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**YEAR A
WEEKDAYS II**

Friday, May 1, 2020

(Lec. 277)

1) Acts 9:1-20

2) John 6:52-59

Or for Memorial (Lec. 559)

1) Genesis 1:26–2:3

or Colossians 3:14-15, 17, 23-24

2) Matthew 13:54-58

Gospel related: CCC 495, 500 CSDC 259

FRIDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Joseph
the Worker)

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

Now that it is May, we approach the summer blockbuster movie season. The dramatic action of today's first reading sounds like a scene from such a film: Saul is *breathing murderous threats*, and seeks to capture the disciples in chains; a flashing light knocks him down and blinds him; his companions are speechless and have to lead him by the hand to Damascus, where Saul cannot see, eat, or drink for three days.

While in Damascus, Ananias, a disciple of the Lord, comes to Saul and lays his hands on him. Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit and *things like scales fell from his eyes*. This conversion story concludes with Saul's baptism, and eating to recover his strength. This may not make the theater screens, but God's actions in this story are better than any superhero we may invent.

No matter what wrong we may have done or are doing, we are not beyond God's reach to knock us off our feet, take away our vision, and set us on a new course. No matter how far gone into evil or sin someone may be, that person is not beyond God's reach. As Paul must have repented before being baptized, so we, too, have opportunities to repent before the Lord and be reconciled to him. And as Paul ate to recover his strength, we also may eat to recover ours. We are invited to the table to eat *the bread that came down from heaven*.

The same voice that called to Paul calls to us. This is what it means to have life in him. The Eucharist is the sacrament of God's eternal and unifying mercy and love. Jesus says in today's Gospel: *Whoever eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood remains in me and I in him*. He does not offer exceptions – there is no, “whoever, except,” or, “whoever, unless.” Through God's grace, *no one* is beyond his reach of mercy and love.

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Saturday, May 2, 2020
(Lec. 278)

- 1) Acts 9:31-42
- 2) John 6:60-69

SATURDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER
(OBL MEM
Saint Athanasius,
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 438, 440, 473, 728, 1336, 2766

FOCUS: Tabitha's rising from the dead shows the merciful power of God.

Each of us has probably been in the same circumstances as Tabitha's friends in today's first reading: Deeply mourning someone truly incredible, reflecting on all the good works he or she did in life and wondering why they passed too soon. Yet, through the work of Saint Peter, we have a glimpse of the Good News: Jesus has the words of everlasting life.

As a disciple, Tabitha would have known this. She had demonstrated her great love of Christ through good deeds and almsgiving. Saint Luke describes how tenderly fellow Christians treated her after her death, washing her body and laying her in a room as they waited for Peter to arrive. They wept and shared the good she had done.

While it is true that we cannot (and should not) expect such miracles as we see in the first reading, where Saint Peter's prayers raise the dead immediately, we can see this miracle as demonstrating the power of God to bring us to new life here, and eventually, to eternal life through Christ and our bodies being raised on the last day.

Sometimes, we may face intense doubts, like the disciples who reacted to Jesus in today's Gospel. In fact, many disciples stopped following Jesus because they struggled to understand and accept his "hard saying." Prior to the passage we just heard, Jesus had said that whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood will have eternal life. So today, when Jesus turns to his closest friends, the Apostles, and asks if they will also leave, Saint Peter's powerful words serve as a reminder for all Christians: *Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*

If we truly believe that Jesus has the words of eternal life – words that demand we love God, love our neighbor and, yes, eat his flesh and drink his blood in the Eucharist – then we, like Tabitha, will experience the merciful power of God. Our death will be a birth into new life, and at the end of time, our earthly bodies will also be raised and glorified.

Let our prayer today be twofold: one, may we pray for the grace to live more like Tabitha, doing good works and giving alms out of the love of God; and two, that we may truly believe Saint Peter's declaration that Jesus has the words of eternal life. May we truly believe that Jesus, the Son of God, wills eternal life for all of us and that his promises are true. May the Eucharist we consume today bring us closer to that ultimate goal of heaven.

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SUNDAY, MAY 3, 2020

(Lec. 49)

1) Acts 2:14a, 36-41

2) 1 Peter 2:20b-25

3) John 10:1-10

Gospel related: CCC 754, 764, 2158 CSDC 1

**FOURTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

FOCUS: Hear and heed the voice of our Shepherd.

Sheep left unattended or corralled will wander off and get into trouble every single time. That is why the shepherd goes to such lengths to keep an eye on them. When left to our own devices, we, too, have this uncanny tendency to wander off and get into trouble of all kinds. When we allow the voices of temptation to drown out the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, we are headed for trouble. Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves, and we need to heed his voice.

What an awesome event is described in today's first reading. Peter speaks plainly to the crowd as to their culpability in the death of Jesus. Some were no doubt agitators in the crowd the day Jesus was condemned and crucified. Others stood by silently and let it all unfold. Let us not forget that 10 of the Apostles ran away! Only the youngest remained at the foot of the cross with Mary and several other women. But Peter told them to repent and they would *receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*.

Those who accepted [Peter's] message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day. All the people repented for whatever role they may have played in Jesus' death, and the community grew by 3,000. Truly a gracious and blessed day in the life of the Church. The heavens rejoiced at the sight of such a glorious event.

This was not the work of Peter, of course. This was the Lord working through Peter. Jesus Christ is the gate protecting the sheep from robbers and thieves – Jesus, who *came so [all] might have life and have it more abundantly*. The crowds in the first reading heard their shepherd's voice in the words and actions of Peter. The Pharisees and others in the Gospel did not recognize their shepherd who was right in front of them.

Let us hear the Good Shepherd's voice this day. Let us help others hear his voice through our words and actions this day as well. For his voice leads us to life. The Easter season is the perfect time to move from pain and suffering to glorious triumph in the risen Christ. May we always hear and heed the voice of the Shepherd.

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Monday, May 4, 2020
(Lec. 279)

- 1) Acts 11:1-18
- 2) John 10:11-18

Gospel related: CCC 60, 553, 606, 609, 614, 649, 754

MONDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus calls us to find truth and life as God intends it.

What or who are shepherds? We likely can list a few things about shepherds. They take care of sheep or other animals, they feed, guide, and protect them. In images, we often see an idyllic, pastoral life of simplicity out in nature. For modern Christians, depending on where one lives, true knowledge of a shepherd's way of life may not be as well known. But we can still understand the importance of the role.

In Chapter 10 of the Gospel of John, we are introduced to Jesus as *the Good Shepherd*. Jesus as a shepherd, or compared to a shepherd, is found many times in the New Testament, but it is only in this Gospel that he is noted specifically as *the Good Shepherd*. One of the oldest artistic representations of Jesus, found in the catacombs in Rome, is of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Jesus is the good/noble shepherd who establishes a relationship with his sheep – he knows them and they know him. He cares for his sheep and he also lays down his life for them. The life of the shepherd is not an easy one. One must be physically and mentally tough to withstand the rigors of the job, from moving the animals around the topography of the land in all kinds of weather, to the messiness of nature itself and survival of the fittest. Thus, if we think of shepherding in too simplistic of a way – that idyllic, pastoral scene – we can be lulled into not seeing all that Jesus is and does for us.

Jesus also speaks of himself as the gate that the sheep enter through, a role the shepherd would hold as he gathered the sheep into a safe area. The gate is literally the gatekeeper, to life. Those who come through the gate have life. In contrast to the life inside the gate is the life found *outside* the gate. Outside the gate are thieves, robbers, and wolves eager to scatter or catch the sheep.

This parable, then, is a way of telling us more about Jesus. Jesus as the Good Shepherd offers a life with him. It is because of Jesus and through his paschal mystery that we are able to have life with God. Jesus' very coming into the world changes everything for humanity. He calls us to him in words we can understand, much like a shepherd calls his sheep. He invites us to follow his examples. He invites us into relationship with him and – through him – a relationship with the Father. He becomes the gate through which we enter into this new relationship with God and his people. Through his presence and grace in the sacraments, we become part of the Church, the People of God.

