

JULY

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WEDDING HOMILY

- 1) Genesis 1:26-28, 31a
- 2) Romans 15:1b-3a, 5-7, 13
- 3) John 2:1-11

FOCUS: The celebration of marriage is also a celebration of the goodness of God and the glory of God's creation.

Today we celebrate N. and N. We celebrate their love story. We celebrate their lives coming together as one. We celebrate their union sealed in this sacrament. It is their special day! We celebrate them, but not just them. Today we celebrate all of creation, because the celebration of marriage is also a celebration of the goodness of God and the glory of God's creation.

Our wedding readings connect the celebration of marriage with the celebration of God's creation. The first reading is from the creation story in Genesis. After creating the heavens and the earth, water and land, plants and animals, God creates humans – male and female – in his image. They are the crowning glory of his creation. God blesses them and tells them to flourish and do well, to fill the earth and make it their home. And then God looks at everything he made and he finds it very good.

Just as God creates the first couple, brings them together, and blesses them, so, too, he created N. and N. He brought them together, and blesses them today in this celebration of marriage. God looks at them and finds them very good, and tells them to flourish and do well, to make their home in this world. Together in love as man and woman, they represent the glory of God's creation. When we see them, we see that God and all of God's creation is very good. Celebrating them, we celebrate God's goodness and glorious creation.

In the Gospel, God's goodness and glory are manifest at the wedding celebration at Cana. Jesus enacts his first public miracle using basic goods of God's creation: Water and wine. Jesus miraculously creates enough wine – *good* wine – for the wedding festivities to continue. With this miracle, Jesus affirms and encourages the celebration of God's gifts of life and love, marriage and family, friends and feasting. Jesus connects the celebration of marriage with the celebration of the goodness of God and of creation.

Even after today – after even the good wine runs out – continue to celebrate this marriage by celebrating creation. Celebrate the goodness of God revealed in each other, for we are created in God's image. Celebrate the glory of this world in which we make our home, for God created us to flourish and fill this world together. Celebrate in harmony and build one another up, for God created us for each other.

N. and N.: We celebrate the goodness of God and the glory of God's creation as we celebrate your marriage today. May God fill you with all joy and peace and may you abound in hope that – just as the good wine came later at Cana – the best is yet to be. May God continue to look upon what he has created and joined together, and find it very good.

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FUNERAL HOMILY

- 1) Lamentations 3:17-26
- 2) 2 Corinthians 4:14—5:1
- 3) Luke 23:44-46, 50, 52-53; 24:1-6a
or Luke 23:44-46, 50, 52-53

FOCUS: We are meant for eternal life with God.

When one experiences a severe storm, the clouds are dark and grey, the wind is raging, the rain is relentless, and the thunder and lightning are frightening. It is ominous, but we know that it will eventually move off and the sun will come out again. It is storming, but it's temporary – we know what's coming next.

Similarly, in today's first reading we meet the author of Lamentations, who is at a very low point – his soul is deprived of peace and his future seems lost. Yet he has reason to hope because *the favors of the Lord are not exhausted and his mercies are not spent*.

Likewise, the Second Letter to the Corinthians reminds us to *look not to what is seen, but what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal*. Why did Paul have such hope? Because he knew that the cross of Christ had saved them. Despite the suffering in every Christian's life, despite the reality and experience of death all around them, Paul preached the triumph of the cross. He knew what was coming next – what follows this life.

We gather here today in sorrow. Someone we love has died. N. can no longer hold our hand, tell us good night, or laugh at a joke. We will miss him [her]. We still cry, it still hurts, but we know what follows this life, and that is eternal life in Christ.

We know this because Jesus has told us. We also know the rest of the story. In today's Gospel, we read of the death of Jesus. We meet Joseph of Arimathea who takes down his body, wraps it in linen, and lays it in a rock-hewn tomb. We encounter the women who come to anoint the body, but instead find the rock rolled away and an empty tomb. Jesus has been raised from the dead and, in so doing, won for all of us a victory over death!

Even before Calvary, Jesus told his disciples that he is *the resurrection and the life* (John 11:25). We, too, are his disciples and we have been baptized into his death *and* into his resurrection. Experience has taught us that this earthly life is temporary. Our faith assures us that death is temporary. N. has passed from this earthly life to eternal life. We pray that he/she will soon see God face to face.

**YEAR A
WEEKDAYS II**

Wednesday, July 1, 2020
(Lec. 379)

- 1) Amos 5:14-15, 21-24
- 2) Matthew 8:28-34

WEDNESDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(USA: Opt. Mem.
Saint Junipero Serra,
Priest)

FOCUS: Jesus Christ has power over all evil.

Today's Gospel shows the tremendous power Christ has over evil. His very presence is enough to disturb evil: He simply enters the territory of the Gadarenes and the demoniacs cry out to him, saying, *What have you to do with us, Son of God?* Then, at the demons' request, Jesus commands them to enter the swine, which then rush down the bank to the sea and drown.

We hear no more about the men in whom the demons resided. We know only that Christ commanded the demons to leave them. But we do know that the same authority and power Jesus exercised for them, he can exercise for us. Where might sin – the devil, our own demons – be in our hearts and lives?

Wherever and whatever it is, Jesus has power over it. He has power over all of it. We can call upon him to come to our aid and drive out that darkness, and with God's grace we will have the courage to allow Jesus to use his power.

The townspeople didn't do that. They begged Jesus to leave their community. Perhaps they were afraid. They had seen a whole herd of swine die – surely, that was a huge loss. But consider what they didn't acknowledge: Two demoniacs, cured. Two people released from the control of demons and sin and evil. Two people free to do good, to follow God.

One wonders what else Jesus might have done had they not driven him away from the town, and who else he might have helped.

Perhaps the lesson we can take from today's Gospel is simply this: The Lord is lord of all. He has power over all evil, but we must not be afraid for him to demonstrate that power. If we welcome him, Jesus can and will drive out all darkness. Only then will we be truly free.

Saint Junipero Serra (1713-1784) Junipero Serra was a Franciscan missionary responsible for spreading Christianity throughout California when the West Coast was still mission territory. He founded or helped establish 21 missions, including San Diego and San Francisco. Junipero chose to walk from mission to mission, even though he had a walking disability and suffered from asthma. By the time his life's work was finished, he had traveled approximately 5,500 miles on foot.

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Thursday, July 2, 2020
(Lec. 380)

- 1) Amos 7:10-17
- 2) Matthew 9:1-8

THURSDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We have faith that Christ is who he says he is.

Jesus' act of forgiving the paralytic's sins earns him, not surprisingly, the accusation of blasphemy from some of the scribes. At the same time, his healing of the paralytic's physical ailment results in the crowds *being struck with awe and [glorifying] God who had given such authority to men.*

These two very different reactions are quite telling. The cultural assumptions at the time saw a direct causal connection between sin and disease. Someone who was sick, disabled, or diseased must have been so due to sin – either theirs, or their parents, or even that of prior generations.

Thus, from the point of view of the scribes – the educated, elite religious leaders – Jesus was a man unjustifiably claiming the authority of God. From the point of view of the crowds, there was something happening that caused them to be in awe, to be afraid (as many translations say), yet also gave them cause to rejoice and give glory to God.

We might consider this contrast in reactions, in that particular cultural milieu, as a way of demonstrating the power contained within Jesus' revelation. As Jesus more and more revealed who he was, some became more blind in their sin, while others began to see the light of the Kingdom breaking through.

We are witnesses to the *fullness* of Christ's revelation – and here we are, right now, gathered in faith in the light of the Kingdom and giving glory to God in our worship. But that doesn't mean we are immune to, at times, having the same type of reaction the scribes did. Out of either our own human frailty or sin, we presume that Jesus could not possibly do what he says he can do: Love us, forgive us, redeem us, and reconcile us to the Father.

