

# January

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## WEDDING HOMILY

- 1) Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31
- 2) Ephesians 5:2a, 25-32
- 3) Matthew 5:13-16

FOCUS: God's love and marital love share these qualities: free, total, faithful and fruitful.

*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church.* Look at the crucifix. That is how Christ loved the Church. Christ's love – a sacrificial self-gift, not merely a nice feeling – stands as the example *par excellence* of spousal love. This love is free, total, faithful and fruitful – characteristics you are called to emulate in your vocation of marriage.

**Free.** Christ *handed himself over* of his own free will as a *sacrificial offering* for the sake of his Church – that is, to open the gates of heaven so that we may live with him forever. Today, the bride and groom were asked if they have “come here to enter into marriage without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?” Throughout their lives together, they will have many opportunities to freely choose to make sacrifices for the sake of the other. Every day, we must freely and readily make the conscious decision to choose love.

**Total.** When Christ died for us, he gave everything he had, down to his last drop of blood. He continues this total self-gift through the Eucharist, in which we receive his body, blood, soul and divinity. Likewise, in the covenant of marriage, “the two shall become one flesh.” Spouses cannot withhold any part of themselves; you each bring the totality of your experiences, your strengths and weaknesses, hopes and fears to your marriage. Strive to share with each other, without shame.

**Faithful.** Throughout all of salvation history, God has been faithful to his people. No matter the circumstances, God has never forsaken his children. He is *merciful and gracious ... slow to anger, abounding in mercy* (Psalm 103:8). Nuptial vows include the promises to “love and honor” and to “be true to you in good times and in bad.”

**Fruitful.** The bride and groom were also asked “Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?” Certainly, Catholic spouses are called to be open to life. Additionally, marriage should be fruitful in other ways. How did Christ's love of the Church bear fruit? Look around: Countless Christians, good works and knowledge of the Gospel are a result of Jesus' love of us. So, too, should your marriage inspire good works and be a living Gospel. In this way, you can be salt of the earth. In this way, you can be the light of the world: Let your marriage be a powerful witness of Christ's love for the Church, of his love for us. Reach out to the poor, work hard and fear the Lord like the woman in the first reading. Fill your lives with good deeds and glorify God.

Your vocation is your call to holiness – it is how each of you will be sanctified. As you join yourselves in marriage, you are promising to help each other get to heaven. May each day of your marriage reflect Christ's love for the Church: A love that is free, total, faithful and fruitful.

## FUNERAL HOMILY

- 1) Job 19:1, 23-27a
- 2) 1 Corinthians 15:51-57
- 3) Luke 7:11-17

**FOCUS:** God visits his people in their grief, offering comfort, assurance and the promise of resurrection.

*God has visited his people!* This is how the crowd reacted to Jesus at the city gate of Nain. It is a busy scene. Jesus is with the large crowd entering the city, while a funeral procession is exiting the city. Despite the commotion, Jesus notices the widow weeping for her only son. Jesus is moved to pity. He interrupts the funeral procession to touch the young man's coffin. He raises the widow's son to life and gives him to his mother.

We know the widow's grief. We, too, have lost someone dear to us, N\_\_\_\_\_. Whether or not we weep openly, we suffer the pain of loss. We may feel sorrow and emptiness. We may feel fear and doubt. We may feel hurt and anger. Just as Jesus sees the widow's grief, Jesus sees our grief. We are not alone. God visits us in our grief here today.

If we feel hurt and angry, God speaks to us through the Book of Job. Job is grieving the loss of his family, his friends, his property and his health. Knowing that he has done nothing to deserve such suffering, Job cries out: *I know that my vindicator lives! ... I will see God.* In the midst of a storm, God visits Job and gives him the vindication he seeks. In the midst of our tumult over the death of N\_\_\_\_\_, God comes to us and vindicates us – in the Eucharist.

If we feel fear and doubt, God speaks to us through Saint Paul's letter. The Corinthians worry how they and their loved ones will have life after death. Paul assures them: *Death is swallowed up in victory.* Those who die are raised through Jesus Christ. God clothes them with incorruptibility and immortality. In death, life does not end, but is changed. This is the mystery of resurrection promised to us in Christ.

If we feel sorrow and emptiness, God speaks to us through Luke's Gospel. Jesus says to the widow: *Do not weep.* It is not that Jesus objects to tears or does not understand them – not at all. He is moved by tears and comforts those who weep. The widow will weep no more when Jesus restores her son to her. We, too, will weep no more when Jesus restores us to our loved ones in the resurrection.

God visits us in our grief. He speaks to us through his Word, offering comfort and assurance. He comes to us in the Eucharist, offering us the gift of his very self. Participating in the Eucharist binds us together in his eternal love. In loving communion with him and one another, we continue our journey of faith – through our grief and toward the day when we all may visit God together in his heavenly kingdom.

**YEAR A  
WEEKDAYS II**

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1, 2020**

(Lec. 18)

- 1) Numbers 6:22-27
- 2) Galatians 4:4-7
- 3) Luke 2:16-21

Gospel related: **CCC** 486, 525, 527, 2599

**THE OCTAVE DAY  
OF THE NATIVITY  
OF THE LORD;  
SOLEMNITY OF MARY,  
THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD**

FOCUS: By having his Son born of a woman, God has invited us to participate in the mystery of our salvation.

This first solemnity of the New Year is one that celebrates Mary, and her role as the Mother of God. God, who is beyond our comprehension and control, loves us so much he became one of us. He became one of us in the same way every other human being comes into being: *God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law.* And in doing so, he made us participants in the mystery of our salvation.

The core of this feast is that Mary has given birth to the Savior who is not just the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, but the Son of the living God. This feast, then, is about the mystery of the Incarnation – God’s presence among us as a newborn child, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin. Here we come face to face with God’s unique presence among us and the faithful fulfillment of his promises to Israel.

Recall how the Jewish leaders sent emissaries to John the Baptist to inquire if he was the Christ. John’s response was a firm and resounding *no!* But there was, he told them, one among them whom they did not recognize, who came after him but ranked before him, the thong of whose sandals he was not worthy to untie. He was, of course, speaking about Jesus. It is upon this recognition that the focus and justification of this holy feast stands or falls. Who is this Christ child and what difference does he make in our lives?

If we profess this newborn child to be the Son of God, then it makes sense that the one who gave birth to him should bear the title Mother of God. Because Jesus is both true God and true man, and because these two natures are inseparable, it is proper and right to call her so. She is mother who carried him in her womb and gave birth to him in the flesh. It was through Mary that Jesus obtained his human nature, and he entered into human history with all its dreams, messiness, hopes and disappointments.

But even in this role, Mary was not simply a passive instrument in God’s hands. Rather, in her acceptance of and firm “yes” to God’s plan, Mary discovered and accepted new dimensions to her motherhood and discipleship. Indeed, as her life unfolded she constantly presented to the world its Savior, just as in our readings today she presents the newborn Christ to the shepherds who visit. She invites us to true worship before her Son, and to treasure and immerse ourselves in his divine mystery.

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Thursday, January 2, 2020  
(Lec. 205)

- 1) 1 John 2:22-28
- 2) John 1:19-28

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY  
(OBL MEM  
Saints Basil the Great  
and Gregory Nazianzen,  
Bishops and Doctors of Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 575, 613, 719

FOCUS: We know who Jesus was when he walked this earth, but do we know who he is today?

In today's first reading, we see John encouraging disciples to remember the truth they've learned about Jesus and his identity. He implores the early Christians to ignore the Antichrists, the false teachers who denied Jesus was the Christ. In doing so, they thus denied the Father as well.

The Church honors two saints today, Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, who were profound theological teachers and best of friends in the fourth century. Notably, they were instrumental in defending the Church against the Arian heresy, which denied the equality of being and substance of God the Son with God the Father. This heresy professed Christ as God, but as subordinate to the Father. Those who held and taught this heresy were the kind of people about whom John warned his followers in our reading today.

We give thanks for Saints Basil and Gregory, and all those who held to the truth of the faith in Christ. And to those who pointed away from faulty ideas of the Messiah, and to the person of Christ – like John the Baptist did, and like these saints and others did in eventually giving us the Nicene Creed that we profess every Sunday. In this creed, we state that Jesus was fully human and fully divine; that he was conceived through the Holy Spirit; and that he is part of the Holy Trinity.

This memorial is a good time to reflect on all we know of Jesus as Savior – to have a conversation with him, to let him into our hearts and to recommit our lives to him. He came into this world to save us from sin, and he desires for us to have a relationship with him. May the grace of this liturgy increase our love for and faith in him, that our hope for our coming salvation may enlighten our days.