Jesus transforms our lives, enabling us to find true life as God intends it. It is through Jesus and all he does that we have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

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Tuesday, May 5, 2020

(Lec. 280)

1) Acts 11:19-26

2) John 10:22-30

Gospel related: CCC 548, 582, 583, 590

TUESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The Lord gives us the grace to recognize and trust him.

My sheep hear my voice: I know them, and they follow me, Jesus says. The sheep are smart. They follow the one who cares for them, who protects them, who knows them. *They are in his hand* and no one will take them from him.

The sheep, Jesus says in today's Gospel, are not at all like the ones in the Temple area asking him questions. Those in the Temple area challenge him: *If you are the Christ, tell us plainly*. They do not appear to be asking out of genuine interest; rather, they appear to be aggressive. Before talking to him they surrounded him, and immediately after this exchange, the very next verse tells us that they picked up stones to throw at him. They give Jesus no benefit of the doubt, only doubt.

We can sometimes find ourselves between these two extremes, not *against* our Lord exactly, but not ready to fully trust him either. Sheep, for example, can frighten easily. If startled, they can be scattered. Our faith may waver; we may have doubts; we may have questions.

Yes, we are called to live like the sheep, following the shepherd, but this does not mean that we cannot ever ask questions, or that we will not ever have doubts or uncertainties. Rather, it means that we try to trust, that we try to give our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading us, that by staying close to him, we will be able to recognize him, even from different angles, in different circumstances.

As we celebrate the Eucharist, may our Lord nourish us, the sheep of his flock, and give us the grace to recognize and trust him.

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Wednesday, May 6, 2020

(Lec. 281)

1) Acts 12:24–13:5a

2) John 12:44-50

Gospel related: CCC 679, 109, 2466

WEDNESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The Christian story is indeed “good news,” and good news ought to be shared.

The word “Gospel” comes from the word *evangelion* in Greek – or *evangelium* in Latin, and simply means “good news.”

Sadly, many in today’s society do not perceive the Christian message to be “good news.” While there are a host of causes that precipitate this, one may be a skewed idea or image of who God is. Some might think of God as an angry God who keeps tabs on us, simply waiting to condemn us. Or that God carries a legal pad recording all our deeds, much like the most feared teacher or principal at school: “That will go on your permanent record!”

Yet Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel tell the story of a different God: A God who sent his Son into the world to save it. A God who loves us and longs for us to live with him in eternity. And while Jesus does speak of “being judged and condemned,” it refers not to what God does, but what we will have done in respect to his commandments, at the end of days. Rejection of Christ and non-acceptance of his words is *self*-condemnation. The free gift of salvation is there for the taking, and if *we* judge it not worthy of our time and attention, then we have truly missed the good news.

Thus, any image of God that begins or ends with God primarily or simply as judge falls far short of the Jesus we experience in Scripture: He who *came into the world as light*, so that believers would be brought out of darkness. He *did not come to condemn the world but to save the world*. And this type of news *must* be shared. And this is what Barnabas and Saul did after being commissioned: They went forth, sent by the Holy Spirit to preach the word of God.

Today’s readings are a powerful reminder of the good news – the “Gospel” – that we, too, have received. The Jesus we meet in Scripture – the Jesus who longs for all of us to be saved, through his gift of love – is the same Jesus present to us in word and Eucharist. When we know this Jesus, we cannot help but share, for it is too grand and wonderful to keep to ourselves.

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Thursday, May 7, 2020
(Lec. 282)
1) Acts 13:13-25
2) John 13:16-20
Gospel related: CCC 858

THURSDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: We are called to continue Christ's mission in word and deed.

Today's Gospel reading takes place after Jesus has washed his disciples' feet. He explains to them that no slave is greater than his master, and therefore they who call him master should do as he has done. *If you understand this, he says, blessed are you if you do it.* As disciples, what we know and how we act are equally important.

By virtue of our baptism into Christ's Body, we are each called to participate in Christ's prophetic office. The call to preach is not just for the ordained, but for all believers. Homilies are just one form of preaching. Each of us should be able to talk about the love of Jesus and how God has kept his promises to us.

Certainly, this may require courage, and we can pray for the courage to carry it out. Christ's act of washing his disciples' feet required him to humble himself, taking on the role of a servant. In this way, it prefigures his death on the cross, the ultimate act of humble and self-giving love. He then instructs the disciples to do the same for one another. While we may not literally wash each other's feet, we can pay attention to what this action symbolizes. As Christians, we are called to consider the needs of others before our own, and to perform acts of loving service for them. When we do this, we represent Christ to one another.

Jesus says, *Whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.* Just as the Son was sent to show the Father's love for the world, so we have been entrusted with carrying on Christ's mission. As we receive Christ in the Eucharist today, may we be strengthened for our mission to love one another as Christ has loved us, so that the whole world may know the love the Father has shown us in Christ.

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Friday, May 8, 2020

(Lec. 283)

1) Acts 13:26-33

2) John 14:1-6

Gospel related: CCC 74, 151, 459, 661, 1025, 1698, 2466, 2614, 2795 CSDC 1, 555

FRIDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Christ has prepared a dwelling place for those who follow him.

In her old age, a woman named Ruth grew ill and her children gathered around her bedside to say goodbye. Ruth prayed earnestly in these days to prepare her soul for the passing from this life. But a few days later, Ruth recovered and grew well enough to go home. During her illness she had meditated on the words of Jesus to the Apostles at the Last Supper. So now Ruth remarked, "God must not have my place in heaven ready yet."

While there is obviously no way to test the validity of her statement, it is a bit of a charming story that pastorally reflects a truth from Scripture. Jesus says in today's Gospel, *In my Father's house there are many dwelling places, If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?* Jesus spoke these words to his Apostles who had troubled hearts, and as yet did not fully understand all the things he was telling them. Thomas even questioned Jesus about how they would know the way, even if Jesus was preparing a place. Jesus replied, *I am the way and the truth and the life.*

We can learn a little something from both Thomas and Ruth. Thomas helps us understand that we will not always have the answers to our questions – that even in our faith, we may still have doubts. Ruth helps us understand that prayer is an essential part of our relationship with God, and can resolve doubt – for she *had* no doubt. She understood and believed what Jesus said and looked forward to entering into the place prepared for her.

Christ has prepared a dwelling place for Thomas, for Ruth, and for all who follow him. May the mercy and grace of God bring us to that place when the time comes.

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Saturday, May 9, 2020
(Lec. 284)

1) Acts 13:44-52

2) John 14:7-14

Gospel related: CCC 470, 516, 2614, 2633, 2815 CSDC 28

SATURDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus, united with the Father, reveals the Father to us.

Antioch was a city that had a considerable population of Jews, even though it was a Greek city. Luke tells us that Paul and Barnabas receive a warm welcome from the Gentiles in Antioch after being rejected by the Jews. *Almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But the Jews ... were filled with jealousy.*

This rejection by the Jews leads to a new direction for their preaching, opening the doors to the Gentiles, who *were delighted ... and glorified the word of the Lord*. Reaching out to the Gentiles means that the Gospel can now be preached to the whole world. Luke tells us that *the word of the Lord continued to spread through the whole region*. And as part of a *persecution against Paul and Barnabas*, the Jews drove them away. So they move on to Iconium, rejoicing in the Spirit.

In today's Gospel, Philip asks Jesus to *show us the Father*. Jesus replies, *Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. For I am in the Father and the Father is in me*. The Easter season Gospels, drawn from John's Last Supper narrative, are very spiritual. In John, unlike the other Gospels, Jesus speaks in highly theological language. But it is important to hear this language, for the unity of which he speaks, and which he shares with the Father, is a unity that his disciples, and we, share as well. Through the paschal mystery, Jesus has given us a share in God's life.

