points the way to Jesus and God the Father.

Today we celebrate the wondrous and hopeful feast of the Assumption – Mary’s assumption into heaven, body and soul. Mary, who was spotless and sinless from the moment of her conception, remains pure and incorruptible even after death as she is raised bodily to heaven to reign with Jesus, her Son.

For many of us who have sinned and fallen short of living out our call as followers of Jesus, Mary’s exalted status can make her seem out of reach. At various points in our lives, we have sinned and we have failed. While we rejoice that Mary was fittingly received body and soul into heaven and that she is reigning with Jesus forever, we might ask, “How does this celebration relate to us?”

But today’s readings point to a woman who is more approachable than we might think. In spite of her exalted role in heaven and in salvation history, Mary always sees herself as God’s lowly handmaid whom all ages will call blessed – not because of her own accomplishments but because of God’s mercy and grace. As Mary reminds us in the *Magnificat*, *The Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name*. It was God who chose the lowly handmaid from Nazareth to be the mother of Jesus, and it was God who prepared her for this role by filling her with grace, thus preserving her from original sin and the corruption of death.

Mary, as the mother of Jesus and as our mother, reminds us that the glory belongs to God and her Son. She encourages us to follow her lead – to be humble, and to trust that God’s mercy and goodness are there for those who fear him. Just as God worked through the obedience and acceptance of Mary to bring her Son into the world, so he can work through us to bring God’s love and goodness to those around us.

In the same way, Mary’s assumption points to our future. Paul reminds us in the second reading that the risen Jesus is the *firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*. That is, he is the first of the harvest, dedicated to God in recognition of all that God faithfully provides for his people. As the rest of the harvest follows the first fruits, so all who follow Christ shall be gathered to God in that harvest: *In Christ shall all be brought to life ... Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ*.

In Mary’s assumption into heaven, she shows the promise of this heavenly harvest fulfilled. As followers of Christ, we, too, shall be brought to life after our death, to celebrate a life of eternal joy with Jesus and Mary.

* * *

SUNDAY, AUGUST 16, 2020

(Lec. 118)

- 1) Isaiah 56:1, 6-7
- 2) Romans 11:13-15, 29-32
- 3) Matthew 15:21-28

Gospel related: CCC 439, 448, 2610

20TH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God wants all people to know his love and mercy.

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks to a Canaanite woman in a way that makes many feel uneasy. The woman pleads for Christ to heal her daughter, but he refuses because she is not an Israelite. Jesus explains that his ministry is only for *the lost sheep of the house of Israel*, and not for a Canaanite woman and her family. If there were a question of “who’s in and who’s out?” she is plainly out.

At least, that’s what was true under the old covenant. With the coming of Christ, however, that woman, once on the peripheries, is now invited to the Kingdom. Through her faith, she moves from the outside in, taking her family with her: Her daughter *was healed from that hour*.

The prophet Isaiah and then Saint Paul also speak of this new Kingdom. Isaiah prophesies that not only will the chosen people worship at God’s holy mountain, but foreigners can also *join themselves to the Lord*. Indeed, he asserts, God’s house will be *a house of prayer for all peoples*.

Saint Paul’s own mission to the Gentiles bears out the prophecy of Isaiah. In his Letter to the Romans, he writes that through God’s own design, they – the Gentiles – are receiving the gifts and call of God. *God delivered all to disobedience*, Paul says, *that he might have mercy upon all*.

All of our readings today reveal the generosity of God’s grace – God wants all people to know his love and mercy. And through Jesus Christ and the gift of faith, the door to the Kingdom is opened to all who accept the Good News.

As recipients of God’s grace through our baptism and as members of his Church called to proclaim the Good News to everyone, we each have a role in welcoming those who seek God’s healing and mercy. And so, as we prepare to receive the body and blood of Christ, let us pray that the grace given to us in this sacrament will help us be conduits of that grace for all, like the Canaanite woman, who come seeking the help of the Lord.

* * *

Monday, August 17, 2020
(Lec. 419)

- 1) Ezekiel 24:15-24
- 2) Matthew 19:16-22

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

MONDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: May God strengthen us in choosing to love and follow him above all other things.