When those faulty presumptions trip us up, Jesus is there to catch us. In prayer, through participation in the sacraments – particularly the sacrament of reconciliation – and by our cooperation with God's grace, we, too, can hear Christ say, *Courage, child, your sins are forgiven.* Every time. For we have faith that Christ is who he says he is.

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Friday, July 3, 2020

(Lec. 593)

1) Ephesians 2:19-22

2) John 20:24-29

Gospel related: CCC 448, 644, 645, 659 CSDC 491

**SAINT THOMAS,
APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: We are called to bring the good news of the risen Lord to others.

A child tells a tall tale to a parent as to how the vase in the living room was broken and receives the response: "I don't believe you." A driver tells the officer: "I know I couldn't have been speeding, it must have been the car next to me your radar picked up." The officer responds while handing the driver a ticket: "I don't believe you." The Apostles tell Thomas in today's Gospel: "Jesus isn't really dead" and Thomas responds: "I don't believe you."

Skepticism is not necessarily a bad thing. The parent and police officer had what we might call healthy skepticism. As for Thomas, which one of us would have responded differently? Thomas was deeply in grief over the death of Jesus. His skepticism was understandable.

Yet a week later when Jesus once again appears to the Apostles, Thomas professes a strong statement of faith, *My Lord and my God*. The presence of Jesus Christ – the *power* of his presence – helped Thomas navigate from unbelief, to belief.

If there were a patron saint for doubters, Thomas would be the logical candidate. In reality, he is the patron saint for every last one of us – for we all have doubts. We have doubts about a relationship, about things in our world, and yes, we even doubt our faith in our weaker moments.

With a restored faith, Thomas went on to preach the good news about the risen Lord, and the Church celebrates him with a feast today. He preached in Asia, went outside the borders of the Roman Empire, and tradition holds that he took the Gospel to India. Saint Gregory the Great, bishop and Doctor of the Church, once preached this about Thomas:

"Dearly beloved ... do you really believe that it was by chance that this chosen disciple was absent, then came and heard, heard and doubted, doubted and touched, touched and believed? It was not by chance but in God's providence.

... Paul said: 'Faith is the guarantee of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.' It is clear, then, that faith is the proof of what cannot be seen. What is seen gives knowledge, not faith ... When Thomas saw and touched, why was he told – You have believed because you have seen me? Because what he saw and what he believed were different things. God cannot be seen by mortal man. Thomas saw a human being, whom he acknowledged to be God and said: 'My Lord and my God.' Seeing, he believed, looking at one who was true man, he cried out that this was God, the God he could not see" (excerpt from homily 26).

Like Thomas, it is with faith that we push through our doubts. Like Thomas, we, too, cry out, *My Lord and my God!* And, as with Thomas, the presence of Christ in our midst and in our very selves allows us to conquer fear and doubt, and to boldly proclaim our belief in him.

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Saturday, July 4, 2020

(Lec. 382)

1) Amos 9:11-15

2) Matthew 9:14-17

SATURDAY OF

13TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Independence Day
in United States of America;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Note: for Independence Day, any readings from the *Lectionary for Ritual Masses* (vol. IV), the Mass "For the Country or a City," Nos. 882-886, or "For Peace and Justice," nos. 887-891

FOCUS: The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

In the first reading, Amos speaks of how God will restore Israel to a land of freedom and joy after it has been conquered by its enemies. God will *raise up the fallen hut of David; ... raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old.*

This prophecy of Amos would have been well known, and awaited, by the Jewish people in Jesus' time. And yet, for all their knowledge and waiting, the people did not see its fulfillment in the person of Jesus. Even John's disciples did not understand what they were witnessing and experiencing. And so they ask: *Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?*

Jesus' answer, *Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?* is a signal to John's disciples that he is the one for whom the Jewish people have been waiting, and it is a time of rejoicing! Therefore, the mournful spirit of fasting in strict obedience to the law is not only not necessary, it has been overcome by events: The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

But even as God will raise up Jesus, and therefore *the fallen hut of David*, there will be times for fasting. For Jesus' disciples, it will be when the authorities take Jesus away from them. For us, it is when our sin or failure to obey his commandments takes us away from Jesus. This is what we do as a Church during Lent, but it is a spiritual practice centered in love, not law, that any one of us can do at any time.

Like the Israelites of Amos' time, our fasting and repentance help us reconcile any brokenness in our relationships – with God and with others. So as we celebrate the bridegroom in the Eucharist, we ask for the grace to help us see and acknowledge that which needs repair – and to seek God's help to wall up breaches, raise up ruins, and restore our spiritual lives.

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SUNDAY, JULY 5, 2020

(Lec. 100)

- 1) Zechariah 9:9-10
- 2) Romans 8:9, 11-13
- 3) Matthew 11:25-30

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 153, 240, 443, 459, 473, 544, 1615, 1658, 2603, 2701, 2779, 2785

**14TH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: It is in Christ that we find perfect freedom and the fullness of hope.

The image of a yoke is often lost on us in our modern culture: It's that wooden crosspiece that harnesses oxen and other beasts of burden and keeps them together as they plough a field or haul goods. In today's Gospel, it is the central image Jesus uses to invite us into union not just with him, but with the Father and thus with the Holy Spirit.

No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him. These words from Jesus indicate two things. First, only in Jesus do we find the fullness of all revelation of God. As the *catechism* states: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.' Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father's one, perfect and unsurpassable Word. In him he has said everything; there will be no other word than this one" (CCC 65).

Second, Christ chooses to reveal the Father to us, and to mediate that experience and relationship by shining a light for our feet to follow, and by walking beside us in our journey. Therefore, his instruction to all of us who are burdened and who labor – to come to him, and to take his yoke upon ourselves – is meant to alert us to our being literally bound to him, coupled to him, so that he may help us pull and plough our way through the fields we walk. We can rest when we allow him to manage that yoke and do the heavy work.

This is not another way of him saying, "take up our cross and follow him." While it is true that we must do that, in this case the message is that when we yoke ourselves to Christ – in baptism and through our life of faith and in the sacraments – grace abounds and there is more room for Christ to work in our lives; there is more room for Christ to lead the way and fewer opportunities for us to stumble over rocks in our path.

Jesus does not say we will no longer have struggles, but that we will find recourse in him. His strength will be our strength, infusing us with trust and helping us place all our difficulties before him. And when we commit ourselves to him, we become one with him, with the Father whom he has revealed to us, and with the Holy Spirit who gives us the gift of faith, marked by the sign of the cross by which Christ claims us as his own.

We can look about this world and know that there are many who continue to walk alone. Bereft of hope, they mistakenly believe that to take Christ's yoke upon them means that they are somehow limiting their freedom. But it is just the opposite. Christ tells us his *yoke is easy* and his *burden light*. It is in him, and the life of faith bound up with him, that we find perfect freedom and the fullness of hope.

This is God's gracious will – that we may one day know the freedom of trusting him completely and return to him in his everlasting glory. In Jesus, he has given us the way, and this way is freely and humbly given.

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Monday, July 6, 2020

(Lec. 383)

1) Hosea 2:16, 17b-18, 21-22

2) Matthew 9:18-26

MONDAY OF

14TH WEEK

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Maria Goretti,
Virgin and Martyr)

FOCUS: In faith we are drawn to answer the One who has called us first; in love and mercy, Christ responds.

Our first reading comes to us from the prophet Hosea. He writes during a time when the people of God have fractured into two kingdoms: Israel and Judah. They wrestle with revolutions and political instability, and have started to worship false gods. They have failed to be faithful to the Lord, and have forsaken their covenant with him.

Hosea portrays Israel as an unfaithful spouse. But rather than condemn her, he offers words of hope. God is faithful to Israel and their covenant. He will lead Israel into the wilderness – that place where Israel will once again come to love God alone, to rely on God alone. Hosea's consolation to Israel, and to us, is that no matter how we have turned away from God, he seeks to be reconciled to us, welcoming us back in faithfulness. He will *espouse [us] to [him] forever: ... in right and in justice, in love and in mercy.* We just need to *accept* his invitation.