Jesus promises that whatever we ask in his name, he will do. So as we journey through the Easter season, let us pray to be more united with the God who gives us a share in the divine life.

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SUNDAY, MAY 10, 2020

(Lec. 52)

- 1) Acts 6:1-7
- 2) 1 Peter 2:4-9
- 3) John 14:1-12

Gospel related: CCC 74, 151, 459, 470, 516, 661, 1025, 1698, 2466, 2614, 2795 CSDC 1, 28, 555

**FIFTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

FOCUS: We are a royal priesthood, initiated by our baptism, called out of the darkness to share our faith.

In the second reading today, Saint Peter provides one of the most beautiful, inspiring, and challenging definitions of what it means to be a Christian and part of the Church: *You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation*. As the Easter season continues, Christians everywhere rejoice that the risen Christ has called us *out of darkness into his wonderful light*. We exercise our *royal priesthood* as a community of believers when we share our faith with others, inviting them to become part of God's *chosen race*.

This faith we share, this chosen race that unites us, is one that follows Jesus, who is *the way and the truth and the life*. It assures us that neither his story nor ours will end in death. The cross, once a symbol of torture, with Jesus' holy hands nailed to it, becomes a trophy. It is a key with which Jesus unlocks for us the gates of heaven and gains access for us to the Father's house, where *there are many dwelling places*.

We are beginning our fifth week of the Easter season, and hopefully – at least in the Northern hemisphere – new life is beginning to burst around us in springtime fervor. Grays and browns are being replaced by greens and the subtle shades of other colors that will burst forth in time. Grass is beginning to grow; perennials are breaking through the dirt. Light is replacing darkness. Life is replacing death.

As the tilting and turning of the earth toward the sun brings new life to its lands, so we can visually understand how our own turning of our hearts and lives to the Son brings new life to our lives and our souls. Solar energy gives the fauna and flora the energy to grow, to spread, and to increase in number. The Holy Spirit gives *us* the grace to grow, to spread the Good News, and to increase in number and holiness for the sake of the Kingdom.

We are indeed a royal priesthood, initiated by our baptism, called out of the darkness – both metaphorically and seasonally – to share our faith. May we embrace our role and our hope as easily as the springtime flowers respond to the rays of the ever-increasing sunlight. And may God's grace in this Eucharist nourish us as we tend to the landscape around us.

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Monday, May 11, 2020
(Lec. 285)

- 1) Acts 14:5-18
- 2) John 14:21-26

Gospel related: CCC 243, 244, 260, 263, 647, 692, 729, 1099, 2466, 2615, 2623 CSDC 70, 104

MONDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Give all glory to God.

In the Gospel, Jesus says to his disciples, *Whoever loves me will keep my word ... yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me.* Here, Jesus is emphasizing the unity he has with the Father, and reminding his disciples that all credit, if you will – all glory – belongs to the Father. Jesus comes from him, and all he says and does glorifies him. Therefore, anyone who loves and follows Christ and his commands, and who proclaims the Gospel in his name, gives glory to God.

This is how we find Paul and Barnabas today: toiling through the eastern Mediterranean world, preaching the Gospel, and healing a crippled man who has faith in God. By their words and actions, the two disciples give glory to God, but the people of Lystra misunderstand. Instead, they praise Paul and Barnabas themselves, believing them to be Greek gods who have come to them *in human form. They called Barnabas "Zeus" and Paul "Hermes," because he was the chief speaker.*

Cultural difficulties like this were just one of the many challenges the young Church and the disciples faced. Some might say that the more things change, the more they stay the same, for cultural difficulties like this are just one of the many challenges the Church *still* faces. The goodness and divine power of God is often misunderstood or misapprehended as being from some other source: one's own hard work, luck, or another god or idol.

As she did then, the Church today faces this challenge by loving Christ and following his commands. When we come to Mass, we give God glory through our celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharist transforms us to go out and proclaim the Gospel – to give witness to the One who truly deserves glory. And with the help of the Holy Spirit, others begin to give all glory to God as well.

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Tuesday, May 12, 2020
(Lec. 286)
1) Acts 14:19-28
2) John 14:27-31a

TUESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saints Nereus and Achilleus,
Martyrs;
Saint Pancras,
Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 606, 1851, 2853 CSDC 491, 516

FOCUS: The peace of Christ is greater than anything the world could ever give.

Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

These words of Jesus to his disciples are rather consoling, given that he has been telling them many things that have confused them, and caused no small level of anxiety.

“I give you peace,” Jesus says. “Not any kind of peace you might find in the world, but something greater. Peace in knowing that even though I said I am going away, I will come back to you.” I am doing *just as the Father has commanded me*.

The setting of today’s Gospel is the end of the long meal Jesus has just shared with his disciples – the Last Supper, as we call it. Jesus is preparing his disciples for the trial that is coming, and the peace that he offers them is the same one he also offers us – his disciples of today – to strengthen us in the face of our own trials and hardships.

And as he himself tells us, the peace Jesus offers is different than the peace the world offers. What Jesus offers is communion with the Father and the Father’s abiding love. It is a promise that he will come back to – and for – us. It is the knowledge that he gave us the Holy Spirit to help us in his absence from earth. It is encouragement to hold fast to faith in God’s love for us – a love that wills and brings about our good even in the face of sin and evil. It is a peace that comes from the grace of our baptism, which assures us we will die *and rise* with Christ. It is a peace that comes from the hope of eternal life that is more glorious than anything we can imagine.

And as if to assure us of that peace, Jesus comes to us in Word and sacrament. In a few moments, he will be just as fully present – body, blood, soul, and divinity – to us as he was to those disciples at the Last Supper. So as we come to the table, let us heed his encouragement to *not let [our] hearts be troubled or afraid*, and pray for the grace to embrace Jesus’ gift of peace in our lives.

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Wednesday, May 13, 2020
(Lec. 287)

- 1) Acts 15:1-6
- 2) John 15:1-8

WEDNESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Our Lady of Fatima)

Gospel related: CCC 308, 517, 737, 755, 787, 859, 864, 1108, 1694, 1988, 2074, 2615, 2732 CSDC 39

FOCUS: To remain in Christ, the vine, is to know the promise of bearing the fruit of the Kingdom.

Around this time of year, millions of people begin the task of preparing the land for the coming growing season. They will clear away old growth, prepare the soil, and prune back existing shrubs to encourage new growth. It is this image of pruning that lies at the heart of our Gospel today.

The image of the vine has strong and rich meaning for the people of Israel, and is found right through the Scriptures. So it is no coincidence that Jesus would choose it to speak about the Christian life. Looking at a vine, it is often impossible to see where one branch stops and another starts, yet they grow together from the central stem, undifferentiated by anything except perhaps their fruitfulness. So, too, the Christian community: Growing from the stem of Christ is enlivened by the surging sap that flows from his death and resurrection.

Being Christian means to be grafted onto Christ, the vine, and to all the others who belong to him. We need each other for strength and encouragement, and we need to gather with one another to worship at the table of the Lord. Accordingly, we also need to avoid those whose actions and words threaten to rupture that web of relationships.

To remain spiritually healthy, the vine of our lives must be pruned regularly by God, the vine grower. Especially when a twig of individualism shoots out on its own way, or a wayward sucker feeds on self-interest. Both of these draw life away from the vine and inhibit the bearing of good fruit.

As we strive to remain in the Lord, we know that it is not an easy task. Even the first disciples, who witnessed his words and miracles first-hand, managed to deny and even betray him. We all need the grace that can come only from Christ through a life of deep prayer and sacramental practice. We also need the support and encouragement of others that come only from participation in a community of faith.