In the first reading today, the prophet Ezekiel's experience of losing his wife serves as a sign for the coming fall of Jerusalem, and there being no time for mourning. The Israelites have let false idols replace God in their lives. Their sinfulness has separated them from God, and they will rot away.

In a bit of a counter-narrative, the rich young man in today's Gospel wants to know how he can *avoid* being separated from God. *Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?* he asks Jesus. Jesus answers, *If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.* Jesus challenges him to go beyond fulfilling the minimum of what the law requires, and to be perfect as God is perfect.

Despite being at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of faithfulness to God, both the Israelites and the rich young man are faced with the same task: Determining whether anything in their lives is more important than following the Lord. The Israelites have already made their decision, and given their answer: Yes.

The young man, on the other hand, is only for the first time considering the question. And his decision, and answer, are less obvious. True, he walks away sad because *he had many possessions*; but the reason he walked away *at all* is because that was the first part of Jesus' instruction to him: Go. What happens next determines his decision and answer, and we simply do not know his final answer. For that's where the narrative ends.

The same question is posed to each one of us: Is there anything in our lives more important than following the Lord? Our answer likely depends on many things: when we ask it of ourselves; our state of grace at the time; our temporal circumstances and the strength of our ability to trust in God's providence; our temptation to sin. The list could go on and on.

And if we find ourselves in danger of being overrun, as the Israelites were, or sad as the young man was, we need not lose hope. For grace and counsel are always available through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus shows us perfect love in giving up all – even his life – for us. So as we become one with him today through his body and blood, let us ask him to strengthen us in choosing to love and follow him above all other things of this world.

* * *

Tuesday, August 18, 2020
(Lec. 420)

- 1) Ezekiel 28:1-10
- 2) Matthew 19:23-30

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

TUESDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: For God, all things are possible.

It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God.

Ouch! these are challenging words to hear. Especially if we have a roof over our head, food on our table each day, and maybe even some savings. In the end, is wealth creating too many obstacles for us to enter the kingdom?

While it is easy for us to hold Jesus' words in today's Gospel at arm's length, casting them off as too challenging, too "unrealistic," it is helpful to understand *why* Jesus is so wary of money. The short answer is that it often becomes a god, or an idol, for many.

We need look no further than today's first reading for the truth of this. The prophet Ezekiel gives a stern warning to the prince of Tyre. The prince is wise beyond his years, and he has used his wisdom and business acumen to acquire great wealth. The problem, however, is that the prince's riches have led him to be *haughty of heart*. In other words, the prince is consumed by his position of power. Able to buy his way through life, he considers himself a god. Ezekiel reminds the prince: *No, you are a man, not a god*, and you will die like everyone else. In short, your wealth cannot save you.

Ezekiel's words are an important reminder to all of us of the danger that wealth can pose. Though neutral in and of itself, wealth can prove perilous to our salvation when it leads us to haughtiness, to seeing ourselves as more important than others, to ignoring the pleas of the poor, or to replacing God with the god of ourselves. Of course, wealth also can be incredibly beneficial, such as when it is used to aid others, and shared with those who are most in need.

Ultimately, the moral of the passage about the prince of Tyre is that we are not God; we cannot save ourselves. And thank goodness for that! Instead, we cling to the hope of the good news of the Gospel: ... *for God all things are possible*. Our wealth will never be capable of saving us, but the God of mercy and love can, if we put our trust in him.

* * *

Wednesday, August 19, 2020
(Lec. 421)

- 1) Ezekiel 34:1-11
- 2) Matthew 20:1-16

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

Gospel related: **CSDC** 541

FOCUS: God's generosity is a gift.

God's generosity is at the heart of today's parable. The landowner pays the laborers hired late in the day the same daily wage as those who worked in the vineyard all day. Of course, we know that the all-day workers grumble, believing the landowner to be unfair. But they were not cheated, as Jesus explains, because they received exactly what had been agreed to for them to work all day. They were not owed more.

This parable is certainly relatable. It seems unjust, or unfair, to us when others receive what we receive, but get it after putting forth less effort, or less money. It's almost as if they got a deal that we did not. But deals are for commodities, not God's grace and generosity. For God's generosity to each one of us takes absolutely nothing away from his generosity to any other.