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Friday, January 3, 2020

(Lec. 206)

1) 1 John 2:29–3:6

2) John 1:29-34

Gospel related: CCC 408, 438, 486, 523, 536, 608, 713, 719, 1137, 1286, 1505

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Opt. Mem.

The Most Holy Name  
of Jesus)

FOCUS: When we love unconditionally, we reveal the inner life of God.

We have just concluded the Octave of Christmas, a season that celebrates the birth of Jesus. John's Gospel, unlike those of Matthew and Luke, does not begin with the birth, but rather a statement that Jesus is the Word of God, who was with God from the very beginning. When John the Baptist pronounces, *Behold the Lamb of God*, he is acknowledging Jesus is more than a man born in Bethlehem. John is professing that Jesus is the Son of God.

This declaration of faith places Jesus within the context of the Trinity, a community of love. Saint Bonaventure describes this community by using the image of a moving water wheel with three buckets: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As the water wheel rotates, each bucket in turn empties out into the other, without expectation of being refilled. This circle of continuous outpouring of love is an analogy for the nature of God. It is in and through this love that Jesus, the Lamb of God, calls disciples and forms them into the beloved community.

Twenty-one centuries later, we gather as a beloved community and celebrate the Supper of the Lamb. As we prepare to receive the Eucharist, we respond to John the Baptist's profession of faith, *Behold the Lamb of God*, by acknowledging our unworthiness. But we also respond with faith, believing that as the children of God our souls will be healed. With confidence, we receive the Lamb of God into our bodily temples, which draws us into the mystery of the Trinity, where no sin exists because love abounds.

Therefore, in these early days of the New Year, it is appropriate to take stock of our lives and ask ourselves, "If we profess to be children of God, how should we act so as to personify that claim?" The answer is simple: Love God and love neighbor as we love ourselves. For it is impossible to remain in Christ, to dwell within the mystery of the Trinity, if we sin and fail to love. If we love in this way, we see others as equally loved by God. When we love we build relationships. When we love we build community. When we love we change the world.

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Saturday, January 4, 2020

(Lec. 207)

1) 1 John 3:7-10

2) John 1:35-42

Gospel related: CCC 608, 719

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(OBL MEM

USA: Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton,  
Religious)

FOCUS: Jesus sees in Peter what he sees in us – our true identity as God’s children.

What is it that Jesus sees in Peter? Jesus takes one look at Peter and says: “*Simon, the son of John ... you will be called Cephas,*” which is translated *Peter*. Jesus recognizes Peter and declares his true identity. There is instant recognition and immediate connection. From that moment on, he will no longer be Simon, but Peter, an intimate disciple of Christ.

In this encounter, Peter does not say a word. It is Jesus who looks at Peter, speaks to Peter and claims Peter as his own. Peter does not do anything to prove himself to Jesus, he simply follows him; and, as we later learn, Peter is far from a perfect disciple. But Jesus sees something in Peter that he cannot help but love.

Jesus sees in Peter the very thing Jesus sees in all of us: a child of God. Jesus is God’s only begotten Son, incarnate of the Virgin Mary. In Jesus, humanity is joined with divinity in a way that binds us to God forever. God cannot help but claim and love what is his very own.

This is part of John’s message to his community, and us, in the first reading. John says that our being *children of God* is *made plain* by our *act[ing] in righteousness*. Because of God’s only begotten Son, we are able (though not always successful) to be righteous and refrain from sin: that is, we love one another as God loves us. Our righteousness in loving is not of our own doing, but due to the grace of our being beloved and adopted children of God in Christ. Christ the Son *cannot sin because he is begotten by God*; he lives in us, conforming us to himself and to the Father.

Today the Church memorializes Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, the first saint to be born in the United States. Like Peter, she responded to Christ’s call to follow him and made plain to all her status as a child of God through her love of others in her work. May her intercession, and that of all the saints in heaven, help us to refrain from sin and act in righteousness.

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**SUNDAY, JANUARY 5, 2020**

(Lec. 20)

1) Isaiah 60:1-6

2) Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

3) Matthew 2:1-12

Gospel related: **CCC** 439, 486, 528, 724

**THE EPIPHANY  
OF THE LORD**

FOCUS: We pray for the grace to have the open-heartedness of the Magi.

We have been hearing throughout this beautiful season of Christmas about the gift that God has given us – the gift of his only begotten Son, Jesus, as our Savior. Jesus, who is God Incarnate, born as a helpless baby. Today's Feast of the Epiphany celebrates the public "announcement," if you will, that the gift of salvation is available to all, not just those of the Israelite covenant with God.

Long before Paul tells the Ephesians in today's reading *that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel*, the revelation of Jesus Christ is made to the Magi. These Magi were not Jewish, but men *from the east* – Gentiles – who have traveled to Bethlehem to see *the newborn king of the Jews*. They were somehow drawn to the gift, and Matthew's Gospel tells us how they respond.

Their response is a beautiful example of how we ourselves should respond to Jesus – and to any gift that God offers to us. They have the vision to see the star, to follow it a great distance from their homeland and to accept the simple gift that is revealed to them: a humble, simple child who does not radiate the majesty of a king. The Magi are able to see beyond the surface, to see this child for who he is, and without hesitation pay him homage and present him with their gifts. Finally, they are obedient to the voice in their dreams and go home a different way, avoiding Herod.

Matthew's Gospel also gives us a completely opposite response to this gift, carried out by Herod. King Herod, hearing of the newborn King of the Jews, responds defensively and in great fear. If what the wise men report is true, Herod reasons, he will lose his status and prestige. Rather than see this child as a gift, as the long-promised Messiah, Herod sees him as a threat that needs to be extinguished right away. He responds with deceitful cunning, planning to kill the child once the Magi reveal to him where the child is. Herod closes his heart to the gift of God, the Messiah, wanting to keep his own power and glory.

None of us would claim to want to follow the example of Herod – to close our hearts and minds to God and to resort to killing innocent children to keep our power. Yet, it helps us to think about how open we are to the many gifts that God presents to us throughout our lives – from the rainy morning that greets us upon our awakening; to the family God has placed in our lives; the work we are called to do; and the sufferings we are called to endure. Each of these is, in different ways, a gift from God – some more easily seen as gift than others. We can either reject them as Herod did, or follow the example of the Magi and accept them in humility, trust and obedience.

As we continue our celebration of the Eucharist, we pray for the grace to have the open-heartedness of the Magi throughout the coming year. All is gift from God. With the help of the Holy Spirit, may we greet the expected and unexpected gifts – the obvious gifts and those that are harder to understand – as truly gifts from our loving God. May we see the radiance and glory of Jesus in all we meet in the years ahead, and welcome them into our hearts with joy, reverence and trust.



Monday, January 6, 2020

(Lec. 212)

1) 1 John 3:22–4:6

2) Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25

Gospel related: CCC 1503, 1720, 1989

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Opt. Mem.

USA: Saint André Bessette,

Religious)

FOCUS: God works in unexpected ways and in unlikely places.

Saint André Bessette, whose feast day we celebrate today, was an unlikely character. Uneducated, unskilled and in poor health, he approached the Congregation of Holy Cross in France with the desire to become a brother. Given his background, however, the congregation could find only one position for André: doorkeeper. André accepted this position gratefully and openly, and God did the rest. Over the course of the next several decades, God brought throngs of pilgrims to André's door to meet the humble doorkeeper, many of whom were healed at André's hands. No one would have expected the simple, uneducated André to become a saint, and therein lies the beauty of God's ways.

Jesus, too, was what we might call an "unexpected character of sorts." As today's Gospel attests, Jesus came from Nazareth, eventually beginning his public ministry in Galilee. The specific region was known as *Galilee of the Gentiles* because, while under Assyrian rule, the Jews had been deported from this area and replaced largely by Gentiles. The Samaritans were the descendants of these Gentile imports who heavily populated Galilee during Jesus' day. For Jesus, who was to others a no-name Jewish man from small-town Nazareth, to begin his ministry in Galilee – a Gentile-dominated area considered to be in "darkness" – seems to make little sense.

Yet God breaks into every scene – of Jesus, of André Bessette, of you and me – and works in unexpected ways. He heals the sick, cures the demoniacs and amasses followers from nothing. In a world where the educated and talented have the upper hand, God raises up the lowly. In other words, God takes unlikely people from unlikely places. And if that's not enough, God then sends them out to even more unlikely places to bear witness to his grace.