And accepting does not have to be hard, though as we see in today's Gospel, it requires some humility and vulnerability. But in Jesus' waking of the little girl from sleep, and his healing of the hemorrhaging woman, we are shown the good fruit of union with God. In faith, we are drawn to answer the one who has called us first; who has espoused us, and in whom we believe. In love and mercy, Christ responds.

If we can only get out of our own way! If we can manage to push aside anything that keeps us from kneeling before the Lord in our need or reaching out to him in courage and faith, then we, too, will share in the inheritance God provided for us, and hear the Lord say, *your faith has saved you.*

As we come to the Eucharistic table, we re-commit ourselves to faith only in the One who gives his body and blood for us. And we pray for those who have turned away from God, that one day, they may be reconciled to him and join us at the altar of the Lord.

Saint Maria Goretti (1890-1902) - Maria Goretti of Italy is the patron saint of youth and young girls, and of all rape victims and abused children because she chose martyrdom over submitting to sexual harassment and rape. Her forgiveness of the attacker who stabbed her to death led to his repentance and eventual life as a monk after his release from prison. She was canonized by Pope Pius XII in 1950.

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Tuesday, July 7, 2020

(Lec. 384)

1) Hosea 8:4-7, 11-13

2) Matthew 9:32-38

Gospel related: **CCC** 2611 **CSDC** 259

TUESDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus prayed for us, he died for us, he intercedes for us.

In today's Gospel, we hear that as Jesus travels through the towns, healing and preaching, he is moved with pity *at the sight of the crowds*. He pities them because *they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd*.

It would be a fair wager to bet that each one of us, at some point in our lives – and maybe especially in these last months – has felt *troubled and abandoned*. Regardless of who or what has caused that feeling, we can resonate with the metaphor of the sheep missing their shepherd. And maybe our own experience includes a few wolves who are threatening, or an untrained and overexcited sheepdog puppy herding us in every direction, just to make life interesting.

Jesus' pity moves him immediately to prayer as a source of relief. He tells his disciples to pray: *Ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest*, he says. This response, a combination of compassion and the desire to serve, is the response that should be our model, the one we should strive to imitate. For this is Christ's mission field, and all who are marked with the sign of his cross in baptism share in his priestly, prophetic, and kingly ministry.

At the very least, this means praying for one another: Praying that God will provide laborers for the harvest, and assistance for one another; and praying that we will have the grace to go as laborers where we are sent, when we ourselves might be an answer to someone else's prayer.

For we are no longer sheep without a shepherd; we are not, as the children of Israel were, troubled and abandoned. But when we *feel* like we are, and when circumstances make it difficult for us to believe otherwise, we remember the compassion and service of Jesus. He prayed for us, he died for us, he intercedes for us.

May the grace of this sacrament transform our hearts so that our labor might always imitate the example he set before us.

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Wednesday, July 8, 2020

(Lec. 385)

1) Hosea 10:1-3, 7-8, 12

2) Matthew 10:1-7

Gospel related: CCC 543

WEDNESDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: From the Twelve, the Gospel spread to every nation on earth.

In today's Gospel from Matthew, *Jesus summoned his Twelve disciples*, an action that should alert us to a parallel to the twelve tribes of Israel. This calling and revealing the names of the Twelve is a way of signifying that Jesus' kingdom is the "new Israel." It is the beginning of the restoration of Israel – an Old Testament theme that the prophets returned to again and again.

But it is early in the new Israel. Jesus is very specific in his direction to the Apostles today. They were not *to go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town*. Instead, they were to go to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel* and proclaim that the *Kingdom of heaven is at hand*. This was not because God's redemption was not offered to all, but because it was necessary to announce Christ's coming first to the Jews.

Saint Jerome says, "This passage is not contrary to the command given later: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The former command was given before the resurrection and the latter after the resurrection" (Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*).

This was part of the covenant God had made with Abraham almost 2000 years earlier: They (the Israelites) would be his people, and he would be their God. For all that time, through the history of the Hebrew people and their emancipation, rebellion, exile, and return to Jerusalem, God had promised to deliver them. He had promised a Messiah. In Jesus, that promise was fulfilled.

In today's Gospel, Jesus has selected the Twelve who will be the first to extend his mission and carry out deeds in his name. From those Twelve the Gospel spread to every nation on this earth. It is good to hear this story every once in a while. It helps remind us of our graced and humble beginnings as Christians. Graced, because God chose to save us; and humble, because he became like us so that we could be like him.

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Thursday, July 9, 2020
(Lec. 386)
1) Hosea 11:1-4, 8e-9
2) Matthew 10:7-15

THURSDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Augustine Zhao Rong,
Priest,
and Companions,
Martyrs)

Gospel related: **CCC** 543, 1509, 2121, 2122, 2443 **CSDC** 184

FOCUS: We are recipients of God's priceless generosity and mercy.

Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. These words of Jesus, in the midst of a kind of "deployment checklist" for the Apostles as they prepare for their mission, stand out for a couple of reasons.

First, they prescribe the interior, personal disposition the Apostles must have. A spiritual mindset, if you will, rather than an exterior item they must carry (or not), or action they must (or must not) take. Second, it connects the Apostles' past with their future in a way that no other verse in this passage does.

Jesus is sending out his disciples to minister and to perform miraculous works of physical and spiritual healing. For this he sends them with essentially nothing physical. Neither food, nor extra jackets; no money, no walking stick. Their reliance will be on God. Therefore, having the proper interior, spiritual mindset will be essential.

They will also be performing miracles and healing, and proclaiming the Kingdom, *in Jesus' name* – not their own. All that they are, all that they have, and all that they have received in their call to follow Christ is through God's pure gift. Therefore, everything they do must also be freely given.

Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.

We might think of this as a kind of "motto" for the Apostles' mission, and for our own lives. It can center us; remind us of who we are – *whose* we are – and where we are going. For we, too, are reliant on God for everything – whether we acknowledge it or not. We, too, are recipients of God's priceless generosity and mercy. And we, too, have the opportunity to share them in a world desperate for both.

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Friday, July 10, 2020

(Lec. 387)

1) Hosea 14:2-10

2) Matthew 10:16-23

Gospel related: CCC 161, 728, 764, 1821

FRIDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *O Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.*

Moses was worried that he would not be able to speak to the people, because he had a speech impediment. So God said he would *assist [him] in speaking* and teach [him] what ... to say* (Exodus 4:12). The prophet Jeremiah resisted his call by pleading with God, claiming that he did *not know how to speak*, for he was *too young*. The Lord answered that wherever he sent Jeremiah, he would help him speak (Jeremiah 1:6-9).

While neither of those incidents were present in the Scriptures we heard today, we can reasonably presume that knowledge of them was present in the minds of the disciples to whom Jesus is speaking in today's Gospel. *When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say*, Jesus tells them. *You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*

From the beginning of his covenant with us, God has not left us to our own, meager devices. Jesus' words are a reminder of that to his disciples, and a reassuring promise that when they are acting in true faith as witnesses to the Gospel, God will provide what they need.

In addition, and perhaps more importantly, these words remind *us* that it's not about us, it's about God working in the world. Yes, we are commanded to go forth and proclaim the Good News – to preach the Gospel to all nations. And yes, it is vitally important that when we speak, we do so in truth and with love. But it is also important to get out of God's way and let him work through us! To allow *the Spirit of [our Father]* to come forth from our mouths.

O Lord, open my lips, the psalmist cries out today, *and my mouth shall proclaim your praise*. See? With this prayer, the Lord has already made good on his promise of giving us what to say.