So why, if we have been true and faithful followers of Christ all our lives, would we ever begrudge another what God may have given them? To do so would make us guilty of envy, as the parable suggests. Envy is not just jealousy of what another possesses, but rather the sin of begrudging another his or her good fortune. In a nutshell, we should all be happy that God is generous, because all that *any* of us has is a gift from him.

In his generosity, God reminds us that he is the shepherd of us all, giving us what we need. We can't always see God's handiwork as it happens. One day we may be the all-day laborer paid the same as a one-hour worker. On another day, we may be the one who received a day's wage for one hour of work. Either way, it's all gift.

* * *

Thursday, August 20, 2020
(Lec. 422)

- 1) Ezekiel 36:23-28
- 2) Matthew 22:1-14

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

Gospel related: CCC 546, 796

FOCUS: God has called us – invited us – into union with him.

Think of what it means to receive a personal invitation to a banquet. Apart from modern fundraising galas and corporate networking events, an invitation to a banquet – a wedding feast – usually means that someone actually *wants* us there. Someone is honoring the relationship we share; someone loves us; someone has a selfless desire to share goodness with us. And if that relationship, that love, that desire to share the good is also found in us, then – apart from practical circumstances that we might not be able to overcome – we would not refuse that invitation. We would willingly accept!

This is the message at the heart of the parable we just heard. Admittedly, it is a parable with elements that can be a little unsettling. But the elements – exaggerated and in some cases comical – are ways of reinforcing the deeper essential meaning: God has called us, invited us, into union with him. With his Son, Jesus, having come into the world as the bridegroom, God has flung open the doors of the banquet hall and said: Come, dine with us. Celebrate this nuptial union I have prepared for you, with my Son.

This message is not new – we’re almost at the end of Matthew’s Gospel, and the people have heard this many times. But they still don’t get it. So Jesus is offering them this rhetorical device: What person, in his or her right mind, would actually refuse an invitation from a *king*, throwing a wedding banquet for his son? Answer: No one! The idea is laughable. Except the Pharisees were doing just that.

What person, offered a seat at the table of the finest dining with the elite of the elite, would kill the messenger bringing such an invitation? No one! Again, an absurd idea. Except ... King Herod did just that, to John the Baptist.

Jesus is present among the Pharisees and the Jewish people as the Incarnation of the relationship, love, and selfless desire of God, and still people refused – and still refuse today – the invitation to share in it.

As is the way with Jesus’ parables, we can each listen and take away from it something that God is giving us the grace to reflect upon. Perhaps at times we are the guests; we have received invitations directly from God, or, more likely, through the call, witness, and example of his servants. Therefore, may we ardently prepare for the wedding banquet – that we may be chosen to remain in God’s presence.

Viewing the parable another way, though, as baptized Christians – perhaps at times we are the servants. We are sent out to invite anyone and everyone we encounter to this wonderful feast.

So as both receivers of God’s gracious invitation and extensions of his generosity, may we eagerly prepare ourselves and others, that we may truly say: “Happy are those who are called to the wedding feast of the Lamb!” (Revelation 19:9).

* * *

Friday, August 21, 2020

(Lec. 423)

- 1) Ezekiel 37:1-14
- 2) Matthew 22:34-40

FRIDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Pius X,
Pope)

Gospel related: CCC 575, 581, 1824, 2055, 2083 CSDC 112, 580

FOCUS: God's love brings us life. We are called to share that love with others.

Ezekiel's vision of dry bones comes from the Lord, who tells him that *these bones are the whole house of Israel*, and that the Israelites have been saying, *Our hope is lost, and we are cut off*. So the Lord tells Ezekiel to prophesy to them and tell them that the Lord says: *I will open your graves ... and bring you back to the land of Israel*. To a hopeless people the prophet offers hope: *I have promised, and I will do it, says the Lord*.

The image Ezekiel sees is not merely dead bodies, but dry bones. The skin, muscles, and sinews are all gone and the bones themselves have been scattered. The situation appears completely hopeless. But God's word and spirit will renew them.

God's word and spirit come in the Incarnation of Jesus, and his sending of the Spirit to remain with the world after the Son returns to the Father. Jesus' coming to dwell among us not only fulfills the prophets such as Ezekiel, but gives greater meaning to the law under which the people lived.