This grace is not evident through our strengths or talents most often, but rather through our weaknesses and inabilities. For it is there that God shines through. We do not have to be the smartest, wealthiest, most attractive or capable, for in God's economy, these attributes carry little weight. Even – or *especially* – when it seems like we have little to offer, God shows up and surprises us, turning our simple, humble desire to love and serve into sainthood, one day at a time.

At a door in France, in *Galilee of the Gentiles*, light dawns amidst the darkness. This Christmas season, we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, of André Bessette, and of countless other saints who lead us in unexpected ways to unlikely places, all by the surprising grace of God.

Tuesday, January 7, 2020

(Lec. 213)

1) 1 John 4:7-10

2) Mark 6:34-44

Gospel related: CCC 472

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Raymond of Penyafort,

Priest)

FOCUS: *God is love.*

Our first reading today addresses one of humanity's most pressing questions, and one of the most central mysteries of our faith. Who or what is God? John answers, *God is love*. We have heard this time and again, perhaps reverently, or maybe even in a way that makes it sound trite. During this Christmas season, let us reflect more deeply on what it means.

God's very being is love. Our one and only God is a community of three persons united in love. We were created out of this love and for this love. Being created in God's image, we bear resemblance to God. The fall of humanity into sin did not erase this image, only distorted it. God has constantly sought to bring us back to him throughout our history, sending prophets to share his Word, and anointing kings to rule his people.

But the primary revelation of who God is took place when *God sent his only-begotten Son into the world so that we might have life through him*. God loves us so much that he became one of us and lived among us. Because our nature was united with God's in Jesus, we can now share in the divine nature.

All of revelation is summed up in the person of Christ. Even before Jesus' passion, death and resurrection reopened the gates of heaven, God revealed his love for us by emptying himself – coming to earth as a human infant, born of a human mother. Before the cross came the manger.

We who have received this revelation have a special responsibility. The love we have for one another must be the same type of self-emptying love with which God has first loved us. Our relationships should be markedly different from our secular contemporaries. The world should see how we love one another, and know we follow a God who radically emptied himself in love.

How do we do this? Not without grace. In today's Gospel, Jesus took five loaves of bread and two fish, blessed them, broke them, and gave them to his disciples, and a crowd of 5,000 was satisfied. Now Jesus feeds *us* with his very body, blood, soul and divinity under the appearance of bread and wine. God continues to empty himself for us every day in the Eucharist, taking on the humblest of forms in order to satisfy not our physical hunger, but our hunger for love and community. The grace of this sacrament is that it unites us not only to Jesus, but to all who make up the Body of Christ. As we receive the Eucharist today, we can be united in love, so that all who see us may know the love of Christ.

**Saint Raymond of Penyafort (1175-1275)** – A civil and canon lawyer, Saint Raymond of Penyafort was a Spanish Dominican friar, and is known as the "Father of Canon Law." He compiled a collection of canonical laws that remained a major part of Church law until 1917. He also wrote a guide on penance for confessors. At age 63 he was elected the master general of the Dominicans, succeeding Saint Dominic.

Wednesday, January 8, 2020

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Lec. 214)

1) 1 John 4:11-18

2) Mark 6:45-52

Gospel related: **CCC** 2602 **CSDC** 453

FOCUS: Jesus never gives up on his followers.

Witnessing the exchanges between Jesus and his disciples in today's Gospel, it is easy to project our own human failings and wonder if Jesus ever got tired of doing so much for his followers. At the beginning of the Gospel, we hear that Jesus has just fed the 5,000 – a miracle of epic proportions. He then sends the disciples across the sea, dismisses the crowds and goes to the mountain to pray. Jesus has taken care of everything for everyone else, and now he needs rejuvenation and strength from his Father. Yet his solace is interrupted when he sees his disciples in need, and once again he comes to their aid and cares for them.

We do not hear if Jesus was tired or frustrated with his disciples; we do not hear, in this Gospel, how he felt, but we see what he did. The disciples keep needing him, and he comes to their aid. On their own, they fail, and he forgives them. Their hearts are inconstant and become hardened, but Jesus never gives up on them.

In this Christmas season, we have celebrated the Lord's miraculous coming. The nativity scenes we put up testify to the impossible truth that God became human. We celebrate a truth that we believe but that we most likely do not fully understand. In that way, we are much like those with whom Jesus came into contact. For he did not come into a world that was ready to recognize him for who he is. The disciples sometimes seemed to "get it," only to turn around and be terrified and unbelieving when he did something like walk on the sea.

So, too, do we sometimes recognize the Lord at work in our lives, but maybe not always. We seek to encounter him here at Mass and to hear his voice, but do we recognize him in all the places he dwells? In the poor? In the silence of our hearts? In our enemies? We call Jesus "Lord," and yet if we are honest, there are times we live quite unaware of his presence – when our hearts are too hardened to recognize and receive him.

We don't know how Jesus felt or what he thought as his disciples bumbled time and again, but we *do* know he never gave up on them. Untiringly, he responds to his follower's cries and helps them – then, and now. The Lord never tires of forgiving us, of offering us what we truly need. He gives us himself, in particular through the Eucharist of which we prepare to partake. With this knowledge of his unwavering love, and the grace always available to us through prayer, may we cry out to him untiringly, and with courage receive the One who has called us and who never gives up on us.

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Thursday, January 9, 2020

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Lec. 215)

1) 1 John 4:19–5:4

2) Luke 4:14-22a

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

FOCUS: Jesus came to bring *glad tidings* – news we cannot keep to ourselves.

Jesus came to preach the Gospel. We have heard this many times. So many times that we might associate his preaching with many different things: repentance, the kingdom of God, justice, mercy, sin, redemption. Today's readings though, help us understand why we use the word Gospel: It is an Old English translation which means simply "good news." All of this – Christianity – is good news indeed.

Jesus came to bring *glad tidings* – tidings of comfort and joy. During these last days of the Christmas season, the feelings of holiday comfort and joy may be fading. We can be grateful, then, that today the Church reminds us why and what we are still celebrating, even if the Christmas music and lights of the secular celebration have already come down. We are celebrating that God *first loved us*, and this is good news worth celebrating for a long time!

While we were still yet sinners, our God made his way into our broken and battered world. He did it in the most unlikely, though often foretold, manner: vulnerable, dependent and obedient. In short, he became human. He did this with great love – love for you and for me: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son* (John 3:16). In the Incarnation, we can see that God loves us, that he knows us, that he wants our good. In his human nature he feels what we feel, sees what we see and wants what we most truly want, all without sin.

This is good news – news that we cannot keep to ourselves. We must share it. The love of God we first receive drives us to love God in return, and to love our neighbor (whom God also loves). It is news, then, that commands, but not in a way that is a burden, but in the same way as glad tidings command: It demands to be shared. It is news that *proclaim[s] liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, [and lets] the oppressed go free*.

We pray, then, that each of us, baptized and anointed with Christ, may be given the grace we need to share this great love. We receive our anointing at our baptism – many of us as humble infants ourselves – not because we earn it, but only because God wants to give it to us, so that then we might love in return. As we come to the end of this Christmas season, while still only starting this new year, may we make this a year when we love one another, share our joy and so preach the Gospel. This, then, will truly be a year *acceptable to the Lord*.

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Friday, January 10, 2020

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Lec. 216)

1) 1 John 5:5-13

2) Luke 5:12-16

Gospel related: **CCC** 2602

FOCUS: God wants us to be witnesses to the life given in Jesus Christ.

Today's readings invite us to reflect on the nature of faith in Jesus Christ. *Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean*, says the man. What faith is modeled for us in this Gospel!

What is this "faith?" We don't just accept Jesus as if he were an abstract being to whom we pledge loyalty. Instead, we hear John in our first reading go to great lengths to explain that our faith is not a blind faith. We are called to faith – to say "yes" to a relationship with Christ because we have come to know him, to possess him, as John writes. More importantly, John also assures us that the Holy Spirit is active in this work, witnessing to Jesus and helping us say this "yes."

Still, as with any relationship, we do have to open ourselves up to it. To open ourselves to the person of Christ. Like the man in the Gospel, we can hear about what Jesus has done, perhaps even see how Christ has worked in the lives of others. But faith moves beyond listening. Eventually, we must, like this man, make a decision. Will we approach Jesus? Will we lay our brokenness before him?