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Saturday, July 11, 2020

(Lec. 388)

1) Isaiah 6:1-8

2) Matthew 10:24-33

SATURDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Benedict,
Abbot)

Gospel related: **CCC** 14, 305, 363, 765, 1034, 1816, 2145

FOCUS: *Here I am ... send me!*

Jesus tells his disciples in today's Gospel to not be afraid, He promises that the Father knows and cares for even the sparrow. He reminds us that we are worth more than many sparrows, and that even the hairs on our heads are counted and known by the God who made us and cares for us. This is great news, it is reason for great hope. Our hope, though, is not in some promise of worldly comfort. Rather, the kind of hope we are called to is, in fact, reason to leave behind the comfort and ease sought so often in the world in order to know this love of the Father better and better.

Saint Benedict is an example of just this. As a young man with much promise in his studies and the potential to live a comfortable noble life in Rome, Benedict chose to leave it all behind. Retreating to the mountains near Subiaco, Italy, Benedict entered into a quiet life of hidden obscurity and radical simplicity. Paradoxically, this choice to leave behind the pursuit of any worldly fame would eventually mean that Benedict would prayerfully craft his now famous "rule," and come to establish 12 separate monasteries. Benedict's rule offers a plan of life for those seeking to devote their whole lives to prayer and work in the Lord's service. It is the foundation of the Order of Saint Benedict, which today claims thousands of members in hundreds of monasteries throughout the world.

Life in those monasteries is not easy, but it is very good. Benedict's life was not easy, but it was very good. This is the life that Jesus invites you and me to as well. It may not be a life of cloistered simplicity in a monastery (although some are still called to that), but it is nonetheless a call to radical dependence on him no matter what state of life we find ourselves in. Like the prophet Isaiah in the first reading, then, let us pray for the courage to answer the voice of the Lord when he calls, saying, *Here I am ... send me!*

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SUNDAY, JULY 12, 2020

(Lec. 103)

1) Isaiah 55:10-11

2) Romans 8:18-23

3) Matthew 13:1-23 or 13:1-9

Gospel related: **CCC** 29, 546, 787, 1724 **CSDC** 325

**15TH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: All things come from God, belong to him, and should be used to give him glory, honor, and praise.

No matter how many advances modern technology affords to farmers, they face the same challenges and obstacles experienced by their ancient counterparts, not the least of which is the weather, something no one can accurately predict or control.

Isaiah compares the farmer's efforts to yield a bountiful harvest with that of the preacher and prophet attempting to sow the seeds of faith in the hearts of believers. God promises rain to moisten the ground, making it fertile and fruitful. As he gives us bread to satisfy our physical hunger, we are also given the living Word to answer our spiritual hungers.

The Apostle Paul described the process of cultivating growth in the faith to the groaning experienced by women in labor. We long to be set free from slavery to sin. In Christ, humanity has received salvation for the soul and the promise of the resurrection of the body. Paul, like the long-suffering farmer, willingly endured all kinds of suffering in order to plant the seeds of faith in the early Christian communities, giving them the promise of freedom and new life.

In his parables, Jesus often spoke in agricultural terms, making himself easily understood, as most people in his time had to live off the land. Like the farmer's seed, our faith must be nurtured and fed, protected and cared for.

And, just as the farmer separates the wheat from the chaff, and prunes his larger plants for a more bountiful harvest, we, too, must learn to separate the good from the bad in our own lives. We submit ourselves to the pruning, purging, and purifying of our sins so that we also may experience the glory of God in this life and in the next.

The seeds of our faith must be so deeply rooted in Christ and his Church that nothing can cause them to waste or wither – not the temptation to do wrong, not wealth or power, not pride or prejudice.

The farmer understands better than most that all things come from God, belong to him, and should be used to give him glory, honor, and praise. That is why the farmer always offered up the first fruits of the harvest as a sacrifice in thanks to God. When the Word takes root in our lives and our faith grows, we can offer ourselves back to the One who first gave all to us. We do so in acts of love for him and for each other. Just as Christ did for us.

* * *

Monday, July 13, 2020

(Lec. 389)

1) Isaiah 1:10-17

2) Matthew 10:34–11:1

MONDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Henry)

Gospel related: **CCC** 858, 1506, 2232 **CSDC** 193

FOCUS: God's heart is for the orphan and widow.

Throughout both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, one finds the terms “orphan” and widow” used often, such as in today’s first reading. And while there were indeed orphans and widows in need of great care, this phrasing also alerts us to the larger Gospel message to care for the most vulnerable people in society: Those who have been neglected, the poor, the disabled, those who are sick or imprisoned, and those who have been ostracized from society or deemed less valuable or human than others. Today’s readings remind us that it is precisely these outcasts for whom God’s heart overflows.

Make justice your aim, Isaiah says. Redress the wronged, hear the orphan’s plea, defend the widow.

As Isaiah exhorted the Israelites, so Jesus is commanding his disciples: To be worthy of following him, each one must take up his own cross. Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel might easily confuse us. Why does the Prince of Peace proclaim that he has come not to bring peace but the sword? He speaks of setting family members against one another, carrying one’s cross, and losing one’s life for the sake of the Gospel. Yet ultimately, Jesus concludes his teaching with a very practical instruction: *Whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple – amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward.*

In a Gospel passage that uses such stark imagery of division, these last words remind us of Jesus’ true nature and mission, which was to bring healing and salvation to a broken world. Isaiah recounts the Lord’s utter dissatisfaction with the Israelites’ pious attempts at religion and sacrifice, while they neglected the most fundamental mission of God. It’s possible that Jesus, too, was dissatisfied by what he saw as attempts at pious religion. He certainly was frustrated by the religious elites of his day.

To such pious, but unloving behavior, Jesus clearly brought the sword. To the vulnerable and outcasts – the orphans and widows, the wronged and sinners – Jesus brought open arms and a cup of water. We can be thankful that we have the opportunity to hear these exhortations and commands! For if that sword of righteousness is pointing right at us, by God’s grace we may repent and cease doing evil; we can put away our misdeeds and learn to do good.

God himself looks out for us in *our* vulnerability. With his help, and in faith, let us do so for each other.

Tuesday, July 14, 2020

(Lec. 390)

1) Isaiah 7:1-9

2) Matthew 11:20-24

TUESDAY OF

15TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(USA: OBL MEM

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha,
Virgin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 678

FOCUS: Take courage and trust in the Lord's promises.

We often think of prophets as fiery preachers calling God's people to task. In today's first reading, Isaiah conveys a message of comfort to God's chosen people

When they hear that their enemies have joined forces against them, *the heart of the king and the heart of the people trembled, as the trees of the forest tremble in the wind*. We can picture the swaying trees and the shivering leaves. This fear strikes deeper than worry or anxiety. The king and the people are afraid for their lives. And yet, the Lord sends Isaiah to tell the king to remain calm and have courage. He assures the king that his enemies will not destroy him, but will themselves be destroyed, eventually. Today's reading concludes: *Unless your faith is firm, you shall not be firm!*

In today's Gospel, in the towns where Jesus had done *most of his mighty deeds* – Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum – their faith was most decidedly *not* firm. Jesus reproaches these towns for their lack of repentance. Even though they have witnessed all that he had done, they did not have faith. And even though Jesus' presence among them was the literal embodiment of God's promise – the same promise that Isaiah conveyed – the people failed to believe in him.

Jesus is still present in the world today, especially in the Eucharist. And we are here because we *do* believe in him. The Church is also blessed to have the example of the saints. Today is the feast of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, a Native American who lost her parents and brother at a young age. In spite of derision by her surviving family and members of her village, she continued to practice her Catholic faith, eventually choosing to walk nearly 200 miles to live in a Christian community. Her courage conquered fear and anxieties, and she stood firm.

We who know Jesus can also take courage in his promises. For even when we, like the townspeople, fail to see God's mighty deeds, God's gracious mercy is there when we repent. With his help, we, too, shall stand firm in our faith.

* * *

Wednesday, July 15, 2020

(Lec. 391)

1) Isaiah 10:5-7, 13b-16

2) Matthew 11:25-27

WEDNESDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Bonaventure,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 153, 240, 443, 473, 544, 2603, 2701, 2779, 2785

FOCUS: May God use us for his glory.