We see this in the Gospel, where Jesus is challenged by one of the scribes, *a scholar of the law*. The scribe invites Jesus to give his opinion on the matter: *Which commandment in the law is the greatest?*

Jesus' response claims that the law of love is most important. Love God, *with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*, he says. This is a central teaching of the rabbis. But Jesus does not stop there, he also speaks of a second commandment which calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves. By joining them together, Jesus indicates that love of God is not enough. Since we were all made by God, we are called to show our love for God by loving our neighbor. Our love for God is shown by our love of neighbor.

As Jesus says at the end of the passage: *The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments*. And to fulfill them is what God asks of us. As we approach the Eucharistic table today, let us thank God for giving new life and hope to the old bones of his people; for renewing us with his Word and his Spirit; and let us pray that God's grace will help us love one another more fully each day.

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Saturday, August 22, 2020
(Lec. 424)

- 1) Ezekiel 43:1-7ab
- 2) Matthew 23:1-12

SATURDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
The Queenship
of the Blessed Virgin Mary)

Gospel related: CCC 526, 2367

FOCUS: Mary is our queen whom we love and honor.

Today is one of those special days set aside to honor the Blessed Virgin. While there are many titles for Mary, today we honor her as our heavenly queen. Officially, today is the feast of the Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Recognition of Mary as “queen” dates back to the early years of the Church, but it was not made an official feast until fairly recently, in 1954. It was made part of the Church calendar by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical, *Ad Caeli Reginam (To the Queen of Heaven)*, published that year.

Today, the idea of a queen is not as popular or as significant as it has been in other moments in history. In the Old Testament, as far back as the time of Solomon, the king's mother was regarded as a special consul of the king. It is this tradition that is one of the foundations of today's feast. Mary's queenship is seen as a share in Jesus' kingship [not his salvation of us], as well as a tribute to her role as his mother.

In establishing the feast, Pope Pius XII pointed out that Mary deserves the title of *queen* because she is “Mother of God ... the new Eve (ACR #38); because of the unique manner in which she assisted in our redemption by giving of her own substance, by freely offering Him for us, by her singular desire and petition for, and active interest in, our salvation” (ACR #37).

Today's readings can help us reflect on her role in salvation history. In the first reading, the prophet Ezekiel has a vision of the restored temple, with God's glory filling it and dwelling with God's people forever. We know that Jesus was the fulfillment of this prophecy. He is the restored temple. His Incarnation was the manifestation of God dwelling with his people – as part of the human race – forever. Of course, Mary is the person whom God used to bring this about. In and through her this prophecy was fulfilled.

In the Gospel, Jesus calls for his followers to be servants of others, and that *whoever humbles himself will be exalted*. Mary is a role model and example of perfect service and humility. No one in history has humbly dedicated his or her life to God's will and the service of humanity as Mary did.

In honor of Mary, our Queen Mother, may each of us dedicate, or rededicate, ourselves to serving God by serving those we encounter along our path today. Let us celebrate the incredible journey of her life, and the example it gives us of the surprising and wonderful results that can happen when we say “yes” to God's will. Let us give special thanks to her today for all she has done and is doing for us.

* * *

SUNDAY, AUGUST 23, 2020

(Lec. 121)

- 1) Isaiah 22:19-23
- 2) Romans 11:33-36
- 3) Matthew 16:13-20

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

**21ST SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Upon the simple, yet profound, faith of Peter, God will do great things.

Who do people say that the Son of Man is? This is the question that Jesus asks of his disciples. They reply that some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, or Jeremiah, or a prophet. Jesus takes the question further: *But who do you say that I am?*

It is Simon Peter who speaks up. He speaks with confidence. He doesn't begin by saying, "Well, I think" or "I suspect," or "In my opinion," rather, he asserts, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

And Jesus replies, *Blessed are you ... for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.* God gave Simon Peter the special grace of recognizing Jesus, and now Jesus goes on to acknowledge Simon Peter in a public way. Jesus says, *Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah ... And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.* Jesus gives Simon a new name: Peter, which means "Rock." Upon this rock he will build his Church. Upon the simple, yet profound, faith of Peter, God will do great things.

The question for the disciples is a question for all of us: Who do we say that Jesus is?

With God's grace, we will acknowledge him. With God's help, we will recognize Jesus. We will take time each day to say hello to him. With God's grace we will be confident in our recognition. We will not say, "Well, I think," or "In my opinion." Rather, with God's grace, we will say, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And in so saying, we will trust him. And through our own, simple faith, God will be able to do great things.