It may be easy to dismiss this story as another miracle story that has nothing to do with us, here and now. But, the living word of God is speaking to us here, today. This leprous man, separated from his community and wounded by his disease, invites us to bring our own brokenness to Jesus. To lay before him anything that is causing separation from others or damage to relationships in our life. To show him what wounds us and holds us back from being all we are created to be. The Holy Spirit, through the witness of this leper, is inviting us to bring all of this to Jesus. *Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean.*

For this is what faith is at its heart. It is trusting that Jesus *wants* us to bring our brokenness to him. *I do will it*, he says to us. Christ longs to share his life, his transforming love, with us, especially as we receive him in the Eucharist in a few moments. We can, miraculously, *possess the Son* and so have the life God offers us. With his grace, may we say "yes" to that offer.

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Saturday, January 11, 2020

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Lec. 217)

1) 1 John 5:14-21

2) John 3:22-30

Gospel related: **CCC** 523, 524, 796

FOCUS: *He must increase; I must decrease.*

John the Baptist sees Jesus in all his glory and acknowledges that when he says, *He must increase; I must decrease*. Today's Gospel gives a voice to John the Baptist's humility, and his understanding of his role in salvation as the one who sets the stage for the Messiah, and then fades into the background. He compares himself to the best man at the wedding, who rejoices in the bridegroom and knows that the bridegroom is the important one.

Making Jesus greater, and ourselves less, as John the Baptist was able to do, is a challenge, of course. For many of us, putting God first may call for, not only a serious change of thinking, but also a change in our daily lifestyle. Putting Jesus first demands a focus on a life of faith and a pursuit of holiness, rather than on worldly goods and accomplishments. It forces us to rethink our secular goals, and instead examine what God's plan is for us. It calls us to live a life that is "other-centered" rather than "self-centered." It requires spending more time in prayer and setting goals that move us closer to God.

Easier said than done, right? In cases like this, we are reminded that nothing is impossible with God, and he will give us what we need if we only ask. Prayer, looking to the lives of the saints and seeking out the sacraments for the grace we need to change our lives is how we go about it. Love for our creator and our desire to spend eternity in his presence is why we do it.

Every time we pray, every time we allow God's word to penetrate our hearts and our actions, every time we participate in the sacraments and are strengthened with grace, we allow Jesus to increase and ourselves to decrease. In the Eucharist, we receive the real presence of Jesus into our bodies – and the more room we make for him, the stronger we become in allowing him to grow within us and direct our steps. Let us now prepare ourselves to do just that.

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**SUNDAY, JANUARY 12, 2020**

(Lec. 21)

1) Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

2) Acts 10:34-38

3) Matthew 3:13-17

Gospel related: **CCC** 444, 535, 536, 608, 701, 713, 1223, 1224, 1286

**THE BAPTISM  
OF THE LORD  
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Through our baptism, we are called to assist Christ in building the Kingdom.

Three of the four Gospels recall the Baptism of the Lord, each one in its own way. The version we heard today, from Matthew, is unique in recalling that when Jesus came to the Jordan, John the Baptist at first *tried to prevent him*, saying that he was the one who needed to be baptized by Jesus. But Jesus replies, *Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*.

Here, Matthew is keen to emphasize that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel – as found in the first reading – and the one whose sandals John is unfit to carry (Cf., Matthew 3:11). John acquiesced to Jesus' request, and upon coming up from the water, Jesus is revealed as *my beloved Son* through a voice from heaven, while the Spirit descends upon him in the form of a dove.

As we hear this Gospel proclaimed, we note this revelation/divine action occurs after Jesus comes up from the waters of the Jordan. We, too, have emerged from the waters of baptism, and been anointed with the same Spirit. The words of the Father are words meant for us, too, for we also are God's beloved.

If anything, this feast has as much to say about us as it does about Jesus and his identity. Yes, by going down into the waters of the Jordan, Jesus demonstrates his solidarity with our broken world, but we know that he was without sin and so his baptism is different from ours. Unlike Christ who embodied perfection, we have to choose whether or not to live up to that baptismal identity, and to continue his divine work in our world today.

We who gather here have made this choice, it seems. We may not do it perfectly, but by our profession of faith and openness to the grace available at this Mass we are, at the very least, committed to trying our best. May God bless us in our efforts, and may the Eucharist continue to transform us for the sake of the world.

\* \* \*

Monday, January 13, 2020

(Lec. 305)

1) 1 Samuel 1:1-8

2) Mark 1:14-20

MONDAY OF  
FIRST WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Hilary,  
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 541, 787, 1423, 1427 **CSDC** 49

**FOCUS:** *The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel.*

Today, as we begin the Church period called *Ordinary Time*, we are no longer preparing for some special feast or continuing to celebrate some great happening in Church history. Instead, Ordinary Time is a structured, “ordered” way of focusing on the Scriptures that takes us through the life of Christ: We delve deeper into his words and actions, and allow the Word to work in us to live our faith daily.

What we hear in the Gospel from Mark today is the account of Jesus calling the first four Apostles to help him reach the people with his message of God’s love and forgiveness. Mark tells us that this occurred *after John [the Baptist] had been arrested*. So now we have a bit of historical information about the timeline of Christ’s ministry. In Galilee, where John had been preparing the way for him, Jesus now began *proclaiming the Gospel of God: This is the time of fulfillment*, he said. *The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel.*

This is what the men he chose to assist him would have heard, if indeed he preached in their hearing. And when he calls them to come after him, they do not hesitate. They literally leave their nets, and follow.

Jesus entered human history at a particular time, and he remains present to us today in the Eucharist, in the other sacraments, and through the power of the Holy Spirit. And his message has not changed. We hear the same proclamation as did Simon, Andrew, James and John: *The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel*. May we, too, have the grace to untangle ourselves from whatever nets may hold us back, and follow him without hesitation.

**Saint Hilary, Bishop and Doctor (310-365)** – Hilary was the Bishop of Poitiers and is a Doctor of the Church. He wrote important works on the Arian controversy. He is believed to be the first to bring Greek doctrine to the Western Church, and is the first writer of hymns. Saint Abra of Poitiers, a nun known for her charity, was his daughter.

\* \* \*



Tuesday, January 14, 2020

(Lec. 306)

1) 1 Samuel 1:9-20

2) Mark 1:21-28

Gospel related: CCC 438, 1673, 2173

TUESDAY OF  
FIRST WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus' new teaching comes with great authority, full of mercy and grace.

*Jesus came to Capernaum with his followers, and on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught.*

So begins today's interesting, short passage in the Gospel of Mark. It is interesting, first, because Mark does not say here *what* Jesus taught. Unlike so many other Gospel stories, we hear no parables, exhortations, commands or instructions. It is also interesting because the only one who recognizes who Jesus is, is a man with an unclean spirit. He cries out to Jesus, *I know who you are – the Holy One of God!*

The others are *amazed*, and while they have questions, they are not about Jesus himself, but that there is *a new teaching with authority*. In this introductory chapter of Mark's Gospel, the people are not yet aware of who Jesus is, or could be, and so there is no attempt to obstruct him or challenge his presence in the synagogue. Still, they realize there is a *new teaching* – and this, it seems, is most relevant.

As the Lord heard and provided Hannah a son for her deliverance (from the pain and sorrow of no progeny, and all the cultural and practical difficulties of those circumstances), so God heard the cries of the whole world in need of deliverance, and gave us *his* Son. His Son, who came not just for the Jewish people of the covenant, but for all people. The kingdom of God is now at hand for all who repent and believe in the Gospel. This *is* a new teaching, and it comes with great authority, full of mercy and grace.

This, of course, is not a new teaching for us. It is the faith into which we were baptized and the creed we profess here in our worship together. But it is worth remembering that even though Christ is in our midst, we, like the crowd that surrounded him, may not always see the whole picture. And that is OK. For God always hears us, never abandons us and always comes to us with mercy and grace. May we have the faith and conviction of Hannah, and the gift of thankful amazement at what God has done for us, to sustain us in the difficult times. And may the *Holy One of God* be the teacher we follow in all we do.

\* \* \*

Wednesday, January 15, 2020  
(Lec. 307)

- 1) 1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20
  - 2) Mark 1:29-39
- Gospel related: **CCC** 2602

WEDNESDAY OF  
FIRST WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.*

Today's readings describe to us what it means to be a servant of the Lord. In the first reading, two servants – Eli and Samuel – are sleeping in the Temple when God calls out to Samuel, who misunderstands what is happening. When the priest Eli understands that it is God calling out to the young Samuel, he coaches his apprentice, telling him to reply simply: *Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.* In this simple act, Eli imparts great wisdom to Samuel, and to us. When we call God “Lord,” we are not only recognizing his greatness, but also our place before him. If he is Lord, we are “servant.” If he speaks, we listen. If he calls, we rise.