It's human nature to believe we're the ones in charge of our lives, especially when it comes to taking credit for the good things we accomplish or enjoy. Today's readings, however, remind us that God is the one who can and does use us for his own purposes, whether we realize it or not. This knowledge should humble us as we freely allow God to guide us for his glory.

The nation of Assyria did not realize that God was using them for another purpose. They may have thought to themselves, "We are so great and mighty! We have besieged Jerusalem because we are powerful!" But the Lord, through the prophet Isaiah, compares their boasting to an axe thinking that it felled a tree by itself.

In the Gospel, Jesus reminds his disciples that the wise and knowledgeable cannot find God of their own accord. We cannot study our way to an intimate relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We must instead be like a child, coming with a humble and open heart. If we approach God with open hands saying, "Here I am, Lord, use me," think of what beautiful things can be accomplished!

Saint Bonaventure, whose feast we celebrate today, was someone who cultivated that relationship with our Triune God, all to the glory of God. A Franciscan in the 13th century, he was named a cardinal by Pope Gregory X about a year before his death. His scholarship and insight were famous, but what drew people to him was his fervent love for Christ and his Church. He practiced a "theology done on his knees." And God used him there.

Today, we ask God for the humility to recognize his hand in everything. We ask that the Holy Spirit might give us the humility and childlike openness to understand what has been revealed to us. We are so blessed to have the great privilege of receiving the Son in the Eucharist. As we receive him, we pray also that he will reveal his Father to us – and that God may indeed use us for his glory.

* * *

Thursday, July 16, 2020

(Lec. 392)

1) Isaiah 26:7-9, 12, 16-19

2) Matthew 11:28-30

THURSDAY OF

15TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel)

Gospel related: CCC 459, 1615, 1658

FOCUS: In his generous love, God invites us to come unto him to receive the rest and strength we need.

Come to me. What a direct, personal invitation that the Lord issues to *all you who labor and are burdened*. As he walked the earth, Christ saw first-hand the heavy burdens that people carried: pain, illness, loneliness, shame, suffering, loss. Throughout the Gospels we hear that Jesus had pity on the crowds that surrounded him; he had compassion for those he encountered.

We can look around us and see much of the same: So many people who have heavy loads of all different kinds to carry. No one is spared suffering or struggle; burdens weigh at our hearts and pull us down. Where do we go for the strength and rest that we need?

God's response to our burdens, sufferings, and struggles is totally different than the human way. Whereas we are tempted to minimize or avoid pain, the Lord says, *Come to me ... and I will give you rest*. The Lord welcomes our pain and invites each of us to bring our burdens to him so he can carry them with us. His response to our pain is to enter into it with us.

In his company, we find rest. In his generous love, he shows us the way to carry our burdens with his strength. This is the invitation he extends to us in life with him, nourished especially at this Eucharistic table we approach together. May we boldly come unto him, as he says, and find the rest we need in his love.

* * *

Friday, July 17, 2020

(Lec. 393)

1) Isaiah 38:1-6, 21-22, 7-8

2) Matthew 12:1-8

Gospel related: CCC 581, 582, 586, 590, 2100, 2173

FRIDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Prayer is opening our hearts to God and accepting in faith the challenges and joys of this life.

In one of the prefaces of the Eucharistic prayer during Mass, the priest says these words: *For, although you have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift, since our praises add nothing to your greatness but profit us for salvation.* These words address the reality and sometimes the challenge in building a life of prayer.

To begin to build a life of prayer, one needs to appreciate that the desire and the effort to pray is itself a gift from God. We are already in relationship with God, and he wants only the best for us. As today's Gospel reminds us, even the command to keep holy the Sabbath was God's gift to humanity – a time for family, prayer, renewal and, of course, sharing with others. It was never meant to be a burden or a moment of divine indictment.

So in a real way, our prayer should be about opening our hearts to accepting what he wishes to bestow upon us. For as the preface indicates, God is not in need of our prayers, whether it be thanksgiving, repentance, adoration, or supplication. Instead, "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God" (CCC 2559). It is the expression of relationship – of covenant and communion – with the one who created us and loved us into being.

Our earthly life is a mixture of good and bad, celebration and trial, joy and pain. In the midst of all this, our eyes and hopes are fixed on the promise of eternal life in Christ. So we persevere in prayer and open our hearts to God, and embrace with faith the challenges and joys of this life.

Saturday, July 18, 2020

(Lec. 394)

1) Micah 2:1-5

2) Matthew 12:14-21

SATURDAY OF

15TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(USA: Opt. Mem.

Saint Camillus de Lellis,

Priest,

Saturday in honor

of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC 713 CSDC 261**

FOCUS: This is the divine order of things: God *gives* us our inheritance

Behold, my servant whom I have chosen ... he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles ... in his name the Gentiles will hope.

Matthew's quoting of the prophet Isaiah in today's Gospel is meant to show that what had once been available only to the Israelites through the covenant with Abraham would now be available to all. There would no longer be those who were in, and those who were out. All would be invited to the Kingdom, but of course, not all would accept the invitation.

And though the prophet we heard in our first reading, Micah, lived about 700 years before Jesus, the very sins he identified are still present today: There are those who scheme, covet, cheat and take; those who practice evil ways and interfere with the divine order of things. In short, there are still many who reject what God, and Christ, offer.

But, Micah warns, their day will come. In his time, those who seized land from others will have that land taken away from them by other conquerors. In our time, those who never repent and grasp ahold of the Promised Land that is the kingdom of heaven – freely offered we ought to remember – shall see that land forever from a distance. For this is the divine order of things: God *gives* us our inheritance; it cannot be obtained through cheating or taking.

Jesus' death and resurrection freed us from the eternal bonds of sin and death, but not the daily temptation to sin. Yet through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the grace of the sacraments, we have the ability to resist temptation, and to repent when our spirit is willing but our flesh fails in that resistance. This is a great gift, and one we should never take for granted.

* * *

SUNDAY, JULY 19, 2020

(Lec. 106)

1) Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

2) Romans 8:26-27

3) Matthew 13:24-43 or 13:24-30

Gospel related: CCC 333, 827, 1034

**16TH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: God is patient and kind to us as we grow in faith.

Today's readings are about the patience and kindness of God. Wisdom describes God as just *and* kind. In his power, God exercises mastery and care over all, judging with leniency and governing with clemency. God teaches those who are just to be kind, as he is.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus shares the parable of the sower who grows wheat in his field alongside weeds planted by his enemy. Rather than pulling out the weeds and risking harm to his wheat, the sower allows them to grow up together, patiently waiting for harvest time to separate them.

Growing in faith is like being in this field, living among a mix of weeds and wheat. We strive to grow up as wheat, bearing the fruit of faith, hope, and love. But we are surrounded by weeds that feed on hatred, despair, and deceit. In our weakness, we may be tempted to grow like the weeds. But we are not weeds! We are planted by the master sower to grow up as wheat. We are *his* wheat!

But when we forget or fail, when the weeds of sin encroach and overwhelm, God is patient and kind to us. God governs his growing field with clemency. In his mercy, he chooses not to separate the righteous from the evildoers until the end of the age. Every moment until then is an opportunity to grow in a state of grace, and to repent and turn back to God when we have failed. He sends his Spirit to intercede for us and *come to the aid of our weakness*. Under the care of God, who lovingly nurtures us through the Word and sacraments, we will grow to bear good fruit, worthy of his harvest.

We give praise to God for being so patient and kind to us. May that patience and kindness guide and inspire us to be as patient and kind to others.

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Monday, July 20, 2020

(Lec. 395)

- 1) Micah 6:1-4, 6-8
- 2) Matthew 12:38-42

MONDAY OF
16TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Apollinaris,
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 590, 627, 635, 678, 994

FOCUS: *Walk humbly with your God.*

In today's Gospel, the scribes and Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign. We might think of this "ask" as more of a "demand." For despite having seen or heard of the many signs and wonders Jesus has already performed, they refuse to accept any of them as actually legitimizing his authority from God.