Thus, this is the work of the Church: The public worship – liturgy – of God. In it we nurture our relationship to God and to one another, maintaining the health of the vine so as to bear great fruit. In the Eucharist we share, we are nourished for a life in Christ, remaining in him as he remains in us. And so may God be glorified by our lives.

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Thursday, May 14, 2020

(Lec. 564)

1) Acts 1:15-17, 20-26

2) John 15:9-17

Gospel related: CCC 363, 434, 459, 609, 614, 737, 1108, 1823, 1824, 1970, 2074, 2347, 2615, 2745, 2815 CSDC 13, 29, 39, 580

**SAINT MATTHIAS,
APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: The Lord chooses us to follow him and remain in his love.

In one of the best known moments of the University of Notre Dame's football history, Rudy Ruettiger was called on to the field to play. Rudy had walked on two years earlier and trained tirelessly with the team without any realistic expectation of ever playing in a game. As those who have seen the movie know, Rudy sacked the opposing team's quarterback, his teammates carried him off the field, and his legend lives on.

The saint we celebrate today, Saint Matthias, had his own "Rudy moment" when he was selected as the 12th Apostle, taking Judas' place. As we heard in our first reading, the Apostles looked among those who had been with them from the beginning. Through prayer Matthias is chosen, and he goes from an unknown faithful follower of Jesus to the known saint whose feast we celebrate today.

Both before and after his Rudy moment, Matthias faithfully followed the Lord. Matthias lived the words Jesus' spoke in today's Gospel: To remain in his love and keep his commandments. Matthias did not choose the Lord on his own, but the Lord chose him, and Matthias responded in faith. After Matthias became one of the 12 Apostles, *how* he followed Jesus changed, yet the direction of his compass stayed the same – to remain in his love.

Saint Matthias' story draws our imagination to *all* the faithful followers of Jesus. In addition to the disciples, and other named friends of Jesus such as Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, and Joseph of Arimathea, there were so many others – whose names we don't know – who followed the Lord. Their stories are not told, and they are unknown to us, yet they were not unknown to Jesus. He saw them and knew them; he called them to himself and cherished their faithfulness.

For those of us following the Lord today, the witness of Matthias and other "unknown" followers of Jesus can be a light to our paths. The Lord has chosen each of us, through our baptism, and called us to remain in his love. He knows our name, even if we do not have a seemingly big or important role in the Church or the world. He calls each of us to remain with him, in our own particular circumstances, and to follow him here, now, and today.

We could indeed have a Rudy moment where we are "called up," yet more likely, our paths will remain hidden, unknown to any but the Lord who sees our labors and knows the extent of our faithfulness. May the Lord give us what we need to be faithful and follow him always – whatever that may look like – keeping his commandments and remaining in his love.

* * *

Friday, May 15, 2020
(Lec. 289)

- 1) Acts 15:22-31
- 2) John 15:12-17

FRIDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(USA: Opt. Mem.
Saint Isidore)

Gospel related: CCC 363, 434, 459, 609, 614, 737, 1108, 1823, 1970, 1972, 2074, 2347, 2615, 2745, 2815 CSDC 13, 29, 39, 580

FOCUS: *Love one another as I love you.*

What do we expect most from a friend? Is it honesty? Is it love? Is it time? Or is it just to be there when we need him or her? Perhaps it's "all of the above" or "none of the above." In today's Gospel from John, Jesus gives us his answer. He tells the Apostles that he no longer calls them slaves, but friends, because he has passed on all that he has heard from the Father – in love.

"I get by with a little help from my friends" is a well-known refrain from a Beatles song, but to "get by" is not enough for Jesus. He's looking for the Apostles (and us) to "thrive" as his friends, to be "alive" as his friends, as noted in today's Gospel. In the verses immediately preceding today's reading, Jesus had told the disciples that the love he has for them is equal to the love the Father has for *him* – the love of total self-giving. So today, when Jesus then says the greatest love is to *lay down one's life for one's friends*, he is referring to his upcoming death on the cross. The *catechism* calls Jesus' sacrifice unique because "it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices" (CCC 614).

When the Apostles eventually see the love of Christ played out on the cross, they witness an extraordinary act of humanity and are able to grasp his command to love one another. One commentary on this passage says that "humanity ... and his death as loss, gives the command its moral force and exemplary power" (Mays, *Harper Collins Bible Commentary*).

Jesus' message is aimed as much at us as it is to the Apostles. The problem is that, although his command to *love one another as I love you* is a simple one, following it is difficult.

Our sinfulness and selfishness get in the way of our desire to love as Jesus does. We all know in our hearts, though, that we can love better.

To love others better, we should start by loving Jesus better. We do that by becoming better friends with Jesus. How do we do that? By almsgiving, prayer, and the sacraments. Though that sounds more like a Lenten statement than an Easter season one, it rings true all year long.

So today, let's vow to not just "get by with a little help from our friend," Jesus. Let's become alive and thrive in his friendship, and pledge to love another a bit better.

* * *

Saturday, May 16, 2020
(Lec. 290)

1) Acts 16:1-10

2) John 15:18-21

Gospel related: CCC 530, 675, 765 CSDC 39

SATURDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Love isn't easy, but with God's grace we can have the gift of persistence.

How do we figure out what God wants us to do? In today's reading, Paul has a dream, or as the reading says, a vision: *Come over to Macedonia*. He listens. He was paying attention.

It is probably safe to say that most of us, if not all of us, are paying attention to God. Or at least, we are making good efforts to. After all, we are here! And wouldn't it be nice to have an answer in a vision as clear and direct as Paul's. Though we might suspect that a vision that said "Come to Greece" (of which Macedonia was then a part) would probably not mean "come on over for a vacation!"

To be fair, this homily started with somewhat of a loaded or skewed question, for figuring out what God wants us to do is really not that hard. Faithfully achieving it is more difficult, of course. What God wants us to do is quite simple: Love one another as he loves us. Now, those words are not in any of today's Scriptures, but they shouldn't come as any surprise. And in fact, Jesus' words to his disciples today are predicated on their already knowing that. For he tells them what awaits them in following him and in doing what God wants of us.

What awaits them, and us, is the world that does not understand. The hope is that our love and our attention to building the Kingdom will make more of the world understand, but it seems there will always be some who do not. Jesus consoles his followers saying, *If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first*. It's what lets us know we're doing it right.

We will have successes and failures in our efforts to live as God is calling us to. Love isn't easy. But with God's grace we can have the gift of persistence, growing stronger in faith and increasing in virtue. For Christ has chosen us out of this world, and it is to him we belong.

* * *

SUNDAY, MAY 17, 2020

(Lec. 55)

1) Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

2) 1 Peter 3:15-18

3) John 14:15-21

Gospel related: CCC 243, 687, 692, 729, 788, 2466, 2615, 2671 CSDC 39, 70

**SIXTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

FOCUS: Let us nourish the world with spiritual fruits.

In the Gospel today Jesus says, *If you love me, you will keep my commandments*. This assertion is meant not for just his contemporary disciples; it is intended for all who choose to follow Jesus. And for the first half of the sentence to be true, the second half must be fulfilled.

Loving Jesus begins, as Saint Peter would later write, by *sanctify[ing] Christ as Lord in [our] hearts*. Evidence that the early disciples understood what it meant to love Jesus is found in Philip's ministry in Samaria. When Philip went to this Samaritan city, he did not just proclaim Jesus as Messiah. He expressed his faith through his witness, and all who heard him and saw the signs he was doing, believed. They believed because Philip did these works in Jesus' name – working with the Holy Spirit and imitating Jesus, who did perfectly the will of God.

If we love Jesus, then, we will continue to be, as Jesus was, a voice for the voiceless – the grieving, the abandoned, the persecuted. We will understand that Jesus' ministry of love did not end with his death, but continues through his body, the Church. Through baptism we enter into Christ's prophetic, royal, and priestly ministry.

