

JUNE

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**YEAR A
WEEKDAYS II**

Monday, June 1, 2020
(Lec. 572A)

- 1) Genesis 3:9-15, 20
or Acts 1:12-14
- 2) John 19:25-34

MONDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
The Blessed Virgin Mary,
Mother of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 478, 495, 601, 544, 607, 624, 641, 694, 726, 730, 964, 1225, 2561, 2605, 2618, 2677, 2679

FOCUS: Mary, Mother of the Church – pray for us.

Today, on the Monday after Pentecost, the Church celebrates the memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church.

From the early Church, this understanding and title for Mary as Mother of the Church was present in the minds of the faithful. Saint Augustine and Saint Leo the Great both wrote about it, and she has been honored throughout the centuries in this way. In 1964, at the conclusion of the Third Session of the Second Vatican Council, Saint Paul VI formally declared the Blessed Virgin Mary as “Mother of the Church, that is to say, of all Christian people, the faithful as well as the pastors, who call her the most loving Mother.”

Mary was conceived and born without sin, and the fullness of her grace meant she was free from sin her entire life. But she was a woman, of flesh and blood, human as we are human, and so we neither worship nor adore her. Instead, we celebrate and give great thanks for her, and honor, love, and venerate her. For she, *whose Only Begotten Son, as he hung upon the Cross, chose [her], his Mother, to be our Mother also*, helps the Church to *be more fruitful day by day* (Prayer for Mass and Divine Office on the Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church). Mary, Mother of Christ, is also Mary, Mother of the *Body of Christ* – the Church – our mother.

On the cross, Jesus gives us not only the grace of the sacraments poured forth from his side as our constant food, he gives us also his own mother. *Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.*

In Mary, the Church receives the gift of a mother’s love. A mother who nurtures, intercedes for, and loves with an unconditional and unflinching love. There is no day in which we ought not to seek her intercession, but on this day especially, may her prayers for us help us to be more faithful and holy members of the Body of Christ.

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Tuesday, June 2, 2020
(Lec. 354)
1) 2 Peter 3:12-15a, 17-18
2) Mark 12:13-17

TUESDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saints Marcellinus and Peter,
Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 450 CSDC 379

FOCUS: We need not worry about what we have, but rejoice in whose we are.

In today's Gospel, *some Pharisees and Herodians* approach Jesus and try to *ensnare him in his speech*. They are doing this because he has threatened their authority as religious leaders, encroaching on their power. So, they give him an almost unanswerable question regarding paying taxes. If Jesus says they should pay the census tax, his followers will be upset that he supports this unjust policy; if he says no they should not, he will be guilty of resisting the empire.

In his wisdom, Jesus takes their question and turns it on its head. He asks them whose image is inscribed on the coin, and their answer reflects a truth even larger than they probably intend. That truth is: each one of us is made in the image and likeness of God. We are not expendable – like coins are. We are made worthy to *grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ*. We belong to God, and God in his generosity provides for our every need. He gives us everything, and he asks for everything in return. *Repay ... to God what belongs to God*. The Creator of everything, the Savior and Sustainer of the world, has claim to everything that is.

We each come today with concerns, anxieties, or worries. The Good News we receive is that we need not worry about what we have, but rejoice in whose we are. We belong to the Lord, and his grace will empower us to give him what is his and so live in his freedom. As we approach him in this Eucharist, may we rest in the knowledge that we are the Lord's, and that he will indeed provide for our every need.

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Wednesday, June 3, 2020
(Lec. 355)
1) 2 Timothy 1:1-3, 6-12
2) Mark 12:18-27

WEDNESDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Charles Lwanga
and Companions,
Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 993, 1619

FOCUS: The love of Christ changes everything; it transforms.

The truth about God always is bigger than our imagination or our categories. God always transcends what we might think. Not recognizing this fact is the error the Sadducees commit in today's Gospel.

They assume that any resurrection that Jesus is talking about will simply be as life is now – with all laws and limitations still present. Jesus points out that they are *greatly misled* in completely misunderstanding the resurrection of which he speaks (v. 25), and also in their failure to believe in resurrection at all (v. 27). What we know about resurrection, and the Sadducees didn't, is that when we rise from the dead, all will be transformed.

That promise offers us hope today – the kind of hope that can give us the strength to do all that God asks of us in this life. Today, we celebrate the memorial of Saint Charles Lwanga and his companions, who were transformed by the love of Christ and their belief in his death and resurrection. They stood up to a king and sacrificed their lives to protect one another and live virtuously. Their martyrdom was transformed into a witness to the power of God in ways that the corrupt king could never have imagined.

Today, we might ask what God is seeking to transform in our lives. We can consider what our belief and hope in the Resurrection means for our everyday life – whether we are misled, as the Sadducees were, or whether we are witnesses like Saint Charles Lwanga and his companions.

What are we holding on to that, if we were to entrust it to God's transformative power, God might return to us as something new and unimagined? As we approach the Eucharist today, let us place whatever goodness, whatever brokenness, whatever joy, whatever grief God is asking us to place on this table with the bread and the wine so that it might also be transformed. And may the hope and promise of the Resurrection give us the strength to allow God to work in us in ways beyond our own imagination.

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Thursday, June 4, 2020

(Lec. 356)

1) 2 Timothy 2:8-15

2) Mark 12:28-34

Gospel related: CCC 129, 202, 228, 575, 2196 CSDC 40, 112

THURSDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Dare to bring all we are, all we have, and all we need before God.

And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

In today's encounter between Jesus and the scribe, the exchange is conversational in tone, and Jesus actually compliments the scribe at the end, as we just heard. So it is interesting, is it not, that Mark also tells us in the final verse that *no one dared to ask him any more questions*.

We are not told why this is so, though some commentaries suggest that Jesus spoke with such authority there was no *need* to ask anything more. One either believed what Jesus said, or did not. Without additional evidence in the text, it would be imprudent to speculate much further. Regardless of what may or not have been happening in that encounter, however, there is one thing we can say for sure about that last verse: It need never apply to us.

We never need to fear – that is, “not dare” – to ask Jesus anything. Nor be afraid to ask the Father. In fact, throughout all of Scripture we are taught how to pray, and we are instructed in some form to, “ask and you shall receive” (e.g., 1 Kings 3:5; Psalms 37:4; Mark 11:24; Matthew 7:7-11; John 14:13-14; Luke 18:1-8; Philippians 4:6-8). We are encouraged, exhorted, and at times commanded to ask God for things – to pray for ourselves and for one another. Prayer also helps when we just need clarity on whatever is going on in our lives –especially when it is hard to see the "larger picture" we know is visible to God.

“Fear not” and “be not afraid” are variations of the one commandment that is given most often throughout Scripture. Or in other words, *dare!* Dare to bring all we are, all we have, and all we need before God. Dare to be vulnerable with our hearts and our questions. Dare to be open to how the word of God may change us. For it is in that approaching, with confidence and trust, that we find ourselves ever more *not far from the Kingdom of God*.

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Friday, June 5, 2020
(Lec. 357)
1) 2 Timothy 3:10-17
2) Mark 12:35-37

FRIDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Boniface,
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 202

FOCUS: Those who follow God's way will be equipped for every good work.

In today's first reading, Paul writes to Timothy about all he has endured for the sake of the Gospel. Though he has met with success, Paul has also encountered persecutions, even imprisonment. *Yet from all these things the Lord delivered me*, he says. Those who seek to follow God's way will encounter trials as Paul has.