* * *

Monday, August 24, 2020
(Lec. 629)

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

**SAINT BARTHOLOMEW,
APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Jesus calls to each one of us.

Bartholomew is one of the Twelve Apostles commissioned by Christ and empowered by his Holy Spirit to heal and preach in his name. According to tradition, Bartholomew traveled on missions to India and Armenia, where he was martyred. He is the patron saint of the Armenian Church.

We read about this saint by the name Bartholomew in every Gospel except John, where he has come to be identified with Nathanael, the disciple who professes his faith in today's Gospel.

Nathanael is told by Philip that they have found the Messiah, the one Israel has been looking for. Nathanael is doubtful and goes to find out for himself. When Jesus sees Nathanael coming, Jesus makes the first move, calling out, *Here is a true child of Israel*. Jesus, a stranger to Nathanael, already knows Nathanael and the kind of person he is. Nathanael is surprised to be recognized and affirmed by Jesus, so he asks, *How do you know me?* Jesus tells Nathanael he has seen him *under the fig tree*. This is thought to be a figure of speech indicating that Jesus knows Nathanael has been faithfully awaiting the Messiah and preparing himself for the redemption of Israel. Nathanael realizes that Jesus must be some kind of wonder worker, for Jesus knows his heart and what he is longing for. With this, Nathanael is convinced and opens his heart to Jesus, professing his faith in him.

This story is not just about Jesus' call to Nathanael – it is about Jesus' call to each of us. Like Nathanael, we have our doubts. We may hesitate to believe that Jesus is the one we are looking and longing for, but Jesus does not hesitate to call out to us first. Jesus sees us first, before we see him. He knows us first, before we know him. He believes in us first, before we believe in him. He makes the first move, recognizing and affirming us for who we are – and what a difference this makes! It is just what we need to trust him and to open our hearts to him in faith.

Just as Jesus promised Nathanael, our faith in him opens us to see even greater things. Nathanael, or Bartholomew, sees the risen Christ, witnesses his Ascension, and shares the Gospel in India and Armenia. We see the risen Christ present under the appearance of bread and wine in the Eucharist. We see Christ in the people gathered here with us to receive him in the Eucharist. And we faithfully wait for the day when we will see him face to face – along with Saint Bartholomew and all the saints – in the glorious splendor of God's kingdom.

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Tuesday, August 25, 2020
(Lec. 426)

- 1) 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3a,
14-17
- 2) Matthew 23:23-26

TUESDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Louis;
Saint Joseph Calasanz,
Priest)

FOCUS: The Lord calls us to choose what is most important so he can be Lord of our lives.

A husband and wife were preparing to welcome their extended family for Thanksgiving. As the wife began to set the table, she asked her husband to take care of the leaves, hoping he would get the inserts to extend the table for the guests. The husband assured his wife that he would take care of the leaves, but each time she walked by, the table looked the same. After reminding him a few more times, the husband replied, "I can go rake the yard, but wouldn't you rather me help get the table ready?" They later laughed about their miscommunication, not only about what the "leaves" were, but about what was most important to do in order to prepare for their guests.

In today's Gospel, we hear a number of admonishments about attending to what is most important in the life of faith. Unlike the couple above, there is no miscommunication here. Jesus speaks plainly to the scribes and Pharisees, chastising them for attending to minor details of the law while neglecting what is most important. By fixating on peripheral parts of their faith and ignoring what is essential, these religious leaders failed to see *the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity*. Jesus instructs them to take up the whole of the law, while keeping what is most important at the center.

We each have our own journey of faith, and on that journey, we are called to learn what is most important in life and choose it. We have heard many times that God is our source and our aim. Yet does the way we spend our time reflect this? Like the scribes and Pharisees, we often need reminders to put God first. In God's goodness, he teaches us that he alone is our God. He does it at this Mass, speaking his Word to us and feeding us with his very self. May he lead us deeper into his truth so that God will indeed be our beginning and end, and Lord of our entire lives.

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Wednesday, August 26, 2020
(Lec. 427)

- 1) 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10,
16-18
- 2) Matthew 23:27-32

WEDNESDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God's mercy and grace are at work in us.