This call to love Jesus by following his commandments to love and care for our neighbors is challenging. For this reason, Jesus did not abandon us to carry out this ministry of love without support. He sent his Spirit to abide with us.

It is comforting to know that we are not alone. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, we become witnesses to the Resurrection and nourish the world with spiritual fruits. As Saint Teresa of Ávila wrote, "Christ has no body on earth without us." So, if we do not speak and act for Christ, who will?

* * *

Monday, May 18, 2020

(Lec. 291)

1) Acts 16:11-15

2) John 15:26–16:4a

MONDAY OF

SIXTH WEEK

OF EASTER

(Opt. Mem.

Saint John I,

Pope and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 244, 248, 263, 692, 719, 729, 1433, 2671 CSDC 39

FOCUS: All Christians are called to testify to the hope we have received in Christ.

As we continue in this Easter season, the unfolding story in the Acts of the Apostles and today's Gospel makes it clear that while Jesus calls us to a very real, deeply intimate, and personal relationship, his call does not end there. We are not merely to be disciples, but to be missionary disciples.

In today's passage from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear a story from one of Paul's great missionary journeys. From the moment of his conversion, Paul recognized that he had been sent, that the Church of Christ was not something to be maintained, but something to be built. Paul was not content to think and pray about his personal relationship with the Lord, but instead he felt compelled by the same Lord to constantly add to the body of Christ. Thus, he never misses an opportunity to speak to those he encounters. And in today's story, the words he spoke led to a woman named Lydia, and her entire household, being baptized.

Every Christian is compelled to this same mission by the same Lord. Our mission is simple: Testify to him. To testify means "to witness to." We are not all called to offer this witness in the same way; to evangelize we do not have to be pastors, teachers, or professional ministers. We do, though, have to be willing to be attentive to someone besides our own selves. We must think, for example, of what Christ may want to say to our neighbor who is hurting, or to walk gently and patiently with family members fallen away from Christ for a time.

Pope Paul VI clearly reminded us that the Church "exists in order to evangelize." This mission to bring Christ into our world will not be easy; it will mean some experience of the same rejection and suffering that was met by our Lord. Yet, this mission is deeply life-giving, and we are not in it alone. Rather, the Spirit of truth, sent from the Father by the Son, testifies with us.

Let us pray, then, that we each can be a witness – an example – of the joy and beauty of this life lived with Christ, and testify to him.

* * *

Tuesday, May 19, 2020
(Lec. 292)

1) Acts 16:22-34

2) John 16:5-11

Gospel related: CCC 385, 388, 692, 729, 1287, 1433 CSDC 39

TUESDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The Holy Spirit brings consolation to the world.

Today, with Pentecost still two weeks away, Jesus promises his disciples the Holy Spirit. He tells his troubled Apostles that it is better for him to go so that he can send the Advocate. These are words of consolation, surely, in the face of a very traumatic parting of Jesus through his upcoming crucifixion and death. Yet, shortly after these words of promise and comfort, Jesus concludes with rather confusing words: The Spirit will *convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and condemnation*.

The *Catechism* sheds some light on this statement: “The Holy Spirit has proved ‘the world wrong about sin,’ i.e., proved that the world has not believed in him whom the Father has sent. But this same Spirit who brings sin to light is also the Consoler who gives the human heart grace for repentance and conversion” (CCC 1433).

In this way, the Holy Spirit continues to bring the Good News of Jesus: That true life and righteous living means to believe in Jesus, and that this true life is readily available to those who accept the graces necessary to turn their lives around and believe.

The first reading has a great example of the grace of conversion that the Holy Spirit promises. The jailer of Paul and Silas, after securing them very severely in jail, is inspired by their peace and joy in the midst of imprisonment, and their concern for him when he is about to kill himself. This, and their insistence on belief in the Lord Jesus in order to be saved, led the jailer to accept the grace to convert and to show great kindness to Paul and Silas – most likely at the risk of his own life. His conversion, and that of his household, brings great rejoicing.

Those of us who were baptized into the Church as infants probably don’t have such dramatic conversion stories, yet we are called to be open to conversion throughout our lives of faith – changes of heart to enable us to live out our faith more fully and more intentionally.

During this season of grace, as we prepare for Pentecost, may we be open to the Holy Spirit’s calls to us to change our attitudes, words, and actions. And may we be open to the many graces the Spirit might be pouring down on us to lead us to conversion – inspiration from Scripture, other people, or new opportunities to be of service. As we continue to respond to the grace of conversion, may we rejoice as the jailer and his family did that we have a Consoler who can lead us ever closer to God and to one another.

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Wednesday, May 20, 2020
(Lec. 293)
1) Acts 17:15, 22–18:1
2) John 16:12-15

WEDNESDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Bernardine of Siena,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 91, 243, 244, 485, 687, 690, 692, 729, 1117, 1287, 2466, 2615, 2671 CSDC 29, 39, 104

FOCUS: The Spirit of truth will guide us to the truth of God.

No matter where we are in life, many of us struggle to find answers. So many situations prompt us to question how God works in our lives and in our world. In our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear of how the Greeks also struggled to find answers. We know from history that the Greeks had a sharp philosophical acumen, and yet we hear Paul describe how they built an altar to an unknown God. Like us, they, too, were confounded with questions of how the world works.

An altar to an unknown God might sound foreign to us, but we ourselves might have built our own altars to false gods. When we face daunting questions in life, where do we ultimately turn for answers? Is it to God or to someone or something else? If we do turn to false altars, do we ever really find answers in these places, or do they just temporarily soothe us?

The questions we face about our lives and our world are not there to demand simple answers. They are actually opportunities to deepen our understanding of God. God is present in his creation and is never far from us. Indeed, before Jesus left his disciples, he assured them that the Spirit of truth would be with them every step of the way: *I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth* (John 16:13). The Spirit of truth is with us today.

As we near the end of the Easter season, may we embrace and pursue the questions we face in life. May we be inspired to bring these questions to God, who is always near to us, and who desires for us to know him through all he has revealed to us. And as we celebrate the Eucharist, may we remember that the grace we encounter in the sacrament and the Spirit of truth will guide us to that knowledge – the truth of God and his love for us.

Saint Bernardine of Siena (1380- 1444) – Bernardine of Siena, a Franciscan priest, was renowned for his energy and eloquent preaching. Called a “second Paul” by Pope Pius II, and known as “the Apostle of Italy,” he traveled throughout Italy on foot, preaching against the overall depravity rampant in the culture, emphasizing virtue and its rewards. In a time of warring political factions, Bernardine preached about peace and reconciliation, attracting thousands wherever he spoke. He had a particular devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus, a devotion which he popularized.

* * *

Thursday, May 21, 2020
(Lec. 294)
1) Acts 18:1-8
2) John 16:16-20

THURSDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Christopher Magallanes,
Priest,
and Companions,
Martyrs)

Gospel related: **CSDC** 39

FOCUS: Our grief will become joy.

As Christians we live in a world of both/and. Christ has come, and he will come again. The kingdom of heaven is both present, and yet not complete. Christ has defeated death, and yet death will come for each one of us.

In the midst of this tension, we continue to celebrate this Easter season. We acknowledge the victory of the Resurrection, and that God's love is more powerful even than death. We know the end of the story, even as we still find ourselves in the story.

But here, in the thick of it, it's easy to lose sight of that, isn't it? Even the disciples surrounding Jesus today were perplexed: "What does he mean that in a little while we won't see him, and then in a little while we will?"

So Jesus puts it plainly: You will both grieve, and be filled with joy. That's the reality of the Christian life. That's the tension with which we traverse this mortal earth, and not even Saint Paul was immune to it.

In our first reading today, we see Paul's frustration. The transforming truth of Jesus Christ and his being raised from the dead fails to move some of those to whom he preaches. And yet Paul never loses stride. He moves on to others who will hear and be transformed by the message. We know that he found great joy in proclaiming the Gospel, and in the steady growth of the Church in many different regions. He never lost hope in the promises contained in the Good News he taught.