But Paul encourages Timothy to remain faithful to the Word he has received, even if he encounters resistance. *For all Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching*, he writes. God's word is *capable of giving you wisdom for salvation*.

An example of this is found in today's Gospel. Jesus is teaching in the Temple area, and he questions his listeners about the anticipated Messiah/Christ who was expected to be a son of David. He quotes a Scripture passage with which they would have been intimately familiar – Psalm 110:1 – where David says, *The Lord said to my lord*. Jesus asks, "Why would David call him 'Lord' if he was David's son? Could a son be greater than his father?"

He doesn't answer his own question, nor does he receive an answer. Mark tells us simply that *the great crowd heard this with delight*. What does *that* mean? In short, it means that the people understand that he is telling them he is the true Messiah. Scripture had given them *wisdom for salvation*.

For centuries, the Jewish people had been awaiting their savior from the house of David. This had been promised by God and was central to their history as a people. So in expounding on this psalm, Jesus is pointing out that he is not merely "son of David," he is also "Son of God." For only one who was of God could outrank a king (David) and be called "Lord."

Today the Church celebrates the memorial of Saint Boniface, bishop and martyr. Known as the great "Apostle of Germany," he was an abbot and missionary whose ministry resulted in a vast number of conversions. He faced persecution, and eventual martyrdom. The example of his life is that belief in the power of Scripture, and in Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah, leads to a fruitful life. For each of us, the fruit we bear for the Kingdom is whatever God desires of us when we cooperate with his grace.

As we prepare ourselves to receive this sacrament, we pray for the grace to have wisdom for salvation, knowing that God's word – in Scripture and in the body of Christ – equips us *for every good work*.

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Saturday, June 6, 2020
(Lec. 358)
1) 2 Timothy 4:1-8
2) Mark 12:38-44

SATURDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Norbert,
Bishop;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: CCC 678, 2444

FOCUS: May we live the truth of Jesus Christ.

In today's first reading, Saint Paul writes to Timothy. Realizing that his days on earth are drawing to a close and others need to fill his shoes, he says: *I have finished the race*. Paul then issues a charge to Timothy to proclaim the Good News, telling him to be persistent in his proclamation. He rightly predicts there will be a time when sound doctrine and truth will be ignored at the expense of myths.

The world today can seem unduly focused on the pursuit of power, pleasure, wealth, and notoriety, which is what Paul is warning against in today's reading. It can be challenging to preach the truth today, but we can remain strong by staying focused on the Eucharist. It is our belief in the divine presence of Jesus in the Eucharist that gives us direction and the courage to, in Paul's words, *perform the work of an evangelist*. If we do, then Paul says we will be rewarded by God on the final day.

Those who will not be so rewarded are the scribes outlined in our Gospel reading from Mark, who relish places of honor at banquets and who *devour the houses of widows*. On the contrary, *they will receive a very severe condemnation* says the Lord. It's important to note that Jesus is criticizing the behavior of some scribes, not the scribes themselves. So, too, for us. It is not wrong on the face of it for us to hold positions of honor, or to live comfortably. But when we seek honor or wealth as goals in and of themselves, we become like the scribes in the Gospel and those whom Paul warns against in the first reading.

It is up to us to *perform the work of an evangelist* – to spread the Gospel and proclaim God's word. And Paul implores us to go about our task with patience and persistence. In a moment, we will express belief in, and accept into our very bodies, the truth of Jesus. The question remains, are we living this truth each day?

Saint Norbert (1080-1134) – Norbert founded the religious order known as the Premonstratensians, or Norbertines. After a near-death experience reawakened his faith, he became an itinerant preacher. Traveling through western Germany, Belgium, and northern France, Norbert was known for helping to revive the faith of a demoralized clergy, converting heretics and reconciling enemies. Named an archbishop in 1126, he continued his zealous evangelization despite several assassination attempts until his death in 1134.

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SUNDAY, JUNE 7, 2020

(Lec. 164)

- 1) Exodus 34:4b-6, 8-9
- 2) 2 Corinthians 13:11-13
- 3) John 3:16-18

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

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY - SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.

The greatest love story of all time is the story of our salvation. God, despite all our sins, has such great love for us that he is unwilling to leave us in our sinfulness. And as today's Gospel reminds us, he was willing to sacrifice his only Son so that we might be raised from the death of sin and come to share in his life of communal love.

Today's solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity celebrates that life of communal love. For God is one God, in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – whose relationship is one of complete self-gift and outpouring of love. In other words, God is not a *being* who loves, God *is love itself*.

That God is greater than we can ever know and yet is also one who revealed himself to us in his Son is truly something to celebrate. For the God who is transcendent – above all things – is also immanent: present to all things. He invites us to relationship with him; to seek more and know more and to open our hearts and minds to how he reveals himself to us.

So today's solemnity is actually a double celebration; we celebrate what God has revealed and we accept the invitation to know him more, and to find joy and fulfillment in that knowing.

As the fundamental mystery of faith, it permeates our identity and prayer. Already at this Mass we have invoked the Trinity in several ways: from the initial sign of the cross to the Gloria to our opening prayer, which is addressed to the Father but offered through Jesus Christ *in the unity of the Holy Spirit ... one God, forever and ever*. In a few moments, our creed will set out what we believe about the oneness of God, and yet a God who is Father, Son, and Spirit. And, of course, in the central act of the Mass we will ask the Father to send the Spirit so that our bread and wine might become for us the body and blood of Christ, his Son. Our faith is Trinitarian!

Here we have three divine persons who in the words of the creed are *consubstantial – eternal – each to be adored and glorified*, and yet, *one God*. Within the Trinity there is such a perfect relationship that they are fully united in every way – no boundaries or separations except that they are not the same person. Everything that belongs to one belongs to the other, and yet each is not the same as the other.

By celebrating the Trinity, we recall God's invitation to us to be in relationship with him. We are reminded that God loves each of us and wills only our good; that this love is so real that Christ was actually willing to die for us; and that the Spirit is the gift of the Father and Son to us, to remain present among us. The Holy Spirit teaches and reminds us of that Trinitarian love, strengthening and consoling us in times of challenge and trial, and empowering us to be disciples in a troubled world.

Let us be honest, we will never fully know – in this world – how and why God loves us so much or why he has chosen to make us his sons and daughters. So let us today just simply revel in that divine love and that holy identity. Let it flow over us like a great wave – empowering us to live as faithful disciples.

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Monday, June 8, 2020
(Lec. 359)

- 1) 1 Kings 17:1-6
- 2) Matthew 5:1-12

Gospel related: CCC 520, 544, 581, 764, 1716, 1720, 2305, 2330, 2518, 2546, 2763 CSDC 492

MONDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We come to this holy place and know that we are blessed by God.

While touring a large city, a father made sure that his family visited the local cathedral. As they walked down the main aisle, his young son noticed many people in the church. He turned to his father and asked, "Why do people come here?"

We can ask ourselves that same question every time we come into the church. Setting aside for a moment our obligation to attend, the work of the Church as communal worship, and Jesus' command to celebrate this sacrament, what draws each one of us, personally? What are we *bringing* to this moment? We all have different reasons. At times, it can be to give thanks to God. Others carry heavy, and perhaps painful, burdens and seek solace in God's love. Perfectly or imperfectly, we have come here to present ourselves before the Lord.

We are here together as one community, performing the work of the Church: public worship. Together, we have perfect union with Christ, and therefore with one another. Here we receive the blessings that come from listening to the word of God and being nourished at the table of our Savior.