In the Gospel, we hear of two more of God's servants. First, after Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law, we hear that *she waited on them.* In her manner and her actions, she sent the same message to Jesus as did Samuel to the Lord: *Speak ... I am listening.* We followers of Christ who proclaim that he is our Lord are meant to approach him in the same way. Good servants wait on their master, patiently remaining attentive, carefully listening, until such a time that a job is given them. Then, through the power bestowed upon them by the master to carry out the task, the servant acts.

Jesus himself, of course, is the ultimate servant. Like Samuel, Jesus listens to the Father. He rises *very early before dawn* to pray alone with his Father – to listen and to wait for his Father's words. Jesus also serves his Father by performing the actions he has been empowered to do. He drives out demons, cures the sick and preaches the Kingdom. In all of this, Jesus willingly does the tasks given him by the Father, and not by his power alone.

So it is, then, for us. If we dare to say with Samuel, *Speak, Lord,* we must be prepared to be spoken to! We must be prepared to be servants who wait on the Lord – who listen, and obey. When we do, we will find that the burden is light and the task is easy.

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Thursday, January 16, 2020

(Lec. 308)

1) 1 Samuel 4:1-11

2) Mark 1:40-45

Gospel related: **CCC** 1504, 2616

THURSDAY OF  
FIRST WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Christ's goodness surpasses all things.

The story of the disastrous defeat of the Israelites reminds us that God does not always give us exactly what we ask for. But he always answers our prayers. The heartbreak, the confusion, the suffering described in the first reading is palpable. We may even be able to relate on some level, having suffered whatever failures or defeats in our own lives. But the story of the Israelites does not end there, and neither does ours. God redeems us.

This story of the Israelite defeat leads, across centuries, to our Gospel – our Good News – to Christ. God's answers often don't look like what we may want or expect; they may not look like mighty military victories. Much more frequently, they look like our Gospel story. God, intimately present to us, reaching out his hand to touch us, to heal us.

We may struggle to understand why God allows some evil. We may find it challenging to explain why God allowed that terrible defeat in our first reading. But we do know with certainty that God did not stop working, that God was still bringing good even in the midst of that profound suffering, ultimately sending Jesus Christ to defeat even death. God is working in our lives, too – he is present in the defeats we may be suffering. Jesus Christ is here today, reaching out his hand to us.

In a few moments, Christ, the living God, will reach out to give himself to us, body, blood, soul and divinity, in the Eucharist. Christ wants to give us goodness that far surpasses anything the world has to offer: goodness that is eternal; goodness that can transform our suffering, bringing joy even in pain; goodness that is not deserved, that is not earned, but is freely given.

\* \* \*

Friday, January 17, 2020

(Lec. 309)

1) 1 Samuel 8:4-7, 10-22a

2) Mark 2:1-12

FRIDAY OF  
FIRST WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Anthony,  
Abbot)

Gospel related: **CCC** 430, 473, 574, 589, 1421, 1441, 1484, 1502, 1503, 2616

**FOCUS:** Following the example of Saint Anthony, the abbot, can put us on a path to Jesus and bring us closer to living God's plan.

Today the Church celebrates the Memorial of Saint Anthony, the abbot. Born in the third century into a house of privilege, he grew up in Egypt with parents who were Christians. By the time he was 20, both his parents were gone and he was alone. In reading Matthew's Gospel one day, he was struck by the sentence, *Go, sell what you have, and give it to the poor*. In a desire to live the best life he could, he did exactly that. He sold his land and gave all he had to the poor. He then lived as a hermit in the desert, fasting and praying.

His life of prayer and dedication drew many followers. He visited those imprisoned, and openly presented himself as a disciple of Christ even when Christians were being persecuted. Though he spent long periods in isolation, early communities of monks began to work with him and preach the Gospel. They imitated his life of prayer and humility, sharing his message with others. He became known as the "Father of Monks." As his reputation grew, people took his words and actions to heart and saw him as a holy man.

So, we may wonder, why does the Church celebrate him? After all, there is no requirement to separate ourselves from the world and live as a hermit, fasting and praying. Even so, there is much to learn from Saint Anthony. He modeled humility for us. God was first in his life, and took precedence over everything. We can work toward the same kind of humility by examining our priorities and putting God at the top of our list.

We know much about Anthony because a biography written by one of his followers recorded not only his life, but also many of his ideas for following the Lord. "I die daily" is one of his mottos that can still speak to us today. He thought that we should wake up each day believing that it would be our last. Imagine living each day as if it were the day we would meet our maker ... as if this day were the final chance to make a difference ... as if this day would end our earthly life.

We can be prepared for that moment by dying to Christ daily, as he died for us. The Eucharist we are about to receive gives us the grace we need. May we allow ourselves to cooperate with that grace in the manner of Saint Anthony – dying daily in humility for the glory of God.

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Saturday, January 18, 2020

(Lec. 310)

1) 1 Samuel 9:1-4, 17-19;  
10:1a

2) Mark 2:13-17

Gospel related: **CCC** 545, 574, 1484, 1503

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

FOCUS: Christ invites each and every one of us to follow him – the invitation is personal and universal.

There is a famous painting by Caravaggio, an Italian artist from the 16th century, titled “The Calling of St. Matthew.” It depicts the calling of Levi, which we heard in today’s Gospel. Levi, who is often called Matthew, is shown sitting with his colleagues in the customs post. The tax collectors are dressed in elegant and patterned garments, some with large feathers in their hats. One young man is counting money on a table, around which all the other wealthy men are sitting. On the far right of the painting, Christ is seen standing in the shadows, stretching out his arm and pointing with his finger directly at Levi. Levi, at the same time, has an expression of shock and confusion. He is pointing at another person sitting beside him, certain that Christ must be calling someone else. His eyes are wide and scared.

Levi is stunned to be called. Of the many gathered at the customs post, Christ says, *Follow me, to him*. In the painting, Levi is singled out; he is getting a very personal calling from Christ. The Scripture is mute on any verbal exchange that may have happened next, but Mark tells us that Levi then *got up and followed Jesus*. Christ looked at that group of sinners, singled one out, and called him: *Follow me*, he said. Here we are, an assembly of sinners, and Christ singles out each one of us. *Follow me*, he says to all of us and to each of us.

That is the paradox of our calling – it is both universal and personal at the same time. The invitation to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is made personally to each one of us. Yet while that invitation is universal, it is still done individually. Christ calls everyone, but he does so to each of us uniquely. We are called as persons, not as a group.

In the same way that in the Caravaggio painting Christ reached out his finger to single out Levi, he points now at each one of us. Christ calls each one, points his finger toward each one, to beckon that we follow. Often, our temptation in this moment is similar to Levi’s reaction to the invitation: “Are you pointing at me? Are you sure you don’t mean that other person in the pew who seems holier than I am? Why me?” But recall that Christ *did not come to call the righteous but sinners*.

In a few minutes, we shall declare before the Lord that we are not worthy that he should enter under our roof. Of course, we are not worthy. God’s mercy does not depend on our worthiness; his grace and mercy flow from his love for us. He has already said the Word that we might be healed – and that Word came in the form of Jesus Christ. So, as did Levi, let us get up and follow him.

## SUNDAY, JANUARY 19, 2020

(Lec. 64)

- 1) Isaiah 49:3, 5-6
- 2) 1 Corinthians 1:1-3
- 3) John 1:29-34

Gospel related: CCC 408, 438, 486, 523, 536, 608, 713, 719, 1137, 1286, 1505

## SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Our baptism calls us into service to the Lord.

Anyone here who has ever been a part of a pickup basketball, football or baseball game as a youth and was not overly athletic knows the anguish of hoping and praying not to be the last one chosen. Now, on the other hand, if the boss was looking for someone to take on a large project that would involve a lot of time and energy, our hope and prayer might be the opposite – stare at the ground and try to become invisible.

In our three readings today, first the prophet was called, and then Paul, and finally, Jesus was called. There was no staring at the ground in hopes of being overlooked – no worries they would be the last one tapped to be God’s servant. In each case, the invitation to service was boldly embraced.

So, today, let us talk about each of us being chosen to be God’s servant. Is this a welcomed call? In an ideal situation we would all say “yes” – yes this is a welcomed call. But on this side of heaven, we do not live in an ideal world, so our answer to the invitation to be God’s servant may cause us to hesitate in boldly saying “yes.” This is quite normal and understandable given all the demands placed upon our time. There are, after all, only 24 hours in a day, right?