Hypocrites, Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees. They are hypocrites for caring more about external things – cultivating righteousness for the sake of accolades – than what is inside them.

Paul was once a Pharisee. But he has been transformed by the Gospel, preaching Christ crucified for the sake of the salvation of as many as would hear and understand. His words and his actions are united in that single purpose. He is the very opposite of a hypocrite.

So we can understand his angst in his letter today to the Thessalonians. Some of those in the community have acted, as he writes, *not according to the tradition they received from us*. History tells us that this group he addresses were people who had taken his message and distorted it. They believed Second Coming of Christ to be so imminent that they had stopped working for their living.

Paul reminds them that this was not what he and the others (Silvanus and Timothy, mentioned in the beginning of the letter) had taught them, nor is it how they acted. *For we did not act in a disorderly way among you, he writes. Nor did we eat food received free from anyone. On the contrary, in toil and drudgery, night and day we worked, so as not to burden any of you.*

This is an example of authentic witness to the Gospel. It is an example of one who knows he is *serv*ing the people he leads. He models for them what he has personally received from Christ [Galatians 1:12] so that others may come to know Christ, too, through him.

God took Paul, considered “a Pharisee’s Pharisee” by his contemporaries – a hypocrite – and, in his unfathomable ways and mercy, made him a model to imitate Christ. Through divine grace, God made Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles and one of the most significant reasons for the growth of the early Church. Therefore, we might think of the message today as one of hope. For God’s mercy and grace are at work in us, too. When we cooperate with it – when we allow him to deliver us from any hypocrisy we might inhabit – there we find our own ability to imitate Christ.

* * *

Thursday, August 27, 2020
(Lec. 428)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 1:1-9
- 2) Matthew 24:42-51

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

Gospel related: CCC 673 CSDC 259

FOCUS: We must stay awake and remain alert to the work of God in our lives.

Stay Awake! A short but very important message from Jesus in today's Gospel. The scene today takes place four chapters from the end of Matthew's Gospel, when Jesus has been in Jerusalem for some time after his triumphal entry into the city. While there, he has been speaking about the end times, and denouncing the hypocrisies and faithlessness of the religious elite. Jesus is preparing for his passion – just days away, and he is preparing his Apostles for their time when he is gone.

“Stay awake!” These words of Jesus are addressed to us as well. This Christian life can all too quickly become something we “could do in our sleep.” It can become familiar and routine, comfortable, safe, and normal. Jesus wants to shake us free from any such illusions. He exhorts us to stay faithful, and to stay alert. Although we do not know the day or the hour of the Second Coming of Christ, we do know that God is always at work in this world.

We are a people who know that God has constantly been at work in the story of human history, and that God continues to be at work in our stories here and now. And so, we must stay awake! We need to be on the edge of our seat with anticipation. Not just to be prepared for some perhaps far-off, perhaps imminent, judgment and end times, but to recognize and respond to the work of God in our lives this very hour on this very day.

This attentiveness we are called to is urgent, yes, but we also must be patient. God works in his own time – which is indeed not our time. Saint Monica, whom the Church recognizes today, is a wonderful example of this combination of attentiveness and patience. A woman of tremendous faithfulness and great endurance, she persevered through many years of waiting for her own family to recognize the work of God in their lives. Her husband, a pagan when they married, ultimately converted to Christianity just one year before he died. Saint Monica then patiently began offering prayers and fasting on behalf of her son, Saint Augustine, until the great day when he, too, came to the faith. This was a long-term project for Monica, but it never lost its urgency. Let us also “stay-awake” – with eagerness to see what God accomplishes today.

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Friday, August 28, 2020
(Lec. 429)
1) 1 Corinthians 1:17-25
2) Matthew 25:1-13

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

Gospel related: CCC 672, 796, 1618

FOCUS: Today is our day to respond and to renew our commitment to the Gospel.

The return of the Lord Jesus in glory at the end of time is a central tenet of the Christian faith and is testified to throughout the New Testament. Often it is referred to as the *Day of the Lord*, when in the words of the creed, Christ will come to judge the living and the dead and take to himself all who have been faithful to him and the Gospel message.