In today's Gospel, Jesus pronounces blessings: *Blessed are the meek ... the mourning ... the peacemakers*, and many more. These blessings are freely given. But they can be received only by those who have the proper disposition to receive them. We must cooperate with God's grace in order for it to allow us to grow and be transformed for the Kingdom.

So those who Jesus named: for example, the poor in spirit, the mourning, the clean of heart, will be blessed. All of us, at some point, have one, if not more, of these dispositions. By our presence here, we at least desire to participate in God's grace. What a gift, then, to come here and know that Jesus preaches this good news, and offers this opportunity for union with him.

We come here to worship the Lord. To give praise and thanksgiving, and to participate in the re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. We come to receive him in Word and in sacrament. We know that the Lord is close to us, and each of us brings something to him in our coming to Mass. May God's unconditional love and the grace of the Eucharist give us ever more ways to present ourselves *before* him, and hearts for further union *with* him.

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Tuesday, June 9, 2020
(Lec. 360)
1) 1 Kings 17:7-16
2) Matthew 5:13-16

TUESDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Ephrem,
Deacon and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 326, 764, 782, 1243, 2763, 2821

FOCUS: In baptism, we received the light of faith we are called to share with others.

Many of us probably do not remember our baptism, that sacrament through which we became children of God and part of the very body of Christ. If we were initiated as infants, we were too young to remember it. But hopefully all of us have been present at enough baptisms to know that after we were baptized, the minister anointed us, gave us a white garment, and finally, lit a candle from the paschal candle and handed it to one of our parents or godparents. This candle symbolizes the gift of faith we receive at baptism, a gift the minister prayed would be kept burning brightly in our hearts. It is the hope of the Church that our parents and godparents nurtured our faith until such time as we were able to seek for ourselves the sustenance our faith needs to be kept burning brightly.

And what nurtures our faith? Gathering as we do for the sacred liturgy is, of course, a powerful action that sustains our faith. In this time, we are nourished by the word of God, nourished by Christ himself in the Eucharist, and we are nourished by the presence of each other – the witness we give each other that we are not alone in our desire to persevere in the journey of faith.

Our personal prayer and devotion is another essential way our faith is nurtured. That time we spend one on one with God, sharing what is in our hearts and listening and getting to know the Lord better, is invaluable to sustaining that relationship that is at the heart of faith.

And why bother doing all these things to nurture our faith? Because, as Jesus reminds us in the Gospel, faith isn't something that is meant to be hidden, or protected. Like a lamp or candle, it is meant to be brought out into the open, to be exposed before others. We tend to think of faith as personal, private. And there is a personal and private dimension to it. But the reason the Lord gave us this gift of faith wasn't just for our own personal, private good. It was for the good of others, too. And to achieve that good, we need to let our faith be known, be willing to speak about and show in our actions how it shapes and influences our choices and our opinions, how we spend our time, how we treat others.

As we prepare to be nourished by Christ in the Eucharist, let us pray for the courage to share the light of our faith in the places where the Lord has chosen to lead us.

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Wednesday, June 10, 2020

(Lec. 361)

1) 1 Kings 18:20-39

2) Matthew 5:17-19

Gospel related: CCC 577, 592, 764, 1967, 2053, 2763

WEDNESDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Both Elijah and Jesus call us to let go of the idols in our lives so that we can give ourselves completely to God.

We find ourselves between two mountains today, as we continue Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and reach the climax of Elijah's mission with his dramatic "showdown on the mount." And if we're paying attention, they're both calling us to make a radical choice.

Before Elijah's contest with the false prophets, notice how he challenges the people. He doesn't accuse them of not believing in God, but of *straddling*. It sounds like they want to keep calling themselves God's people while worshiping other "gods" on the side. Certainly, the political pressure from Queen Jezebel makes it risky to openly follow God. And maybe they want to hedge their bets, see which god has the power to do more for them. The Lord clears that question up in spectacular fashion, reminding them that he has made their hearts for himself alone, not to be shared with idols, and that being his people means remaining faithful to his law no matter what.

Jesus' words seem to reinforce and expand on this point in today's Gospel. As one who has come *not to abolish but to fulfill* the law, Jesus is the embodiment of faithfulness to God. Obedience to God will consist of making a total gift of ourselves to God, as Jesus did, rather than in animal sacrifices like Elijah's. There is no room for "straddling": *whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.*

With this standard in mind, let's think back to Elijah's challenge and ask ourselves: Are we straddling? We want to belong to Christ, but we may be holding something back from him. We may have told ourselves that a particular commandment is too hard to really follow, or too trivial to make a habit of. There may be idols keeping us from giving Jesus our whole heart: Success? Comfort? The esteem of others. How about our grudges? We may not be pouring out *blood libations to them*, like today's psalm says, but they sure take up a lot of our time, our effort, and our thoughts.

It took quite the demonstration of power for the Israelites to give up their idol. Today, Jesus wants to show us, not just his power, but his love – not with fireballs from the sky, but with his own burning heart in the Eucharist and the purifying fire of reconciliation. Let's listen and receive that love in the silence of prayer. Let us name our idols, ask for the grace to reject them, and *repair the altar of the Lord* in our own hearts.

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Thursday, June 11, 2020

(Lec. 580)

1) Acts 11:21b-26; 13:1-3

(Lec. 362)

2) Matthew 5:20-26

THURSDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Barnabas,
Apostle)

Gospel related: CCC 278, 764, 1034, 1424, 2054, 2257, 2262, 2302, 2608, 2763, 2792, 2841, 2845

FOCUS: A good Christian avoids any sin against charity and justice.

In today's Gospel, Jesus focuses on anger. Catholic teaching holds that as an emotion [or what our theology calls "a passion"], anger itself is neither good nor evil (CCC 1767). How it is embodied determines its nature. When it is for the purpose of correcting a vice, or is directed toward charity and justice, it is virtuous and noble (CCC 2302).

When we are angry over the wrong things, when we perceive an affront to justice when things are not unjust (cf., Thomas Aquinas), or when our motives are vindictive or for vengeance, then anger is indeed sinful. Jesus' words today are a foundation for that teaching. He says, *You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, "You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment." But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.* He is giving this commandment a broader meaning than simply "not killing" anyone. For, like murder, sinful anger is a sin against charity and justice.

Therefore, a hard heart or refusal to forgive someone who has hurt us are things for which we will be judged. As will insulting others and bullying – Jesus gave the examples of "*Raqa*," meaning imbecile or blockhead, and *fool*. The pain of words, like a dagger penetrating the heart, can often take longer to heal than a physical wound.

Today we celebrate the memorial of Saint Barnabas, one of the Apostles of Jesus. He is one who took seriously the essence of Jesus' teachings, including today's about avoiding any sin against charity and justice. The reading from Acts tells us that when he arrived in Antioch and *saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all ... for he was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and faith.*

Barnabas spent much of his ministry traveling and preaching with Saint Paul. It is thought that the followers of Jesus in Antioch were first called Christians during Barnabas' time there. Tradition holds that he was martyred in 61 AD after dedicating his life to spreading the Good News to both Jews and Gentiles as they established the early Church. We have much to learn from his dedication, his courage, and his unrelenting commitment to his mission to continue to teach about the Messiah, despite any danger to himself.

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Friday, June 12, 2020

(Lec. 363)

1) 1 Kings 19:9a, 11-16

2) Matthew 5:27-32

Gospel related: CCC 226, 764, 1034, 1456, 2330, 2336, 2380, 2382, 2513, 2528, 2763

FRIDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We listen for the voice of God speaking truth to our hearts.