Jesus refuses. He is not an entertainer, not a magician. This refusal is not arrogance, but recognition that it would be a complete waste of time. As it states in the USCCB's online Bible notes on this section: "Because his opponents are evil and see him as an agent of Satan, nothing will convince them." Jesus calls them *an evil and unfaithful generation*.

The scribes and Pharisees pride themselves on their knowledge of Scripture and their covenantal history with God, so Jesus speaks to what they know. He references Jonah, the prophet; the Queen of Sheba; and Solomon, and claims that there is something greater in him and what he is doing than any of them.

We don't know what these scribes and Pharisees did next, though we're certainly aware that Jesus' words did not convince or convert them. We can almost hear the cries of the prophet Micah across the generations, borne aloft in the desert winds and carried on the grains of the sands of time to land on the gilded robes of the religious leaders: *Pay attention! ... You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.* In other words, "pay attention to the covenant you so rigidly espouse – which, by the way, never says 'ask for a sign' – and be open to what God is revealing to you."

But the scribes and the Pharisees simply shake the dust off their clothes, and move along in their contented, if misguided, piety.

We're the Pharisees, by the way. At least ... sometimes. Aren't we? Demanding signs and proof from God. Unwilling to be open to what God is revealing to us. But the good news is that while we might occasionally inhabit those robes, we have a place to cast them off – at the feet of God's mercy. We can cast them off because we know who Jesus is. And if we forget, God provides exactly the grace we need to remember and grow stronger in faith. He gives us himself, and we are transformed by that, which is indeed far greater than anything the world has ever seen.

Saint Apollinaris (1st century) Originally from Syria, Apollinaris was ordained Bishop of Ravenna, Italy, by Saint Peter. Famous for his effective preaching and healing power in the name of Christ, he was repeatedly exiled, imprisoned and tortured by the pagan leaders, but persisted in proclaiming the Gospel until he was ultimately martyred.

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Tuesday, July 21, 2020

(Lec. 396)

1) Micah 7:14-15, 18-20

2) Matthew 12:46-50

TUESDAY OF

16TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Lawrence of Brindisi,
Priest and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 764, 2233

FOCUS: The Lord has stretched out his hands to us, embracing us into his family.

It may be troubling to hear Jesus ask *Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?* when he is told they *are standing outside, asking to speak with [him]*. Yet Jesus asks these questions in true pedagogical fashion – so that he can answer them!

And his answer is one that should not surprise anyone who has been following him to this point. For Jesus came to open the gates of heaven to all people, not just the chosen people of Israel. Throughout the Gospels, we see the expansion of every kind of definition: of what it means to live the law; of how and who we are to love; of who our neighbor is; of what it means to be blessed; and now, of how to define who are our brothers and sisters. This is the expansiveness of God, not the authors of the Gospels. This is God's all-encompassing generosity, his all-inclusive mercy. It is God's abundant and overflowing love, calling each one of us to relationship with him.

Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother, Jesus says. This is meant to include, embolden, and empower us. No animal sacrifices are required, no particular amount of money is necessary, no proper heritage or lineage is demanded. We are Christ's brother and sister when we do God's will.

By our baptism, we have been marked as Christ's own forever – and so we are already brothers and sisters in his name. Yet we need his grace to help us live out the commands and follow God's will. Of course what that means for each of us will be different, and will indeed involve some self-sacrifice. It will include discerning proper stewardship of time, talent, and treasure. And it will mean listening to what God is asking of us in terms of vocation or state in life.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the Lord has stretched out his hands to us, embracing us into his family. We now embrace *him* in this sacrament, awakening our hearts further to God's voice in our lives.

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Wednesday, July 22, 2020

(Lec. 603)

SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

- FEAST

1) Song of Songs 3:1-4b
Or 2 Corinthians 5:14-17

2) John 20:1-2, 11-18

Gospel related: **CCC** 443, 640, 641, 645, 654, 659, 660, 2174, 2795

FOCUS: The love we know in Jesus compels us to share his message of hope with others.

Today we celebrate the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene, whom the Church honors for her love of Jesus, her faithfulness to him, and her fearless testimony of his resurrection.

Her experience in the garden in John's Gospel is an embodiment of the bride in the first reading, seeking her beloved: *Him whom my heart loves. I sought him but I did not find him.* She sees the angels – the watchmen: *Have you seen him whom my heart loves?* she asks. She turns from them, she *had hardly left them when [she] found him whom [her] heart loves.*

Mary sought Jesus, and at the sound of her name she recognized him. Filled with love, she believes what she sees, and she obeys his instructions to go to the disciples and tell them what he says.

Mary Magdalene is the Bride as we, the Church, are the Bride in this Scripture. The Song of Songs is an ode to a mutual love between Christ and every human soul – between Christ and his Church. As Mary in her friendship, loyalty, steadfastness, and witness was united to Christ in perfect love, so are we each called to be the same. We celebrate Mary Magdalene because she is the Church, and we are her.

And so that intimate scene in a garden 2,000 years ago is also a timeless one, meant for everyone born into this world – persons who naturally seek the One who seeks us first. We are called by name by the One who loves us dearly – Jesus – and we respond in faith. And with and in that faith, we proclaim to the world the good news of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Today, so many people are in the dark, living in tombs of despair and not knowing of God's love for them. Mary of Magdala gave witness, the Church *gives* witness, to those still in the dark of the pre-dawn Resurrection: Jesus really loves them enough to die for them and give them the gift of eternal life.

Two thousand years ago, Mary Magdalene was on a mission to proclaim Jesus' resurrection to the Apostles. In a few minutes, when we go to Communion, we will welcome into our very bodies *him whom [our] heart loves*, and we will be transformed in grace for the same mission – a mission to proclaim the Good News to those around us.

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Thursday, July 23, 2020
(Lec. 398)

- 1) Jeremiah 2:1-3, 7-8, 12-13
- 2) Matthew 13:10-17

THURSDAY OF
16TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Bridget,
Religious)

Gospel related: CCC 546, 787

FOCUS: God is the fountain of life.

The imagery in these readings is vivid. Broken cisterns that hold no water ... Looking but not seeing ... Hearing but not listening or understanding.

They describe the profound scarcity and confusion that sin causes, that we all experience in life this side of heaven. The tragedy of this is that we do it to ourselves! We behave in the same way as those in the first reading: Like the priests, we fail to ask the right questions. We don't look for the right things. Like the lawyers, we fail to try to get to know God. Like the shepherds, we turn away from God's guidance and help. Like the prophets, we look to false idols for comfort and satisfaction. We dig broken cisterns that hold no water.

The crowds around Jesus struggle as we do. They, too, close their eyes at times, and fail to hear with their ears, to understand with their hearts, and be converted and healed. So, as Jesus tells his disciples, he uses parables so that the crowds – and we – might gain *knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven*.

This knowledge comes from the parables' lessons, and the "moral of the story" inherent to them. Lessons such as: The many places and people in whom we seek fulfillment or distraction will never satisfy. Or that any attempt to fulfill our deepest longing – today we might seek it in a job, or in popularity, or in whatever other idol or entertainment we have placed before the love of God – is a futile act of digging a faulty cistern. It will eventually come up empty. While things of this world are good, none of them is *infinitely* good ... and we are made for *infinite* goodness.