And so he is one to whom we can look for reassurance as we struggle to hold on to this truth and let it shape our own lives. Paul's continued witness, through what Scripture tells us, includes shipwrecks, imprisonment, beatings, health difficulties – just to name a few. And this is all the more worthy of inspiration because he never knew Jesus in his earthly ministry, just as we did not.

Grief and worldly rejoicing will cross our paths, and they will also pass away. At the end of days, all whom Jesus has reconciled through himself to the Father will be gathered into the heavenly kingdom in its fullness, and *[our] grief will become joy*.

As we receive this Eucharist, may we be drawn more fully into this same hope, recognizing the risen Christ whose love is stronger than death.

Saint Christopher Magallanes (1869-1927) – Christopher Magallanes was martyred during the Cristero War – the resistance against the Mexican government's efforts to limit the power of the Catholic Church by seizing Church property, closing seminaries, and suppressing religious celebrations. In 1927, he was arrested on the false charge of inciting rebellion on his way to say Mass, and then executed without a trial. Before dying, Christopher absolved his executioners. He was canonized in 2000 with 24 other martyrs of the Cristero War by Saint John Paul II.

Thursday, May 21, 2020
(Lec. 58)

- 1) Acts 1:1-11
- 2) Ephesians 1:17-23
- 3) Matthew 28:16-20

Gospel related: CCC 189, 232, 280, 543, 644, 645, 691, 730, 767, 788, 831, 849, 857, 860, 1120, 1122, 1233, 1257, 1276, 1444, 2156, 2743 CSDC 52

**THE ASCENSION
OF THE LORD
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: Jesus promises his disciples that he will be with them as they become his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

In the first reading from Acts today, two men dressed in white ask the disciples, *Why are you standing there looking at the sky?*

It might be safe to assume that the Apostles were overwhelmed by what they had just heard and seen. In a few short weeks, they had witnessed the torture and death of their beloved friend, who they believed was the promised Messiah. They were trying to comprehend – and believe – that he was no longer dead after seeing him, touching him, and eating with him. And in today's Scripture, he tells them that he will send the Holy Spirit and that *they* will be his witnesses, not only to the Jews in Jerusalem, but *to the ends of the earth*. And then, he is lifted up, on a cloud, and disappears from their sight. Standing motionless, staring up at the sky – probably with mouths gaping – seems understandable!

It is reasonable to think that the Apostles were still reeling from their thoughts and feelings about recent events. Matthew's Gospel confirms this. When they met Jesus in Galilee as he instructed them, *they worshiped [him], but they doubted*. Yet Jesus has confidence in them.

His response to the doubting Apostles is firm and immediate: *All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded*. He has total trust in the Father and in his plan for the world, and he commends that plan to the Apostles. He entrusts his power to them to be his witnesses to all the world – to go and make disciples, to baptize them, and to teach all that he commanded.

But he doesn't leave them – or us – alone, staring up at the sky to question and doubt whether we can accomplish this great task. He remains with us as we accept and embrace his mission, guiding and empowering us through the Holy Spirit. He remains with us, nourishing and sustaining us for his mission with his body and blood each time we receive him in the Eucharist. He remains with us, teaching, and encouraging us in the community he established, his Church, the Body of Christ.

And as he trusted the doubting Apostles, he trusts us to believe in him and his mission. He trusts us to believe that he is the way, the truth and the life that leads and guides us until his return. And he trusts us to believe that he is with us – always – until the end of the age.

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Friday, May 22, 2020
(Lec. 295)

- 1) Acts 18:9-18
- 2) John 16:20-23

FRIDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Rita of Cascia,
Religious)

Gospel related: CCC 2615 CSDC 39

FOCUS: Christ desires to fill us with joy.

We are now approaching the end of the Easter season. Christ's Ascension is celebrated this Sunday, and the following Sunday is Pentecost. For us these are feasts, but what was it like for the first disciples?

All this week, our Gospel readings have been about Jesus preparing his disciples for both his passion and death, and the time when he will no longer be with them. These will not be easy days for them. In today's Gospel, Jesus assures them that their grieving will only be temporary, and that their weeping and mourning will become joy.

When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish, Jesus says, but when the child is born she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy. In a similar way, the disciples may be in anguish as Jesus departs from them, but that grieving will end when they see him again. The joy of this reunion with Jesus will cause their hearts such rejoicing that no one will be able to take their joy away.

This is the meaning of Easter joy for the first disciples and for us. As a Church, we observe Holy Week and Easter every year, recalling Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension, again and again. This is because the message of Easter is always relevant and meaningful. In the Easter story, as in life, there is death and resurrection; there is anguish and joy. This Easter joy is what gives meaning to loss and enables us to endure.

Christ desires to fill us with joy. We open our hearts to his joy, not only during this Easter season, but every time we gather to hear his Word and share in his Eucharist.

Saint Rita of Cascia (1381-1457) – At a young age, Rita was forced to marry a wealthy, abusive man. Eighteen years later, after her husband was murdered and her twin sons died, Rita worked to forge peace between her family and her husband's killers. This allowed her to join the Augustinians at age 36, devoting herself to caring for sick nuns, counseling visitors and prayer. While meditating before a crucifix, Rita received a wound on her forehead, as if pierced by a thorn, which remained even after her death.

Saturday, May 23, 2020
(Lec. 296)

1) Acts 18:23-28

2) John 16:23b-28

Gospel related: CCC 661, 2615, 2795, 2815 CSDC 39

SATURDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Ask for what we need. Ask for grace.

After [Apollos'] arrival [in Ephesus] he gave great assistance to those who had come to believe through grace.

Those who had come to believe through grace. That is such an interesting phrase from this passage in Acts, since it is only grace which makes it possible to believe in the first place. Faith is a gift, freely given; it is a generous outpouring of grace from God that requires no payment or worthiness on our part. We are justified and sanctified by this grace. Although freely given, however, it *demands [our] free response* (CCC 2002). That is, it is our response to God's invitation to love – to *[partake] of the divine nature and of eternal life* (CCC 1996) in our *vocation of becoming his adopted [children]*. It *introduces us into the intimacy of the Trinitarian life* (CCC 2021).

Jesus does not use the word "grace" in today's Gospel. He *does* say, *Whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you. Until now you have not asked anything in my name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.* Through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, we participate in the life of Christ – who reconciled us to the Father. Through them, we have recourse to the Father, to ask for whatever we need. To pray for the grace to do whatever we need to do, or be whatever it is we need to be. We participate in the sacramental life for sacramental graces, and perhaps ask for special graces appropriate to circumstances.

Obviously, there is nothing we can do in this life without God's grace, and God wants to give it to us. We must have the humility to recognize that we cannot sanctify ourselves, and to approach the Lord when we need help. Sometimes, we may bristle at Jesus' words, *ask and you will receive*, for we cannot help but recall instances when we prayed fervently for something and it seemed like the prayer went unanswered. In reality, the prayer was answered, we simply didn't get exactly what we asked for. By God's grace do we receive, and by God's grace are things *not* given to us. Someday, all will become clear to each one of us in those respects.

God wants all of us to live forever in heaven with him – that's why he created us, that's why he invites us into relationship. We just have to ask for his help. Ask, and we will receive.

* * *

NOTE: In those places where the observance of the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord has been transferred to this day, the Mass and readings of the Ascension are used.

SUNDAY, MAY 24, 2020

**SEVENTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

(Lec. 59)

- 1) Acts 1:12-14
- 2) 1 Peter 4:13-16
- 3) John 17:1-11a

Gospel related: CCC 217, 589, 684, 730, 1069, 1085, 1721, 1996, 2604, 2746, 2747, 2749, 2750, 2751, 2758, 2765, 2812, 2815, 2849 CSDC 39, 122

FOCUS: The outpouring of the Holy Spirit gave birth to the Church and sustains her, and us, still today.