Our readings today invite us to deepen our understanding of God's voice in our lives. In our first reading, Elijah is struggling. The Israelites have strayed from God and have killed others who serve God. Elijah is threatened by them. The Lord instructs him to *Go outside and stand on the mountain before the Lord*. The instruction to stand is important here. It signifies not just a posture, but rather conveys the meaning to serve the Lord. Of course, Elijah has already been serving the Lord in his role as prophet. This passage is the Lord renewing his commission for Elijah.

What is also notable in today's first reading is how the Lord speaks to Elijah. He is not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire that Elijah experiences. Instead, after the fire there was a *tiny whispering sound* and Elijah knows immediately that it is the Lord. And he hides his face. The Lord asks him why he is there, and after Elijah answers him, the Lord sends him back out to the Israelites.

In this quiet moment, Elijah finds new strength and wisdom in his call, as the truth comes in God's voice. Our Gospel also invites us to dig deeper into our understanding of what God is asking of us, and how the truth is spoken to us. Jesus says, *you have heard that it was said ... but I say to you...*

As part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers new teachings that challenge prior views. For instance, it is not enough to not commit adultery, but rather, one must not even look at another with lust in the heart. Jesus is challenging people to not just live by the letter of the law, but to live the deeper meaning in the law.

Let us take some time this week to spend more quiet time with God. In this space, may our hearts and minds be open to listen to what God says to us. May we be open to a deeper understanding of who God is and how God is present in our lives. May we come away with new awareness of how God commissions each of us to serve him in this world. And may this Eucharist strengthen us on our faith journey.

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Saturday, June 13, 2020
(Lec. 364)
1) 1 Kings 19:19-21
2) Matthew 5:33-37

SATURDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Anthony of Padua,
Priest and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 581, 592, 764, 2141, 2153, 2338, 2463, 2466, 2763

FOCUS: Give God a complete “yes,” as did Elisha and Saint Anthony.

When Elijah throws his cloak over him, signifying that Elisha was to serve him, Elisha said, *Please, let me kiss my father and mother goodbye, and I will follow you.* Elisha had a moment of “wait, let me do this first,” but then gave himself wholeheartedly to God’s call.

When God calls us to something, do we hesitate, thinking we need to take care of something before we can answer? The message seems to be that when God calls, he knows we are ready.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells his followers to let their “yes” mean “yes.” He does not seem to be speaking of being called, per se, as much as he is addressing the law regarding swearing oaths. But his words still apply: Answer truthfully. Even, it seems, to the point of admitting our own feeling of insecurity about what God is calling us to, as Elisha did. For by God’s grace we are chosen, and by God’s grace we are given all we need to respond. It is our human frailty that doubts. And it is God who gave Elisha, and gives us, confidence to say “yes,” and mean it.

Saint Anthony of Padua, whose feast we celebrate today, had the courage and faith to have his “yes” mean “yes.” Saint Anthony was born in Lisbon, Portugal in 1195 to a prominent family. He left a comfortable life to enter the religious order of Saint Augustine when he was just 15 years old. He later joined the Franciscans, hoping to be a martyr for Christ while preaching the Gospel to the Moors in Morocco. After a few months, he fell ill and set sail to return home, but a storm brought him to Sicily instead.

After he recovered from his illness, Anthony lived a quiet life of prayer at a hermitage until he was unexpectedly asked to give a short sermon at an ordination. Those in attendance realized immediately that Anthony had a gift for preaching and a genuine, holy zeal. Saint Francis assigned Anthony to preach in Italy and northern France, which Anthony did while living a simple, penitent life.

Saint Anthony is a perfect example of completely abandoning one’s previous way of life to follow wherever God calls. He did just that when he joined the Augustinians, then again when he became a Franciscan, and he continued following wherever God led him throughout his various assignments as a Franciscan. This complete abandonment to God’s will led to him becoming both a saint and a Doctor of the Church.

Elisha’s “yes” meant “yes.” Saint Anthony’s “yes” meant “yes.” May we respond to God’s call with the same totality and sincerity.

* * *

SUNDAY, JUNE 14, 2020

(Lec. 167)

1) Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a

2) 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

3) John 6:51-58

Gospel related: CCC 728, 787, 994, 1001, 1338, 1355, 1384, 1391, 1406, 1509, 1524, 2837

**THE MOST HOLY
BODY AND BLOOD
OF CHRIST
(Corpus Christi)
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: Jesus, our bread of life, abides with us as we journey through the desert of our life.

Today is the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, also known as the Solemnity of Corpus Christi. This is a time to celebrate – in a particularly focused way – what we celebrate and believe every time we gather at Christ’s altar for Mass. That is, we profess the Real Presence of the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ in the elements of, and under the appearance of, bread and wine in the Eucharist.

Today we see a parallel between the people of Israel in their flight from Egypt and wandering in the desert to Jesus’ feeding of us in his body and blood. At the end of their 40-year journey, Moses reminds the people of the faithfulness God showed them in providing what they needed, and he instructs them not to forget God who has guided them, sated their thirst, and fed their hunger.

The story of the people of Israel in the desert is our story. We, too, face unknown physical and spiritual dangers as we journey through our lives. Just as the manna kept the people of Israel alive through their journey, so, too, does the Eucharist keep our souls alive in the desert of our earthly life.

But the parallel with the manna in the desert is only partial. Our “manna,” the Eucharist, is so much more than “food for the journey.” Jesus tells us in the Gospel that if we eat his flesh and drink his blood, we will remain in him and he in us, and that he will lead us to eternal life. The Eucharist we receive on Sunday carries us throughout the week, as Jesus remains in us. He is a steady presence, sharing in the good times and in the struggles of our lives.

Today, as we receive Jesus, let us pray for open, quiet hearts throughout the week – hearts that will know of the presence of Jesus in the beauty around us, in the love of family and friends, in the kindness of colleagues, and even in the challenges that we face. When we eat Jesus’ body and drink his blood in the Eucharist, Jesus remains with us. Let us pray for an awareness of that presence so that we can be the body and blood of Christ to others.

* * *

Monday, June 15, 2020

(Lec. 365)

1) 1 Kings 21:1-16

2) Matthew 5:38-42

Gospel related: CCC 764, 2443, 2763

MONDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We pray for the salvation of the world.

In the Gospel today, Jesus recites from Leviticus about offense and reciprocity under the law. Restitution and justice were based on the offense itself. If someone takes an eye, the victim would be allowed to take an eye of the one who harmed him, as a form of restitution. It was not mandated – one did not *have to* exact the same harm – but it was a limit. It was a way to keep revenge from overtaking a person or society. If a person takes a tooth, the one victimized may take only a tooth in return – not the head in which it sits.

Jesus Christ, of course, demands something even more difficult of his followers. *When someone strikes you on your right cheek*, Jesus says, *turn the other one to him as well*. Christ is not teaching us to revel in our suffering, or to ignore the pain inflicted by others upon us. He is also definitely not saying one must stay within an abusive relationship. The teaching is not that when someone strikes you on the cheek, ice it, and say a prayer. Rather, Christ demands of us to love our attacker – not to determinedly suffer in silence, but to *love* the person who is inflicting the pain. And it may be that we love from a far, far distance for our safety and the safety of others.

But love in the Christian tradition is to will the good of the other. We should desire what God does, for God *wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth* (1 Timothy 2:4). Those who offend us most probably seem – to us – least deserving of that salvation. And yet no one is excluded from the invitation. Therefore, those hardest to love are exactly the ones whom we should love enough to pray for their repentance, conversion, and obedience to God's command such that someday they will be beside us in heaven. For in heaven, they will no longer be who they are here. They will have become saints.