It is important here to remember that Isaiah dealt with hardheaded people, and Paul started out persecuting Christians before he became one. Jesus was tempted in the desert and agonized in the garden before he accomplished the Father’s will. We are in good company with our hesitations and difficulties. While we might hesitate for what we think are good reasons, as believers, as followers of Jesus, we can never excuse ourselves from our responsibility to be God’s servants.

Being God’s servant does not necessarily mean running to the nearest seminary, convent or monastery to become a religious or ordained minister of the Church. Although those are indeed good things! What it does mean is seriously reflecting on how God is calling each of us to be his servants.

Yes, some are being called from among our number here to serve the Church as priests, sisters or brothers. Many more are called to marriage. And apart from those vocations, and no matter our state in life, we are all called to holiness.

Let there be no mistake. By virtue of our baptism, we have been called to be servants of the Lord. There are no excuses or exemptions from this call. Our task, therefore, is to live out the call to serve, by growing in faith and holiness. According to the catechism, Christians are “sanctified ... [and] called to be saints” (CCC 1695). Nurses serve, accountants serve, maintenance staff serve, parents serve. Our “job” does not preclude, or improve, the opportunity to serve. As long as we have the love of Christ alive and well within us, then we will be good and faithful servants. And with God’s mercy and grace, we will one day join the communion of saints giving glory to God, forever.

Monday, January 20, 2020  
(Lec. 311)

- 1) 1 Samuel 15:16-23
- 2) Mark 2:18-22

MONDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Fabian,  
Pope and Martyr;  
Saint Sebastian,  
Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 796

FOCUS: May we always hunger to be in perfect union with God.

Today's Gospel sees Jesus challenged by people who question why his disciples don't fast. In Jesus' time, fasting was a form of mourning a death. Fasting was also a means of supplication, for making a request of God. Fasting also expressed a person's repentance. In contrition, people could offer their remorse to God.

When fasting, a person typically excuses him or herself from the table, not sharing in the presence of good food or good company. Just as important, one did *not* fast in the midst of a celebration. And Jesus was indeed a reason for celebration – for the bridegroom was among them! Thus, being at the table was central to Jesus' ministry. He sought out the company of all manner of people, and encouraged them to invite him into their midst.

As humans, we hunger to be in right relationship with others. As people of faith, we know we are created by God to be people of love, who hunger to be in perfect union with God. How wondrous for the disciples to bask in the presence of Jesus, whose mission was to share the love of the Father with them.

On this day, we, too, celebrate the bridegroom among us in the presence of the Holy Spirit in our Church, and in each one of us. We celebrate the bridegroom in Jesus Christ, present in Word and sacrament. How can we possibly fast from the one who asks us to join him at the altar, to physically partake of the God who loves us? May Christ, truly and fully present in the Eucharist, satisfy our hunger for God, while making us ever more desirous to be in perfect union with him, now and forever.

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Tuesday, January 21, 2020  
(Lec. 312)

- 1) 1 Samuel 16:1-13
- 2) Mark 2:23-28

TUESDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Agnes,  
Virgin and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 544, 581, 582, 2167, 2173 **CSDC** 261

FOCUS: We are all called to holiness, each in our own way.

Today we celebrate the feast of Saint Agnes. What we know with certainty about her is that she was very young (12 or 13) when she was martyred in Rome, c. 304. Historical records indicate she was from a wealthy Christian family, and tradition holds that when she refused to marry a Roman soldier, she and her family were reported to the authorities. She was murdered for her refusal to renounce her faith and her consecration to Jesus Christ as her spouse. Agnes is the patron saint of many, including gardeners, young girls, engaged couples and victims of sexual assault.

There are many ways in which Saint Agnes can serve as a model of faith, not the least of which is that the length of one's life does not determine holiness. For holiness does not depend upon us, but on God.

This is essentially the message Jesus provides in today's Gospel. The Pharisees, always looking to find fault with Jesus, question him about his disciples *doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath* by picking wheat. The Pharisees had a scrupulosity based on legalism: For them, only "following the law to the last letter" is what made one holy. As we know, Jesus took them to task many times throughout the Gospels for this subverted understanding of how we are to relate to God – reminding them that holiness comes from God, and his love, and not from our own actions.

In this instance, Jesus points out, *The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath*. In other words, all good gifts, like the Sabbath, come from God. The Sabbath exists because *God* created it, not because we do the proper activities or follow the letter of the law so as to somehow bring it into existence. Jesus' message, which was so powerful and transformative to so many, was that his disciples, and their need to satisfy their hunger, mattered. And they mattered even on the Sabbath, because the Sabbath – like wheat, and goodness, and love and holiness – proceeds from God, not from us.

Confrontations such as the one we hear about today continued, and ultimately led to the cross and Resurrection, which revealed the fullness of God's love for us. We matter to God. Not just in some small way, but in such a profound way that his own Son became Incarnate so as to tell us this message himself and show it to us through his death.

Clearly, Agnes found this message compelling and transformative, worth committing her life to and accepting the consequences of that choice, even if that meant death. She understood, and exemplified, holiness, even at a young age. We might consider this a good counter-argument to whatever excuses we might have about holiness in our own lives, no matter what our age.

Holiness is the goal of all Christians, and few will live it out the way Agnes did. But, like Agnes, and through her intercession and God's grace, we can allow the depth of God's love to penetrate us and transform us, giving us the strength and courage to embrace our own cross and commit ourselves fully to the life of discipleship.



NOTE: For the Day of Prayer, any readings from the *Lectionary for Mass Supplement*, the Mass “For Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life,” nos. 947A-947E, or the *Lectionary for Mass* (vol. IV), the Mass “For Peace and Justice,” nos. 887-891

Wednesday, January 22, 2020

(Lec. 313)

- 1) 1 Samuel 17:32-33,  
37, 40-51
- 2) Mark 3:1-6

WEDNESDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(USA: Day of Prayer  
for the Legal Protection  
of Unborn Children)

Gospel related: **CCC** 574, 591, 1859, 2173 **CSDC** 261

FOCUS: God can work through us to destroy any evil in the world.

The Church in the United States has set aside this day – the anniversary of the Supreme Court decision on *Roe v. Wade* – as a Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children. While Christians may debate the types of policies that would be most effective to protect the dignity and life of unborn children, what underlies every aspect of this debate is that these precious lives are worthy of protecting.

God is clear in Genesis that all creation is good. There are no caveats that say human life must be healthy, intelligent or even wanted. Throughout Scripture, God consistently uplifts the little one, the unwanted and the powerless to bear his love to the world.

In our first reading, young David stands against the longtime Philistine warrior. Neither trained in battle nor able to lift a mighty sword, David defends himself with just five stones. He understood and believed in the power and might of God, and was therefore successful in his mission. In the Gospel, Jesus refused to accept the legalism of the Pharisees, choosing to *save life rather than to destroy it*, even when it put him in mortal danger.

As with David, defending the Israelites, and Jesus, curing the withered hand of the man at the synagogue, God can work through us to destroy the evil that threatens vulnerable lives, especially those of unborn children and their mothers. Each of us has a role. Through the power of prayer alone, or prayer combined with advocacy for women and their unborn children, we *can* affect change in the hearts, minds and laws of people.

David and Jesus were not afraid to face the obstacles that stood before them, and with understanding and belief in the power and might of God, we can ask him for the courage, strength and fortitude to do the same.

And as a Church that values life, we can ask for God’s help in showing us how we can help alleviate the difficult burdens that sometimes come with choosing life, and then act accordingly. Finally, as we do in all things, we pray for God’s intercession: that we may one day have the full, legal protection of God’s smallest lives, the unborn children.

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Thursday, January 23, 2020  
(Lec. 314)

- 1) 1 Samuel 18:6-9;  
19:1-7
- 2) Mark 3:7-12

THURSDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
USA: Saint Vincent,  
Deacon and Martyr;  
USA: Saint Marianne Cope,  
Virgin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 1504

FOCUS: Our true identity comes from our service to God.

In the first reading, Saul becomes jealous because the women of Israel, in their victory songs, attribute more slaying to David, the young shepherd boy and Saul's eventual successor, than to Saul, the king. Saul is not content with the praises they sing of him; he wants the highest praise. His intense jealousy of David leads him to plot the younger man's murder.