What we want most profoundly can *only* be satisfied in Christ. God is, as we proclaim with the psalmist, the fountain of life, the light in which we see light, the delightful stream given to us to drink. Although at times our confusion about life can be profound, although we struggle daily to listen, our God's mercy reaches to the heavens and his faithfulness to the clouds. This mercy is what is truly precious. This love is what we are made for. This goodness is what we long for. So today we cling to this mercy, reaching to receive it in the Eucharist, listening with our hearts to the God who gives himself to us to satisfy our deepest longing

Saint Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373) Bridget was a mystic who experienced visions of the crucified Christ beginning when she was seven. Inspired by her visions, she became committed to works of charity for unwed mothers and their children. After her husband of 20 years died, she gave up her possessions and entered the Third Order of Saint Francis. Bridget dedicated the rest of her life to reforming religious life and establishing the Bridgettines. She is the patron saint of Sweden and co-patroness of Europe.

Friday, July 24, 2020

(Lec. 399)

- 1) Jeremiah 3:14-17
- 2) Matthew 13:18-23

FRIDAY OF
16TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Sharbel Makhlūf,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC 29 CSDC 325**

FOCUS: Keeping ourselves spiritually open to God's word.

In today's Gospel, Jesus takes time to explain the meaning of the parable of the sower, after his disciples asked him why he spoke in parables. These images still speak to us today.

The seeds, of course, are the word of God, scattered and sown. Where they land represent the ways in which people receive that word: As on a path, where there is no understanding and it is easily swept away; as on rocky ground, where it cannot take root; as among thorns, where worldly pains and anxieties *choke the word and it bears no fruit*; or as on rich soil which *bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold*.

It's easy to understand that we hope to be the rich soil in this parable. It is also easy to see that some days we might be the path, or the rocky soil, while other days we are the most prized loam available. That is why this gift of faith, available to all of us, must be cared for and enriched by our own actions.

In the same way that the farmer must care for his fields to assure that they produce the best crop by rotating plantings, fertilizing, and watering the ground, we, too, must keep ourselves spiritually open to God's word. We do this through Scripture reading, prayer, attending Mass regularly, and seeking out the grace of the sacraments. Corporal and spiritual works of mercy nourish us and keep us from drying out.

And so we see that this parable is timeless. It calls us to be open to God's word, to keep ourselves as rich soil that can bear fruit, and to nourish our souls with the truth of the Gospel.

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Saturday, July 25, 2020

(Lec. 605)

1) 2 Corinthians 4:7-15

2) Matthew 20:20-28

Gospel related: **CCC** 440, 601, 605, 622, 786, 2235 **CSDC** 379

SAINT JAMES,

APOSTLE

- FEAST

FOCUS: To be faithful to Jesus, we must serve as he did.

Is it any wonder that the mother of the sons of Zebedee wants the best for her sons? She seeks out Jesus to make a request. She addresses Jesus, and speaks up to advocate for her sons: *Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your Kingdom.*

Now, to sit at the right hand of a king is a place of honor. The one who sits there would have special trust and authority from his unique relationship with the king. He would have the same respect given to the king. Mothers want the best for their children. Nothing about this request surprises us.

Jesus doesn't say no, but asks her if her sons [whom Matthew does not name, but are James and John] could do what Jesus will do. Can they drink from his same cup? Jesus assures them that they will indeed drink from this cup.

Maybe they think that this means all the power and glory will be theirs to share with Jesus. But Jesus' meaning is quite different, one that will be realized when James – whom the Church memorializes today – is the first of the Apostles to be martyred. For as Jesus says, *Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve.*

In baptism, we share in Jesus' ministry as priest, prophet, and king. But in Jesus' life, ministry, and death, his kingship is revealed through service to others. To be faithful to him, we must serve as he did.

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SUNDAY, JULY 26, 2020

(Lec. 109)

1) 1 Kings 3:5, 7-12

2) Romans 8:28-30

3) Matthew 13:44-52 or 13:44-46

Gospel related: CCC 546, 1034, 1117

**17TH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: God grants us the wisdom to know his nearness each and every day.

Ask something of me, God says to Solomon today, *and I will give it to you*. God gives Solomon an incredible gift, the freedom to have exactly what he asks for. And with that freedom, Solomon asks for something that pleases God: He asks for an understanding heart. Solomon, who knows the ways of God and is faithful to him, is already wise in his own ways. Yet rather than increase his own stature, he seeks to honor God as the source of that wisdom. He gives glory to God by acknowledging his reliance upon him.

A similar expression of freedom is exhibited by the individuals in today's Gospel parables. Here, the freedom is found in the desire to experience the kingdom of heaven. There's a sort of irony present, though. In a certain sense, the person who digs for the treasure *already owned* the treasure underneath his feet. Likewise, the merchant who buys the pearl of great price already had the wealth with which to purchase it. Both of these parables teach us that we desire the kingdom of heaven because we already know it. We find it in Jesus Christ, who is the way, and we seek more of it by following him.

The wise youth, in his wisdom, asks God for wisdom. A person uses treasure to purchase a different treasure. A pearl merchant sells pearls to buy a pearl. Christ's parables are clearly not about making good business deals. Jesus, rather, teaches that the kingdom of heaven is as much an encounter as it is a goal. The faithful *experience* God's kingdom in the action of living our lives.

It takes wisdom to seek wisdom in the same way that it takes pearls to buy a pearl. God is present in all of this. For we who love God, all things, every day, work together for the good, as Saint Paul says. Each moment of our work and leisure, our joys and even in our sorrows, every moment is its own reward when we operate with the understanding of the nearness of the Kingdom. Jesus is the way to heaven, and he is here now.

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Monday, July 27, 2020
(Lec. 401)

- 1) Jeremiah 13:1-11
- 2) Matthew 13:31-35

MONDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: With God's power, great things can come from small beginnings.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the classic fantasy epic novel, the flourishing of the entire known world is entrusted to all creatures of good will, but its survival relies on one in particular. This one creature must undertake a dangerous quest through treacherous lands. He must bravely face what most would fear.

This chosen one, however, is not a warrior. He is not a wizard; he is not a king. Rather, the survival of the known world is entrusted to a hobbit by the name of Frodo Baggins.

Frodo is a most surprising choice for a savior. He is small, a "Halfling" as hobbits are known, and he has no experience with battle. In fact, he has never even left the Shire, which is his home. Yet small, Halfling Frodo has help along the way, and each bit of help contributes to the success of his quest.

Aren't there times when we feel like we are too small to be effective? Too insignificant to make a difference? Aren't there times when the problems we face or the problems the world faces seem insurmountable?

And yet: *The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed ... It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants.*

Jesus emphasizes, in these series of parables, that things essential to building God's kingdom can have small beginnings. Moreover, we can be part of building this Kingdom. We do not have to be big to be effective. We do not have to be strong to honor God. We do not have to be the largest, the boldest, the flashiest, or the most likely to succeed, to help bring about the kingdom of God. Rather, we can be as small as a mustard seed, a seed smaller than most ants, not even two millimeters in size. We can even be as small as a speck of yeast, one that leavens the whole world.

Jesus encourages us to look at the natural world, to observe how one small, seemingly insignificant item can blossom and grow. Likewise, we have no idea how God will use each act of charity, each sacrifice, each prayer, each kind word, each act of trust, each little effort on our part to build his Kingdom. Rather than be overwhelmed at the challenges before us, we can do our part, and allow God to create the Kingdom from these actions, no matter their size.

May the Eucharist we celebrate today strengthen us to do our part, however small, and to trust God's power to transform the world.

Tuesday, July 28, 2020

(Lec. 402)

1) Jeremiah 14:17-22

2) Matthew 13:36-43

Gospel related: CCC 333, 1034

TUESDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The Lord will not break his covenant with us.

In today's Gospel, the disciples ask Jesus to explain the parable of the weeds in the field. Jesus walks them through it: Christ is the sower; the field is the world; the good seed is us, the children of the Kingdom. The reality is that the field also contains weeds, those things that threaten our growth as children of God.

What are the weeds in our lives? In our first reading from Jeremiah, we hear of weeds that have overwhelmed the people in a time of drought. Jeremiah's words are directed at God, describing relentless grief for the perils that they face. In this tremendous sadness, they yearn for direction from God. *We wait for peace, to no avail; for a time of healing, but terror comes instead. We recognize, O Lord, our wickedness, the guilt of our fathers; that we have sinned against you.* They beg the Lord not to break his covenant with them.