So we pray for ourselves, that by God's grace we are never the one who offends. And we pray for our brothers and sisters, and the salvation of the world: that all whom God desires to save may turn to him in response.

* * *

Tuesday, June 16, 2020
(Lec. 366)

- 1) 1 Kings 21:17-29
- 2) Matthew 5:43-48

Gospel related: CCC 443, 764, 1693, 1825, 1933, 1968, 2013, 2054, 2262, 2303, 2608, 2763 2828, 2842, 2844 CSDC
40

TUESDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: No one is beyond the reach of God's mercy and love.

We are in the midst of Matthew's version of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Six times in this chapter Jesus begins his teaching by saying, *You have heard that it was said ... But I say to you ...* The lesson in today's passage concerns love, and who is worthy of it. For Jesus, there simply are no limits, no people who are beyond the need for love. He tells the crowd: *Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.*

To Jesus' largely Jewish audience, this teaching would have come as a shock, at best, or as a complete heresy, at worst. The ancient Jewish understanding of the world was heavily influenced by the notion of divine retribution: God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. One does not have to search for long through the Hebrew Scriptures to see this notion at work; today's first reading about Elijah and King Ahab demonstrates it perfectly.

It is easy for us, too, to see the world in simplistic fashion: You're either a good person, or a bad person; you're either on God's side, or against God; God either rewards you, or punishes you. Yet this way of thinking puts God (and people) in a tiny box of contractual, black-and-white behavior.

For Jesus, the sun rises on the just *and* the unjust; the rain falls on the good *and* the bad. In other words, no one is beyond the reach of God's mercy and love, even those who choose to reject it. To be a follower of Jesus, we, too, must strive to love indiscriminately, for each and every person provides an opportunity to love. In doing so, we are perfected as we grow in imitation of the Jesus, who prayed for and loved his persecutors until his very last breath.

Each of us comes to the Eucharist as an imperfect person – liable to sin and temptation, sick and in need of healing. But the good news is that Jesus loves each one of us – loves us far too much to allow us to stay where we are, and gives us his grace to transform us in love and virtue. We come needing the Divine Physician, and he heals us. No one is beyond the reach of God's mercy and love.

* * *

Wednesday, June 17, 2020
(Lec. 367)

1) 2 Kings 2:1, 6-14

2) Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Gospel related: CCC 575, 764, 1063, 1430, 1434, 1693, 1753, 1969, 2447, 2655, 2691, 2763, 2792

WEDNESDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Seek reward from the Father who sees in secret, and don't settle for earthly praise.

In the Sermon on the Mount, which we hear from Matthew's Gospel today, Jesus contrasts the behavior of hypocrites with that demanded of his disciples. The hypocrites blow a trumpet before giving alms; pray on street corners so that others may see them; and neglect their appearance while fasting. They receive the reward they seek – recognition and praise for their good works. Jesus tells his disciples to perform these same actions, but in secret. By seeking approval from God alone, God will be the one to repay them.

In this day and age, it is easy to get caught up in seeking the approval of others, especially through social media. It can be difficult not to evaluate our self-worth based on the opinions of others. As human beings, we are created for relationship and community. Our desire for love and belonging is God-given.

As disciples, we are called to do everything for the greater glory of God, and not for ourselves. As humans, we often have mixed motives for doing good. The disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are not meant to bring us glory, but to bring us into right relationship with God, ourselves, and others. They help us purify our intentions.

Human judgment is fickle, but the Father's love for us is unchanging. Let us not settle for empty praise, but seek God's eternal reward, remembering that at the end of time, all that is hidden will be revealed. May we care less about looking good and more about being good; less about impressing others with our good deeds and more about being compassionate. May we seek to spend life everlasting praising God at the heavenly banquet.

* * *

Thursday, June 18, 2020
(Lec. 368)

- 1) Sirach 48:1-14
- 2) Matthew 6:7-15

Gospel related: CCC 268, 443, 764, 1165, 1969, 2608, 2632, 2659, 2668, 2759, 2763, 2776, 2792, 2845, 2841 CSDC 492

THURSDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Prayer draws us closer to God.

Elijah was a busy and accomplished prophet, as we hear in Sirach's account. He raised a man from the netherworld, he anointed kings, he brought down nobles, etc. While Elijah spoke many prophetic words, the author of Sirach wants to draw our attention to Elijah's deeds. Elijah was a prophet of word and action. He lived what he preached.

But he did none of that of his own ability or authority. As a prophet of God, he was empowered by God to do all those things in his name. God gave him every grace and favor in order to accomplish his prophecies and bring great glory to God.

We, too, may obtain every grace and favor from God. We need only ask, in prayer. And in today's Gospel, Jesus tells us how. First, he instructs his disciples not to babble like the pagans do in prayer. Instead, he offers a very specific prayer to use – what we call the Lord's Prayer. Jesus acknowledges that God knows our needs and desires before we say them out loud. But he will never force them upon us. We ask for them, and cooperate with his grace when we make ourselves open to receiving the good gifts God has prepared for us.

Prayer is how we draw closer to God. Whether we pray to praise God, lament our suffering, or ask for our needs, prayer draws us into a union with our Triune God that is the foundation of our being.

Like Elijah, we can do nothing without God. And like Elijah, our words and actions ought to reflect God's desires and his glory. So may our own habits of prayer help us to grow in this area, and to rely ever more on God who loves us. And through the grace of the sacraments, may we glorify God as we go forth and announce the Gospel.

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Friday, June 19, 2020

(Lec. 170)

1) Deuteronomy 7:6-11

2) 1 John 4:7-16

3) Matthew 11:25-30

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

**THE MOST
SACRED HEART
OF JESUS
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus is unceasing in its desire for the good of others.

In our first reading today, Moses gives us that beautiful image of God setting his heart upon his people and choosing them as his own. Not because they were the largest nation, or the most perfect or worthy, or for any temporal reason. God chose his people because he loved them. That's us! God has set his heart upon us; God has chosen us; he loves us; we are his!

This image that Moses uses is an appropriate one for our solemn feast today, the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Pope Pius XII said about this, "His Heart, more than all the other members of His body, is the natural sign and symbol of His boundless love for the human race. 'There is in the Sacred Heart,' as our predecessor of immortal memory, Leo XIII, pointed out, 'the symbol and express image of the infinite love of Jesus Christ which moves us to love in return'" (*Haurietis Aquas*, 1956).

The image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is a most consoling image. It is a heart that is open and visible to us, full, and lanced – three things that constantly remind us of the depth of God's love in its divinity, transformative power, and woundedness. We often see images of hearts, but we don't see those hearts lanced, flaming, or encircled with a crown of thorns. No, those are rightfully reserved for images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

For the Sacred Heart of Jesus is like no other heart. It is the heart of God-as-love who became human so that we could become divine. It is God whose heart is overflowing in abundance and unceasing in its desire for the good of others. *Beloved*, John tells us, *let us love one another, because love is of God ... [and] God is love.*

This is what Christ is inviting us to today in the Gospel: To yoke ourselves to a heart of infinite, divine love. A heart that has been set upon us and has chosen us, simply out of love. A heart that will bear all things for us, making our burden light and our troubles rest. May the grace and love that shines forth from that heart in every image, and which pours out in every Eucharist, continue to move us to love him in return.