What Saul, and perhaps many of us, fail to realize is that our true identity comes not from popularity or from the praise of other people. And certainly not from how many people we have slayed! In fact, our identity comes ultimately from God, who created us, gives us life and provides the gifts and opportunities to succeed. When we know that we belong to God, that we are his creation, that he loves us, and that he calls us to use our gifts for others, we can each stand firm in our identity as a child of God.

We allow God to use us to help others – not for the gratitude or praise we receive, but for his greater glory. We serve our brothers and sisters in service to God, not in service to ourselves. Any praise or popularity we might gain is possibly appreciated, but unnecessary.

We see this truth demonstrated in the Gospel. Jesus, fully seen in this passage (by the unclean spirits) in his identity as Son of God, does not seek the praises of the crowd, and even shuns the testimony of the unclean spirits. But Jesus allows the Father to work through him so completely that just his touch can bring healing and peace to another. Jesus' identity as Son flows from the Father, and he places himself in perfect service to him.

Our identity flows from God as well, and is most fully and perfectly (as possible here on earth) realized when we place ourselves in service to God and one another. At the end of time, quite honestly, nothing else will matter. Nothing we accomplish, earn, gain, produce, invent or sell will mean a thing at the last judgment, unless and except it was done in service to God.

May God help us always recognize and understand this truth about ourselves, and continue to give us the grace necessary to grow ever stronger in our identity of service to him.

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Friday, January 24, 2020

(Lec. 315)

1) 1 Samuel 24:3-21

2) Mark 3:13-19

FRIDAY OF  
SECOND WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM

Saint Francis de Sales,  
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 551, 552, 765, 787, 858, 1577, 1673

FOCUS: God calls us to mercy.

The definition of mercy is “compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm.” This is the situation David finds himself in during today's first reading, when David chooses not to harm Saul. David chooses mercy. Though he cuts off a bit of Saul's mantle – proof that he could easily have harmed Saul if he wished – David soon regrets even that action. Instead, he pays Saul homage, demonstrating his loyalty to Saul, and admits what he had done.

Now it is Saul's turn to show mercy. Though he is the king and could have David killed, he admits that his own actions were unjust. He repents, and asks that the Lord reward David for his goodness. Mercy, we see, begets mercy.

All mercy, of course, originates with God. He sent his Son, Jesus, to reconcile us to himself and establish his kingdom here on earth. By appointing the Twelve Apostles and *send[ing] them forth to preach*, God ensured that all, Jews and Gentiles alike, would come to know of him.

Only through him and his grace are we both forgiven and granted mercy, and therefore able to do the same for others.

We experience this most profoundly through the sacrament of reconciliation. As we grow in the graces and virtues from this great gift, we are more and more able to be merciful to others as well. Mercy begets mercy.

With God's help, we can be like both David and Saul: aware of our failings, repentant and forgiving of others. He can show us those to whom we specifically may need to show mercy. And in doing so, we can invite them to come and experience the great mercy of God himself. So as we prepare to receive Jesus, who himself is the Fountain of Mercy, let us ask him to help us bring that mercy to the world.

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Saturday, January 25, 2020  
(Lec. 519)

**THE CONVERSION OF  
SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE  
- FEAST**

1) Acts 22:3-16

or Acts 9:1-22

2) Mark 16:15-18

Gospel related: **CCC** 161, 183, 434, 670, 699, 888, 977, 1223, 1253, 1256, 1257, 1507, 1673

FOCUS: May Saint Paul, whose feast day we celebrate, inspire us by his example.

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul. God's working through Saint Paul was evident in the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the ancient world. We honor Paul for many reasons, not the least of which are that his preaching, letters, courageous witness and confident authority helped the fledgling Christian communities grow. He is one of the most important and influential of all the saints. Many of his writings are contained in the Canon of the Bible, and have influenced the growth and development of the Church since the first century.

In today's reading from Acts, we hear Paul's own words telling us more about himself. Saint Paul, known originally to the early Christians by his Hebrew name Saul, was a Roman citizen and a Pharisee. Born in Tarsus, he lived most of his life as a Jewish leader. He himself says that he *persecuted this Way* – "the Way" referring to Christianity and the followers of Christ. He says he took many to prison. He also presided over the persecutions of the early Christians, and was present at the martyrdom of Saint Stephen. Saul worked very hard to attack the young Christian Church and her communities. This was Saul's life.

All of this was before he met Jesus and was forever changed. As we heard him describe today, he experienced a powerful vision on the road to Damascus. Because of this vision and Jesus' question to him, he changes. He converts. He transforms from one of Christianity's attackers to one of her greatest defenders. And from then on, we know him by his Greek name: Paul.

Paul traveled the world, first to Arabia then back to Damascus. He also visited Jerusalem to see the Apostle Peter, the first pope, and pay homage to him. During these travels, he preached ceaselessly, often drawing criticism and attack from those who rebuffed his message.

Paul exemplified a life dedicated to following the command Christ gives to *the Eleven* in today's Gospel. *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.*

Commissioned by God, Paul makes it his personal mission to share the good news of the message of Jesus Christ with all who are willing to listen. We have that same commission, by virtue of our own baptism. May Saint Paul inspire us by his example, and through his intercession, may we have the grace to follow it.

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**SUNDAY, JANUARY 26, 2020**

(Lec. 67)

- 1) Isaiah 8:23–9:3
  - 2) 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17
  - 3) Matthew 4:12-23 or 4:12-17
- Gospel related: CCC 878, 1720, 1989

**THIRD SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: We are freed from our burdens by Jesus Christ, the light who came into our darkness.

Zebulun and Naphtali were sons of Jacob, and the leaders of two of the 12 tribes of Israel. The lands settled by their descendants were in the most northern part of Israel. Of all the Israelites, they were the furthest from the summer sun, giving rise to Isaiah's description of the people there *who walked in darkness and in the land of gloom*.

Their darkness wasn't just a matter of geography, however. These were also the first lands to be invaded by the Assyrians, and the Israelites were oppressed by their pagan conquerors who practiced false worship of many gods. Isaiah prophesies of a time when a great light will shine upon these people, freeing them from darkness and bringing *them abundant joy and great rejoicing*. He prophesies what we know to be the coming of the Christ, who will free them from the yokes that burden them.

Matthew shows us the fulfillment of this prophecy in today's Gospel. Jesus goes to Capernaum, which is the same geographical region of which Isaiah spoke. He has come to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy, to be the great light for those who walked in darkness, and so he begins preaching the Good News: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. This message will appeal to many whom Jesus calls, such as Simon and Andrew, and James and John who follow him. Others will hate him for it – and crucify him.

The freedom found in Christ is what impels Saint Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. He is concerned about a growing lack of unity among them, in mind and purpose. So he reminds them of *the cross of Christ* – the one true sacrifice made for all, into which they are baptized – *that it might not be emptied of its meaning*. For it is not specific people or human words that give them life. It is Christ crucified who freed them from all burdens.

To be sure, there are people who still walk in darkness, and there remains division in the Church and among Christians. Yet we are freed from our burdens by Jesus Christ, the light who came into our darkness. With the gift of faith we can cast aside the nets of doubt, and through graces outpoured we can resolve to follow Christ, our light and our salvation.

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Monday, January 27, 2020  
(Lec. 317)

- 1) 2 Samuel 5:1-7, 10
- 2) Mark 3:22-30

MONDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Angela Merici,  
Virgin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 539, 548, 574, 1864

FOCUS: The kingdom and house of God will stand forever, united in love.

The scribes in today's Gospel really demonstrate their spiritual blindness. Up to this point, Jesus has been doing good things and performing miracles: healing the sick and casting out demons. Unclean spirits have even fallen at his feet, proclaiming him to be the *Son of God* (Cf., Mark 3:11). And now, the scribes accuse Jesus of doing good works through the power of Beelzebul – through Satan! In short, they accuse Jesus himself of having *an unclean spirit*.

What a ridiculous statement. To so grossly mischaracterize Jesus' good deeds, and thus so radically misconstrue and defame the goodness of God, is – quite literally – blasphemy. The very leaders of the Jewish community were committing a mortal sin in an exceedingly public manner, and yet were completely oblivious to that fact.

Jesus' response to the scribes is sharp: He tells them there is no forgiveness for such blasphemy *against the Holy Spirit*. There is no forgiveness for attributing the work of God to the work of Satan. As Jesus asked, *How can Satan drive out Satan?* The foundation for this question is that God is pure goodness, which means both that *only* good can come from God, and anything that *is* good *must* come from God. Therefore, all the good that Jesus was doing had to be of and from God. The scribes rejected this, and therefore blasphemed.