Today is the seventh and last Sunday of Easter, and we might think of the message today as one of prayer. In the Church calendar, we are one week from Pentecost. In the readings, however, we have events taking place after Jesus' ascension, and at the Last Supper. All of this signals a time of transition – and while any time is a good time for prayer, asking for help and reaching out to God in faith is especially helpful and fruitful during periods of change.

We picture Jesus standing between heaven and earth, with his eyes raised to heaven. He says, *And now I will no longer be in the world.* He recalls all that he has done in the Father's name and that he has given him glory; and then he prays for his disciples. He prays for those whom the Father gave him and who have kept the Father's word.

This is very different from the prayer offered in the garden that we hear in the other Gospels at this point in Jesus' life. Jesus is not off alone praying to God about his upcoming capture, trial, and crucifixion. In this Gospel there is no agony in this garden. In fact, there is no garden at all. Instead, he is in the presence of his disciples, entering into this moment of transition beside them.

The Apostles – including *some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers* – met together in the upper room in Jerusalem after Jesus had ascended, and together they *devoted themselves with one accord to prayer.* Here Jesus' physical presence is no longer among them, but they pray in his name, as they were taught. And so he is still beside them in this time of adjustment and new realities.

And Peter, the one upon whom our Church is built, well, he *writes* to his community about praying. It might not seem so at first, until we remember that all things come from God, and all glory should be given to him. And so his words, *rejoice ... rejoice exultantly ... blessed are you ... glorify God* all speak to ways in which we give praise and thanks to God. Even in the midst of suffering, and being *insulted for the name of Christ*, whether one laments, petitions, or gives thanks and rejoices, one is praying and giving glory to God.

So on this Seventh Sunday of Easter, when the readings allow us to think about the need for and the power of prayer, may our own prayers be elevated in praise and thanksgiving for the new life we have received in Christ's resurrection. And may God's grace prepare our hearts for the celebration of Pentecost, where the outpouring of the Holy Spirit gave birth to the Church and sustains her, and us, still today.

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Monday, May 25, 2020
(Lec. 297)
1) Acts 19:1-8
2) John 16:29-33

MONDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Bede the Venerable,
Priest and Doctor of the Church;
Saint Gregory VII,
Pope;
Saint Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi,
Virgin)

Gospel related: CCC 1808 CSDC 39

FOCUS: Jesus, calls us to remain strong, even when we face difficulties.

Take courage, I have conquered the world. Most of us would probably be quite happy to have someone tell us this to our face, and in all seriousness. It sounds a bit like it could be a line from a medieval play or a movie about a hero or superhero. The reality, however, is even better. They are words of encouragement and consolation from Christ, who never stops thinking about, or loving us.

In conversing with his disciples in today's Gospel, Jesus has heard from them that they finally understand what he has been trying to tell them. *We believe that you came from God*, they say. In reply, Jesus warns them of the trials they will face in this world, telling them they will "scatter." But he also emboldens them with that wonderful line we began with: *Take courage, I have conquered the world.*

This exhortation is really – to use a cliché – mind-blowing. *Take courage.* In other words, as we hear often in Scripture: Be *not afraid*. Easier said than done, right? It takes courage, in this day and age, to have courage!

We are surrounded by messages that warn us of danger: to our health, our safety, our retirement, our future, our country, our world. In fact, if someone today were to announce, *I have conquered the world*, we would be in very real, and very mortal danger. So with all of this, we are almost afraid to *not* be afraid!

And yet it is exhausting. The world cannot offer us peace, or safety, or security. Only Christ can. And it is at his feet that we can lay our fears and anxieties – our troubles and our burdens. The more we allow Jesus to take from us, the easier it is for us to *take courage*.

So may we approach the table of the Lord with the courage he exhorts of us, secure in the knowledge that he has indeed *conquered the world*. This truth allows us freedom from fear, and gives us hope for our true future. For though we *live* in this world, we are not *of* it. We belong to God. This world will pass away, and we shall, with God's grace, spend eternity with him.

Saint Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi (1566-1607) – Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi was a Carmelite nun and mystic of Florence, Italy. Accepted as a novice in 1583, she professed her vows just a year later when she seemed near death. After her profession, she experienced an ecstasy that lasted about two hours. She experienced similar visions the following 40 mornings, after receiving Communion. Accounts of her visions were recorded over the next six years, and fill five large volumes.

Tuesday, May 26, 2020
(Lec. 298)
1) Acts 20:17-27
2) John 17:1-11a

TUESDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(OBL MEM
Saint Philip Neri,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 217, 589, 684, 730, 1069, 1085, 1721, 1996, 2604, 2746, 2747, 2749, 2750, 2751, 2758, 2765, 2812, 2815, 2849 CSDC 39, 122

FOCUS: Let us make God known to the world.

The verses from John's Gospel today are part of what is often referred to as "The Farewell Discourse." Jesus and his disciples are gathered in the upper room sharing their last meal together. Jesus has been tenderly preaching his last words to them as he alone knows what is coming in the next hours. But here, the focus changes. Instead of talking to the Apostles, he turns his eyes heavenward and addresses his words to his Father.

For the first time in the Gospels, Jesus acknowledges that his hour has come. And he prays for his disciples. First, Jesus asks that his actions be glorified, giving honor and dignity to the Father. He prays that God will be made known to the world. Then he turns his thoughts to his disciples. He tells God that he has shared all that he knew from the Father with them and they have believed. Now that Jesus will no longer be in this world, he prays for them

I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given me, Jesus says. Knowing that, even in his time of trial and suffering, Jesus was praying for his followers should fill us with joy. For his words were not meant just for those Eleven, but for everyone who would come to know him through his disciples ... and their disciples.

Saint Philip Neri, whose memorial we celebrate today, is one in that long line of discipleship through whom many came to know and experience the love of Christ. He was a Christian missionary who began his studies in Rome in 1535, and was known for being a type of "street preacher" with a Socratic method of engaging his listeners and helping them to consider the Christian life. He was a man of great joy and humor whose prayer life often led directly to action in spiritual and corporal works of mercy. And like every other saint, his life can serve as an example for us in whatever way suits our own vocation and state of life best.

May the intercession of Saint Philip of Neri help us in our own efforts to make God known to the world, and may the graces we receive in this sacrament keep us ever close to the God who made us and loves us.

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Wednesday, May 27, 2020
(Lec. 299)
1) Acts 20:28-38
2) John 17:11b-19

WEDNESDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Augustine of Canterbury,
Bishop)

Gospel related: CCC 611, 858, 2466, 2747, 2749, 2750, 2812, 2815, 2821, 2849, 2850 CSDC 18, 39

FOCUS: We are called to be one as God is one.

Jesus' prayer in today's Gospel is one that expresses the principle and foundation of the Catholic Church: *That they may be one just as we are one*. This is not something that is added on as some "thing" the Church must somehow become. No, as Saint John Paul II said: "It stands at the very heart of Christ's mission. It is not some secondary attribute of the community of his disciples. Rather, it belongs to the very essence of this community. God wills the Church, because he wills unity, and unity is an expression of the whole depth of his *agape*" (*Ut Unum Sint*, That They May Be One, 1995). *In other words*, Jesus prays that the Church have unity like that of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity, our God in three persons, is a God of relationship and communion. Through the Spirit, "we are in *communion* with the Son" and share with him "his *communion* with the Father." By God's grace, we are "sharers in his own *communion*, which is his eternal life. Christ's words 'that they may be one' are thus his prayer to the Father that the Father's plan may be fully accomplished" (*Ut Unum Sint*).

Let us be careful not to relegate this prayer to the pile of "well that sounds nice, Jesus, but there you go not being very realistic again" Jesus really means it when he tells us that we, the Church, should have a unity like that of the Trinity, and that means something for you and for me.