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Saturday, June 20, 2020
(Lec. 370)
1) 2 Chronicles 24:17-25
(Lec. 573)
2) Luke 2:41-51

SATURDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
The Immaculate Heart
of the Blessed Virgin Mary)

Gospel related: CCC 503, 517, 531, 534, 583, 2196, 2599 CSDC 259

FOCUS: O Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us

Yesterday we celebrated the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Today, the Church remembers and celebrates the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Christ's heart was pierced on the Cross, and – as Simeon foretold in the Gospel of Luke (2:35) – Mary's most immaculate heart was pierced in pain and sorrow. It is fitting that these two commemorations should share space in the liturgical calendar, for the two hearts that were once ensconced within the same physical body, sharing lifeblood and nourishment, were united again at Calvary in Christ's eternal sacrifice.

Where the Sacred Heart focuses on the overflowing love of Jesus' divine heart, today we celebrate the interior life of Mary: "Her joys and sorrows, her virtues and hidden perfections, and, above all, her virginal love for God the Father, her maternal love for her son Jesus, and her compassionate love for all [people]" (newadvent.org). And the maternal love of Mary is an all-consuming one – for her Son, and for his body, the Church. Full of grace – that is, lacking nothing in the way of moral perfection – she could do nothing other than *love the Lord God with all [her] heart, and with all [her] soul, and with all [her] strength* (Cf., Deuteronomy 6:5).

As she and Joseph searched for Jesus in Luke's Gospel today, we know there was concern and anxiety in her heart – for she tells him so. There was confusion and lack of understanding. But there was never a lack of faith, never any doubt, and always an abundance of love. Having heard Jesus' words in response to her question, Mary, Luke tells us, *kept all these things in her heart*. Just as she had done when the shepherds came to find her, Joseph, and the infant Jesus and make *known the [angelic] message that had been told them about this child* (Luke 2:17).

Mary's heart was fuller than we can even imagine – for in holding these things in her heart, in pondering them as some translations say, she was cultivating space for the Holy Spirit. From her heart emanates the fullness of grace with which she was created. Unspoiled and perfected in virtue, it is Immaculate just as she is.

With her intercession and in God's great mercy, may we obtain ever greater purity of heart and live in imitation of her faith, hope, and love.

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SUNDAY, JUNE 21, 2020

(Lec. 94)

1) Jeremiah 20:10-13

2) Romans 5:12-15

3) Matthew 10:26-33

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

**TWELFTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Do not fear, for the grace of God is overflowing.

We spend so much time and effort being afraid. Some fear a past they cannot change or a future they cannot predict. Others fear what people are thinking or saying about them. There is fear of heights, the dark, spiders, loneliness, etc. But one of the constant messages of Scripture is, "fear not!" And paying attention to why we are not to be afraid is an exercise in spiritual maturity.

Jeremiah exemplifies that today. He had good reason to fear – if not death, at least great harm to himself. As a prophet who lived some six centuries before Jesus, Jeremiah's prophecy was that the Israelite's careless faithlessness was to blame for their exile to Babylon, which is present-day Iraq. This idea was roundly rejected by his audience, and because the people despised the message, they wanted to *take [their] vengeance on him*.

In the face of such evil, however, the prophet showed no fear, choosing instead to *sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, for he has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked*. If only we could be so brave when *our* enemies gather at the gate!

We can be, if we open our hearts to the words of Jesus. He tells us to *fear no one* and nothing. If we truly believe that God has created all things, even the birds of the sky and the fish in the sea, then surely he has not lost sight of us in our struggles. *You are worth more than many sparrows*, Jesus says. For some, knowing that God has counted all the hairs on our head might be disconcerting, but for others still it offers great comfort, to know that God is so intimately involved with every detail of even the smallest and seemingly insignificant parts of his creation.

In his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul echoes Christ's message of determination and confidence. For it is through Christ, who conquers sin and death, that we can share in his victory over not just mortal death, but the death of our own fears, faults, and failings. God's *gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ* is his grace *overflow[ing] for the many*. The reign of death *from Adam to Moses* is ended and the kingdom of God and the hope of heaven has taken its place.

We live in a world that can be hostile to the Gospel, and we all have our daily burdens and struggles. But Christ's presence among us, God's grace overflowing, is there to give us strength, courage, and fortitude. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we have the ability to pray for these gifts, that we might stand up not only to defend the faith, but to be strong in the face of any obstacles and suffering in our life of faith.

Today is the start of summer and the longest day of the year. It is an opportunity to see anew how the light of the sun, and God's Son, can guide us out of the darkness of fear. As the things of the earth mature in this season, so can we mature in our spiritual life. It is the perfect occasion for us to walk a new path with and for the Lord, trusting in God and fearing no one.

* * *

Monday, June 22, 2020
(Lec. 371)
1) 2 Kings 17:5-8,
13-15a, 18
2) Matthew 7:1-5

MONDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Paulinus of Nola,
Bishop;
Saints John Fisher, Bishop
and Thomas More,
Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 678

FOCUS: In condemning hypocrisy, Jesus is calling us to integrity.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is critical of those who refuse to acknowledge their own shortcomings as they draw attention to the faults of others. *You hypocrite*, he says to those who would act this way.

This is Jesus speaking the hard truth in love, though for once his targeted audience is not the Pharisees, elders, or scribes ... but his own disciples! It is an interesting scene in this part of the Sermon on the Mount: a bit of a dressing down or scolding that lies between dependence on God, and what holiness entails.

It needs very little exposition, as Jesus is direct and concise. Each of us should have our own spiritual house in order before reproving another. But note that despite the initial command, *stop judging*, his teaching is not that we should never disregard the faults of others. If that were the case, his last words would be contradictory, as he says, *remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye*. In condemning hypocrisy, Jesus is calling us to integrity.

How we act toward one another ought to reflect how God acts toward us: Always out of love. Of course, Jesus has perfect integrity and can therefore call any one of us out on our failure to live up to God's commands. We, however, are imperfect. And while the Christian life does require charitable, fraternal correction of one another at times, it should never arise out of any motivation other than love. Not ego, not arrogance, not narcissism, not a desire for power or self-promotion.

In fact, it seems as if Christian love requires that we take care of our faults *so that we may assist others* in overcoming theirs as well. In other words, the Christian life is not just about fixing ourselves and moving along as if all is well. The Christian life is a "first, then" journey of growing in holiness: First remove the beam ... then you will see to remove the splinter.

Let us give thanks for the one who was hung upon a wooden beam so we could see, without splinters, the way to eternal life. May his grace in the Eucharist enable us to love another with integrity and humility.

Saint John Fisher (1469-1535) – John Fisher was a Renaissance scholar and bishop of England committed to defending the truth and primacy of the Church. He was renowned for his character and brilliance in opposing Luther and other Protestant reformers. John was martyred for refusing to annul the marriage of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, and for refusing to recognize Henry VIII as head of the English Church.