While Jeremiah shows despair, Jesus brings good news: God's mercy is with us until *the end of the age*, for it is only at the harvest that the weeds will be gathered up and tossed into the fire. But until then we must do our part and get rid of the weeds that surround us – to repent of the sin that hinders our growth. God will never toss us aside while there is still time for grace and forgiveness. But make no mistake – there will come a moment when the righteous who *shine like the sun* will be separated from those *evildoers* and *all who cause others to sin*.

We know not the time of that judgment, or when Christ will return. So as Jesus says at the end of this passage, *Whoever has ears ought to hear*. It is important to find these weeds in our lives and clear them out. And when they creep back in? Clear them out again.

As we continue our celebration here today, we recognize the gift of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Christ's presence is a sign that the Lord did not, and will not ever, break his covenant with us. This Eucharist nourishes us to be able to hear the voice of God wherever we are in our lives.

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Wednesday, July 29, 2020

(Lec. 403)

1) Jeremiah 15:10, 16-21

(Lec. 607)

2) John 11:19-27

or Luke 10:38-42

Gospel related: CCC 439, 993, 994, 1001 CSDC 260

WEDNESDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Martha)

FOCUS: *I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God.*

We all experience difficult times in our lives and when we do, society tends to offer us an abundance of solutions. “Are you aging? Try this wrinkle cream. Are you overweight? Try this miracle pill, follow this diet, or join this gym. Are you lonely or sad? Try this wine, sip that liquor, or party with this beer. Need an escape? Hop on this plane and find that beach. Feeling low? This movie or that television show will ultimately promise a happy ending.”

In today’s Gospel, we encounter Martha at what must have been a very low point in her life. Her brother Lazarus had just died. She is at home with her sister, Mary, and with mourners who have come to bring them comfort. Yet, upon hearing that Jesus was coming, she goes out to meet him.

Here was the Christ – the one person on whom she could still pin all her hope. With great confidence, she tells Jesus: *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now, I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.* And in response to such faith, Jesus tells her: *Your brother will rise.* Again, she responds with her faith in the resurrection on the last day.

But Jesus continues teaching her, saying, *I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and anyone who lives and believes in me will never die.* He gives a sign and pledge of this while he is still on earth – he will raise Lazarus and others from the dead – thereby announcing his own resurrection (CCC 994).

We celebrate the memorial of Saint Martha today, a woman who demonstrated to Jesus faith and loyalty beyond measure. The conversation she has with Jesus is a beautiful lesson for us all. Martha already had developed a relationship with Christ – he was a friend of the family, she had waited on him when he came to visit. She could speak to him openly, with trust and with hope. She spoke to him as someone with profound faith. She recognized him as *the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.* This is how we, too, can speak to the Lord in prayer.

We have a relationship with Christ. It began at our baptism when he sent his Spirit to dwell in us. It has been nourished by Jesus’ words and around his table. Our Christian life is already a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. So we should live our lives as he has taught us – with hope in him, and with confidence in the abiding presence of God.

When God is the compass in our lives, our choices and our values will lead us to happiness. Let us be resolved, then, to remain in God as he remains in us. He will be our solace in times of trouble, our friend when we are in need, and our certain hope of eternal life.

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Thursday, July 30, 2020

(Lec. 404)

- 1) Jeremiah 18:1-6
- 2) Matthew 13:47-53

THURSDAY OF
17TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.
Saint Peter Chrysologus,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 1034, 1117 **CSDC** 12

FOCUS: Our loving Father has given us gifts and grace to navigate our lives.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells one of the many parables about the kingdom of God. The first part of the story, the universal invitation into the kingdom, is likely very familiar to our ears. Jesus loves each one of us, draws us into his net, and wants us to be part of the kingdom. The second part of the parable is also familiar, and contains an uncomfortable truth: The righteous and the wicked will be separated at the end of the age, just as the fishermen separated the good fish from the bad fish. We cannot dismiss this truth, as it comes straight from our Lord. How shall we think of it?

First, one of the greatest gifts God gave to us was our free will. Love, goodness, and beauty aren't forced upon us. We are free to accept God or reject him. The same goes for our actions: We are free to refrain from sin, or indulge in it. If we get to the end of the age (or the end of our life) and prefer to hold onto sin rather than repent of it, God will grant us what our hearts desire – even if it means we choose eternal separation from him.

Second, there is the image that Jeremiah described in the first reading. We have a foreshadowing of the message of Divine Mercy, millennia before Saint Faustina wrote her diary. *Whenever the object of clay which he was making turned out badly in his hand, he tried again, making of the clay another object of whatever sort he pleased.* Regardless of our sins and mistakes, God will always extend his mercy to a repentant heart. We have all, at times, felt broken or like we've done something unforgivable. But we can take to heart what God says to Jeremiah: *Can I not do to you ... as this potter has done?* Sin is never stronger than grace. God can work with us if we come to him in faith.

Third, we remember the virtues that God gives us to take hold of his mercy and have a truly free will. He doesn't leave us floundering by ourselves. Faith and hope work together so that we are better able to choose love and goodness over sin. Faith and hope have their foundation in God, who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving.

Yes, we will all be judged; our actions and choices truly matter. Yet our loving Father has given us gifts and grace to navigate our lives. Most importantly, he gave us his own Son in the holy Eucharist to give us strength to lead a life of grace.

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Friday, July 31, 2020

(Lec. 405)

- 1) Jeremiah 26:1-9
- 2) Matthew 13:54-58

FRIDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Ignatius of Loyola,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 495, 500 CSDC 259

FOCUS: God's word will meet rejection, but his servants must persevere.

In the first reading, God commands Jeremiah to proclaim a message *in the court of the house of the Lord*, at the Temple of Jerusalem. Jeremiah calls the people to repent. They have disobeyed God's words and rejected the prophets. So now God threatens punishment. This is a common message among prophetic literature.

We know something about the date of his message, *the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim ... king of Judah*. Jehoiakim's reign began in 608 B.C. It was a troubling time for the citizens of Judah. The Babylonian Empire was growing and Judah was at risk of being attacked by it.

God's words to the people, proclaimed by Jeremiah, are intended to lead the people to repentance. Since many of these words are challenging, they will be rejected by his audience. But the prophet is called to speak God's word: *Whatever I command you, tell them, and omit nothing. Perhaps, God tells Jeremiah, they will listen and turn back*. Instead, the people reject his words and tell the prophet, *You must be put to death!* According to tradition, Jeremiah was killed by his own people. And Jerusalem fell to Babylon several decades later.

In today's Gospel, Jesus' words also meet rejection. While Matthew does not tell us what Jesus said, he describes the response of the crowd: *They were astonished*. They cannot believe that someone from their own town, whom they knew, could speak with such wisdom and work *mighty deeds*. They know Jesus and they know his family. He is, to them, *the carpenter's son*, not a prophet. Jesus quotes a saying indicating that it is expected for a prophet to be *without honor ... in his native place*.

Obviously, more transpired at the synagogue than what Matthew narrates. But he is highlighting the fact that like the prophets who came before him, Jesus meets rejection, even among his own neighbors and friends: *He did not work many mighty deeds (miracles) there because of their lack of faith*.

Today, the Church celebrates the memorial of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Founder of the Society of Jesus, he began life as a person of wealth whose greatest desire was to be a soldier. His own autobiography speaks of his vanity and interest in worldly success. After being seriously wounded during a battle, however, he recuperated while reading a book about Jesus, and one about saints. Unlike the people of Jeremiah and Jesus' time, he took what he heard to heart, and began a radical transformation of his heart and his life.

God speaks to us today as he did to the people of Judah, to those in the synagogue, and to Saint Ignatius. He speaks to us as we gather around his table, calling us to reject sin and walk in the light of the Gospel.

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