Jesus uses a parable to make this point: *If a kingdom is divided against itself, Jesus says, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.* Though the Jewish leaders did not recognize it, Jesus was the descendant of King David, the most renowned of all Jewish kings whom we read about in today's first reading. Jesus, the anointed one, or "Christ," fulfilled God's promise to David in his reign over the kingdom of the Jews, the house of Israel. And as God himself, the visible manifestation of God's pure goodness, Jesus sought not to divide but to unify his kingdom and house through love. He did this by accepting and healing the most rejected in the religious and social circles of his day.

We may think of the lesson here as a reminder to be sure we ourselves are not spiritually blinded as were the scribes: We must remember the good works of God, and that God is *love*. It is love alone – the opposite of the scribes' attempt to condemn and ostracize Jesus – that brings unity to God's kingdom and house. May we always be found on the side of love, in a kingdom and house that will stand forever, with Jesus Christ as King.

**Saint Angela Merici (1474-1540)** – Angela Merici founded the Company of St. Ursula in 1535 in Italy. It was the first group of lay women dedicated to educating girls. The Order of Ursulines arose from this, which was an order of religious women who established sites for learning and worship throughout the world. She was canonized in 1807.

Tuesday, January 28, 2020  
(Lec. 318)

- 1) 2 Samuel 6:12b-15  
17-19
- 2) Mark 3:31-35

Gospel related: **CCC** 500

TUESDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Thomas Aquinas,  
Priest and Doctor of the Church)

FOCUS: God's will is for our sanctification.

When Jesus' mother and brothers come looking for him in today's Gospel, Jesus asks, *Who are my mother and my brothers?* He answers his own question, looking at those gathered around him and saying, *Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.*

The word "whoever" is important. God no longer dwells only in an ark in the City of David. God now dwells among us as one of us. By taking on human flesh, God has extended the invitation to be part of God's family beyond the people of Israel. It is also important to notice that Jesus looks to those gathered around him as his *mother and brothers*. This invitation to be his brothers and sisters and mother is not just for the disciples – the chosen few – but for everyone who hears his Word. The only requirement is to do God's will.

Of course, doing God's will is a prescription that is simple, but not easy. The concept of God's will appears only one other place in Mark's Gospel – in Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: *not what I will, but what you will* (Mark 14:36). Before entering into his passion and death, Jesus prays that the Father's will be done.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, whose Memorial we celebrate today, says this about God's will: "The Apostle says (1 Thessalonians 4:3): 'This is the will of God, your sanctification'" (*Summa Theologica*, Pt. 1, Q. 19, Art. 2). This means that God desires nothing for us other than our good; he wills our good, and directs all things toward that end. Therefore, following God's will is not about constraining ourselves and missing out on some other good, but about choosing the greatest good – choosing God above all things.

That is what makes us family. That is what brings us together, this conjoined movement toward the greatest good that both builds the kingdom of God here on earth, and leads us to its fullness in heaven. Christ became one of us – God incarnated himself – in order to show us beyond any shadow of a doubt that he desired our sanctification and eternal union with him. Simple, not easy, but eminently possible.

May we, through the intercession of Saint Thomas Aquinas, have the grace to recognize and follow God's will for us.

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Wednesday, January 29, 2020

(Lec. 319)

1) 2 Samuel 7:4-17

2) Mark 4:1-20

Gospel related: **CCC** 546, 2707

WEDNESDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God rejoices when our lives bear fruit.

Jesus' parables today help us understand how much the human soul needs tending. In the parable of the sower and the seeds, we recognize that not all seeds that are planted will bear fruit. Jesus even pointed out to the disciples the things that can prevent someone from "bearing fruit" for the kingdom of God: To respond to and grow in the Word, he or she has to first be ready. The soil of the soul has to be deep, free from weeds, and well-fed in order for the Word to sink in. Our lives will begin to reflect the word of God only when our souls have first been tended to.

Tending to our souls is not always easy or pleasant work. Sometimes, disappointment and bitterness make us hard on the surface. We don't want to let anyone or anything in past that surface. Sometimes, there are "weeds" of distraction that surround us. And at other times, life's difficulties make us forget to even notice the quiet workings of the soul.

Our presence here, nourishing our souls with sacramental grace, helps us in our growth. The Word can till the soil and the Eucharist feed and transform it. The sacrament of reconciliation clears away the weeds. And all graces are God's way of caring for our souls, of making them ready to receive his Word and love. We simply need to invite God to work deep within to prepare us.

Just like a gardener rejoices over the first bloom on a rose bush, God rejoices when we bear fruit. We may not always be aware of it, but God knows and sees the good work in our lives. Like a gardener, God notices the subtle changes and continually works to help us bloom.

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Thursday, January 30, 2020  
(Lec. 320)

- 1) 2 Samuel 7:18-19,  
24-29
- 2) Mark 4:21-25

THURSDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus, the Good Teacher, teaches us all we need to know to live in his love.

The best teachers know how to instill confidence in their students to empower them. One way of doing this is to ask simple questions that the students can answer correctly. Getting this first question right can then position the student to take on more challenging material.

Jesus, ever the wise teacher, asks his disciples a simple question before presenting them with some more challenging material. *Is a lamp brought in to be placed under a bushel basket or under a bed, and not to be placed on a lampstand?* Of course not! The disciples know that much.

But then Jesus gives them a more perplexing and mysterious notion to ponder: *For there is nothing hidden except to be made visible; nothing is secret except to come to light.* What exactly could he mean?

In his commentary on this passage, Blessed Theophylact of Ochrid [c 1050-1107] observed: "What can be more hidden than God, nevertheless he himself is manifested in the flesh." God, who is unknowable mystery, has become a human person. Even as Jesus gives his disciples this wisdom that they do not understand, he himself is the truth that they long for, but can't understand; he is the light that is hidden from them now, but has come so as to shine for them and for all of us.

As followers of Jesus, the Good Teacher, we, too, have much to learn. Like the disciples, we likely understand some of what Jesus communicates to us, but there is much that is beyond us. We are in good company with the disciples who heard, but did not understand. We are in the best company with the Lord, who does not ask us to understand him, but rather to be faithful to him. When we stay with him in our hearts, in our prayers and in the way we live our lives, he can and will continue to teach us all we need to know of him and the mysteries of God. May the Lord give us grace to remain with him always, and to receive him as the truth and the light that he is.

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Friday, January 31, 2020  
(Lec. 321)

- 1) 2 Samuel 11:1-4a,  
5-10a, 13-17
- 2) Mark 4:26-34

FRIDAY OF  
THIRD WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint John Bosco,  
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC 546**

FOCUS: The life of Saint John Bosco models for us a way to live out the kingdom of God on earth.

Jesus used parables to teach, and the mustard seed from the parable we hear today in Mark's Gospel is a simple, but powerful visual simile for understanding the kingdom of God. We can all picture a tiny mustard seed and the large shrub into which it grows, with its yellow flowers reaching for the sun. We know that Jesus is at the core of its growth, but where do we fit in? As members of the kingdom of God, could we be one of the tiny branches, or perhaps a petal on one of the flowers?

Today is the memorial of Saint John Bosco, whose life definitely places him firmly among the branches of that mustard plant. He was not born famous. He did not descend from a royal family, or become a world-renowned celebrity. In fact, he was born to a poor family in 1815 in Italy and was raised with his siblings by a single mother. He left home at the age of 12 to seek his destiny. He had a hunger for learning and was blessed to meet a priest who helped him feed this hunger.

John felt called to the priesthood, and was ordained. As he began his ministry, he came in contact with many orphans who lived on the streets or even in the prisons. Instead of seeing them as delinquent, he believed in them. He did not see troubled youth; he saw young people with potential. The education he treasured in his own life was made available to them. He became a teacher of youth. Through his efforts, hundreds of boys were removed from a life on the streets and provided for. He fostered many calls to the priesthood and worked with his mother to provide for orphan girls as well.

His work did not go unnoticed. Many were drawn to him and joined him in his efforts. Eventually, he founded an order of priests known as the Salesian Society. Together, they opened several schools to educate the poor. Even today, they operate shelters for the homeless or at-risk youth around the world.

So, we go back to the earlier question of, "How are we a part of that mustard plant?" How are we a part of the kingdom of God? If we look to the example of John Bosco, we might better see our own potential. He came from very humble beginnings, and yet truly made a difference in the world. What can we do? Maybe we are not all teachers, but we all have gifts to share. Go out and make a difference in someone's life. Help grow and spread the Kingdom.

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