Tuesday, June 23, 2020

(Lec. 372)

1) 2 Kings 19:9b-11,
14-21, 31-35a,36

2) Matthew 7:6, 12-14

Gospel related: CCC 1036, 1696, 1789, 1970, 2609, 2821 CSDC 20

TUESDAY OF
12th WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus' teachings always point us to life in him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The king of Assyria, who intends to invade Jerusalem, tells Hezekiah, the king of Judah, not to be deceived by the *God on whom [he relies]*, for the God of Israel cannot protect them. *You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all other countries*, he says. *They doomed them! Will you, then, be saved?*

But Hezekiah is not swayed by the king's taunts and threats. He goes to the Temple and prays in the presence of the Lord *on whom [he relies]*. He prays to be saved, not for his own glory, but so, as he says, *that all kingdoms of this earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God.*

Soon after, Hezekiah received another message, this time from someone who brings God's word of response. He essentially says this: "I have heard your prayer, and – concerning the king of Assyria – things are going to go very badly for him." And *that night the angel of the Lord went forth and struck down one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp, and the king of Assyria broke camp and went back home to Nineveh.*

We don't know if Jesus had this event in mind when talking to his disciples, but it is a good example of his pronouncement that the gate is narrow and the road that leads to life is constricted and few find it. For when Hezekiah was faced with a dire threat, he headed right toward that narrow gate. He trusted in his God. He honored what was holy, and prayed for deliverance.

Clearly, the Assyrian king did not find the gate and the road to life – he arrogantly marched down the road to destruction in his dismissal of God and his saving power. His army was destroyed and he returned home ... and then – in the very next verse (37), which we did not hear today – while he was worshiping in the temple of his false god, two of his sons killed him.

Jesus' teachings always point us to life: Life in him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit – both here on earth, and for eternity in heaven. May we have the fortitude and wisdom of Hezekiah in choosing the road that leads to that life. And may the grace of God help keep us on it.

* * *

Wednesday, June 24, 2020
(Lec. 587)

- 1) Isaiah 49:1-6
- 2) Acts 13:22-26
- 3) Luke 1:57-66, 80

**THE NATIVITY OF
SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: On this feast of his birth, we give thanks for the gift of John the Baptist.

Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist, the paradoxical figure of whom Jesus said, *I tell you, of all the children born to women, there is no one greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he* (Luke 7:28). Unlike most saints who are venerated on their day of death (if known), or the date of their canonization, John is given precedence for his birth.

Luke's Gospel is the only one of the four to have an account of him being born, and it is fairly straightforward: *When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son, and her family and friends rejoiced with her.* The rest of the story in this Gospel is about his circumcision and naming ceremony eight days later.

And it really is "the rest of the story," as Paul Harvey used to say, that helps us celebrate this event as one of greatest importance. First, his birth was the fulfillment of a promise made to Zechariah by the archangel Gabriel (Luke 1:13). Zechariah and Elizabeth were elderly, and had so far been unable to have children. Zechariah had doubted the angel's words, and had been made *speechless and unable to talk until the day these things [would] take place, because [he] did not believe [the angel's] words* (Luke 1:20). As we heard in the reading of this Gospel, Zechariah regained his voice after the birth.

Second, Elizabeth's announcement at her son's circumcision that the child *will be called John* was culturally exceptional because *there [was] no one among [her] relatives who [had] this name.* It was also a sign of God's favor upon her because she had not heard the angel speak to Zechariah, yet she knew the name the angel had declared for her son. Granted, Zechariah may have written this on a tablet for her well before this day, as he wrote on it in today's passage – we do not know. Regardless, she obeyed the angel's instructions, the child was given the name John, and we have the first example of this child-who-would-become-man at the center of a crowd's amazement, fear, curiosity, and the knowledge that *the hand of the Lord was with him.*

And the hand of the Lord was indeed with him. While Isaiah had prophesied the coming of the servant who would gather Israel to him and be *a light to the nations* such that *[God's] salvation may reach to the ends of the earth,* John's role was to literally point to this servant: *Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* (John 1:29).

In celebrating John's birth today, we know, of course, who he is, who he will become, and what he will do. So in addition to the always-celebration-worthy event of the birth of a child of God, we also look back and celebrate what his birth meant for the world in the unfolding of salvation history. His example of trust in God and belief in God's promises are worthy of emulating, and his perseverance and fortitude in showing others the way to Christ are the epitome of discipleship.

So on this feast of his birth, may we give thanks for the gift of John the Baptist. May his example and intercession help us in our own discipleship.

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Thursday, June 25, 2020
(Lec. 374)

1) 2 Kings 24:8-17

2) Matthew 7:21-29

Gospel related: CCC 443, 581, 1821, 1970, 2611, 2826 CSDC 70

THURSDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Let prayer and discernment guide our actions.

Depart from me you evildoers. Those words sound harsh, especially in the context of Jesus theoretically addressing those who have driven out demons in his name, and done *mighty deeds* in his name. These deeds sound like the work of Jesus' disciples, not of evildoers. If the actions themselves aren't evil, what, then, is the problem?

It may be that the actions were not rooted in a key ingredient to our salvation: our relationship with God. This involves our desire and discernment to do his will in our lives. We may be doing great things, but if we are doing them for our own purposes – to gain the admiration or praise of others or to feel better about ourselves and assuage our conscience or guilt – then we are motivated not by God but by our ego.

Jesus' parable illustrates well the problem he is trying to point out. *Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.* A foundation of rock is one that will endure the test of the elements, and it is laid with prayer and discernment of the will of God. We need to first start with God's direction – with God's plan, not ours. No one can carry out this prayer and discernment for us, we can't delegate it, and we can't do it while we're also doing other things.

Discerning the will of God in our lives requires our time and focused attention, both of which can be challenging for us to devote to the Lord. But his Word is accessible; God withholds nothing good from us! And through grace, we have the power to ask for help in listening to and acting on his Word.

So as we prepare to share in the table of the Lord, let us ask him to help us be the kind of disciples who build our houses on rock, as we seek to do the will of God in our lives.

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Friday, June 26, 2020
(Lec. 375)
1) 2 Kings 25:1-12
2) Matthew 8:1-4
Gospel related: CCC 448, 586

FRIDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God always loves us and gives us what we need.

Our readings today show a sharp contrast in people's experiences of God. The reading from the Second Book of Kings shows perhaps the lowest moment in Israel's history: Jerusalem's walls are knocked down, the king is arrested, and the people are sent into exile. In the Gospel, we hear what is likely the high point of a leper's life: When one who has been suffering and ostracized receives Jesus' touch, and is immediately healed.

These two stories – one of pain and destruction, and one of healing and restoration – show drastically different experiences of God. In the painful moments, it can be hard to see God, or to be aware of his love and mercy. In moments of healing and joy, however, it is often easier to sense his presence and goodness.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola knew that every spiritual life has its ups and downs. He described these ups and downs of the spiritual life as consolation and desolation. When we experience fear, doubt, or isolation, we are in a state of desolation, and it is harder to be aware of his loving presence. Conversely, when we experience an increase in faith, hope and love, we are in consolation, and it is a time to savor our connection to God.

Identifying these states of desolation and consolation can help us realize that God's love for us does not depend on our ability to feel it. Did God stop loving the Israelites while Jerusalem was plundered, and did he only start loving the leper when Jesus healed him? Of course not! Does he only love us when we feel his presence? That would be absurd. Our Triune God is a continuous outpouring of love for us every moment of our lives, whether we are awake or asleep, sinful or loving, aware of it or not.

In faith, we learn that the God who created us, saved us, and sustains us always loves us. It may be that we do not always feel his presence, and sometimes his love expressed in our lives does not always look as we would expect. Yet the same God who will call back the exiled Israelites, and would heal the sick and the lame, is always at work in his mysterious, active, and loving way to bring us what we need and bring us to himself.

Today, whether we find ourselves enjoying consolation or struggling in desolation, we bring those feelings and experiences to the Lord. As we approach him at the altar, may we open our hearts to his healing and ask for the grace to trust in him through the ups and downs of our lives, for he is truly loving, present, and faithful.