Now before we dismiss this vision as impossible, we must remember that with every command Jesus gives, Christ also gives everything we need to follow. As our readings today remind us, Christ consecrates us in the sacraments, gives us companions to help us, gives us his truth and his Word, his insight and his guidance. In a special way in the Eucharist we are about to receive, he gives us his very self; he gives us perfect love.

Only with the help of the Holy Spirit, who is here and seeking to heal whatever divides us as Christians, can we live out that reality with authentic hope.

May we open our hearts to receive what we need today to be drawn further into unity with one another – that we may all be one as God is one.

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Thursday, May 28, 2020

(Lec. 300)

1) Acts 22:30; 23:6-11

2) John 17:20-26

Gospel related: CCC 260, 589, 690, 729, 820, 877, 2749, 2750, 2751 CSDC 34, 39

THURSDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: As disciples, we are called to bring unity, harmony, and reconciliation to a fractured world.

Who knew Saint Paul had such a wicked sense of humor and was as sly as a fox? He continues to get into trouble preaching the Gospel. Today he is brought before the council of elders made up of both Sadducees and Pharisees.

As we just heard, he tosses a hand grenade into the middle of the bunch and then sits back and watches the fireworks. Today's encounter is reminiscent of Jesus stating in Mark's Gospel: *If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand* (3:25).

In today's Gospel, we encounter Jesus praying for his disciples and for those who will come to believe because of them – that's us! We are the ones who come after the original followers of Jesus. Jesus prays we will be together and not divided – that we will have a common purpose, namely to bring others to Christ.

As faithful followers of Jesus, are we not ones for whom Jesus prays for today? Our answer is not to be a sheepish "yes." Rather, it needs to be a glorious and resounding "yes!" Into a divided union we are to bring unity; into discord we are to bring harmony; into retaliation we are to bring reconciliation. Remember that by the fruits that we bear we will be known.

Time and time again, there will be forces at work that try to sow seeds of dissension in our ranks, but we must stand firm and united in our faith in the risen Christ. In him alone are the answers to whatever adversity comes our way.

As we pray this day with one voice, so let us speak with one voice. Let it be the voice of Jesus and not our own that is heard loudly and clearly today.

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Friday, May 29, 2020
(Lec. 301)
1) Acts 25:13b-21
2) John 21:15-19

FRIDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Paul VI,
Pope)

Gospel related: CCC 553, 618, 645, 881, 1429, 1551

FOCUS: Fidelity to Christ is the hallmark of the true Christian.

Over the past seven weeks of Easter, we have read most of the Book of Acts, the earliest record of the life of the early Church, with all of its achievements and trials. Now, as we prepare to celebrate Pentecost, we have come near the end of that book and hear about Paul, imprisoned in Caesarea. What is interesting is that Scripture does not record what ultimately happened to Paul – we must rely on tradition for that. Nor does Scripture record what happened to Simon Peter – here, too, we rely on tradition to fill in the gaps. But what we do know is that both men suffered martyrdom and paid the ultimate price for their fidelity to Christ and the Gospel message. Faithful to the end, they were willing to die for their faith.

In choosing these readings for this final Friday of the Easter season, the Church invites us not only to reflect on Paul and Peter's fidelity, but to learn from it so that we, too, might be faithful.

So what can we learn from these two giants of the Christian faith? We know that Peter, despite all his bravado and easy words, was the first to deny Jesus at the crucial time when he most needed the support and love of his followers. We also know that Peter came to regret this act of denial.

One phrase used by the Gospels is that Peter tried to follow Jesus *at a distance*; ultimately that proved impossible and he ended up denying Jesus not once, but three times. Today in our Gospel, those three denials are paralleled by three declarations of love. Here in words of great mercy and patience, Jesus draws from Peter these three declarations but reminds him that the price of this love will be the glory of martyrdom.

Paul, on the other hand, began life as the persecutor of the early Church, seeking to silence the Gospel message and to punish its preachers. Now, today, that same Paul is awaiting transportation to Rome on charges that his preaching of the risen Christ constituted not just an affront to traditional Judaism, but an assault on the imperial system with all its claims to imperial divinity. He, too, will pay the martyr's price for his faithfulness to Christ.

Today we celebrate the feast day of Saint Pope Paul VI. Canonized by Pope Francis, Pope Paul oversaw the work and reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Like his namesake, Pope Paul knew the challenges of preaching the Gospel in a world that was uninterested and indifferent, but that never hindered his commitment or his zeal for the task that was committed to him. May it not hinder us in our commitment to Christ and his Gospel.

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Saturday, May 30, 2020
(Lec. 302)
1) Acts 28:16-20, 30-31
2) John 21:20-25
Gospel related: CCC 515, 878

SATURDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus says, *you follow me*.

What concern is it of yours? You follow me. Jesus speaks these words to Peter at the end of John's Gospel. Peter wants to know more about the beloved disciple, yet Jesus does not elaborate and tells Peter it is not his concern.

Who was this beloved disciple and why did Peter have questions concerning him? In John's Gospel, the beloved disciple is identified as the one who reclined on Jesus' chest at the Last Supper. Though his true identity is uncertain, biblical scholars most often identify the beloved disciple as John the son of Zebedee. This beloved disciple is said to be the author of the Gospel of John, as well as letters and the Book of Revelation.

Perhaps Peter wondered what John would do in his ministry, much as he may have wondered what he would do in his. But Christ's words indicated that this was unnecessary information – for Peter was not following John ... he was following Christ. *You follow me*, he says.

Paul, who never met Jesus in his earthly ministry, certainly understood this statement from him. In the last seven weeks, we have seen him evangelize, preach, travel, and withstand all kinds of hardships in the name of Christ. It is clear on whom his eyes rest. It is evident that Paul is concerned for nothing else than [*proclaiming*] *the Kingdom of God* and [*teaching*] *about the Lord Jesus Christ*.

Christians today share in this discipleship, thanks to the work of Peter, John, Paul, and other spiritual ancestors. Just as Jesus called the early disciples, Jesus calls us to follow *him*, not anyone or anything else. Many of us here today have felt that call. Likewise, we have probably been distracted from the call of Jesus at various points in our lives. Today's Gospel is an invitation to examine our own lives in order to see how we can more clearly focus on that call.

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SUNDAY, MAY 31, 2020

(Lec. 63)

1) Acts 2:1-11

2) 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

3) John 20:19-23

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

PENTECOST SUNDAY

- SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: As Christians, we use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to preach Jesus to the world.

The readings today on this, the feast of the birth of our Church, give us powerful images: *a strong, driving wind; tongues as of fire*; the ability of the disciples to speak to people in their own languages. This is a good day to celebrate the power of the Holy Spirit, transforming a group of fear-filled disciples into bold preachers. Pentecost Sunday is a great day to rejoice in the power of the Lord!

Pentecost is also a great day to challenge ourselves. In the past several weeks, we have commemorated the passion and death of Jesus and celebrated his Resurrection, his appearances in a glorified body to the disciples, his ascension into heaven, and now his sending of the Holy Spirit in great power. The key question is, what do we do with this now, in our own time and place?

We know that *there are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord ... [and] to each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit*. And all of these have one thing in common: they are to be used to build up the Body, the Church – and in turn to fulfill the Church's mission. That mission is the proclamation of Jesus as Lord and of the love that God has for each of us, shown to us through Jesus.

By faith and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we all have the basic gift that Paul mentions up front in his letter: The realization and the ability to say that *Jesus is Lord*. This is the foundation of being a Christian. Grace and discernment help us own the gifts we have been given and make an effort to use them for God's glory and the sake of the kingdom.

The gifts can be as simple as a kind heart that is ready to listen to others who are suffering, or a practical nature that can help in planning efforts to reach out. Today, let us ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the gifts he has given to us – and show us how we can use these gifts for the good of others.

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