In today's world many people, including many Christians, have lost sight of this truth and no longer look forward to that glorious and triumphant day when death will be abolished and sin fully conquered. This means that many are no longer on full alert, persevering in prayer, or ready to greet the Lord. And yet, as the Second Vatican Council reminded us, the final age is already with us, and the renewal of the world is irrevocably under way. In other words, that day has begun: To use the image in today's Gospel, the bridegroom is on his way and all who seek to greet him and enter into the banquet of life have a choice before them.

Saint Paul lived at a time when the early Christians believed that the Day of the Lord was imminent; in other words, Jesus could return in glory at any moment, and so Paul lived his life in anticipation and vigilance. As a preacher of the Gospel, Paul saw his mission as one that needed to reach as many as possible, from all ways of life, as soon as possible. These would be people who not only heard the Gospel preached, but responded to it by being baptized and living according to its truths.

Paul knew there would be many responses to his preaching: Some, like the foolish virgins, would hear, somewhat prepare, but then lose faith and become faint-hearted as they waited; others, like the wise virgins, would be vigilant – ever ready to greet – living lives of faith; and still others would reject his message, finding it an obstacle or foolishness.

Today, as we celebrate Saint Augustine, we know that he, too, saw urgency in his own mission to the people of God. Especially since he had taken so long himself to come to the Gospel. He was 33 when he was baptized. Much of his work – a great corpus of lasting influence which includes many books and more than 500 homilies – helped create the foundation for Christian thought and biblical study. He knew not the hour or day that Christ would return, so he wasted no time. In celebrating him today, we are reminded that today is our day to respond and to renew our commitment to the Gospel so that we might be ready when Christ ultimately returns in glory – whenever that may be.

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Saturday, August 29, 2020
(Lec 430)
1) 1 Corinthians 1:26-31
(Lec. 634)
2) Mark 6:17-29

SATURDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
The Passion
of Saint John the Baptist)

Gospel related: CCC 523

FOCUS: *Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.*

Saint Paul's words to the Corinthians today are meant to give them some insight into God's values and design. At that time (and not all that different from our own, we might argue), the "elite" – those with status and marks of honor – were those who were *wise, powerful, and of noble birth*. These were the people who brought change to the culture, who educated others, and who made the rules. God, however, had never chosen individuals from this class to be his prophets and disciples. Instead, he had chosen the *foolish, the weak, the lowly and despised of the world, and those who count for nothing*.

Paul wasn't calling the Corinthians names, he was encouraging them in the reality in which they lived. Most of them were *not* elite; most of them were among the *count for nothing*. And yet ... and YET: God *chose them*. And *blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own*.

With that knowledge, the Corinthians were to understand themselves no longer as the world saw them, but as God saw them. They were not autonomous individuals, but members of the body of Christ. The lives they would lead would be ones that helped others come to know the word of God.

The Church honors in a special way today a man who was also of lowly birth. Not from Corinth, he hailed from somewhere in Judea, most likely a town known as *En Kerem*. He was born approximately six months before Jesus, and more than 50 years before Paul's letter (1 Corinthians written ~ 53-54 AD).

We know this man as John the Baptist. He was one of God's foolish who indeed literally shamed the wise: Calling out King Herod on his sins of adultery and lust, and probably more. John pointed the way to Jesus Christ in his ministry, and allowed himself to count for nothing while the One who is everything inaugurated the Kingdom.

Herod had John beheaded – this we already know. The reason he had him killed is also something many of us know: Speaking truth to power is dangerous. It can make people afraid. They are afraid of losing influence, losing power, or losing face. The irony is, of course, that the Truth of the Gospel, preached by John, given to the Corinthians, and passed down through generations to us, is what actually gives the most freedom, the most power (in Christ), and the greatest riches in the end.

We celebrate the "*Passion* of Saint John the Baptist" because he was the voice who preceded the Word, a mediator helping the Word enter the hearts of others (Cf., Saint Augustine, Sermon 293:1-3). John endured what he had to endure for the sake of the one he loved. His passion – his suffering love – points to the passion of Christ, whose suffering love redeemed the world.

May we all be as foolish, and as passionate, as those saints and other Christians who have gone before us, for *blessed [indeed] are the people the Lord has chosen to be his own*. Saint John the Baptist, pray for us.