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Saturday, June 27, 2020
(Lec. 376)

- 1) Lamentations 2:2,
10-14, 18-19
- 2) Matthew 8:5-17

SATURDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Cyril of Alexandria,
Bishop and Doctor of the Church;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: CCC 517, 543, 1386, 1505, 2610

FOCUS: Imitate the centurion's humility and his trust in Jesus' power to heal.

Most of us can remember about 10 years ago when we started to say "and with your spirit" rather than "and also with you" at Mass. That was when we began using an updated translation of the prayers for Mass. These new responses more accurately reflect the words and images from Scripture, making their connections to the Mass clearer.

Looking at these prayers and responses side-by-side with the Scriptures that inspired them helps us to pray them more fully and meaningfully. An example is the prayer we say before receiving the Eucharist: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." We heard the origin of this prayer today, in the words of the centurion in Matthew's Gospel.

The centurion's servant has fallen seriously ill, but the centurion knows Jesus can cure him with just a word. Jesus offers to come home with the centurion, but the centurion refuses, saying, *Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed.* This faith in the power of Jesus' word is praised by Jesus, who assures the centurion that his request is granted because of his faith.

The centurion's words are a model for our prayer. We want to imitate the centurion's humility and his trust in Jesus' power to heal. Thus, we use the centurion's words in our prayer, expressing our unworthiness and thus exemplifying the pure mercy of God. We do nothing to earn God's love – it is freely given.

It is important to prepare our own souls to receive the Eucharist and it is also important to love one another. When we offer ourselves – body and soul – to Christ in this prayer, we open ourselves up to healing, and therefore to becoming more loving and more holy. We are transformed by God's love and grace so as to be able to follow more perfectly his command to love.

Before we receive the Eucharist today, when we pray "only say the word and my soul shall be healed," let us offer this prayer for the healing of all souls, as well as our own. In this way, may the Church as the Body of Christ grow stronger in faith and unity, and bear even greater fruit for the kingdom of God.

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SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 2020

(Lec. 97)

1) 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a

2) Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

3) Matthew 10:37-42

Gospel related: CCC 858, 1506, 2232 CSDC 193

**THIRTEENTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Discipleship must be the frame that gives definition and shape to our life.

Today we hear part of Jesus' very candid teaching on the importance and demands of discipleship. As he sends the Apostles out to preach, he reminds them that they can expect hardship and a variety of responses to their preaching. Yet they are not to be afraid of whatever might happen, for they will never be without his care and love.

What Jesus is saying is that we must be "all-in" in our response to him. If we think about it, it makes perfect sense: whatever one invests the most of oneself in, brings the greatest return. Therefore, those who invest in their relationship with Christ will receive a prophet's rewards. Like a frame that gives definition, strength, and shape to a building, discipleship gives the same to our lives. But we must choose that frame – God will never impose it.

Today we hear about the woman from Shunem who sought to serve God by assisting his servant. Her generosity did not go unnoticed, but rather is rewarded with her deepest wish – a child.

Paul reminds us that we are each baptized in Christ – called by God just as the woman from Shunem was called by Elisha and the disciples were called by Jesus. That call emanating from the very heart of God to follow Jesus and to take up our cross is at the heart of our baptismal identity.

Today we are challenged to reflect on how we have accepted this call. If we are indeed serious about our relationship with Christ, then we will be open to allowing it to grow and deepen.

Making the choice to follow Jesus, and then living it fully, is difficult and challenging – even Jesus acknowledges this. But there is reward. When we put God first, when we serve God before all else, we are promised eternal life with him. Let that promise inspire and strengthen our commitment to be faithful as God is always faithful. And may the grace of the Eucharist be the frame upon which we build our lives.

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Monday, June 29, 2020

(Lec. 591)

1) Acts 12:1-11

2) 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18

3) Matthew 16:13-19

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

**SAINTS PETER AND PAUL,
APOSTLES
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: May we have the faith and zeal of Saints Peter and Paul.

Today we celebrate two men who were foundational to the Church: Saint Peter, the rock upon whom Jesus built his Church, and Saint Paul, who spread the word of God to the Gentiles. Both men were flawed sinners – as all of us are – yet their testimony and witness to the Gospel led them to endure imprisonment, persecution, and martyrdom.

It was because of Peter's faith and his recognition of Christ – *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God* – that Jesus chose him as head of the Apostles and first leader of the Church. Paul, who was on his way to arrest Christians, was transformed by his encounter with Christ and lived the rest of his life with missionary zeal.

And how about us? We gather here in this church week after week to be united with Christ in his sacrifice. To publicly worship God who created us, and reconciled us to himself through his Son. We hear the stories of our salvation history, and especially of Jesus' life, mission, passion, and death. We learn about how we are to live as his disciples, about how God calls us all to live. But it's not really about us. It is about God and his love for us, and receiving his grace so as to allow him to work in and through us for the sake of the Kingdom and the salvation of the world. Just as he worked through Peter and Paul.

In the Mass, and with the Eucharist, we are strengthened with the body and blood of Christ and sent out into the missionary field – our own daily lives, to the people with whom we live and interact day by day. We leave equipped to be Apostles, to spread the word of God to everybody in our world. As Peter and Paul were Christ's disciples to all, so may we be with God's help.

Today, as we celebrate these two saints, let us pray for a share in their faith, zeal, and sense of mission to go out to people in our daily lives and bring them the good news of God's love for them.

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Tuesday, June 30, 2020
(Lec. 378)
1) Amos 3:1-8; 4:11-12
2) Matthew 8:23-27

TUESDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
The First Martyrs
of the Holy Roman Church)

Gospel related: CCC 2610

FOCUS: In difficult times, turn to God: *Lord, save us!*

In the first reading, Amos pronounces the Lord's judgment over the children of Israel because they had turned from God and refused to come back. The Israelites were God's chosen people; he had revealed himself in a unique way to them and demonstrated his power by leading them out of slavery in Egypt. But when they experienced *upheaval, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah*, they did not turn to him.

Conversely, in today's Gospel the disciples are in a boat with Jesus when a terrible storm strikes. This is, quite literally, a moment of upheaval for them on the swamping waves. How do they react? They immediately turn to Jesus, waking him to help them. Though Jesus questions their lack of faith, the disciples did have enough faith to know that Jesus could help them – and he does. He calms the storm.

What do we do when we encounter difficult times, or "upheavals" in our lives? In today's readings, we are given contrasting options. We can either ignore God, leading to ruin, or we can turn to him and be saved. Even when Jesus seems to scold the disciples (*Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?*), we can interpret this not as him rebuking them for coming to him for help, but rather a response to their panic: *We are perishing!* With Jesus right there in the boat with them, they needed to trust he would take care of them.

But the truth is, we *would* perish without Jesus. Not in literal, biological ways, but spiritually and eternally, we would be dead without Jesus. The disciples may have felt that he wasn't there because – until they woke him – they couldn't see him doing anything. We, too, should remember that even if God seems silent, he is still there with us, waiting for us to turn to him.

Life is stormy. Our spiritual lives are stormy. The reality is that our faith will be tested, and we will experience severe difficulties throughout our lives. These things can harden our hearts, turn us from God and eventually lead to the death of grace in our souls. Or, we can feel the wind whipping and the fierce waves tossing our boats and cry out to Jesus: *Lord, save us!*

Let us turn to him now as we prepare to receive Christ in the Eucharist. Let our prayer today, and whenever we experience tribulation, be the simple words of the disciples: *Lord, save us!*

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