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 30, 2020

(Lec. 124)

- 1) Jeremiah 20:7-9
- 2) Romans 12:1-2
- 3) Matthew 16:21-27

Gospel related: CCC 226, 363, 540, 554, 607, 618, 736, 1021, 1969, 2029, 2232

**22ND SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Let us unite our sacrifices to Christ's sacrifice.

Today's readings discuss something rather uncomfortable: The necessity of sacrifice, of taking up our crosses to follow Christ, even when following Christ comes at great expense.

Perhaps we can begin to understand what Saint Paul is saying – after all, we probably make various sacrifices for those we love. We also make sacrifices during Lent and Advent; we may fast for a particular intention and we try to live our lives in a way pleasing to God by treating our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit.

But if we're honest with ourselves, we've also probably felt like Jeremiah at times. "You duped me, Lord!" he cries. "God, I followed your will and Church teaching and yet here I am, suffering! Being persecuted! That's not fair," we might say.

"Fair" is not part of the Gospel message, though. Love and mercy are. God's generous justice is. Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary was not fair – and it did not end persecution and suffering – but it brought life. Through God's mercy and love, it meant that suffering would not be the end of us. Jesus' temptation to avoid his passion and death was real; indeed, wishing to avoid difficulties is not wrong in itself. Of course we would like to avoid suffering, but we cannot always do that. Suffering is given meaning, however, through its acceptance and offering up in union with the redemptive suffering of Christ.

What made Peter's suggestion wrong was that it opposed God's will; this is why Jesus told him *Get behind me, Satan!* The opposite of God's will – sin – can often seem like the obvious, easier route. It can appear as a solution to a problem, rather than adding to it.

Our crosses are heavy. Sometimes unbearably so. But Jesus calls us to take up our crosses and follow him. He gives us his body and blood as food for the journey, as we bear our sufferings and bring our imperfections to Calvary. As we carry our crosses, we can rejoice in a way that the early disciples could not: We know the story doesn't end on Calvary. We know that with Christ, there is life. Furthermore, we are invited to participate in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross by uniting our sufferings to his. In offering our very selves as a living sacrifice, Saint Paul says, we worship God and we can be transformed, becoming more holy as we are evermore united to the will of God. Today, we offer Christ whatever sufferings we experience because of following him.

Monday, August 31, 2020
(Lec. 431)

1) 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

2) Luke 4:16-30

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

MONDAY OF
22ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Anointing of the Spirit gives us strength and power to do all that Jesus calls us to do.

The Messiah was the “Anointed One” (the literal meaning of the word “messiah”) whom the Jews awaited. In the days of the kings of Israel, they were anointed with oil as part of their coronation. When Jesus takes the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue, the passage he reads says that *the Spirit of the Lord* has anointed him.

This anointing with the Holy Spirit came at Jesus’ baptism. The four Gospels all relate this event, though each one with their own differences, including images of the heavens opening and the Holy Spirit descending upon him in the form of a dove. For all of us baptized into the body of Christ, the same Holy Spirit is poured out upon us that came upon Jesus – the very love of the Holy Trinity that flows between the Father and the Son.

Anointing in the Spirit brings power, and Saint Paul is a great example of it in the first reading. He had the power to speak of Jesus, despite his *weakness and fear and much trembling*. The power of the Spirit also ensures that the message doesn’t depend on ourselves: *I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified*. We need the Holy Spirit to keep the Lord Jesus front and center in our lives – and to remind us when that slips.

The power of the Spirit pushes us to share the gift of Christ; it’s meant not only for us, but for the whole world. The Messiah was sent to *proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind*. The Spirit is meant to go out and bring others back to the Father.

The Father gives us the power of the Holy Spirit to aid us in times of difficulty. Jesus himself experienced this in the synagogue in Nazareth, from people he’d known most of his life. They *were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth*, but quickly resorted to grumbling. Jesus was just a guy from their town, what made him special? Sharing the Gospel guarantees a certain amount of resistance from others.

The Holy Spirit gives us the power to believe and spread the Gospel, no matter our own weaknesses. And, the Spirit gives us the strength to not only confront the cross, but to accept it. By living in the Spirit, evangelizing, and accepting the cross in our lives, we actively join ourselves to the person of Jesus, our Messiah.

Being anointed in the Spirit starts as a blessing from God, flows into our lives, out to the world, and returns to God.

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